

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities invites
you to join us for a

Real Communities Learning Tour

April 12-16, 2016

Atlanta—Macon—Savannah



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The Real Communities Learning Tour, sponsored by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), is designed to provide participants with the following:

- An intensive view of the community building initiatives that the Council supports
- An overview of the values, practices, and principles of Real Communities, as well as lessons learned
- Opportunities to interact with community builders, community members involved in projects, and program staff
- Time to share, ask questions, dream together, socialize, and reflect
- Ideas for developing and supporting similar initiatives at home

About Real Communities

Real Communities is an award-winning, cutting-edge initiative launched in 2010 by the GCDD to partner with local groups working to build more just communities. It's a thoughtful, action learning approach that equips community members at the grassroots level to work together toward common goals to improve their own community using person-centered supports, community-centered connections, and persistent and reflective learning.

Purposefully involving people with and without developmental disabilities in collaborative projects is pivotal to the framework of Real Communities. We seek to support communities who welcome and utilize the gifts of everyone, including those who have been historically marginalized, and create avenues toward reciprocity, interdependence, and social change. Specifically, partners in Real Communities act on four commitments:

- Taking action that makes a community better for everyone
- Engaging people with developmental disabilities as active contributors
- Organizing in a way that builds a community's capacity for collective action
- Sharing what we learn

The Council actively supports communities in a number of ways, including technical assistance, training, popular education, and at times, financial support. Projects are determined by individual communities, as opposed to GCDD staff, and vary according to local needs and desires. They could range from community-based transportation to cooperatives to community gardens. By handing the reins to individual communities and leading by stepping back, GCDD supports real communities as they flourish and achieve real and lasting community-based change.

Current Real Communities

Basmat Ahmed/Clarkston Relationship-Building Group: Over the past few years, GCDD has supported Basmat Ahmed to explore the development of community projects in Clarkston that are consistent with the Real Communities' Four Commitments. Basmat held the role of the Community Builder for The Clarkston International Garden at 40 Oaks Nature Preserve, a partnership with the Global Growers Network which supported the development of a Community Garden in the City of Clarkston. Currently Basmat works with the Clarkston Relationship-Building group that works to build deeper relationships and finds ways to leverage these relationships to make change in Clarkston.

The Clarkston Relationship-Building Group began their work by planning a retreat so they can spend time together outside of their day-to-day responsibilities and build the relationships necessary to do effective community building work. The group regularly hosts a Community Relationship Lunch every other month where community leaders and members connect and discover partnerships and opportunities. This group also successfully co-organized the first Black History Month in City of Clarkston, which was a result of a relationship founded among different organizations. Combined, they hosted this event, as well as supported and sponsored the 2015 Georgia Would Refugee Day, organized by Refugees.

Throughout her organizing work, Basmat has actively sought to engage people within the disability community. As of now, there are four more adult and six more youth Community Builders with and without disabilities, who are working on implementing different projects within Clarkston. In addition, the Youth Community Builders have taken obtained more leadership roles, as they put together the Clarkston Youth Assembly, the first Clarkston event to be entirely organized by youth. Thirty youth attended and made action plans to develop the community. As a result of this assembly, Basmat partnered with Women Watch Africa, and received additional funding from an individual donor, to support the youth Community Builders to lead the Youth Mentorship and Community Building program set to begin in September of 2015. The adult Community Builders have been focusing on building relationships through the Community Learning and Connecting Conversation program that involves meeting with individuals, organizations, groups and others to discover people's gifts and goals for the future. The Adult Community Builders are also working inclusively to develop community engagement in partnership with different local entities and organizations such as: CDF action, Women Watch Africa, Clarkston Interfaith Group, the Nepali Community and Arabic Speaking Communities (Sudanese, Iraqi, and the Central Africa Republic).

Centenary United Methodist Church: Located in Macon, the Centenary United Methodist Church was founded in 1884. Once a vibrant congregation, but over time and with changes in the neighborhood, the congregation's numbers dwindled. It became clear that both the

church and neighborhood would not survive unless major changes were made. In 2005, the church began to work actively to reach out to and engage the surrounding neighborhood. The neighborhood reached back and the church was saved. The congregation is now extremely diverse and dedicated to addressing the concerns of the community in long-term and sustainable ways. The diversity of the congregation, both racially and socioeconomically, is something Centenary not only embraces, but is proud of.

Centenary has participated in the Real Communities Initiative by seeking ways to welcome people with disabilities and their families into the congregation, and offering opportunities for them to contribute. In the past, Centenary started a community garden and a transitional housing program for men. Centenary founded the Bicycle Program, which featured adults with and without disabilities as paid employees, working on donated bicycles that they would repair and give to people without transportation.

Since 2012, Centenary has organized an annual summer Roving Listeners program with the goal of finding intentional ways to meet and make connections among people with and without disabilities to make the city of Macon a better place to live for everyone. Roving Listening pays youth and adult supporters with and without disabilities to go into their community, meet their neighbors, and learn more about people's individual gifts and talents, discover what they love about their neighborhoods, what their dreams are for the future, and how to connect them to others who may share common interests, gifts, or dreams. The Roving Listeners host regular community dinners designed to bring neighbors together and support these connections. They also employ a Roving Connector who seeks opportunities to connect neighbors to one another.

In the third Summer of Roving of 2014, Listeners focused on revisiting neighbors they met over the past two to find ways to connect their gifts and passions to others in the community. They hosted four community dinners, two community clean-up events, expanded their relationship with Star Choices – a local disability support organization that is seeking to be a better part of the community – and provided six mini-grants to community members to teach a class or support a small community building project. As a requirement of these mini-grants, a person with a disability had to be a part of the project team. Additionally, two Roving Connectors were hired to work five hours per week to support the project, deepening connections that were formed over the past year.

In the summer of 2015, the Roving Listeners project has been expanding and was asked to come to East Macon to be in partnership with the Mill Hill Project. Mill Hill is an artist residency and community revitalization area, spearheaded by the Macon Arts Alliance and the Urban Development Authority. The Roving Listeners are working with the residents of Mill Hill to listen for their hopes, dreams, identify their gifts, and make sure the voices and talents of existing residents are a part of the planning and implementation of revitalizing their neighborhoods. This has involved genuine dialogue and empathetic listening to arrive

at a true understanding of the community's hopes for their neighborhoods. The listeners approached every household in the area and this year recorded the interviews done so that radio quality audio was captured. Also, professional photographers worked with the Roving Listeners in 2015 to capture fantastic portraits and candid shots of neighborhood residents. Their relationship with Star Choices continued and they added a new partner, Woodfield Academy, with two students and a teacher from the school working with them.

Watch our video documentary on the Macon Roving Listeners: <http://gcdd.org/news-a-media/videos/60-where-all-means-all-macon-captioned.html>

Forsyth Farmers' Market: The Forsyth Farmers' Market was created to address food access issues and to provide all members of Savannah's community with a welcoming, inclusive place to purchase regional produce. Market organizers strive for diversity amongst vendors, shoppers, volunteers and educators. As a GCDD Real Communities Initiative, the market in Forsyth Park serves as a building block to create means of developing a more welcoming neighborhood, as well as provide opportunities for connection and contribution for people with and without disabilities.

The core group, Mixed Greens, supports the market with smiling faces, interactive projects and learning opportunities. The Mixed Greens meet regularly for potlucks and to plan new projects. Additionally, each week at the market, members of the Mixed Greens assist with set-up and clean-up for the market and staff an education/information booth. In late March of 2012, the Mixed Greens launched the Little Green Wagon project, a mobile garden for youth. Young people stop by the education booth, plant a seed and add a plant to the market with their name. Members of the Mixed Greens take care of the plants during the week and bring the mobile garden back to the market on Saturdays so that the young people can stop in, socialize and check on their plant. The Little Green Wagon is still an important part of the Mixed Greens and Forsyth Farmers' Market experience.

As of January 2015, 3 part-time Co-Community Builders with disabilities have joined the community building team of the Mixed Greens and members take on active leadership roles. The group recently completed their second farmer and gardener stories project that provided many opportunities for everyone to participate – taking pictures, documenting stories via video or audio, and even acting as connectors between people – which culminated in an art exhibit, Forsyth Farmers' Almanac, showcased during the highly publicized Art March in Savannah.

The Forsyth Farmers' Market is already a cornerstone of the local food community in Savannah. By coupling its efforts around food access with the Real Communities project, the Forsyth Farmers' Market hopes to become the centerpiece for building a more welcoming Savannah community.

Watch our video documentary on the Mixed Greens: <http://gcdd.org/news-a-media/videos/62-mixed-greens-savannah-captioned.html>

Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP): Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is the statewide coalition of organizations and individuals working to end capital punishment in Georgia and around the world. By working in partnership with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Real Communities Initiative, GFADP also seeks protect the rights and dignity of those on death row while ensuring the protection of individuals with developmental disabilities from unjust application of death penalty laws.

In January of 2015, the State of Georgia executed Warren Hill, a 52 year old man with an intellectual disability. Despite undisputed testimony from the States' experts, Warren faced execution because of Georgia's incredibly high burden of proof for defendants with intellectual disability. His case highlights the ways in which people with developmental and intellectual disabilities are railroaded by the criminal legal system every day. As a result of Warren's case, GFADP and GCDD came together to explore ways to stop the execution of individuals with intellectual disabilities in Georgia and deepen our collective understanding of how mass incarceration and the criminal justice system uniquely impact people with disabilities. GFADP is working to create local alliances coalitions in three key communities around the state (Atlanta, Dawson, and a third location to be determined) that come together to focus on a local problem.

GFADP is an organization that is working to actively form alliances by engaging other organizations and leaders both in and out of the anti-death penalty network. The community discussions have been both rewarding and inspirational for the death penalty movement. GFADP has collaborated with GCDD to work to change the standard of proof for proving intellectual disability in death penalty cases. They are working to educate people within and outside of the disability community about why this is an important movement. GFADP was also incorporated in the GCDD organized Social Justice Summit in 2015 where they made new connections and networking opportunities for future organizing work. Similarly, GFADP has been involved in related conversations with the NAACP. As this country is facing overwhelming occurrences of the shooting of unarmed black and brown people and mass incarceration, GFADP attempts to illustrate the connection between the death penalty and the African-American community.

GFADP aims to bringing a more diverse perspective to the death penalty work and they will continue to fight to abolish the death penalty in the state of Georgia. This organization strives to be a major part of reforming the criminal justice system. By building a stronger community, GFADP will be able to end the death penalty, and usher this nation towards the criminal justice reform movement.

Women on the Rise: Women on the Rise a group formed by formerly incarcerated women, works to demand justice, dignity, and liberation for all through collective action that

transforms communities and builds public safety by creating strong, interdependent communities. Through support provided by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Real Communities Initiative, WOTR also seeks to also ensure that equal justice is received by individuals with developmental disabilities ensnared in the criminal justice system.

Women on the Rise hosts regular Transformative Leadership Development and Community Building gatherings and Strategy Sessions. In 2014, they ran a successful internship program for formerly incarcerated women, conducted street and organizational outreach, engaged leaders in an intensive somatic leadership development program, and won important policy victories which impact the lives of thousands of formerly incarcerated people in Georgia when they successfully 'Banned the Box' on job applications in Fulton County, Atlanta, East Point and the State of Georgia. These efforts have benefited those targeted by the criminal legal system, institutionalized and kept from receiving much needed services to integrate them into the community. They have built a strong core group of leaders who are routinely engaging in community outreach and campaign actions in the Atlanta Metro area.

Women on the Rise, the Racial Justice Action Center, and SNaP Co (Solutions Not Punishment Coalition) have been working towards creating a Disability Justice Committee that actively deepens their understanding of disability justice. They are crafting outreach and recruitment activities that address the reality that, similarly to formerly incarcerated people, people with developmental disabilities may often be isolated, discouraged from attending community building events, or even physically segregated by institutions. They hope to build stronger relationships with potential allies and build bridges within agencies and coalitions that focus on developmental disabilities, so they are better able to identify, engage and create a safe environment for people with developmental disabilities in their organization.

Schedule

For logistical purposes, a tentative schedule is provided below. More information, as well as a detailed agenda, will be sent to you prior to your arrival.

Tuesday, April 12, 2016: Begin the tour with a day-long, intensive overview of Real Communities by Caitlin Childs and other GCDD Staff to review the agenda for our time together.

Wednesday, April 13, 2016: Meet organizers of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and Women on the Rise in Atlanta.

Thursday, April 14, 2016: We will start the day by traveling just outside of the perimeter of Atlanta to Clarkston to chat with Community Builder Basmat Ahmed and her cohort of adult and youth organizers, followed by a visit to the Clarkston International Community Garden, a

former Real Communities project in partnership with the Global Growers Network that continues to thrive. We'll checkout of our hotel in Atlanta and head to Macon, Georgia, to meet Stacey Harwell, the Minister of Community Building at Centenary United Methodist Church, to learn about Roving Listening and our experience with faith-based initiatives.

Friday, April 15, 2016: Checkout of Macon hotel and drive to Savannah! Meet with Community Builders Teri Schell, Jessica Mathis, Barry Helmey, Johnny Smith and members of the Mixed Greens and take advantage of all that Savannah has to offer. Enjoy!

Saturday, April 16, 2016: Stroll through the Forsyth Farmers' Market and see the Mixed Greens and Little Green Wagon in action. We will wrap-up with lunch, shortly after noon. We encourage you to arrange to fly out of the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport. You may also return to Atlanta to fly out of Hartsfield Jackson International Airport. It is approximately 4 hours from Savannah to Atlanta.

Registration

Fee: \$300

Your registration fee covers transportation to and from hotels and meeting sites, as well as honoraria for local guest speakers. All other meals, travel expenses, and lodging are not covered. Please let us know if the registration fee will affect your ability to participate, and we will do our best to work with you.

Space is very limited! You are strongly encouraged to reserve your spot as soon as possible. **No reservations will be accepted after March 1st.** For your reservation, please contact:

Gabby Melnick
Organizing Assistant, Real Communities Initiative
Email: gabrielle.melnick@gcdd.ga.gov
Phone: (404) 656-6593

Once your reservation is accepted, registration materials and more detailed information will be sent to you. Please let us know if you require any accommodations in order to fully participate, as well as dietary restrictions.