

WINTER
2016

BIG VIEW

A Quarterly Newsletter from...



CIRCLES®
INITIATIVE
Dubuque

ABOUT US

Circles USA is an innovative national movement that engages individuals and the community in resolving poverty.

Dubuque Circles Mission: To build collaborative circles of support, so those living in a cycle of poverty may lead themselves and their families to permanent stability.

Find us on
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THE CITY OF
DUBUQUE
Masterpiece on the Mississippi

LETTER FROM THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

As it is with every new year, we get the chance to start fresh, to re-evaluate our lives, our goals, and our future. But there's something particularly special about this year for the Dubuque Circles Initiative, as we enter our 5th year as a Circles® chapter. It has been a long road, and we're proud and energized to be here today, with so many amazing projects now underway; from Leadership Development trainings, and the Money Match Program with Dupaco Community Credit Union, to the brand new Passports Project, we're implementing opportunities that give our Circle Leaders the chance to develop skills, build equity and social capital, and reach their goals for 2016 and beyond. And to top it off, we get to enter 2016 with a class of highly motivated Getting Ahead™ graduates, now Circle Leaders, partnered with Allies who are committed to supporting them. As staff, we are committed to this year being one of growth, collaboration and leadership, and of celebration for reaching 5 years as the Dubuque Circles Initiative. Thank you for getting us here! We're SO excited to see what this year will bring.



Dubuque Circles Initiative • Housing & Community Development Dept.
350 West 6th Street • Dubuque IA 52001
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MAKING A MATCH

At Circles, we make the process of building relationships intentional. Individuals generally join Circles for one of two reasons: they want to better their lives, or they want to help another better their life. And so Circles brings these two groups together, Circle Leaders with Allies, so



From left: Scott, Sheri and Ralph build intentional relationship on Matched Circle reveal night.

that those individuals living with daily instability can build their 'bridging social capital', a resource often necessary to get out of poverty. These Matched Circles explore their biases, investigate

their experience with economic class, and build friendship across class lines. These

friendships offer new ideas and ways to problems solve, without judgment.

So how does one go about formalizing what is inherently a very informal process? It begins with dinner. Eating a meal together is sacred—it is where families connect and friends laugh. One of the most important community and relationship building aspects of Circles is our meal

together. It takes the pressure off, and offers a familiar ritual in which to build a bond with someone new.

Next, there is Integrated Matched Circle Training. Allies and Circle Leaders come together for four weeks to share with one another, to participate in get-to-know-you activities, and learn about their new roles together. It is after this point that Circle Leaders and



From left: Eddie and Jon excited to get started on Matched Circle reveal night.

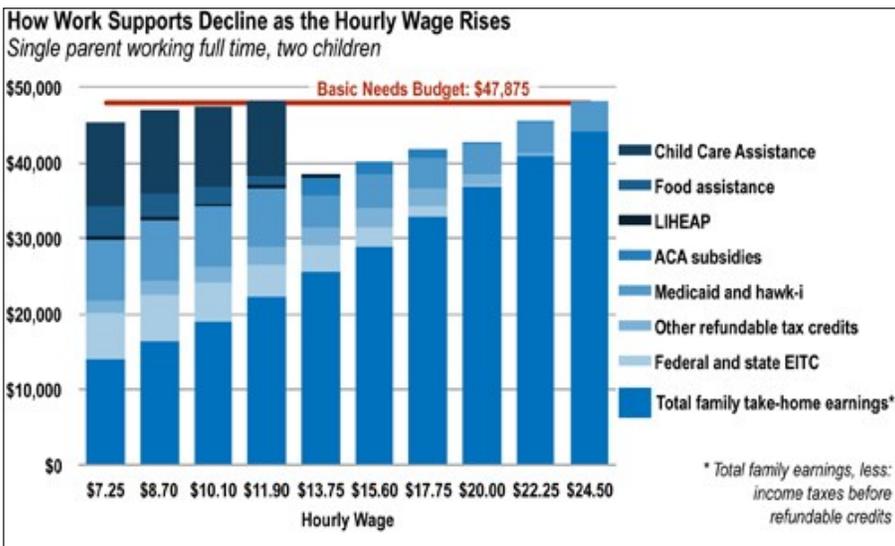
Allies are matched. Individuals offer up their first impressions—if they really “clicked” with one person over another, and then Circles staff plug everyone together, based on their goals, skills and personalities. While there is no perfect match, and relationships are never static, this recent group of Matched Circles has expressed how thrilled they are with their groups. Matched Circles will attend Weekly Meetings as they continue to get to know one another. Out of ten graduates, 9 participants were placed in Matched Circles in December.



From left: Fred, Randy, and Dan chat during the Matched Circle reveal night.

ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF...

The choice is real—many working families in Iowa today are being forced to choose between living on government assistance, or living with the constant risk of becoming homeless, not being able to feed their children, and living without medical coverage. The Benefits Cliff Effect is a detrimental policy flaw that takes place when individuals currently receiving government assistance are offered higher pay either through a promotion, working more hours, or a job change. These individuals are abruptly cut off from their governmental assistance (see chart for Iowa cut off points), causing a significant loss in spending power because their pay increase does not make up for their loss in benefits. For those trying to achieve economic self-sufficiency, this can make or break their success.



One Circles participant explains how she was attending school and was excited to begin working. However, after receiving her first paycheck she remembers, “they turned off medical for me, food stamps for my son, I didn’t even have money for diapers. They just took everything ... that was a real rough time.” Particularly for working parents who do not have alternative childcare options, this loss can be devastating., “I’m willing to work for it, but I need a little room to get there.” Circles USA has put this flaw at the forefront, and sites including Dubuque are actively working to make change.

BREAKING BARRIERS BY BUILDING EQUITY

In partnership with Dupaco Community Credit Union and the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, Circles has implemented a process that will support its participants in building one of the most elusive resources needed to get out (and stay out) of poverty: equity.

Thanks to Dupaco's Money Match Program, qualifying Circles participants can open savings accounts for asset-building opportunities, such as purchasing a home or paying for their education. Once the participant reaches a pre-determined savings goal, he or she receives a dollar-for-dollar matching grant from the Dupaco R.W. Hoefer Foundation, as well as an *additional* dollar-for-dollar match from Circles donations, making a 2:1 match that will go toward the asset of the participant's choice. Five Circle Leaders have already registered to participate in the program.



Circles supports low income participants through coaching as well as asset building financial workshops on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. These workshops are unique from a typical financial literacy class in that they are catered to the participants' specific needs. Even more importantly, because participants have been matched up with middle class allies, they have a support network in place when confusing or frustrating financial issues come up.

To jump start the project, Ruhl and Ruhl Realtors held a fundraiser in August of 2015 that provided Circles with \$2,133 in funds. This contribution allowed Circles to purchase copies of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's financial curriculum, *Your Money Your Goals*. Since then, Circles vol-

unteer Eric Lucy has been an incredible advocate for this partnership, and has assisted in securing \$22,000 for the program in recent months. Thanks to his nominations, a grant from Westfield Insurance was submitted by Creed Waelchli of Cottingham & Butler in the amount of \$12,000 in December, and 100+Men Who Care, a group through Resources Unite, donated \$10,000 also in February.

Sign up for your Money Match account by making an appointment with Circles Coach, Ermina Soler.



TAKING ACTION

Every Tuesday, Circles comes together to build relationships across class lines, hone personal and professional skills, break down barriers, and to support one another. This year, our focus is financial success and equity building, and leadership. Circle Leaders take an active part in the planning and implementation of meetings.



WEEKLY MEETING TOPICS

1st Tuesday: Leadership Development

Members work on leadership, personal and professional development activities. Many of these occur thanks to community partners, such as Dupaco Community Credit Union.

2nd Tuesday: Community Support

Allies and Circle Leaders have the chance to seek support and continued training for their respective roles.

3rd Tuesday: Future Story

Matched Circles work on advancing their goals to achieve their future stories of prosperity. In addition, members can participate in asset-building workshops, for their financial success.

4th Tuesday: Big View

Open to the entire community, here we address systemic barriers. Our current focus issue is the Benefits Cliff Effect, which keeps people 'stuck' in the welfare system.

5th Tuesday: Family Fun Night

When there is a fifth Tuesday in a month, volunteers plan fun, family-friendly events where community members can build friendship and have time to take a break from the stresses of daily life. This is also an opportunity to talk about family goals.

City Manager Mike Van Milligan visits Circles with his team to discuss the City budget process, and to gain input from Circles members.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: NIA GLEASON

Nia Gleason graduated from Getting Ahead in December of 2014, and has since hit the ground running with Circles. As a natural caregiver, Nia often finds herself in activities where she can help others—especially children. While her sarcasm will try to tell you otherwise, she is in fact deeply caring, and a skilled leader. Her own daughter is proof of Nia’s loving, yet no-fuss attitude. Her to-the-point leadership as the Kids’ Corner Coordinator, a volunteer position, provides student interns with the support and honest feedback needed as they practice their skills before graduation.



Nia also mentors for the YMCA’s REACH & RISE Mentoring Program, which she talks about often. “Volunteering is very important to me,” she says of these experiences, “I learn so much from the people I serve... I love doing what I can to make those around me happy, [and] showing my daughter the importance of helping others.” Her own professional experience working with children with autism at the Anna B. Lawther Academy gives her a very unique perspective for Circles Kids Corner, where the range of abilities and ages is drastic.

Nia’s approachable personality also makes her a welcome presence for any newcomers, who she says tend to join her during dinner and ask questions about the program; and when they do, she says, “nothing but good things come out of my mouth.” Nia has presented on her story and experience with Circles to local community groups, and even more recently, to City Council, where she advocated for the program. She continues to push herself out of her comfort zone to become a stronger leader, and we feel very lucky to be part of her journey.



Anywhere from 65-80 people attend Circles every Tuesday.

BREAKING BREAD

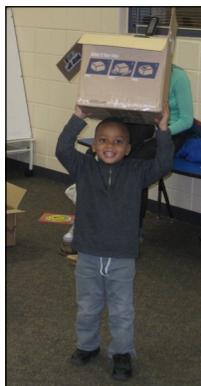
Circles provides a donated meal every Tuesday evening that is open to the community. Meals provide a time for us to connect, and what better way to build relationships than to share a meal together. Dinner often includes “ice-breakers” and “get to know you” activities that encourage participants of differing backgrounds and socioeconomic status to build intentional relationships. This time also provides a meal for those of us who would not get the chance to eat before attending Circles.

As it is an integral part of our Initiative, we greatly appreciate the dozens of service clubs, businesses, families, and faith-based groups who generously donate in-kind food or monetary assistance for our Tuesday evening meals. If you would like to donate a meal to Circles, please contact Andrea at 563-589-4230 or ahelgag@cityofdubuque.org. For a list of all open meal dates, please visit our website at www.cityofdubuque.or/circles. Click Wish List on left side of page.



CIRCLES KIDS' CORNER

We’re building capacity in our Kids Corner this year, with a brand new team of student interns! Interns will plan activities for the children of Circles participants that get their bodies moving, their curiosity sparked, and imaginations running wild. Activity projects include *Kid Chef*, *Let’s Go Exploring*, *World Adventures*, *Get Movin’*, *Imagination Kingdom*, and *Creative Minds*. These projects cover subject areas including arts and drama, health and physical activity, STEM, literacy, and culture. We’re also excited to once again have ISU Extension 4-H Youth Development partnering to provide programming every 2nd Tuesday. If you would like to help our Kids’ Corner, please see below for a current wish-list of supplies, or consider volunteering on a Tuesday night!



Wish List:*

Hand sanitizer
Yarn

Colored string and beads
CD player

Gently used Parachute (for gym play)

*Bring items to the Circles office at 350 W 6th Street, suite 312 during regular business hours.



20 WEEKS LATER... GETTING AHEAD GRADUATION

Congratulations to our most recent Getting Ahead class, round 14, who graduated in December! Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World is a 20 week personal development curriculum. Participants investigate the impact of poverty on their lives and the community, and develop goals for their future.

Family members, friends, staff of Circles and Team members celebrated this milestone in these 10 participants' lives.

Congratulations to graduates Andrea Jones, Bridgette Kuhlman, Eddie Wordlaw, Erica Ysquierdo, Fred Davis Jr, Gladys Dadebo, Jayme Schmitt, Scott Kehoe, Sherice Stevens, Taji Edmonds.

Now graduated, these members have moved on to become Circle Leaders, where they continue their journey into their future story with a support team made up of volunteer Allies and the Circles Coach. They will attend Circles Weekly Meetings, where they will have the chance to hone skills, build relationships, and advocate to resolve poverty. Our next round of Getting Ahead began on February 16, 2016, with 11 participants, expected to graduate this coming June. Andrea Jones, who graduated in December, as well as Destiny Pinckney, a 2014 graduate, are co-facilitating the current Getting Ahead class with coaching and guidance from Jim Ott and Ermina Soler.



Getting Ahead round 14 celebrated their graduation from the class at the Holiday Inn in December.
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MEET A GRAD: TAJI

Taji Edmonds is one of our newest Circle Leaders, yet she has been around for a

long time. Before recruitment for the class even began, Taji was there, with her two young sons, seeking out ways to get ahead in her life. Her friendly personality allowed her to quickly become comfortable in the Circles community, and she developed relationships with some of the Allies right away. By the time she looked into applying for Getting Ahead, a 20 week personal development class offered through Circles, she was clearly a perfect fit.

Looking back, before she started Circles, Taji spoke to the fact that “poverty is a place that you are in and I don’t think it always has to be about financial. I know some of my issues started because I was so afraid to let people in. I’m not social, I wasn’t really social until I started coming to Circles.” Now that she has graduated from Getting Ahead, she is in a Circle with four Allies who continue to support her as she works to achieve her employment goals.

CIRCLES HONORED WITH SCOPE AWARD



Circles received the 1st Annual Thom Determan Scope (Standout Community Organization Pursuing Equity) Award. As stated on the plaque, “those who hold this award are reminded that the work they do is not only important, but it is necessary. Thomas Determan paved the road for believers in justice, equity, and equality to take a stand for what’s right and continue the work of champions”. We take this to heart, and remain deeply honored in receiving this award. Thom was an Ally volunteer with Circles, and an advocate of the



program. He will be always be warmly remembered. The award was presented during the Dubuque Branch NAACP 26th Annual Freedom Fund Banquet. The banquet was held at the Diamond Jo Casino Banquet Hall on Saturday, November 14th, 2015. The event engaged

Dubuque and the tri-state in a celebratory event to continue the advancement of civil rights for all; monies raised provide funding for scholarship opportunities for local students.

CIRCLES

GETTING AHEAD IN A JUST-GETTIN'-BY WORLD

A curriculum that offers step by step life planning lessons with an investigation of poverty, so families can create the path to a stable, secure future.

BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY

A training that teaches middle class individuals about the hidden rules of each socio economic class and how these unspoken rules can serve as barriers to effective communication.

WEEKLY COMMUNITY MEETINGS

This is where it all comes together!
Once a week, Circles members come together to build friendship and gather support as they work toward their goals.



JOIN US...

Weekly Community Meetings

Every Tuesday
Prescott Elementary
1151 White Street

5:45 PM Community Dinner
6:30 PM Meetings begin

Community Dinner & Childcare are provided for all participants and volunteers.

Thank you to all of our collaborative partners and supporters!



...As well our many generous volunteers, and individual and community group donors.



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