

Community leaders take steps to end poverty

By [Susan Albert](#) E-E Business Editor

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Fifty percent of the children in the Bartlesville Regional United Way area under 5 years old are being raised in poverty, according to a United Way study.

More than 30 percent of the population in the BRUWA is below the federal poverty level.

Startling statistics for any community, but the local Poverty Alleviation Coalition wants to do something about it. Not with more public investment and not by “managing” poverty, but by ending it.

Scott Miller, co-founder of Move the Mountain, a leadership program that teaches strategies to eliminate poverty, spoke at a breakfast sponsored by the PAC, Washington County Anti-Drug Network and the Bartlesville Regional United Way. The breakfast was followed by an all-day seminar to learn the transformational leadership planning process.

Miller said Move the Mountain’s mission is to inspire and equip communities to eliminate poverty.

“People in poverty live in the tyranny of the moment without a future story,” he said. “The program helps them reclaim a future story. Without it we have crime, drug use, domestic abuse ...”

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Miller said what usually happens with the current system is that “so many people say here is the bridge and keep walking,” but the support systems stop.

“He gets that first job, the benefits start dropping out,” he said.

The best way to help families move to self sufficiency, he said, is to help them develop a network of relationships with people who are in a higher income class.

Miller said to understand that concept, one must first understand the driving forces in each income class. For example, the person in poverty is concerned with survival, relationships and entertainment. A person in the middle class is work and achievement oriented. People in the wealthy class are associated with financial, political and social resources.

By connecting the family in poverty with “social capital,” they learn to tap into the forces prominent in those classes, thereby achieving new skills and abilities to live “in that world successfully,” he said.

“The Circles campaign we’ve found is the best model to build relationships beyond the class,” said Miller.

The Circles model utilizes middle and upper income allies who befriend the family who is working to get out of poverty. The family acts as the circle leader and, with the help of his allies, each family sets and achieves their own goals.

“The ally says, ‘I will work with you for 18 months; I will befriend you and your children.’ They will be taught the bridges out of poverty concept,” said Miller.

The programs teach skills that will help the families get ahead, teach community leaders the planning tools to address poverty, create support and networking opportunities and examine the causes of poverty.

A Guiding Coalition designs each Circles initiative and a Lead Agency handles the operational oversight of each Circles initiative.

Miller said a study conducted by a number of universities showed that the cost of raising children in poverty is enormous.

Poverty increases health care, increases crime, and reduces productivity to the tune of \$500 million, he said.

By empowering people to take charge of their lives, they can get out of the rescue triangle, whereby a victim and rescuer just end up persecuting each other, according to Miller.

He said what is most important is “people like us taking an interest in what people are dealing with.”

“Keep people moving forward on the bridge; don’t let the bridge fall apart in the middle,” said Miller.