



MACON/BIBB CITIZEN
ADVOCACY, INC.

COMMUNITY CURRENTS

SUMMER 2010

THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Becky and I first met about a year ago. I learned she moved to Georgia from Texas after the death of her mother. Becky's mother was her best friend. Becky lives in a group home environment now which doesn't entirely lend itself to personal one-on-one relationships. I quickly realized Becky's primary need was for a friend of her own. She is a very social person and she needed someone she could call up and chat with on the phone, someone to take her out for fun.

I was hesitant at first because I'd never had a relationship with anyone who had a developmental disability and I wasn't sure how to interact with Becky. Any fears I had were quickly allayed after meeting her. We have a very normal friendship. We talk on the phone and share what's going on in our lives. We get together for meals and shopping. We spend time just hanging out at my house watching movies or playing games. Sometimes we get together with some of my other friends.

One of our favorite things we did was going with a couple of friends to pick out a Christmas tree. This is a particularly fond memory of mine. I love Christmas music, so normally when I go shopping for a Christmas tree, I listen to Christmas music. Becky had just gotten a George Strait CD as a Christmas present that day. She popped it in the CD player in my car and we listened to "All My Exes Live in Texas" over and over on the way to pick out a Christmas tree. Not what I had envisioned for our outing, but way more memorable!

Becky has taught me so much about myself, about those with disabilities, and about the importance of being there for one another.

1. How has being in a relationship with Becky expanded your life?

Being friends with Becky has opened me up as a person and helped me to step out of my comfort zone. I'm a fairly shy person, but Becky never meets a stranger! She can engage anyone in conversation, so when we're out together, I end up meeting new people, too. I've learned not to be so concerned with what others think about me. If one of your favorite songs comes on while you're in a store and you just really want to sing and dance to it, then go for it. Becky does and I've tried to loosen up and have fun with her. Becky has taught me to enjoy life to the fullest. Her unbridled enthusiasm helps me see the world through her eyes.

2. How has Becky changed?

I feel that Becky knows she has someone she can trust and come to about anything. She knows I'll be there to celebrate exciting events and listen when there's something weighing heavily on her heart. I think she has a peace in knowing she's got a friend to share in and help on life's journey.

3. Self Reflection?

I've learned that I struggle with stereotyping people with disabilities more than I realized. In serving as an advocate though, my own views have changed and I want to make others aware of their stereotypical mindsets and to break those down.

1. What does having Sarah in your life mean to you?

I can talk to her and we are friends. Whenever Sarah and I get together we can talk about anything for hours. I can call Sarah when I'm having a good day or a bad day and she's always there. She encourages me and helps me explore various things that I'm interested in. It's great to know she's there. *(story continued on page 2)*



Becky and Sarah

(Story continued from page 1)

2. What do you enjoy the most with Sarah?

I enjoy spending time with Sarah. Whenever we're together we make plans to do various things that we like to do together. Going to Barnes and Nobles is one of our favorite things to do. We both enjoy reading a lot. But the simple thing that we do that I enjoy the most is going out to eat and hanging out at Sarah's house playing Wii.

3. What would you like to be doing in 5 years?

In 5 years I hope to be the best of friends with Sarah. I hope to have a good job making good money. I hope to be doing whatever I want to do.



Get out and vote! 2010 Election Dates

Registration Deadline	October 4, 2010
General Election	November 2, 2010
General Runoff Election	November 30, 2010

The Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO) is Georgia's Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities (P&A). We are available to provide information, referrals and in some instances, direct advocacy, regarding any issues related to disability and voting. If you are a Georgia citizen with a disability and you encounter problems with voting, please call us at (404) 885-1234 or (800) 537-2329 (both numbers are voice or TDD). You can reach us weekdays from 9am until 5pm and on Election Day from 7am until 7pm.

CALL your local Board of Elections NOW if you need accommodations for Voting

Examples of aids and services that may be available to you include:

- ballots in alternative formats
- audio recordings
- Braille
- Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDD)
- the assistance of another individual of your choosing

REMEMBER to take a form of identification with you

The following are acceptable:

- A Georgia driver's license, even if expired
- Any valid state or federal government issued photo ID, including a FREE Voter ID card issued by your county registrar's office or the Dept. of Driver Services
- A valid U.S. passport
- A valid employee photo ID from any branch, dept., agency or entity of the U.S. Government, Georgia, or any county, municipality, board, authority, or other entity of this state
- A valid U.S. military photo ID
- A valid tribal photo ID

REQUEST to be given a provisional ballot if you are told that you cannot vote

When you vote, if you do not have a proper ID, if you are not on the list of registered voters, or if someone challenges your qualification to vote, request to vote a provisional ballot.

A provisional ballot is a paper ballot. Your vote is counted only if the issue (for example, your name is not on the list of voters) can be resolved by the election board.

If you do not have your ID with you, you will need to provide it within two days of the election for your provisional ballot to be counted.

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact the Elections Division of Georgia's Secretary of State at (404) 656-2871 or (404) 656-1787 (TDD for people with hearing or speech impairments), or visit their website at <http://sos.georgia.gov/elections>.

For early voting information, contact the Elections Division of Georgia's Secretary of State at (404) 656-2871 or (404) 656-1787 (TDD), or visit their website at <http://sos.georgia.gov/elections>.



Cornorris and Zita

“Cornorris fills my heart with joy whenever I see him, he is a spark of light to me.”

Zita Portillo

Our Lives...

Our Stories

No Play Station 2 or Xbox 360 for Cornorris, just give him a roadmap, atlas and a computer and he's ready to go. Zita Portillo became a citizen advocate three years ago, to ensure that Cornorris would get a good education.

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BACK TO SCHOOL A TIME FOR EXCITEMENT AND HOPE

It is that busy time of year again! Yes, that time when parents with their kids in tow are looking for the latest and greatest new styles of notebook, pens, paper and uniforms; leaving the aisles of the stores in complete disarray. The community comes together to make sure all students have the necessary supplies to start the new year off right. Both parents and the community desire that students will be ready for school, not just with supplies, but also with the hope that a new year brings.

In citizen advocacy, we think about those students whose experiences often do not reflect this hope and enthusiasm. They are often excluded from the classrooms where the kids from their neighborhood are sitting in their new desks. It is often in these classrooms that the highest expectations and opportunities for learning and advancement are present, but there are many students who will not have the option to learn and interact here with their peers. Advocates for children in the school setting might think about ways their protégé could share some of this hope and excitement.

Here are three examples of ways that might happen:

1. Have lunch with your protégé in the school cafeteria. Sit at a table with the “non-special education” students. Once a week or twice a month sitting at the same table with the same students, week after week, watching the walls of separation fall as the table community builds.
2. Find out about clubs and activities at school and try to find a way for your protégé to be a part of the group. Scout troops or drama groups might be a great fit for your protégé when you find ways to have conversations about inclusion.
3. Join your protégé's family in becoming home room sponsors. Bring hope into the classroom, celebrating the seasons and events with *all* students.

Those might sound like simple things when there is the hugely important conversation of a good inclusive education to be had; however, when you are young, being excluded from the larger community is probably more of a consideration than making this year's Individual Education Plan perfect. In your protégé's life, these simple things might lead to the hope and enthusiasm the new school year brings if it included “both-and's” and not “either-or's”.

*Compliments of Oconee Area Citizen Advocacy
August 2010 Insight & Action*

Upcoming Events

*Please join us for First Friday October 1, 2010 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the office.

*Macon/Bibb Citizen Advocacy, Inc. will be hosting a Friend Raising event at Cox Capitol Theatre on October 28th featuring the movie, “The Soloist”.

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Statement of Purpose

Citizen Advocacy is not a service. Rather, it is the invitation for people leading full lives in our town to get to know others who have been excluded. Macon/Bibb Citizen Advocacy, Inc. is supported by people in our community. We are an independent non-profit organization. Citizen Advocacy is a people intensive endeavor—little by little, one person at a time.

CITIZEN ADVOCACY

A Valued Citizen, unpaid and independent of human services, creates a relationship with a person who has a developmental disability and is at risk of social exclusion.

The citizen advocate represents and responds to that person's interests, and brings the gifts and concerns of the person into circles of ordinary community life.

We're on the Web!

maconbibbcitizenadvocacy.org

Thank You

Citizen Advocacy is a community-strengthening endeavor that depends on the support of local citizens. All investments directly benefit the Macon/Bibb County community. Our thanks to these folks who have invested from January 2009 through August 2010.

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