



A Tribute to Dottie Adams: A Life's Work Well Done

Throughout her 35 years of advocacy for the disability community, Dottie Adams was known for pouring herself into the work she loved and appreciating the people she worked with. She was proud to be a child of the 60s and believed that she and her friends could, in fact, change the world.

Dottie Adams, pictured above with one of her granddaughters, was an artist who created beautiful quilts. It is estimated that she made more than 100 over her lifetime. She almost always gave them away or raffled them for her favorite charity, Relay for Life.



Dottie designed these handcrafted quilts that hang in Centenary United Methodist Church to recognize the work of GCDD's Real Communities in this congregation in Macon, GA.



With that spirit, she enjoyed a willingness to challenge the status quo. Her life and career were about civil disobedience and creating opportunities for people with disabilities. She took pride in her own generation of baby boomers who refused to settle for a simple “no.”

Dottie credits her mom for teaching her – be kind; treat people the way you would want to be treated; listen; protect children’s hearts and spirits and do the right thing. Through her many mentors, teachers and life experiences, she learned that there “was the system approach and there was the human approach.”

Her disability career began in Fitzgerald where she used her skills as Girl Scout leader and summer camp counselor to teach school-aged children with disabilities. Most of the time was spent doing normal things that simply made sense. In a short period of time, she saw a lot of progress as the kids gained confidence in their own abilities and she found a new passion in her own life.

She then worked for Barrow County Mental Health Center transitioning people with disabilities from institutions into their communities for seven years and 18 more years on the District’s Intake and Evaluation Team serving the greater Athens area.

“We were there to help people get the supports and services they needed. It was our job to make life easier on people, not more difficult. We were driven by the needs of the people, not by a set of rules. We

learned that following the lead of the people in your community was the best approach,” Dottie wrote in her blog in 2012.

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In 2002, Dottie Adams brought her life-long devotion and a great deal of real life experience to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) where she saw room for innovation and creativity. While reminiscing, she noted she worked in the same service system with the same rules and restrictions as everyone else yet found that being person-centered gave her the authority to make things work for each and every person.

“We all need to recommit to doing what each of us can to make life easier and to share our gifts to help people get what they need. That is when we are being of service and being our best.”

In describing her career, Dottie said, “This work is not a job. It’s who I am and who I was meant to be.”

“Dottie’s impact on GCDD and Georgia’s developmental disabilities community cannot be overstated,” GCDD Executive



Dottie (center) with GCDD staff in 2012 during the *Making a Difference* Annual Ceremony where she was honored for her advocacy work.

Director, Eric E. Jacobson, said. “When I hired Dottie, she was already known for her fierce advocacy work on behalf of individuals and their families. I knew Dottie would build important bridges for GCDD and strengthen our network of partners across Georgia, not to mention work tirelessly on behalf of family members trying to navigate the Medicaid waiver system,” he said.

Dottie was a pioneer in developing Futures Plans for Person Centered Planning, a way of zeroing in on an individual’s interest, goals and dreams in order to help them enjoy more meaningful lives. She was key in the formation of the Direct Support Certificate Program to elevate this profession and improve the quality of the direct support experience for clients and staff as well as providers. She was among the founding

members of the Children’s Freedom Initiative to ensure that Georgia children would have the opportunity to live with families in loving homes by moving them out of institutions into the community. Dottie brought Project SEARCH to Georgia and served as its State

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Coordinator for GCDD. Project SEARCH is a nationally acclaimed employment program, involving local businesses, community organizations, schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies to create internships for high school students with disabilities.

In January of last year, Dottie was honored with an award in her name at the Georgia Winter Institute. The Dottie Adams Community Organizer Award was established to recognize persons who are mission-driven and support a diverse, inclusive community – the great qualities that Dottie brought to our disability community across the State.

Later in June, she was honored with a Proclamation from the American Association on Intellectual Disabilities as a Luminary, “in appreciation and gratitude for her leadership whose light has shown both within Georgia and far beyond.”

The members and staff of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities laud the example Dottie set for the developmental disability community and her lifelong advocacy career.



Dottie with her son and her granddaughters.

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Dottie (center) with members of the Real Communities Korean Coalition at the 2012 *Making a Difference* Appreciation Ceremony.



Dedicated to making positive change in the lives of all she knew, Dottie will surely be missed by many.