



## Circles® Overview

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Circles® has drawn national attention for helping families out of poverty and inspiring communities to commit to new long-term solutions for addressing this persistent issue and to building more wealth.

Several national organizations have members who have initiated implementation of the Circles model, including United Way, Goodwill, the United Methodist Church, Lutheran Social Services, Community Action Partnerships, and Catholic Charities. Additionally Circles® is being adapted for use by community colleges, housing corporations, workforce development centers, human service systems, and hospitals. Each member receives training for its staff and volunteers, as well as fund development coaching. Site visits are conducted by National Campaign staff or trainers annually. The National Campaign office also provides phone and email coaching and performs regular fidelity site visits to ensure that the programs in which members have received instruction are being implemented to the fullest, extent possible.

*Move the Mountain created Circles® to inspire and equip communities to end poverty by:*

1. Leading a movement to end poverty in the U.S.
2. Building best practices on the Circles® platform to achieve the ultimate goal of poverty eradication.

*The National Circles® Campaign Office provides:*

1. Leadership and oversight of the National Campaign
2. Coordinated regional training and coaching for local sites
3. Research and development of the model
4. Management of the National Guiding Coalition which has five focused teams
5. Public relations and marketing to national network

*Each local Circles® Member Site commits to:*

1. Building a community-based, volunteer team of people with financial resources around a individual/family that wants to get out of poverty;
2. Educating community leadership on how to help individuals and families help themselves out of poverty; and,
3. Changing structures and policies to increase the capacity of the community to end poverty.

## How it Works

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The primary participant is a family working to get out of poverty. The family is the **Circle Leader** and sets the direction for activities and actions which will result in their emergence from poverty. Circles are conducted in cohorts of up to 25, to ensure that Circle Leaders have peer support from each other (bonding social capital) as well as the support of their **Circle Allies** (bridging social support).

Each cohort begins with training for Circle Leaders as a group, using a variety of training curriculums. During the first few months of Circle Leader training, participants assess their current relationships, resources and reason or purpose for making the necessary changes to escape from poverty permanently. It is

during this time that Allies are also attending training session that increase awareness of poverty issues within the families they will be matched with as well as issues that affect the community as a whole. Both the **Circle Leader and Ally Training** curriculum teaches participants to better understand the “hidden rules” or “social norms” associated with class in the US as well as how to build a long-term vision for their future both individually as well as for the community. Looking at poverty in a more holistic manner is necessary for both Circle Leaders and Allies once they are matched in an intentional team for a minimum of 18 months.

Helping each family set and achieve goals unique to their own needs will be the responsibility of **Circle Allies**, who are middle to upper income community volunteers. Leaders and Allies meet monthly to build relationship, review goals that have been set, discuss and problem-solve barriers to getting out of poverty, such as improving self-sufficiency, expanding social networks, and enhancing academic performance of both children and parents.

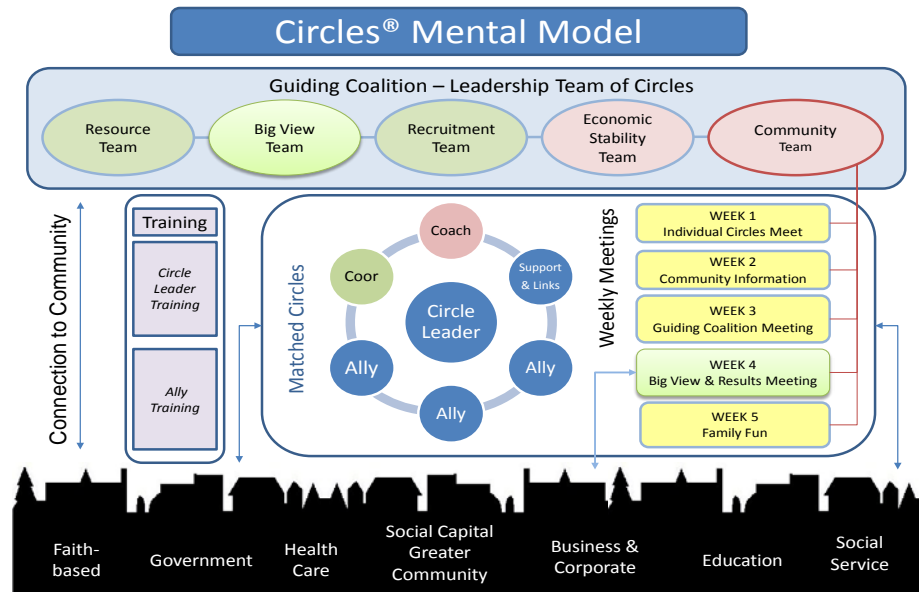
Moving forward, **Weekly Community Meetings** gather Circle Leaders, Circle Allies, and other interested community members to provide support and networking opportunities. Big View Meetings are held once per month and feature a far ranging discussion of the causes of poverty in the community and how to address them for the long-term, in the process removing systemic barriers.



# Mental Model of the Community Initiative

Each Circles® initiative is developed and designed by the partnership of the lead organization and a community **Guiding Coalition**.

The **Guiding Coalition** is composed of community leaders, low-income individuals, Circle Leaders, Allies, elected and appointed officials, and volunteers. The coalition works to change the mind set and policies of their community with respect to poverty, utilizing the Circles® model while also tailoring the approach to their community's needs. The National Campaign Staff and Certified Circles Trainers work alongside the



**Lead Organization**, which is responsible for staffing, operational oversight, and for contributing resources to each Circles® initiative. Each Lead Organization is assigned a **Certified Circles® Trainer** to ensure best practices are being followed, deliver key trainings for member staff and are consistently available to give advice on various aspects of each member's Circles® Campaign implementation and ongoing practice.

Each Lead Organization is responsible for convening the Guiding Coalition which provides oversight to the initiative, staffing the local initiative and recruiting a Community Champion that will assist in accessing various networks in the community. The National Certified Trainer will work with the Lead Organization at every step of the development process. One of the unique aspects of Circles is that while we want to have a positive impact on the low-income individual, we also want to have a significant impact on the community.

# Circles® 2011

Currently operating in 61 communities around the country each Circles® initiative is lead by a local organization that provides a Circles Coach, volunteer coordination and fundraising efforts. These key roles are critical for providing leadership and capacity for the campaign. National Circles® staff works with members to implement all the components of the model by providing guidance for Circles® members once an initiative is underway.



## Evaluation

As of September 2011, there are over 1200 Circle Leaders who have participated in an evaluation process which includes tracking of Circle Leader income, education, assets and social networks over time. The early results show positive gains that are being made by Circle Leaders across the country:

### *Retention Rates:*

Survey Collection Time Increments	Number of Circle Leaders	Retention Rate
Finish the class (GA):	760 out of 1179	64%
Circles for 6 months	672 out of 1094	61%
Circles for 12 months	463 out of 807	58%
Circles for 18 months	59 out of 138	42%

### *Gains:*

	Income Increase	Assets Increase	Welfare Benefits Decrease
Finished the Class	28%	28%	-6%
Circles 6 months	29%	71%	-6%
Circles 12 months	34%	101%	-27%
Circles 18 months	48%	115%	-36%

## The National Team

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Circles® was developed by the nonprofit Move the Mountain Leadership Center largely through funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Iowa Department of Human Services, and the USHHS Office of Community Services.

Circles® was initiated in Ames, Iowa by Move the Mountain in 1995. In 2004 it was measured by Iowa State University to have a 2-1 return on welfare and food stamps assistance (\$490,000 annual savings) and 4-1 return on new earned income for 58 families (\$960,000 new annual income). From 2003-2007, Circles was transferred through the community action network to communities in Minnesota, Idaho, Iowa, and Missouri. Average income went up in all sites in the first 12-20 months, but the fidelity of the model was difficult to sustain. Lessons learned were embedded in new training programs and coaching protocols.

In 2008, Move the Mountain began working with a local Circles site in Springfield, OH to build a national training process, including regional training centers and certified trainers. In 2011, Move the Mountain asked the local Circles site lead organization to assume the management, leadership responsibilities and day-to-day operations of the national campaign. In August 2011, Think Tank officially assumed this position and will continue to implement the strategic goals and objectives of the national campaign.



**Scott Miller** is co-founder and CEO of Move the Mountain. For more than twenty years Scott has provided training and consulting across the country helping communities understand and engage in high impact strategies to end poverty. Scott leads MTM's Circles® transformational initiative which teaches communities how to provide direct relationship support between community volunteers and low-income families. He is an inspiring speaker and author of the field manual, *Move the Mountain: the Transformational Planning Guide*, and the book, *Until It's Gone, Ending Poverty in Our Nation in our Lifetime*.



**Karin VanZant, MPA, LSW** is the CEO of the National Campaign. For more than 15 years Karin has provided social services in Southwest Ohio. She has worked at the local level in direct services with low-income persons, at the state level with the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and has worked nationally as a contractor for Move the Mountain Leadership Center and the Circles Campaign. In 2005, Karin co-founded an intermediary non-profit, Think Tank, which began implementing the Circles Campaign in Springfield, OH in 2007. The second Circle site in Dayton, OH started in 2009. Karin worked closely with Move the Mountain to establish the national trainer's pool and has visited most of the local Circles initiatives in the past two years. She has been a National Certified Trainer for both Move the Mountain and aha!Process and has coached over 50 Circles sites since 2009. Karin has been an Ally since 2007. Karin has lived in Clark County, OH all of her life. She married her high school sweetheart and has a wonderful teenage son.



**Marlo Fox** is the National Operations Director for the Campaign. Marlo Fox has a BA in Social Work from Anderson University and is currently pursuing her Masters in Nonprofit Management at Regis University. In 2005, Marlo co-founded an intermediary non-profit, Think Tank with Karin VanZant, which began implementing Circles in 2007 in Springfield, OH. Prior to establishing Think Tank, Marlo worked for nine years as a Workforce Development Program Director to promote training and employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed citizens of Clark County. Marlo's experience includes eleven years of direct service with low income populations and nonprofit administration including leadership of multiple programs and staff. This experience and Marlo's ability to critically think through difficult processes and strategies has her uniquely qualified for the coordination role for the campaign. Marlo is the co-chairperson for the National Economic Stability Team of the National Guiding Coalition, assists the local Big View team and has been an Ally for several years.

Marlo, her husband of 13 years and their two daughters are all committed to the development of a Springfield community where people from all walks of life have the opportunity to thrive.



**John White** is the National Campaign Director for Circles. Former Ohio Representative John White is a native of Dayton, Ohio, who has been active in community service, politics, business and organizational change for more than two decades. Currently John is leading the National Circles Campaign Recruitment Team. He is the first connection that many new communities have when deciding to enter the campaign. John can speak firsthand about the power of Circles and how it has transformed his life over the past two years. Since leaving the Ohio General Assembly after serving eight years, John has partnered with Think Tank, Inc. to launch the Dayton Circles Campaign and work with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and Montgomery County leaders to adapt the Circles principles to assist incarcerated individuals as they transition back into their communities.

John and his wife Andrea have been married 28 years. They have three daughters and reside in Kettering, Ohio.



**Heather Cunningham** is the National Training Director for the Campaign. Heather's care for people has always been the center of her career. She has worked in the nonprofit sector for over a decade. In the early years of her career, she worked at a domestic violence agency, which included working with clients and supervising staff, managing projects and funding. Heather's more recent work has been with the Clark County Circles Campaign. She has helped to build a very strong initiative and VISTA project that support four different Circles Sites in Ohio. She has worked intensely with Circle Leaders, Allies and Guiding Coalition members and her hands-on approach is valuable to new Circle Communities. Her areas of expertise include: working with HUD, AmeriCorps\* VISTA, PHSS, DV, HMIS, staff development and building relationships across class, race and cultural lines.

Heather, her husband, son and daughter live in Springfield, Ohio.