GCDD Real Communities Initiative

Building Inclusive Neighborhoods in Georgia

Real Communities is a cutting edge initiative launched state-wide in 2010 by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) to partner with local groups working to build more just communities. It's a thoughtful, action learning approach that equips community members, *people,* at the local, 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. Key to our approach is the use of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles which make use of already-existing resources in the community in a different and newly successful manner. ABCD says:

- When people discover what they have, they find power.
- When people join together in new connections and relationships, they build power.
- When people become more productive together, they exercise their power to address problems and realize dreams.

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.

In addition to the capacities and gifts of people in their local communities, Real Communities initiatives draw on three sources of knowledge that give them a common language and core of practices.

- **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)** guides the process of community building.
- **Person-Centered Support** guides the discovery of people's gifts and defines the conditions necessary for them to offer those gifts to the Real Communities initiative.
- **Purposeful Learning** offers a set of disciplines for gaining a deeper understanding of the work.

To build knowledge and skill in these three areas, Real Communities provides supervision of community builders, consultation to local initiatives and expects and supports regular participation in workshops, learning journeys, and retreats.

To date, GCDD has supported 7 communities as part of Real Communities. In 2013, we plan to bring 3-5 new communities on board.

For a better idea of Real Communities initiatives that the Council supports, check out these short documentaries: http://www.gcdd.org/news-a-media/videos/viewcategory/12/real-communities.html

Real Communities

Commitments and Responsibilities

A Real Communities initiative accepts four commitments and four responsibilities for learning.

Commitment	...this means learning...
Action focuses on making the community better for everyone. The initiative is not about specialized responses to disability, but about engaging people who care about working together on local issues of common interest.	...to listen carefully to fellow citizens outside the circle of those primarily concerned with disability to discover what local issues people care about enough to take action together.
People with developmental disabilities are active members who influence the group's direction and participate in doing its work. Action is *with* people with developmental disabilties, not *for* them.	...to keep asking, "Whose gifts are missing?" and discovering how to reach out, invite, and actively involve people who need personalized support in order to contribute to their community.
Over time, the initiative builds up local capacity for collective action by creating and strengthening continuing relationships with a variety of associations and groups. The initiative is not about single victories but about building communities where people have a growing capacity to act together.	...to build and strengthen local alliances and networks.
Participants take responsibility for sharing what they are learning. The initiative creates new ways for people with developmental disabilties to do the work of active citizenship and makes what they have found available to other communities.	...to reflect together on the work and identify and communicate its lessons.

The Expansion Process

In June, GCDD will host three trainings for those interested in working with Real Communities. All interested communities must send at least one representative of their group or project to one of the three trainings. We strongly encourage you to attend with more than one member of your local community. During these trainings, you will get an overview of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), the purpose, vision and values behind Real Communities, and you will have an opportunity to begin developing your application to participate in the initiative. Questions related to the application and community selection process will only be accepted by GCDD staff during these training sessions. All answers to questions presented during the trainings will be recorded and publicly posted to the GCDD website (www.gcdd.org). We will accept applications from interested communities until July 1, 2013. At that point, the GCDD Council Members and staff will review applications and select communities to visit in person. Over the summer, we will spend time in these communities exploring possibilities, having conversations, and by October 1, 2013, we will select our new community partners.

What are we looking for?

Completed applications for future community partners will be reviewed by the Council and ranked according to the criteria listed below:

- Projects that respond to the Real Communities Commitments and Responsibilities, as well as the GCDD's mission, values, and goals.
- People and groups with a strong commitment to social justice and a willingness to engage with people across identity lines to work on community issues that matter to everyone – not just people with disabilities.
- Groups with no official connection to disability advocacy communities, but with a strong willingness to engage people with disabilities actively in group leadership.
- Groups with a history of action, though new projects and groups are welcome to apply, too.
- Strong commitment to taking part in an active learning and reflection process.
- Groups that actively support leadership and direction from folks who have been traditionally isolated and marginalized in communities.
- People who already use an organizing approach (with/us) vs. a charity or service delivery approach (for/them).
- You do not need to be a registered 501(c)(3) or formal organization to qualify! In fact, we are especially interested in supporting grassroots and community-initiated projects and groups!

The GCDD will NOT consider proposals that

- Are for ongoing, administrative, or operational expenses of existing programs.
- Are for direct services, equipment purchase, capital campaigns, fundraisers, or construction.

Training Dates and Locations

<u>**Saturday June 15, 2013**</u>
9 AM – 5 PM
Centenary United Methodist Church – Fellowship Hall
1290 College Street
Macon, GA 31201

<u>**Monday June 17, 2013**</u>
9 AM – 5 PM
Albany, GA – Location TBA
Location will be provided upon RSVP

<u>**Wednesday June 19, 2013**</u>
9 AM – 5 PM
Atlanta Friends Meeting
701 W. Howard Avenue
Decatur, GA 30030

In order to ensure adequate space and food, **please RSVP by Tuesday, May 28, 2013 to:**

> **Cheri Pace**
> **Email: cmpace@dhr.state.ga.us**
> **Phone: (404) 656-6593**

Include the number of people attending, the date of the training that you and/or your group will attend, any accommodations needed for full participation, and dietary restrictions. Lunch will be provided, compliments of the Council.