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PROMISING PRACTICES



Inclusive institute grooms future community leaders

When the [Albany Advocacy Resource Center, Inc.](#) (AARC), realized that a community leadership program did not include individuals with disabilities, the organization stepped in to establish a similar program to embrace persons with disabilities.

AARC serves and advocates for individuals with a wide range of disabilities and supportive living needs in Albany, Georgia, and surrounding Dougherty County.

Using the community leadership program as a model, AARC launched the Dougherty Leadership Development Institute (DLDI). AARC enlisted the support of the alumni of the community leadership program, members of the private business sector, and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to sponsor the institute.

DLDI addresses regional needs and resources

DLDI educates participants about civic opportunities in Dougherty County and raises awareness of the region's organizations and agencies serving persons with disabilities. The institute focuses on three purposes:

1. To allow individuals with diverse disabilities and without disabilities to become more knowledgeable about common issues, needs, concerns, resources, and opportunities that cross disability lines.
2. To provide the opportunity for leadership skills development aimed at empowering participants to have even more influence over decisions that affect

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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their lives.

3. To establish a network for better communication and relationships between individuals with differing disabilities and with organizations and agencies serving persons with disabilities.

Although AARC's community resource coordinator directs the institute's activities, the institute is self-governed by a board of community leaders.

Annual classes graduate community leaders

Every year, DLDI graduates a class of individuals who were selected through nominations and an application process. The institute encourages nominations from all organizations in Dougherty County that serve persons with disabilities in addition to nominations from other community organizations serving persons without disabilities.

Participants are requested to pay tuition, which may be paid by the participants, businesses, or sponsoring organizations. The tuition covers meals, speakers, materials, and awards.

Each year's DLDI class meets for educational sessions and tours covering a broad range of topics:

- Diversity training.
- Health and human services.
- Education and communication.
- Courts and public safety.
- Business and economic development.
- Arts and cultural activities.

Since its inception in 1991, DLDI has graduated more than 400 participants—including more than 200 individuals with disabilities. The diversity of each class brings more knowledge about issues, needs, resources, and opportunities for all of the county's citizens.

A recent [CARF International](#) survey report observed that "good community relations and carefully developed relationships with political and other leaders made the organization [AARC] a leader in representing the needs and interests of persons with disabilities."

For more information, contact Marcy McCarty, project manager, Albany Advocacy Resource Center, at MMcCarty@albanygaarc.org or (229) 888-6852, extension 306, or visit AARC's website at www.albanyarc.org.



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