

Savannahians helping Savannahians for more than 45 years...

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy is a 45-year-old community-based non-profit organization that recruits, matches and offers support to over 100 local citizens in voluntary citizen advocacy relationships.

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WINTER  
2023

### Message From George:

If you read a recent newspaper headline, you will see war, national division, hatred, and the complications of local and national politics. The articles shine a light on the isolated silos that continue to build on the harmful language of "Us vs. Them". But as the media look for enticing headlines to draw the reader in, very few of those headlines capture the essence of connection that is Savannah.

While talk radio programs (conservative and liberal) echo how much we are different and no longer agree with one another or find common ground, I am fortunate enough to get a glimpse of things from a different point of view. This year, through the lens of Citizen Advocacy, I have seen advocates and proteges say yes to getting to know each other. Advocates shared how they ensured nursing homes provided the best possible care for their proteges, and others shared how they made sure that doctors provided life-saving care. Moreover, advocates walked with their proteges as they fought to get benefits reinstated and for better housing.

Advocates and proteges have built their relationships by celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and life together. Together, they are figuring out how to get rights restored, challenge the court system, and help people move back to Savannah. This is the essence of Savannah. Beyond Savannah's beauty lies her people -- advocates and proteges connecting and finding commonality.

This commonality sheds light on what is possible in Savannah, throughout Georgia, and wherever the conversation can be changed from "Us vs. Them" to we are not different, and we all belong.

**“Belongingness entails an unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference, but to ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong.”— John A. Powell**

## **Here are a few stories of how people are finding belonging.**

### **A 37-year-old relationship in which both women have decided they will stay connected no matter where the other is.**

Advocate Neel Foster and Loretta have known each other since 1986. When Neel and Loretta first met, Loretta was 21 years old and pregnant. At first, Neel saw her role in Loretta's life as someone who could help her be the best mother she could be. Neel also figured that she could help Loretta figure out some parts of everyday life, like house management skills.

Over the years, the women have thought about what was a good job for Loretta, how to stand up against the court system and bad people, and how to help Loretta think about how she finds her community. These days, Loretta tends to move from place-to-place, city-to-city, state-to-state. Through each move, Neel has figured out how to stay in good touch with Loretta. Neel has always paid Loretta's phone bill to ensure she has a way to find Loretta, and Loretta has a way to find her. Neel realizes the world has gotten more challenging for Loretta over the years and wishes she would move closer to Savannah. Recently, Loretta received some concerning information about her son, and Neel is helping her figure out what is happening.

### **Scott sees value in helping Ronnell find his people.**

Advocate Scott Vaughan and Ronnell have known each other for eight years. Scott was asked to get to know Ronnell because he had no family support and was being moved from group home to group home across the state. Through the years, Scott has been able to keep up with where Ronnell is living and encourage Ronnell's staff to spend Ronnell's Social Security disability money on things that Ronnell needs and wants in his life. Early on, Scott realized Ronnell likes to go fast and get around, so he encouraged the group home staff to buy him a golf cart to enjoy his community. It seems as if Ronnell has settled in Valdosta, and Scott believes it is important for Ronnell to have someone in Valdosta to get to know him. A person closer to

Ronnell can help provide additional support and protection for Ronnell. So, for the last few months, Scott has been using his personal connections in Valdosta to find someone close to Ronnell. This year, he also learned that Ronnell has extra Social Security money to spend before the end of the year. Scott is looking for ways to use that money for an ancestry search for Ronnell. He is also considering hiring a private investigator to find Ronnell's family.

### **The two women have developed their routine together, spend time with one another, and celebrate life together.**

Advocate Tracy O'Connell and Melissa have been matched since 2015. When Tracy initially met Melissa, her parents served as a support team for her, but they were located in another city. They wanted to ensure that Melissa had a person she could count on in Savannah. Over the years, Tracy and Melissa have developed a routine where they meet regularly for lunch. This year, she helped make sure Melissa had medical insurance, helped her get connected to services she needed, and talked with her about routine medical care. Tracy has realized she is one of the few people that Melissa trusts and wants in her life. Tracy is also introducing Melissa to her friends and plans to slowly introduce her to more people she thinks Melissa would like to meet.

### **Sarah recognized that things are 100% better than three years ago.**

Advocate Sarah Payne and Eva have been connected for three years. When Sarah first met Eva, Eva and her family were looking for a place to live. Sarah helped Eva navigate the system, reach the right decision-makers, and find a home. Eva's daughter is on her way to the first grade, and Sarah is helping Eva complete the paperwork to apply for the lottery program so Eva's daughter can go to a better school. She is also assisting Eva in thinking about finding meaningful work or volunteer opportunities during the day.

**The picture below is Earl and Lester celebrating getting Earl out of the group home for Sunday morning worship.**

Advocate Lester Lee and Earl have known each other for almost two years. Lester was asked to get to know Earl because as Earl grew older, his circles grew smaller. The guys hit it off right away. They went shopping together, met each other's families, and started going to church together. While getting to know one another, Earl's group home said they had to stop spending time together. This did not seem fair to Lester or Earl. Lester swiftly moved into action. He called management, wrote letters, and let Earl's family know what was going on. He made it clear that he would remain a part of Earl's life, and the group home management changed its decision.

**Now, the two women are thinking of places they could go together in Savannah.**

Advocate Nicole Lee and Alisha have known each other for two months. Alisha recently had to move from Hinesville to Savannah to live with a family member. It has been hard for her to figure out day-to-day transportation, at-home support, and practical help to get things done. Nicole stepped in right away and identified that a barrier to Alisha being a part of the Savannah community was an inaccessible house. She worked with people in the community to raise money and build a removable ramp for Alisha to use no matter where she lives.



**Oysters on the Bluff to be bigger than ever:**

We are excited to be back at the Isle of Hope Marina for our Oysters on the Bluff on Sunday, February 4, from 3-6 p.m. to shuck oysters together and celebrate community.



Thanks to our 2024 Oysters on the Bluff Sponsors as of December 7. Please let us know if you want to become a sponsor by calling us at 912-236-5798 or emailing us at [info@savannahcitizenadvocacy.org](mailto:info@savannahcitizenadvocacy.org).

**Tickets will go on sale December 7.** Call the office if you would like to purchase tickets.

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Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to shucking oysters and celebrating community with you on February 4, 2024, at Oysters on Bluff! If you have any questions or want to get involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.