



Circles[®] Orange County

Thriving Families, Thriving Communities

Annual Report April 2015 - March 2016



Circles engages entire communities in owning the solution to poverty by inspiring and equipping families and neighborhoods to thrive. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to become economically stable. To accomplish this, we build intentional relationships between people from all walks of life to help individuals build resources to achieve their unique goals and dreams leading to economic improvement.



THE CIRCLES® CONCEPT

Circles is a national model that addresses poverty in a holistic way recognizing that change happens at the individual, community, and systemic levels. Circles® creates the framework for people to build intentional relationships across economic and class lines with the goal of ending poverty in their community.

Circles is a high impact strategy that:

- Changes the mindset of the community so that members want to work together to create a place where all of its residents are able to thrive.
- Advocates for changing systemic policies and approaches that prevent people from becoming economically stable.
- Empowers people living at or near the federal poverty level to help solve community problems while transitioning into economic stability themselves.

HOW IT WORKS

Each Circle consists of an individual with low income who is working toward economic stability (Circle Leader) who is matched with two or three middle or upper middle income individuals (Circle Allies). This “matched” circle meets twice a month to work on the stability plan developed by the Circle Leader. The other two to three weeks in the month are focused on understanding community resources, enhancing life skills, identifying obstacles that are barriers to overcoming poverty, and building relationships.

CIRCLES IN A NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, Lead Organization for Circles® Orange County, has made a commitment to walk alongside the community of East Winter Garden (EWG) with the goal of reducing poverty one family at a time. Implementing Circles in a specific neighborhood maximizes the outcomes and potential impact for families and for the neighborhood as a whole. Through dignified interdependent relationships, the capacity of each family increases, one at a time, which leads to increased capacity in the neighborhood. This concept is simply and aptly summarized by our tag line: Thriving Families, Thriving Communities!





“I have learned that we all can make a difference in the lives of others if we dare to try.”

Circle Leader



“Through Circles I have learned about friendship and motivation to make positive changes!”

Circle Ally



ACHIEVEMENTS

Class One

Out of the 7 Circle Leaders who began in our inaugural class, 6 fulfilled their 18 month commitment (86%). Out of the 6 that completed all 18 months, 5 have achieved their economic stability goals. These five families have attained stable housing, transportation, health insurance and sufficient food supply as well as having reached income levels that cover these costs. In addition, 100% are not receiving Public Benefits in the form of food stamps, cash assistance, unemployment or other supplementary aid.

In total, these five graduates achieved:

- 15% increase in income
- 75% decrease in debt
- 119% increase in cash and savings

Class Two

At 12 months:

- 60% of the Circle Leaders increased their income
- 100% decreased public benefits dependence
- 40% increased cash assets (savings & cash)
- 100% increased their social capital

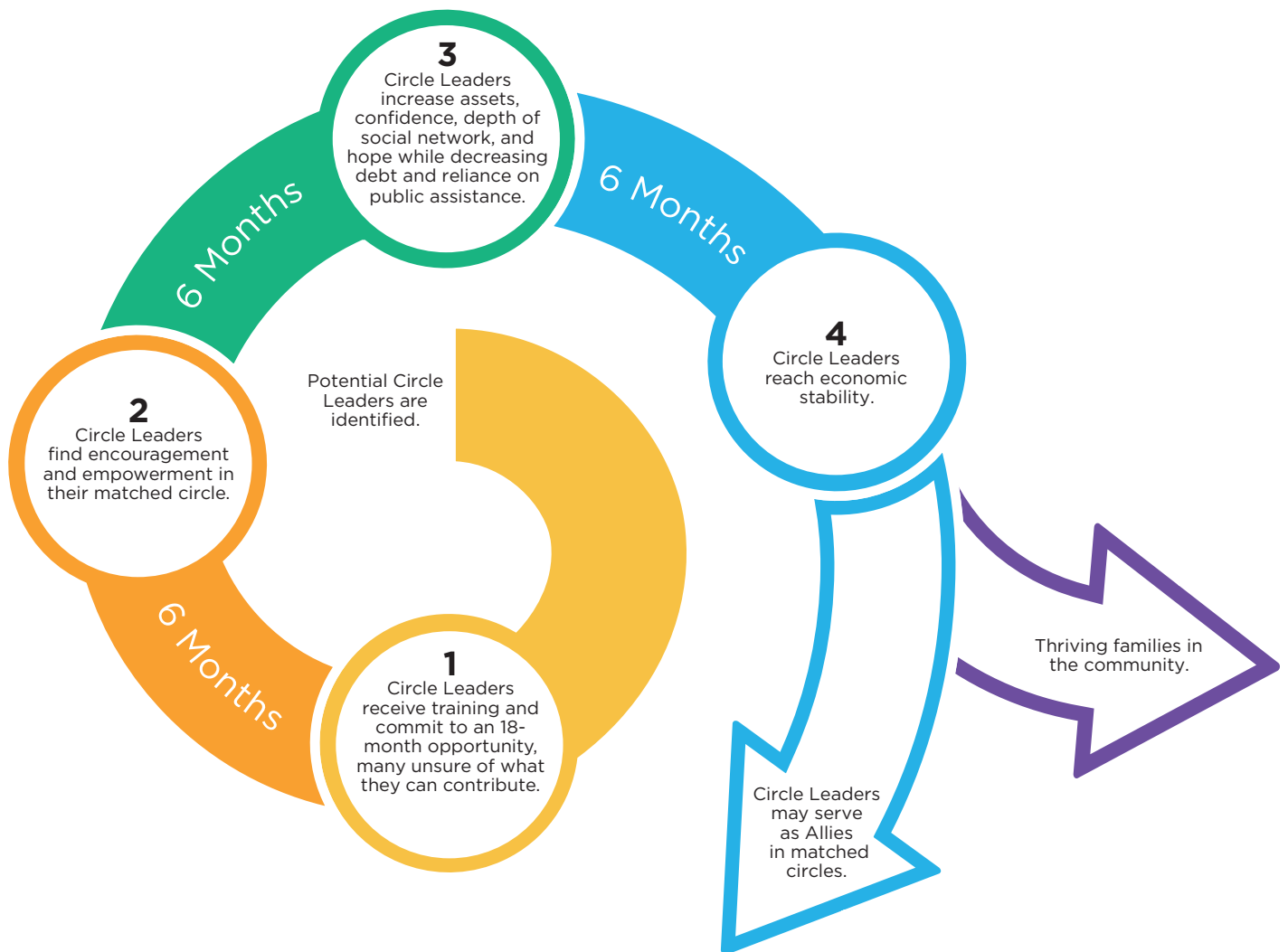
Class Three

In fall 2015, fifteen individuals graduated from our Getting Ahead class. This training is offered in preparation to become a Circle Leader and helps individuals with lower income learn how to build positive resources and relationships for a more prosperous life. Ten of the 15 graduates completed the process to become Circle Leaders, our largest class yet. This class is opening doors for Circles Orange County to address challenges such as successful re-entry into the workforce, education, and business development for those with criminal background issues.

Education Achievements of our Circle Leaders:

Many Circle Leaders are engaged in continuing education classes to earn degrees, certifications, and licenses as well as to increase their job related skills. Since joining Circles, we estimate that our Circle Leaders have completed over 1,000 educational hours. They have earned over 12 certifications and licenses such as Certified Office Specialist, Commercial Driver's License, Jobs Partnership, and CPR/First Aid.

CIRCLES CLASS PROGRESSION



WHO WE ARE



Circles Orange County meets weekly and includes:

- 21 Circle Leaders
- 41 Circle Allies
- 38 Children
- 5 Ad Hoc Allies/Volunteers

Members in the community range in age from 4 to 78

Weekly Meetings

2 hours every Tuesday evening, comprised of:

- Dinner and fellowship
- Youth programming for children (includes tutoring, fun, and personal development)
- Weekly content for adults (includes building relationships, working on goals, learning, and/or impacting the community)
- Wrap-up and clean-up



Training

To prepare participants for their Circles journey, we provide 24 hours of training for Circle Leaders and 17 hours of training for Circle Allies. This year, 28 Leaders and Allies completed approximately 440 hours of training in support of their participation in Circles.

Since inception in 2014, 94% of our Leaders and Allies have remained active and engaged in our Circles Community.



2015 BY THE NUMBERS



Anticipated Expenses	\$120,000
Actual Expenses	-\$102,000
Reinvested for 2016	<u>\$18,000</u>

Donation of Meeting Space Value \$5,000

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Community partnerships increased from two to eight for a 300% increase.

- Kid's Café
- Boys & Girls Club
- East Winter Garden Community Development Corporation
- South Street Ministry
- West Orange Church of Christ
- First United Methodist Church of Winter Park
- West Orange Habitat for Humanity
- City of Winter Garden

“Through Circles I have learned that I have a lot to offer to others! I have achieved a 689 credit score and have been able to budget for my family GOALS!”

Circle Leader

“I have learned job training skills and am now able to apply for positions!”

Circle Leader

“We are able to see God through our connection to others. Our greatest asset is being a community and meeting every week to eat together.”

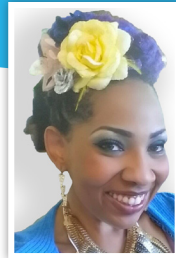
Circle Ally



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Join Circles as an Ally, Leader, or Community Partner.
For more information please contact Beth Witten or visit st.lukes.org/circles.

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