



Evaluation Report

National Circles Campaign

First Quarter, 2010

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SUMMARY

The first group of 33 families to complete *Getting Ahead* and six months of Circles has just posted its six-month, post-Getting Ahead results: **88% increase in earned income, 30% decrease in use of welfare benefits, 56% increase in assets, and 125% increase in “people in my life I can count on.”** The median income rose from \$637/month to \$1200, average assets went from \$604 to \$941, welfare benefits dropped from \$436/month to \$306/month, and the average number of “friends I can count on” went from four to nine.

Circles is designed to not only help families out of poverty, but to initiate changes in the community that result in eliminating barriers to economic stability. The long-range vision is to eliminate the condition of poverty altogether. We will begin reporting this year on the Big View (systemic change) wins that communities are beginning to see as a result of their local Circles initiative.

The Circles Campaign, launched by Move the Mountain Leadership Center in 2007, has drawn national attention for helping families and inspiring communities to commit to new long-term solutions that address this persistent issue. Elements of this model were introduced in 1995 and have evolved through years of development, as well as through a partnership with Dr. Ruby Payne, to the current approach. 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. Move the Mountain is interested in two levels of results: *First of all, families are moving from poverty to economic stability and secondly changes are taking place in the community to build a bridge so others can move out of poverty.*

At its heart are matched Circles consisting of two or more middle and upper income volunteers, "**Allies**," to a family who is ready to get out of poverty. The Allies provide friendship, coaching, networking and anything else necessary to help families achieve their self-sufficiency goals. The participating families are known as **Circle Leaders** and are expected to set goals and take the action steps needed for them to become economically stable while helping community leaders learn how to help others out of poverty.

Circles also provide weekly meals with free child development services while the adults focus on their self-sufficiency goals. Existing community services are customized by the Circles to achieve results. In addition, each community's Circle Campaign is led by a Guiding Coalition comprised of five teams responsible for development and implementation of the Circles approach, conducting weekly meetings, generating resources, and linking families to education, training and jobs. The **Guiding Coalition** organizes a "Big View" meeting once a month which is essentially an open house to the community with the goal of illuminating the community about the barriers families face as

they become economically stable and eliminating these obstacles.

Poverty creates severe financial hardship for communities, states, and our nation. According to testimony to Congress by the Center for American Progress, our nation spends **500 billion dollars** a year on the fall-out from children raised in poverty. For a fraction of the cost, Circles provides an opportunity to develop a powerful new approach to helping families out of poverty, reduce wasteful spending and increase the number of economically stable households in every community that adopts Circles.

Circles are conducted in cohorts, a group of up to 25 Circle Leaders, who begin with a training using the **Getting Ahead** curriculum written by Philip DeVol, a consultant for aha! Process and based on Ruby Payne's **Framework for Understanding Poverty**. This curriculum teaches participants to understand and use the "hidden rules" of class and to learn methods to build self-sufficiency through the development of financial, social, and emotional resources. It also empowers them to take a leadership role in addressing the causes of poverty that lie within their community. While the Circle Leaders are working through the Getting Ahead curriculum, their future Allies are receiving training in a parallel curriculum based on the, *Bridges Out of Poverty*, by Philip DeVol, Ruby Payne, and Terie Dreussi Smith. Bridges Out of Poverty is designed to educate members of the middle class about the hidden rules of poverty and to train them to address the causes of poverty. When the groups complete their respective curriculums, the Circle Leaders are matched with their Allies and begin monthly meetings with them. Additionally, they continue weekly meetings with the other Leaders in their cohort, thus ensuring that the Circle Leaders have peer support from each other (bonding social capital) as well as support from their Allies (bridging social capital).



EVALUATION METHODS

This report is based on a progress report that is completed by each Circle Leader. These reports are completed prior to the initial training component (*Getting Ahead*), at the completion of *Getting Ahead*, and every six months after. *Getting Ahead* is group training in which low income families learn to understand and use the “hidden rules” of social class and learn methods to build self-sufficiency through development of financial, social, and emotional resources. They complete a follow-up progress report when they finish *Getting Ahead*, which is typically when the Leader is matched with Allies. Future evaluation reports are completed every six months for the duration of the program (typically 18 months after matching).

Wilder Research worked with Move the Mountain staff in the development of consistent evaluation instruments for use in all participating sites. The **Circle Leaders Progress Report** is completed by each Circle Leader and at least one trained staff, volunteer, or ally working together to answer the questions. It includes 80 closed-ended questions that assess household composition, financial status (including sources and amounts of income, public benefits, assets, and debt), health conditions and health insurance, education, employment, housing, social support, child care, transportation, and community engagement. It also includes two open-ended questions to identify the most important goals the Circle Leader has set for the coming six months as part of Circles and the goals that have been accomplished during the preceding six months as part of

involvement in Circles. Move the Mountain has trained staff in participating sites in the use of the instruments.

Data collection began in July 2008. Each community began their next Getting Ahead class at varying times after that, some in July, but many in October, November, or even 2009. The Getting Ahead curriculum lasts between 12-20 weeks depending on schedules at the local community. Thus, the total time from the before Getting Ahead data collection to post Getting Ahead was 3-5 months. The next data collection was 6 months after Getting Ahead graduation.

Data included in this report comes from three states and six communities: Meriden, Connecticut; Coeur d’Alene, Lewiston, and Sandpoint Idaho; and Muncie and Bloomington Indiana. For this report, a total of 33 Circle Leaders had progressed through all three stages of data collection with fully completed data.

EVALUATION RESULTS

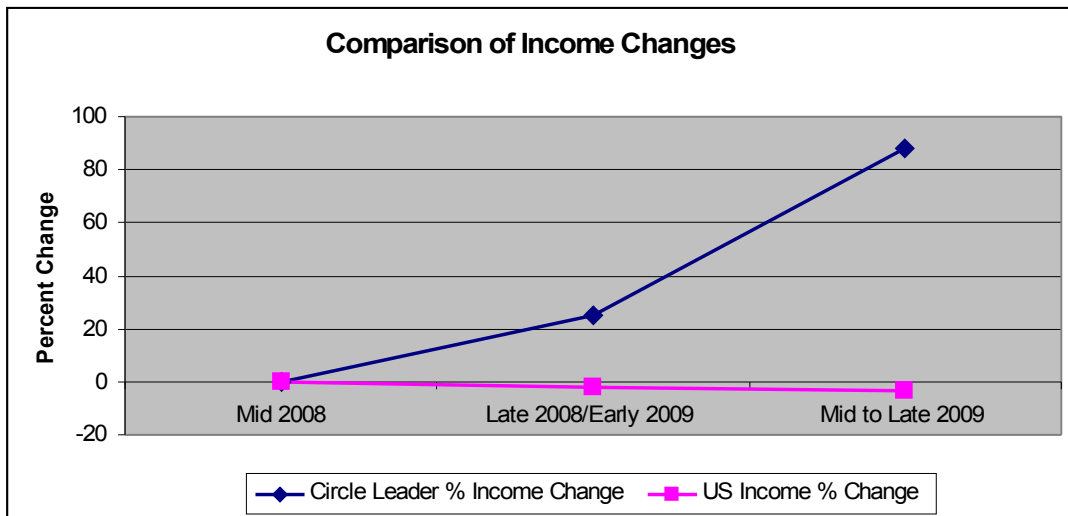
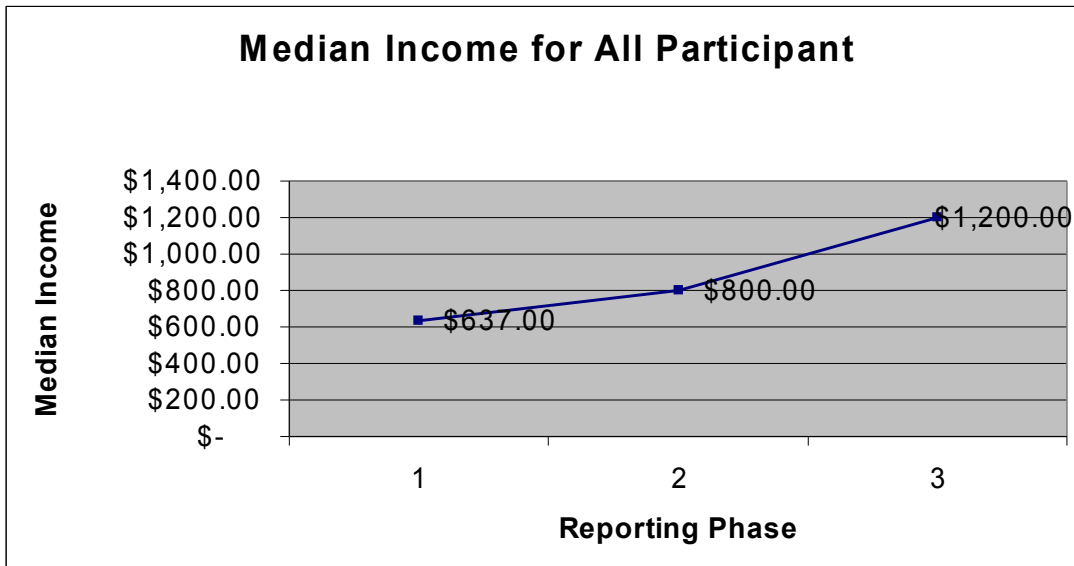
The Circle Leader Progress report is completed at baseline with answers as of the date that *Getting Ahead* began, again at the end of *Getting Ahead*, and thereafter every six months while the participant remains engaged. Data collection began in July 2008 and each community began their next Getting Ahead class at varying times after that. The Getting Ahead curriculum lasts between 12-20 weeks depending on schedules in the local community. Thus, the total time from the before Getting Ahead data collection to post Getting Ahead was 3-5 months. The next data collection was 6 months after Getting Ahead graduation.

Data Period	Date Range
Data Period 1: Prior to Getting Ahead	7/15/2008 to 2/07/2009
Data Period 2: At conclusion of Getting Ahead	10/13/2008 to 5/18/2009
Data Period 3: Six months after Getting Ahead completion and enrolled in a Circle	5/12/2009 to 12/11/2009

Data included in this report comes from three states and six communities: Meriden, Connecticut; Coeur d’Alene, Lewiston, and Sandpoint Idaho; and Muncie and Bloomington Indiana. For this report, a total of 33 Circle Leaders had progressed through all three stages of data collection with fully completed data.

Change in Income

Over the course of the three data collection points, 54% of the Circle Leaders indicated that they had obtained a better paying job. This change is paralleled by a marked increase in median income. The Circle Leaders' median income increased from \$634/month to \$1200/month. This is an 88% increase and occurred at a time when the economy as a whole was shrinking. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that median household income decreased by 3.6% during this same period.

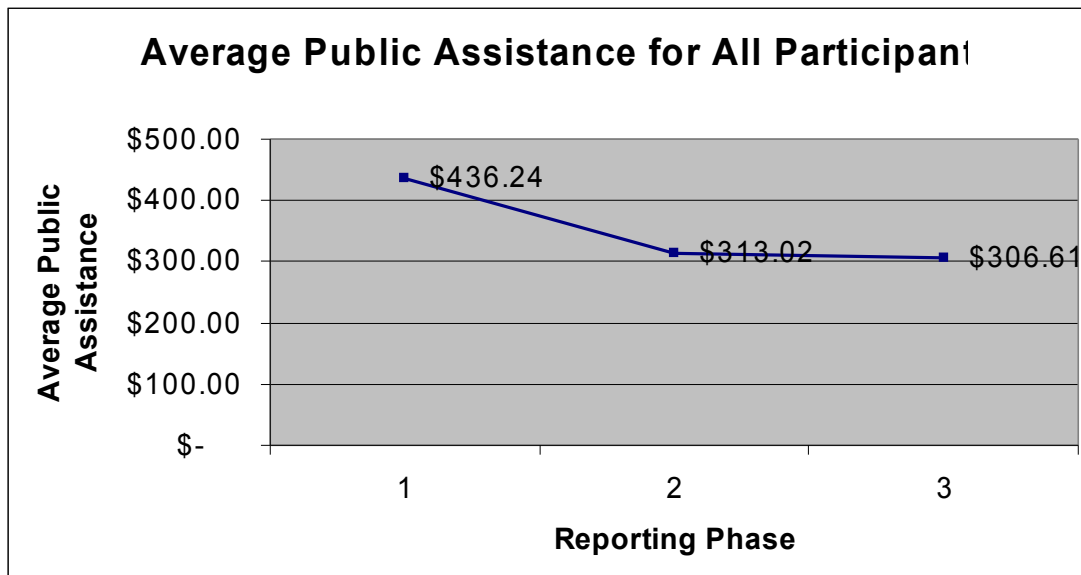


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Source: Circles data and author's interpretation of US Census Bureau Statistics

Changes in Benefits

Over the course of Getting Ahead and six months in Circles, the average Circle Leader reduced their receipt of public benefits. At the beginning of involvement, the average Circle Leader was receiving \$436/month in benefits. After completion of Getting Ahead and six months in Circles, that number was reduced to \$306/month. This resulted in a \$51,336 annual total savings to the communities involved in Circles.



Decrease in Isolation

One of the goals of the Circles Initiative is to increase the social capital and decrease the isolation of low income families. One item on the Circle Leader Progress report inquires about the number of “friends you can count on”. The average answer at Phase One (Pre-Getting Ahead class) was 4 friends, and at phase 2 (post Getting Ahead) this number increased to 7 and at Phase 3 (6 months of Circles involvement) the average number of “friends I can count on” increased to 9.

Additional Results

- 100% of respondents indicated that they had donated food, clothing, or other goods to an individual or organization.

- 50% reported that they had obtained reliable transportation during their involvement with Circles.

CONCLUSION

The first 33 families that have completed six months after Getting Ahead and enrolled in Circles are showing promising results. Their median income went up by 88%, their use of public assistance benefits went down by 30%, their assets when up by 56% and they reported that the number of people they say that can count on more than doubled to a healthy support system of 9 other people. This progress was made during a time in our economy when national household income decreased by 3%.

DATA SUMMARY CHART

Data Summary	Pre Getting Ahead	Post Getting Ahead	Six Month post GA
Number of Circle Leaders included in this report	33	33	33
Date Ranges for Data	7/15/2008 to 2/07/2009	10/13/2008 to 5/18/2009	5/12/2009 to 12/11/2009
Median Income	\$637	\$800	\$1200
Percent Increase in Median Income from Baseline	n/a	25%	88%
Average Public Assistance Benefits Received	\$436	\$313	\$306
Percent Decrease in Benefits	n/a	-28%	-30%
Average Assets	\$604	\$468	\$941
Average Number of “friends I can count on”	4	7	9

These early numbers are encouraging milestone on the long journey to economic stability. Most households will need to earn 200% of the poverty guidelines (over \$3,000 a month for a family of three) and have 6 months of savings in the bank before they can be considered economically stable. Like any goal, getting there is exciting and every win along the way is important to achieving the dream.

Our data collection system will be conducted on-line beginning in April of 2010. Progress reports can be compiled both locally and nationally at any point in time. Communities can compare their local data to other communities and to the national Circles Campaign. This immediate feedback will provide additional focus and motivation to all members of the Circles initiative and help achieve news results.