**Real Communities Learning Tour**

The **Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities** invites

you to join us for a

## Real Communities Learning Tour

## March 23-28, 2015

## 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 a 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

***The International Community Garden at 40 Oaks Nature Preserve:*** Global Growers Network connects international farmers who now live in Georgia to agriculture, by growing good food, training farmers and creating economic opportunities. They work primarily with metro-Atlanta's refugee community, made up of people who have been forced to flee their home countries due to war, genocide and persecution. Many were farmers back home. Through the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' (GCDD) partnership with Global Growers Network, the Real Community is engaging members of the Clarkston community to participate in and lead a new community garden that will serve as an avenue toward a deeper level of community engagement of people with and without disabilities in the area.

In April 2012, the Clarkston International Garden launched with 26 families from the surrounding community. The City of Clarkston, though just one square mile, has the distinction of being the most diverse city in the nation with immigrants and refugees from more than 60 different countries, speaking over 100 languages. The garden creates a safe space for community members with and without disabilities to gather and share ideas of how to build a stronger community, while also having the opportunity to produce fresh food for their families, many of whom are food insecure. The enthusiasm for gardening and working toward a common goal can transcend any language or social barriers. Currently in its second year, the Clarkston International Garden has grown to include 50 families that have organized themselves into five sub-groups based on their common interests including: Tactile Growers, GED Women's Group, Kids Group, Walking/Exercise Group and Flower Group. This effort is as much about building community as it is about growing good food!

In 2013, the Clarkston International Garden hosted a Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony that was well-attended by members of the broader community, as well as city officials. The event was such a success that the group organized a Friends of 40 Oaks Harvest Festival in the fall. In an effort to engage neighbors beyond the community garden, a Friends of the Park group was recently established. This group is officially recognized by the county, and is now eligible for additional funding opportunities to enhance educational, recreational, and community building activities at 40 Oaks Nature Preserve, directed by local residents.

Watch our video documentary on the International Community Garden: <http://gcdd.org/news-a-media/videos/59-international-harvesting-in-clarkston-captioned.html>

***Centenary United Methodist Church:*** Located in College Hill Corridor in downtown Macon, GA, Centenary 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 saved the church.

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 a Minster of Community Building on staff, has started a community garden, has a transitional housing program for men and supports and houses a summer camp for youth of promise and potential, in addition to other programs that actively support the community and address root causes as opposed to providing temporary band-aid type relief.

The Centenary Community Bicycle Program, which had been supported through a grant from the Knight Neighborhood Foundation, featured adults with and without disabilities as paid employees, working on donated bicycles that they would repair and give to people without transportation.

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is continually exploring opportunities to collaborate with Centenary as part of Real Communities. Centenary is very interested in exploring ways to welcome people with disabilities and their families into the congregation, offering opportunities for them to contribute.

One way this has happened is through the Roving Listener project in the summers of 2012 and 2013. Youth with disabilities worked alongside youth without disabilities to participate in deep listening in the Beall's Hill Neighborhood of Macon. Participants were paid a stipend to listen for the gifts, skills, and dreams of older and newer residents of this changing neighborhood. Community dinners and a block party created opportunities to build bridges between neighbors with similar interests. It all started with a GCDD-sponsored trip to Indianapolis to see De'Amon Harges in action at Broadway United Methodist Church's own Roving Listening project.

The Roving Listener project was such a huge success that the community opted to continue Roving one day a month and host monthly community dinners throughout the year. At the beginning of 2013, GCDD supported Centenary in hiring a Roving Connector who works five hours a week to intentionally connect neighbors whom the youth have met with other neighbors and organizations, providing opportunities to share and utilize their gifts.

In June 2014, the summer project resumed in a slightly different form. This summer, they focused on revisiting neighbors they met over the past two years through Roving Listening and are working 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.

Centenary is trading a volunteer culture, where volunteers are constantly stressed and burned out, for a gifts-based culture where everyone cheerfully uses their gifts for the good of the whole.  Consultant Bruce Anderson continues to work with the church to develop an intentional process of identifying and utilizing members’ gifts. The ‘Dream Team’ is a group of church members who are holding this process. Interviews have been completed with much of the congregation, and they are now working on finding ways to share this information and create avenues for folks to share their gifts. One of the projects to emerge from this is the Centenary School of Creative Education, which provides free classes to the community, hosted by members of the church whose gifts were identified by the Dream Team.

 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 will serve 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.  Mixed Greens also started a new project taking place in the market called Green Chairs, and it is turning into a great conversation starter.

The Mixed Greens continues to grow and members take on active leadership roles. The group recently completed a farmer 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. Following the event, there was a month-long exhibit at the Sentient Bean, with a live storytelling event.

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>

***Basmat Ahmed/Clarkston Relationship-Building Group***

This year, GCDD supported Basmat Ahmed to explore the development of a new community project in Clarkston that is consistent with Real Communities’ Four Commitments. During this time, GCDD staff and consultants met with her at least twice a month to provide support and guidance. Basmat has been building a group of folks active in community work in Clarkston to build deeper relationships and find ways to leverage these relationships to make change in Clarkston. This group decided to begin 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. Jubilee Partners, an intentional Christian community in Comer, GA, which has a thriving ministry welcoming new refugees, has generously offered free meeting space, food, and lodging for this retreat. In June, a group of 17 community members, including 4 with disabilities, traveled to do a site visit to get an idea of the physical accessibility of the space. Though very welcoming and in-line with the group’s vision to bring many types of people together to build relationships and make change in communities, the farm does not currently have wheelchair accessible sleeping space or bathroom facilities. The group decided they would like to work with Jubilee to help them make at least one sleeping space and one bathroom fully wheelchair accessible. The group has made this offer to Jubilee and has begun finding resources to make this possible. After the accessibility issue has been remedied, the group will be working to plan the actual retreat. From this, we expect a next project (or projects) to emerge in FY15.

***Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP):*** The State of Georgia has twice tried to execute Warren Hill, a 52 year old man with intellectual disability. Despite undisputed testimony from the States’ experts, Warren faces execution because of Georgia’s incredibly high burden of proof for defendants with intellectual disability. Even with court intervention, Warren remains at risk of execution. His case highlights the ways in which people with developmental and intellectual disabilities are railroaded by the criminal legal system every day. There has been incredible collaboration from the anti-death penalty community and the disability justice/rights community around Warren’s case. Expanding on this partnership, GFADP’s vision is to create local alliances and/or coalitions in three key communities (Atlanta, Columbus and Dawson) that come together to focus on a local problem. Through this coming together, GFADP wants to create meaningful relationship building and leadership development opportunities that move people to action with a focus on the intersections of the criminal legal system and developmental disabilities. This will be achieved by launching local alliances that reflect GFADP’s and Real Communities’ values and are led by local community members; providing uplifting leadership development activities and meaningful leadership roles for individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members; and building strong relationships between – and deepening the analysis of – members of the Disability Justice/Rights community and communities fighting mass incarceration.

***Women on the Rise:*** Women on the Rise – a group formed by formerly incarcerated women – works to create a space where everyone, including the most marginalized, can bring their whole selves, are seen for the gifts they possess, the assets they embody, and feel proud and contribute to the collective. The group also seeks to create a transformative space where people can practice being the change they want to see in the world – being in radically different relationships with each other than what mainstream society teaches. Women on the Rise wants to foster a community of trust, of care, of interdependence, building on the incredible resilience that people and communities have developed and enhancing the capacity to transform trauma to healing, while living and working in deep connection with one another.

The group holds monthly Transformative Leadership Development and Community Building gatherings and Strategy Sessions as a part of activities for the Real Communities Initiative. This past summer, 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 an important policy victory that impacts the lives of hundreds of formerly incarcerated people in Fulton County.

Airports

If traveling by plane, you will want to **book your flight to arrive at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport on Monday, March 23rd. For departure on Saturday afternoon (March 28), we recommend booking a flight out of the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport.** Please note that travel by car between Savannah and Atlanta is typically 3.5 hours (without traffic), and we expect to be back in Atlanta around 5 PM Saturday afternoon. You are ultimately responsible for all flight arrangements and transportation to and from the airport; however, we are happy to help in any way we can.

Accommodations

Lodging costs during the Learning Tour are **NOT** included in the registration fee; however, we will reserve a block of hotel rooms for guests at the government rate. You will pay the hotels directly at checkout. Below are the hotels and **approximate** rates (not including taxes and customary fees) for each portion of the tour:

**Overnight March 23, 24, 25 (checkout March 26):**

**Courtyard Marriott**

130 Clairemont Avenue

Decatur, GA 30030

(404) 371-0204

Rate: $133/night

**Overnight March 26 (checkout March 27):**

**Hilton Garden Inn**

1220 Stadium Drive

Macon, GA 31207

(478) 741-5527

Rate: $109/night

**Overnight March 27 (checkout March 28):**

**Hilton Savannah DeSoto**

15 East Liberty Street

Savannah, GA 31401

(912) 232-9000

Rate: $175/night

Meals

Unless otherwise specified, you are responsible for your own meal arrangements. Each hotel was chosen as it is centrally located to many food options that accommodate a variety of dietary restrictions and preferences. You are encouraged to experience the cities and towns we visit. More information will be available after reservations are received.

Schedule

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

**Monday, March 23, 2015:** Arrive at Courtyard Marriott in Decatur and enjoy the city square on your own, or rest and prepare for a busy week of travel.

**Tuesday, March 24, 2015:** Begin the tour with a day-long, intensive overview of Real Communities by Caitlin Childs and Cheri Pace and review the agenda for our time together.

**Wednesday, March 25, 2015:** Meet organizers of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and Women on the Rise in Atlanta. Then, we’ll drive just outside the perimeter to Clarkston to chat with Community Builder Basmat Ahmed and take a tour of the Clarkston International Community Garden, a project in partnership with the Global Growers Network.

**Thursday, March 26, 2015:** We’ll checkout of our hotel in Decatur 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, March 27, 2015:** Checkout of Macon hotel and drive to Savannah! Meet with Community Builder Teri Schell and members of the Mixed Greens and take advantage of all that Savannah has to offer. Enjoy!

**Saturday, March 28, 2015:** 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.

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 February 15th.** For your reservation, please contact:

**Cheri Mastin**

**Organizing Coordinator, Real Communities Initiative**

**Email:** cheri.pace@gcdd.ga.gov

**Phone:** (404) 656-6593

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