

Melissa Gerr ([00:01](#)):

You're listening to Pull Up A Chair, stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore, a podcast created by The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Dee Evans ([00:13](#)):

We meet each other out in public now and speak, and we have a different kind of a relationship.

Tikvah Womack ([00:17](#)):

You'd be amazed what kind of barriers you can overcome without sacrificing any part of you, by just having a conversation.

Melissa Gerr ([00:28](#)):

Welcome back to Pull Up A Chair, I'm your host, Melissa Gerr. Each month, we explore a different theme that illustrates how, for 100 years in counting, The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore has been a place to turn to in times of struggle or celebration and for assistance and connection. You'll probably hear some familiar voices as we laugh, reminisce and learn a thing or two about what it means to build and be a part of a strong Jewish community. The focus of this episode, like so many great things, started with a conversation between friends. Tikvah Womack an African-American Orthodox Jew was conducting diversity events at her synagogue, Rena Galasgov, a member of a neighboring Orthodox synagogue, heard about it and wanted to know more. They both saw an opportunity to expand the conversation and build stronger relationships between the African-American and Jewish neighbors that live side by side, in upper Park Heights. They enlisted the help of CHAI, an agency of The Associated that strengthens Northwest Baltimore neighborhoods. The result is "CHAI: Community Conversations, Creating a Diverse Mosaic." Here's Tikvah Womack to talk about the project.

Tikvah Womack ([01:44](#)):

It was a layering of again, understanding a group history and what, how that group history kind of shows up in today and how that ends up then impacting the relationship between the African-American community and the Jewish community and just really creating as best as we could a safe environment for people to ask questions that they might not have been able to ask before to have dialogues that maybe felt unsafe and threatening and a space that is more of curiosity. And, and with an understanding of the intention is wanting to be in a relationship

Melissa Gerr ([02:29](#)):

Dee Evans and her husband have lived in upper Park Heights since the 1970s. They're a part of the fabric of the community and raised four children there. Dee was all in for the chance to talk with other women as part of the community conversations. However,

Dee Evans ([02:46](#)):

I'm not going to sugar coat it. We were very, very nervous about each other. Because we didn't know what to expect. I have a wonderful friend, an active community person that puts everything together for CHAI and Sharelle Savage is awesome. So she approached me about the whole aspect of doing this me and a couple other of my friends, and we jumped right on board because it's something I've always wanted to do. I don't like being in an area where my children grew up here and we don't know our neighbors and to get to any household, if you get to the moms, you've now got larger insight into what people think. So we see in a room full of women that have every age range, you could name and

have raised kids. And my curiosity was the different than somebody else's curiosity, but people were brave enough to ask all kinds of questions. And it was just really, really received well. I am so thrilled to be a part of this group.

Melissa Gerr ([03:50](#)):

The group met in person until pandemic restrictions moved them online. The women continued their conversations while protests against racial injustice swept through the country after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Tikvah Womack ([04:04](#)):

It was a white Jewish woman who stepped up, who said, 'We have this amazing group and there's this time in the world where there is, there is this outcry from black people. And I feel like there is something that I have to do that we have to do to address this', right? And so, bam, that's like a tangible moment where, where someone was saying, 'Wait a minute, we're now in relationship. I have to stand behind this, right?' Like I, 'I have to do something' this now, all of a sudden, there's this accountability.

Dee Evans ([04:41](#)):

Well, we learned that we were more alike than we are different because we had to do different, [inaudible] had us do different, really unique groupings. She put us in different groups and she gave us these papers and around the wall, she would have different phrases and your inner fears, what makes you comfortable and what makes you uncomfortable? And how are you feeling insecure? How are you not? So you go to whatever area you felt was you were drawn to, and you see how many other people in the room of all nationalities went to the same insecure or went to the same fears. And we would sit down and actually talk about what made you feel insecure. And as women there, once again, I say we were more alike than we were different, because the same fears of raising our children and taking care of our husbands, and making sure our homes are safe. We have to live in this area. We have to make sure our families are secure.

Tikvah Womack ([05:42](#)):

The truth, is my soul, by being surrounded by all these different women, my son's being surrounded by all of these beautiful, just heartfelt women and having, like I said, these different aunties around them, they are better off for it. So if people were able to really embrace that being in relationship with someone that's different from me, right? Maybe engaging in a conversation I might be afraid of is good for me. And I think there was a focus in our particular group around Orthodox, right? Because what we found is Orthodox community and African-American community are side by side. And sometimes that conversation doesn't always happen in that. So I just want to address what Dee said, and it's like the barriers, it's just a conversation.

Dee Evans ([06:27](#)):

It is.

Tikvah Womack ([06:27](#)):

It's just having those conversations. And you'd be amazed what kind of barriers you can overcome without sacrificing any part of you by just having a conversation.

Melissa Gerr ([06:40](#)):

Community conversations is on hold temporarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But when public safety measures allow, the group will be going strong. Tikvah and Dee hold those thoughts for the future.

Dee Evans ([06:53](#)):

I would like to have it possible that in the next year, going into the spring of next year, for us to be able to do a larger group and for people to start leaving their fears outside of CHAI and just sit down and be able to do what we do in a larger scale.

Tikvah Womack ([07:09](#)):

It's a lot of infrastructure sometimes to put these things together in terms of space and resources and finances, right? It was, we have meals together, right? And we, somebody was able to watch my kids while we were having these dialogues in the space. And so I'm grateful to CHAI, for being able to, to offer that to us, to be able to grow for the benefit of the entire community.

Dee Evans ([07:36](#)):

No matter who you are, we have the same basic concerns. And that's what, that's what this would for me,. That's what that pulled out in my mind was that the fact that no matter where we are, we are in this for real together.

Melissa Gerr ([07:52](#)):

Thanks for listening to pull up a chair. I'm your host, Melissa gear. This podcast was produced for you by The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. From East Baltimore to Forest Park, from Pikesville to Randallstown and beyond, The Associated has been there for the community every step of the way. Don't miss the next episode with more stories from your friends and neighbors in Baltimore's Jewish community. Thanks for listening. You've been listening to Pull Up A Chair, stories from 100 years of creating community and Jewish, Baltimore. It's part of The Associated Centennial celebration.