

Mission Statement:
Charis Circle exists to foster sustainable feminist communities, work for social justice, and encourage the expression of diverse and marginalized voices.

www.chariscircle.org | 404-522-9912

1189 Euclid Ave NE | Atlanta, GA 30307

2006 in Review

Program Highlights

We hosted a record number of authors and program presenters in 2006, in addition to squeezing an impossible number of program attendees into the store (nearly 200 at one time!).

We are so thankful to all the people who helped make it possible, especially the communities of authors, artists, and activists who keep us inspired and motivated to continue our work.

A year ago at this time, our monthly book group had dwindled in attendance to zero, and so we decided to try a different, more focused, model. In May of 2006, we launched the *Exploring Genders Through Reading* group. Facilitated by Max Green, the group continues to meet monthly to discuss books that explore issues of gender identity and representation. In the life cycle of ongoing programs, 2006 also saw the climax and the end of our monthly *Open-Mic* (or *no-mic*, as the case may be), as well as our monthly craft circle, *Stitch-n-Bitch*. Designed to encourage creativity and community, both of these programs are directly in line with our mission, however it is equally important to our mission that we support the efforts of other groups.

If you are looking for an open-mic to attend or a place to perform your spoken word, check out *Cliterati*, *SisterFire*, *Word Diversity Collective*, *Art Amok*, *Java Monkey Speaks*, *Birdi's*, *Aphrodite's Toybox*, *Java-ology*, or *Lovin' It Live*, to name a few, as well as annual events like *Lady-fest South* or *Café Medusa*. For info on crafting circles, be sure and visit your local, independent craft stores. We especially hope you will continue to support *Nease's Needlework* in Decatur, our *Stitch-n-Bitch* co-sponsor.

Author Events

Pearl Cleage, Harry Lefever, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Barbara Ransby, Phyllis Bennis, Connie Mae Fowler, Michelle Tea, Fiona Zedde, Lisa Moore, Helen Caldicott, Barbara Brown Taylor, Alice Walker, Eve Ensler, Sera Beak.... Not to name-drop or anything, but look who all we've had reading at Charis in '06! And that's just a few of them! Before we get all self-congratulatory, though, we'd like to check in with the reality of big names coming (for free) to little bookstores on behalf of even littler non-profits. It is obvious that something special is at work here. We think it has something to do with YOU! Our community is the secret ingredient in our author event recipe. It's what the big-box bookstores are lacking. Many authors feel compelled to thank us profusely for their rewarding experiences at Charis.



Alice applauds her Charis fans

In turn, we wish to express many many thanks to all of YOU who have come to author events, participated actively, and shown these authors how their work affects its readers. YOU are the most rewarding part of the Charis author experience. We have more incredible events lined up for 2007, and we hope that they will continue to thrive in this mutually beneficial way for all of us who are involved.



Photo courtesy of J. McNulty
Waiting in the rain to hear Alice Walker

Changing the World, One Program at a Time

We see the revolution happening in small pieces all the time, in individual moments that change our lives and connect our hearts, moments that don't register on the bureaucratic radar but that occur just the same. In 2006, there were several programs where moments like these collided, and something revolutionary happened, something we've heard people refer to as "magic." Here are a few examples:

In May, local activists L.J. Paget-Seekins and Stephanie Guilloud read their pieces from the anthology, *Letters from Young Activists*,



A. Lovelace & Granddaughter

then facilitated an intergenerational dialogue about activism in recent history. People who thought they had nothing in common found themselves nodding to the same words and ideas, and the so-called

"generation gap" seemed to dissolve before our very eyes. L.J. and Stephanie proved to be such an amazing team that we invited them back to facilitate a 2-part program series on racism in queer communities. We called the project *Undoing Racism*, and L.J. and Stephanie did a brilliant job of navigating us through the ways that racism



Stephanie (left) & L.J.

and white supremacy invade our lives and our communities on personal and systemic levels. In July, activist and artist Cynthia Harris performed excerpts from her dramatic piece on intimate partner violence, "Why Won't She Leave," evoking intense emotional responses from her audience, from tears to laughter, from clapping to awed silence. In August, the Committee on Women, Population, & the Environment (CWPE) teamed up with Georgians for Choice and Sister-Song for a 2-part series on some of the more urgent areas of reproductive justice, including birth control, reproductive technology, sterilization, and eugenics. The tension in the air was palpable as people made realizations, spoke up about personal experiences, testified to the power of coalition-building, and left holding piles of resources to follow up on, ways to get involved and make changes. In September, journalist Nadirah Sabir, whose writing is featured in the anthology *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*, led a panel of Muslim-American women in a dialogue about their experiences pre and post 9/11. We received calls for days afterwards from people saying how honored they felt to have heard the women's stories.

In November, we hosted a reading with the editor and many contributors from the collection *Growing Up Girl: An Anthology of Voices from Marginalized Spaces*. Michelle Sewell and the multi-generational flock of writers who came to read their work were truly inspiring. In December, Vanessa Jackson gave affirmations on food and body image, engaging her audience in an extremely personal dialogue about the complex roots of disordered eating in women.

At each of these events, there was something indescribable in the air, something you could sense but could not touch, taste, see, or smell. That something is the stuff that change is made of. Each time it occurs, at a Charis program or anywhere, it is like finding another piece of the revolutionary puzzle, connecting people and ideas and movements.



Pearl Cleage



Lilli Lewis plays Charis

Looking ahead in 2007

Responding to Community Concerns

It is with great pleasure we announce the inaugural Charis Community Corner column of the Circle newsletter. This space is dedicated to Charis Circle's redoubled efforts at community transparency and community involvement. We invite your comments and suggestions to let us know how we can better serve you. And to let our community know that we take your input seriously, we'll respond to the concerns you raise here in our newsletter.

We are currently engaged in addressing racism and white privilege within the structure of Charis Circle, Charis Books, and our programming. Over the years Charis has struggled with actualizing its commitment to anti-racist principles. We were recently charged by a community member to really do the work to make our actions match our ideology. As a step toward exploring this concern on a deeper level, Charis board and staff members will participate in a 3-day anti-racism workshop at the *People's Institute for Survival & Beyond* (www.pisab.org). We have made this training a mandatory component of Charis board and staff membership, so all current and future members of the board and staff will be attending. This is the first of many steps the board will take to foster a new Charis Circle whose vision and practices match up.

Please email communityliaison@chariscircle.org with questions, comments, and suggestions about the things you think we should be doing that we aren't at present, or ideas for how we can improve. We are also happy to hear your concerns and ideas in person—next time you attend a program, flag down a board or staff member and chat with us! We exist to serve the community of Charis and we hope that you will join us in our efforts to "be the change we want to see."

D.I.Y. Everything—An Open Call for Program Proposals



What exactly does Rosie the Riveter mean when she holds up her fist and says, "We can do it!"? Our guess is that once upon a time, women (and many other groups of people) were systematically taught that they could NOT, in fact, do "it." "It" could mean reading, writing, counting, driving, repairing, building, thinking, or any other tool for survival in the capitalist world. Fortunately, those days are over... or are they? At this point in our capitalist

society, we have become more dependent on the system and "the man" than most of us would like to admit. Here at Charis, we've been thinking about this, and we've decided that it's high time we liberated ourselves from this patriarchal mechanism. But we can't do it without you, and most importantly, your skills (we know you've got them!). We are inviting the community at large to submit program proposals for skill-shares, teach-ins, and other ways for us to share knowledge and D.I.Y. resources. We would like to hear from all interested parties about this, potential learners and sharers alike. Even if it seems basic or easy to you (or incredibly complicated), it might be something others are wishing they knew how to do. Come teach us how to do "it" ourselves. "It" can really be anything. We would love to see proposals for D.I.Y. basic car and bicycle maintenance, easy steps to green the home, workshops on resume writing, grant writing, query letter writing or any other kind of writing, tools for outdoor survival, ways to make buildings more accessible, guerilla gardening and permaculture, co-counseling or other forms of alternative mental health care, small-scale union organizing, forming consensus, sign language, biodiesel conversions, and anything else you want to learn or are able to share. Please send all queries and proposals to kerrie@chariscircle.org.



THE UNITED STATES
SOCIAL FORUM

Board & Staff Update

There have been many changes for the Circle in 2006, which have mostly taken place behind-the-scenes (where the majority of our work is done). Here is an update on those developments, both past and future.

In 2006 we said goodbye to a few board members – deepest thanks to Laura Reagin, Anne Greene, and Nicole Chalk. Laura continues to volunteer her services as a CPA to help us with our taxes. We are honored to now work with the board members who joined us in 2006: Alysia Burdette, Moya Bailey, Caitlin Childs, Stephanie Kyono, and Uzoamaka Obiocha. Along with the rest of the board, Sarah Crymes, Holly Deal, Pat Del Rey, Mickey Gillmor, C.J. Harden, and Sally Herbert, these women will be working with committees of volunteers and staff to keep it all going.

The Board of Directors of Charis Circle is responsible not only for raising funds – a huge job! – but also for examining, refining, and ensuring compliance with our mission. At our first retreat of 2007, we were able to rearticulate our mission in a way that seems more true

to our work. "Charis Circle exists to foster sustainable feminist communities, to work for social justice and to encourage the expression of diverse and marginalized voices." In order to accomplish that mission, we will be working more with committees as part of building communities, participating in more activist organizing, and continue to expand and feature independent voices. *If you'd like to be part of this fabulous group – as a board member or on a committee, please let us know of your interest. Email us at info@chariscircle.org or give us a call at 404-522-9912.*

As we move into 2007, we have some exciting staff changes. Kerrie Lynn, our Program and Publicity Coordinator, is now full-time, a big leap for us and very needed in order to continue to do so many quality programs each year. Elizabeth Anderson, a former member of our Young Writers Group, is now facilitating that same group, as well as working with the adult Women Writers. She is an accomplished writer herself with a great deal of workshop experience. Linda Bryant continues to work with the board, staff, and donors, and as always, lends her experience and insight toward making our visions into realities. New to our staff in 2007 are Kerline Astre and Caitlin Childs (who is also a board member). In her position as Fundraising Coordinator, Kerline is hard at work getting to know donors, and we are thrilled to have her on our team. Caitlin is doing a 7-month internship with us through the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, with the goal of bringing disability awareness into the mainstream of our programming and our lives.

How can you resist? Come join us in this powerful work! Please visit the Circle website for more information on board committees and volunteer opportunities, or flag us down when you're at Charis.

Where will you be during the U.S. Social Forum?

Taking place this summer in Atlanta (June 27-July 1) is the first ever U.S. Social Forum. Charis Circle, along with hundreds of other organizations from all over the country, will participate in the Forum, and we strongly encourage you to get involved! The USSF is more than a conference or a networking bonanza, more than a reaction to war and repression. The USSF sends a message to other people's movements around the world that there is an active movement in the U.S. opposing U.S. policies at home and abroad. We must declare what we want our world to look like and begin planning the path to get there. ***Another World Is Possible!*** Please visit www.ussf2007.org for more info and to register.



Elizabeth, Caitlin, Moya



Stephanie Kyono



Elizabeth and the Writer Grrrlz