

Building an Inclusive Community One Conversation at a Time

Nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in building a better future for those in need. The [Circle of Friends](#) organization is driven by a mission to address social issues, provide support, and address the growing needs of adults with disabilities in Cherokee County, GA.

The Circle of Friends website outlines the organization's history and three cornerstone goals that define its purpose. In May 2019 a town hall was held at Hickory Flat United Methodist Church to discuss which support services (or lack thereof) were available for adults with Intellectual Development Disabilities (IDD). Guest speakers and 80 community members shared their experiences and knowledge of existing services and expressed their longing for more.

Young adults with IDD and their families completed a survey about needs and services in the community. The results of the town hall and Facebook-administered survey identified three top needs: Socialization, Supportive employment, and Supportive Affordable Housing. These goals guide the future of Circle of Friends.

Fast forward to 2024, two of three goals have been met, but the third goal, Supportive Affordable Housing remains steadfast on the Circle of Friends wishlist. Co-founders, Diane and Glenn Keen meet regularly with Cherokee County community members through ongoing fundraiser events and information-sharing forums. One such meeting occurred today where Diane and Glenn met with parents of children with IDD, people who work within the IDD care space, and Paul Seals a District Representative through Congressman Barry Loudermilk Georgia's 11th District office. Both Diane and Glenn shared the dreams and blueprint of their current project underway as well as the bigger picture for "an attainable, neuro-inclusive, living community for our friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Cherokee County, Georgia."



Paul Seals, center, looks at several illustrations of different inclusive communities the Circle Of Friends cofounder Diane Keen shared. The Circle of Friends: Living With Purpose nonprofit has done extensive research on housing models for IDD communities. Flourish Cafe Manager Caira Stetson looks on at left.

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Circle of Friends cofounder Glenn Keen, center, shows the blueprint layout for the Flourish Cafe, a second and larger Circle of Friends coffee shop, now being built in Hickory Flat.
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In addition to celebrating the 3rd anniversary of the Circle of Friends Coffee Shop with Purpose located at The Circuit Cafe in Woodstock, a second and larger facility, the 'Flourish Cafe' is being built by the organization in Hickory Flat, of which all members of the Circle of Friends are highly anticipating its opening in the spring of 2024.

Flourish Cafe's larger space can accommodate hosting more activities and programming to provide much-needed socialization. In addition, the Flourish Cafe menu will include a bountiful beverage menu, light fare, fresh-made croissants, cookies, and eating options prepared by Flourish Cafe Manager Caira Stetson, an experienced French baker. Flourish Cafe will add more supportive employment opportunities for individuals with IDD.

By focusing on the well-being and empowerment of vulnerable populations, the Circle of Friends nonprofit works toward improving the quality of life for individuals with IDD and their families who face questions about their loved ones' futures.

Consider donating to or volunteering with Circle of Friends, or sponsoring the upcoming Circle of Friends Golf Tournament scheduled for May 17, 2024. For more information on the event, visit: <https://golf2grow.com/circle-of-friends>