



[www.circlesusa.org](http://www.circlesusa.org)

WHAT  
IS  
CIRCLES?

### **Circles reduces poverty**

It's about intentional relationships across income lines. While middle-income and high-income families enjoy networks of support through their jobs, schools, and neighborhoods, families living in poverty rarely develop such contacts. Many who live in poverty are hardworking and motivated, so when a circle of support forms around them, advice is offered, contacts are shared, and the fears that keep people in poverty start to disappear.

### **Circles changes communities**

Volunteers and participants grow and learn together. While participants navigate their way to prosperity, volunteers get an in-depth education on the culture of poverty. Participants' successes and challenges are also analyzed at monthly meetings with community leaders. This new understanding enables a community to identify, discuss, and often resolve the barriers that keep people in poverty. By changing the mindset, systems can be transformed from poverty management to poverty reduction.

### **Circles is working**

Many communities are using Circles because the results are so encouraging. After 18 months, those in the program achieve an average 71% increase in their income.



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BECOME  
AN ALLY



# Building a friendship with someone in poverty will have a life-changing effect on both of you.

## LEARNING TOGETHER

Participants are called Circle Leaders, and volunteers are called Allies. After both groups receive training, two Allies are matched with every Circle Leader. These intentional friendships are the foundation of the Circles model. Circle Leaders set their own goals and run the weekly meetings. As an Ally, your job is to listen, ask questions, and make suggestions. You'll help Circle Leaders use their unique gifts and skills to reach their goals, and Circle Leaders will help you better understand poverty in your community.

## CIRCLES GIVES YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO

- > Support people as they leave poverty for good
- > Use your experience and networks to help others
- > Improve your problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills
- > Expand your perspective about the culture of poverty
- > Take an active role in improving your community



## LEADERS & ALLIES COMMIT TO

- > Building a friendship
- > Attending meetings regularly
- > Being open to new perspectives
- > Being honest
- > Trusting the process even when it's challenging

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY



*"Being a Circles Ally is like being a VIP on the floor at a Knicks game. You see the 'thrill of victory' up-close-and-personal."*

— Ken Smith (Circles Ally)

*"When you listen intently to individuals and families living in poverty and engage in relationships with them, you develop a different understanding of their circumstances and a deep desire to create change."*

— Jeannie Chaffin (Circles Supporter)



*"I can't come to Circles with an attitude of 'I can fix you' or even 'I can show you the way.' In Circles, everyone—volunteers and participants—has something to offer to the group."*

— Sherri Brown (Circles Chapter Director)



## HOW IT WORKS

- > All participants and volunteers receive training
- > Circle Leaders set goals, and Allies support Leaders as they meet their goals
- > Circle Leaders and Allies gather for weekly large group meetings
- > Monthly sessions engage community leaders in the work of poverty reduction
- > Most families achieve financial stability around the 18-month mark
- > Victories and milestones are celebrated together
- > Friendships formed in the group last a lifetime