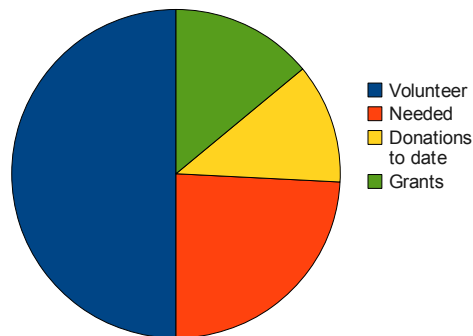


This volunteer investment ensures that donors' dollars are being maximized. In fact, our current fundraising efforts are inspired by the desire to **honor our volunteers** by making sure that our

Circles of Hope Resources



monetary donations come close to approximating their labors of love. This is a challenging goal when you consider the hours spent by our volunteers are valued at over \$100,000 this year.

So where do the monetary contributions go?

The annual budget for Circles is about \$150,000.

Those monies sustain a

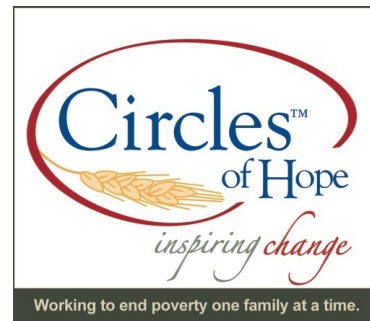
year-round program of Tuesday evening gatherings each week that include: Getting Ahead classes, matches that connect Circle Leaders with Allies (about three allies per circle leader), meetings for the community at large, volunteer training, and expanding outreach in our community and beyond.

Circles invests about \$7,000 per participant. Those who graduate from their Getting Ahead class and continue on to become a Circle Leader are usually involved for at least two years, for a total of about \$7,000. **More than twice this amount is saved each year** for every adult empowered to end dependency on public assistance programs like Medicaid and food stamps; for those with children, the impact increases.

Bottom line. Every dollar donated is **doubled in value by our volunteers** and the **return on investment doubles** when Circle Leaders get out of poverty, a benefit to the whole community.

Ensuring people move out of poverty is no longer just a humanitarian effort; it is an economic survival strategy.

Gifts for Circles of Hope should be made out to Peace Connections, a 501(c)(3) at 612 N. Main, Newton, KS 67114. Please note Circles as the recipient.



COMMUNITY BASED

RELATIONSHIP FOCUSED

VOLUNTEER DRIVEN

Making an impact

For the last three years, Circles of Hope has been building local relationships that **inspire and equip people to end poverty**. This visionary initiative empowers individuals and families in Harvey County to take practical steps to move from limited resources to greater stability and vitality in all areas of their lives.

Circles of Hope is part of a Circles® National Campaign and is the **first in Kansas**, joining efforts in 63 communities and 23 states. We are now State Training Center for Kansas, charged with supporting other communities to begin their own Circles initiatives.

***Circles of Hope is not a “handout” but a “hand up.”** The initiative represents the very best of what sustaining communities and advancing a high quality of life is all about. It centers on the intrinsic value of each person, resulting in a healthy sense of pride, conviction and accountability. And Circles provides our community hope that there is a method and a means to change our thinking and our actions regarding poverty.*

Jim Schwarzenberger

Executive Director, Newton Area Chamber of Commerce



Kansas Health Foundation



Circles
NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Peace Connections, 612 N. Main, Newton, KS 67114, is the home of Circles of Hope. 316-284-0000 info@peaceconnections.org

Maximizing resources & relationships

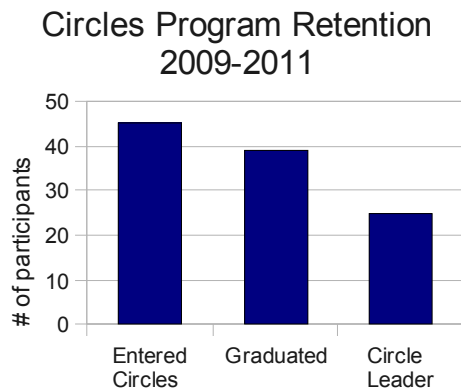
As a first step, Circles sponsors a **Getting Ahead** class in which participants set goals and make changes to build their lives on a stronger foundation. After completion, a graduate (Circle Leader) connects with several community volunteers (Allies) in a Matched Circle that provides ongoing accountability, support, networking and friendship. Everyone in the group is challenged and inspired to change.

This resource-based approach focuses on capitalizing on the gifts and strengths the person has to offer as they actively participate in their own transformation, rather than focusing on their disadvantages or deficiencies. Each meeting starts with sharing something **new and good** and ends with **appreciations** for one another.

Circles also works to **raise awareness and remove barriers** by building relationships across class lines. This happens in weekly Circles gatherings, monthly community meetings and ongoing collaboration with city and county government, area Chamber of Commercences and many non-profit groups and churches.

Measuring the impact

Circle Leaders & their families: Out of the 45 participants who have signed up for the Getting Ahead class since the program started in 2009, 84% have graduated and 66% have become Circle Leaders.



One of our earliest Circle Leaders, Jerica Hinshaw, has transitioned from minimum wage jobs to working as a paraprofessional in a Newton school and pursuing her bachelor's degree in education at Bethel College.

Another, Elmo Newman, is reinvesting in the program following his successful completion: he is now serving as an Ally to a new Circle Leader.

Circles has not only helped me to get out of poverty, it is also helping me to break the cycle of poverty for my children and grandchildren.

Sharon Freeby
Circle Leader

Volunteers: “Not only do I help Sharon with her goals, but she also helps me with mine,” said Gordon Houser, one of Sharon’s four Allies. “I am not here to fix Sharon. We have become friends.”

Within the Harvey County Community:

- *Circles has connected with the City of Newton* to solidify its comprehensive plan, Re-Newton, to build a better future for everyone.
- *Circles has helped to launch a round-table discussion* for landlords, tenants, community service professionals, builders, developers and City and Chamber representatives to tackle the issues that impede better housing for all citizens.
- *Circles has laid the groundwork for a CASH or Individual Development Account (IDA) program* that makes savings accounts available to low-to-moderate income families who put money aside to acquire a high-return asset. Participants saving \$1 in an IDA receive a \$2 match.

Leveraging community investment

The Circles of Hope initiative is particularly remarkable for its **high level of community investment**, especially from volunteers who can be found in the basement of First United Methodist Church every Tuesday evening throughout the year. These caring citizens participate in a variety of activities that make Circles both possible and meaningful.

Circles Outcomes

Circles of Hope, Harvey County, Kansas

After 12 months of being matched with their Allies and working on their goals, our local Circle Leaders show an **average**:

- 63% increase in their income.
- 44% decrease in their use of public benefits
- 122% increase in their assets
- 58% decrease in their debt

National Circles Campaign (now 69 sites in 23 states)

Nationally, after 12 months of involvement with Circles there is an average:

- 34% increase in income
- 27% decrease in use of public benefits
- 101% increase in assets

And at 18 months:

- 48% increase in income
- 36% decrease in use of public benefits
- 115% increase in assets

Additional changes from the beginning of their involvement with Circles:

- In the last 2 years, during a recession, 12% of Circle Leaders who were unemployed obtained employment,
- nearly 9% enrolled in education,
- 18% opened a savings account for their first time
- over 8% paid off credit card or payday loans



Working to end poverty one family at a time.



SNAPSHOTS OF HOPE

Stories gathered and compiled by
Laurie Oswald Robinson

Carolann Adair

When Carolann Adair comes to the Circles of Hope meetings at the First United Methodist Church in Newton, she often has her camera in hand.

Carolann, a self-employed professional photographer, does not want to miss an opportunity to capture the essence of Circles. It's been her community since she became a Getting Ahead participant in April 2011 and a Circle Leader later that fall.

Carolann, homeless several times in her life, was no stranger to the struggle of low resources, though she had held many jobs that kept her family afloat. Before she became a photographer, Carolann worked as a taxi driver, a courier, a cashier and a traveling carnival worker.

When I first came to class, I felt embarrassed and ashamed. Since then I realized I could set goals—lose weight, go back to church, become a better business woman.

Her husband Merle died in 2005, leaving Carolann and her son James to cope without him. James became a participant in Getting Ahead in Fall 2011. They are learning what it means to have faith in a future that can unfold more sustainably and positively than the past.

"I got involved with Circles because I wanted to change and better myself," Caro-



Carolann with her Matched Circle (L to R): Kate, Carolann, James and Juan.

lann says. "It was a place where I did some deep soul searching. I looked into a mirror and saw that the self looking at me was more than I thought I was.

"When I first came to class, I felt embarrassed and ashamed. Since then I realized I could set goals—lose weight, go back to church, become a better business woman."

What's even better, Carolann has a community of Allies to listen to her and to remind her that God is good and works through a community as people love and support each other.

"I'm enjoying this journey, as I learn to ask for advice and support when I need it," she says. "I am learning that all of us, no matter what our income level, need each other.

"We need to remind each other that when God closes a door, God opens a window. And if God can feed the sparrows, God can feed us. In the end, we all have a lot in common. We truly are brothers and sisters."

Elmo Newman

After the death of the father for whom he was named, Elmo Newman Jr. was searching for ways to fill the void left by his primary role model, whose life was focused on caring for others. When Elmo saw a flier in the Newton Public Library that advertised Circle of Hope's first Getting Ahead class in 2009, it captured his interest.

The Circles community began meeting his need for new hope and new goals. That was important for Elmo, whose blindness due to a birth injury did not allow him to hold down a full time job.

Elmo was working at a discount store, but because he could not read the labels, the manager had to let him go.

"As I became part of Circles, I found good people who were willing to lend helping hands and hearts by connecting me to resources that could help me cope with my disability," he says.

As I became part of Circles, I found good people who were willing to lend helping hands and hearts by connecting me to resources that could help me cope with my disability.

Thanks in large part to his Allies, Elmo is the proud owner of a pair of glasses that include a telescope to enhance his limited vision. He also now uses an electronic, cordless mouse that magnifies what he is read-



Elmo with his Matched Circle (L to R): Janet, Elmo and Curtis.

ing on the television. This was provided by the local Lion's Club.

Elmo has invested in a small house and volunteers at the homeless shelter as well as at his church, following his father's example of reaching out to others. Once a week, he also helps to care for a disabled man in Halstead.

He knows the challenge of not seeing clearly in life, and his driving passion is to help others see possibilities that may be hidden from view. He is the first Getting Ahead graduate to choose to become an Ally for another Circle leader after completing his 18-month role as Circle Leader.

"I knew Craig before I was his Ally, and I was the one who suggested he get involved in Circles," Elmo says. "I really like being his encourager, supporter and mentor. There are times I am tempted to overdo it, and his hurts become my hurts.

"Then I remember I am here for him to dream his own dreams and make them become reality. That's what others did for me."

Gordon Houser

In 2009, Gordon Houser's editing job was cut to half-time and he looked for additional work. In the midst of the search, he felt God nudging him to volunteer some of the time freed up by the cutback.

The nudge—which would no doubt mean increased people contact—was not particularly comfortable, Gordon says. He describes himself as an introvert who loves nothing more than reading good books in the solitude of his living room.

However, when he learned about Circles of Hope from his wife, Jeanne, he undertook training to become an Ally to a Circle Leader. In training, based in part on *Bridges Out of Poverty* by Ruby Payne, he learned that there are many reasons people are in poverty.

The genius of Circles is that it provides a way for people to move beyond their isolation into a supportive community.

Many people grow up in generational poverty, which includes multiple generations being caught in the patterns that prolong low resources. But other people find themselves in situational poverty, brought on by sudden job loss due to the economic downturn.

"I began to see how there are so many systems at work that keep people in pov-



Ally Gordon Houser with Matched Circle (L to R): Jeanette, Sharon, Dee and Sue (not pictured).

erty," Gordon says. "And it is such an isolating experience."

"The genius of Circles is that it provides a way for people to move beyond their isolation into a supportive community."

Gordon says that even though it would be easy to throw money at the problem, Allies are encouraged to provide other kinds of support.

"Sharon and I have become friends," he says. "Not only that, Sharon comes to the meeting with goals, and she is our leader. She has us share our goals as well."

"And the experience has taught me that no matter where we fall on the spectrum of resources, we all fall short sometimes in setting and reaching goals, and we need each other to help us move forward."

Lea Ann Reber

Lea Ann Reber has lived her entire life in south central Kansas, growing up in a family that taught her the joy of serving others. As a result, Reber developed a servant's heart and has engaged with many church and civic endeavors as an adult.

So when she joined Circles of Hope as coordinator of the Weekly Community Team, it wasn't a new idea for her to connect to ministries and causes. What was different about Circles was the way it deepened her view of community.

"What captured my heart immediately was how everyone on Tuesday evenings came together as a big family, no matter what one's situation in life," says Reber, who makes sure meals are available for the Circles gatherings at the First United Methodist Church where she is a member.

I have watched many participants persevere through these tough times, and it is an honor to help them build strength in the face of so much that threatens to tear them down.

"What's impressed me most about Circles is that there are no social lines. I wasn't able to tell who were the participants and who were the volunteers supporting the participants. We are here as one big family, and we support each other as we evolve and grow."



Lea Ann (right) in the kitchen coordinating the wonderful volunteers who provide meals for Circles.

It's important for Reber to be part of this community-wide initiative which helps low-resource families build sustainable lives. Reber, a scheduler for Radiology at Newton Medical Center in Newton, came from a business-oriented family. Her parents owned and operated Larry's Drive-In and her mother owned Reber's Fashions on Main Street in Newton.

"Circles is truly a place where I feel I can give back from all the blessings I've received, and I hope I can do that in a way that bears fruit in people's lives," she says. "And getting to know participants in Circles has blown away a lot of stereotypes about 'poverty.'"

"I've learned that people's situations are so often not about what they've done or not done but rather a matter of the hard times and bad breaks in life. I have watched many participants persevere through these tough times, and it is an honor to help them build strength in the face of so much that threatens to tear them down."

Libby Baumgartner

As a graduate student working toward a master's in art therapy, Libby Baumgartner wasn't sure she had a right to be in Circles of Hope.

However, Libby learned that Circles was about finances and education and also about the entire canvas of her life—emotional, spiritual and social.

She liked that concept and so took the plunge to sign up for the Getting Ahead class. That choice brought her a bigger perspective on how to better handle the fact that as a young adult, her choices had led her into some debt.

Libby works as an art therapist at a local mental and developmental health center. Even so, her income level combined with that of her partner—as well as the severity of his disabilities—does not bring in enough income for them to live without subsidized housing and food stamps.

"On the first day I was touched in a really deep way as I realized that the others in class shared the same feelings I did—hurt, sadness, anxiety, loneliness, depression, worry and uncertainty about the future," she says.

...my allies are helping me to get really clear and to move forward toward financial stability and my other goals. They are helping me to gain the hope, options and resources I need.



Libby (L) with Anita, one of her Allies. Mary Sue and Mel not pictured.

Circles helps people reflect on the entirety of their lives and to establish goals wherever resources are low.

In class, Libby honestly faced her lack of resources in several areas—including being isolated socially and not assertive enough in the business side of her art therapy practice.

"Many of my current clients can't afford to pay me what is parallel with my education, but in the current economic climate, there are a lot of people struggling, just like me and others in Circles," she says.

"However, my allies are helping me to get really clear and to move forward toward financial stability and my other goals. They are helping me to gain the hope, options and resources I need. Working as a community art therapist in private practice, I can serve art therapy clients by walking beside them and being a resource as they make a difference in their own lives.

"At the same time, this helps me move ahead in my own goals."

Mel & Mary Sue Voth

After being engaged in business leadership for over 50 years, Mel and Mary Sue Voth, retired and living at Kidron Bethel Retirement Village in North Newton, Kan., felt they wanted to be less involved with business outcomes and more involved with the personal outcomes of others.

They found just such a focus when they became part of Circles of Hope. As Allies to Libby Baumgartner, they combine lifelong expertise in managing staff and business with the ability to mentor someone in a more personal, one-on-one relationship.

"Being an Ally to a Circle Leader is a lot like being a grandmother," says Mary Sue, grandmother of ten. "When your grandchildren are born, they are in your heart the minute they come into the world.

"And that is how it is with Libby. The minute we became part of her Matched Circle, she became part of our hearts, and we became a part of her. We support her. We mentor her. We pray with and for her. We experience the joys and sorrows of self-discovery—on both sides of the equation."

*The minute we became part of
[Libby's] Matched Circle, she
became part of our hearts, and we
became part of her.*

Mel agrees. "It sounds like an old cliché, but the Matched Circle really does function as a team," he says. "Libby, along with her



Mel and Mary Sue join with Anita as Allies to Libby Baumgartner.

Allies, is working towards her growth. We don't tell her what to do. She cues us on how we best support her goals."

The Voths bring a range of expertise and wisdom to their Circle. Mary Sue worked closely with managers and other staff in banking and other businesses. Mel put his business and accounting degrees into practice as CFO for a number of corporations and has taught accounting and finance for several universities. Together they offer a practical and seasoned approach to setting and achieving goals.

"Libby reaches her goals by smaller increments, rather than by giant leaps forward," Mary Sue says. "People don't get into poverty all at once, and they don't get out all at once. But with mentors by their side, they can persevere one step at a time."

Peggy Gerber

When Peggy Gerber first saw the article in *The Kansan* about “Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin’ by World,” she was working five part-time jobs.

The exhausting scenario was a necessity. She had been laid off from a fulltime job during the economic downturn. That reversal, for the first time in her life, left her unable to provide enough resources for herself. She felt frustrated and scared.

The article renewed her hope that she could heal from the emotional and financial devastation of the job layoff. In March 2010 she joined the class, which gave her tools to rebuild her life.

“The class gave me some much-needed insight on how to better utilize my resources,” Peggy says. “It taught me that life is one big set of choices. I learned that I can make choices with the options available to me due to my particular circumstances.”

Circles is a very non-judgmental and accepting place. This acceptance has helped my self-esteem. Circles is a place where people value my opinion and value me as a person.

And her Circles’ experience—which has included both the class goal-setting and community support from her Allies—has helped Peggy to make some new choices and changes.



Peggy (left) signing up for the first Individual Development Account (IDA/CASH) in Harvey County.

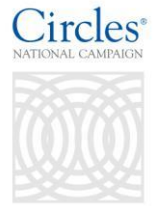
One of her five jobs has turned into a part-time job as an administrative assistant at the St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in Newton. From this office she also serves as a part-time employee in the church’s administration of the Representative Payee Program, which administers disability benefits for those in need of those services.

But even though Peggy’s work life has stabilized to provide a sustainable wage, the heart of Circles for her is not about the increase in her financial resources. For Peggy, a former abuse victim, it’s about the increase in her trust in others.

“Circles is a very non-judgmental and accepting place,” she says. “This acceptance has helped my self-esteem. Circles is a place where people value my opinion and value me as a person.

“I know of no other program like Circles, where in one place you can both set new goals and gain emotional support from others to help meet those goals.”

Circles®



How it Works

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.

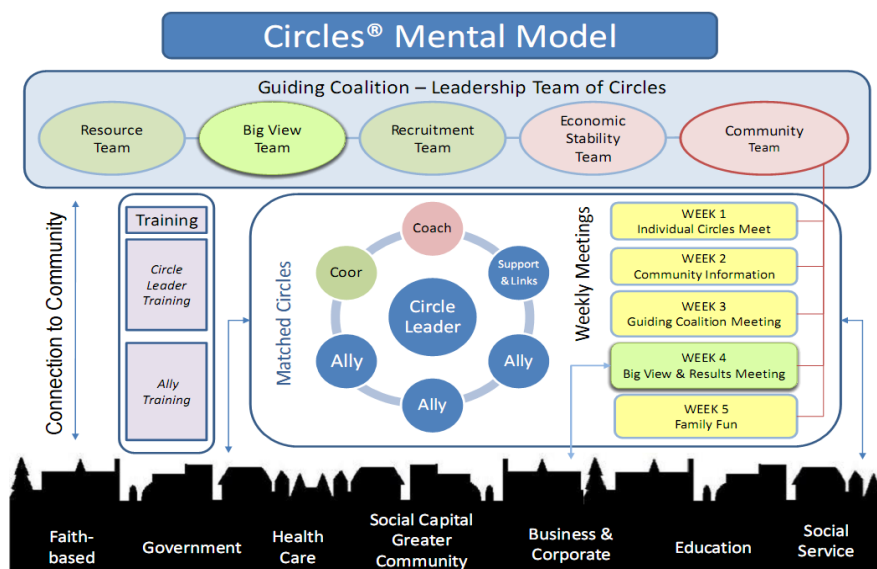
Helping each family set and achieve goals unique to their own needs will be the responsibility of **Circle Allies**, who are middle to upper income community volunteers. Leaders and Allies meet monthly to build relationship, review goals that have been set, discuss and problem-solve barriers to getting 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

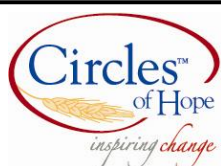
Each Circles® initiative is developed and designed by the partnership of the lead organization and a community **Guiding Coalition**. The Guiding Coalition is composed of community leaders,



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 State Training Center for Kansas

Circles of Hope at Peace Connections • 612 N. Main Street • Newton, KS 67114
316-284-0000 • info@peaceconnections.org • www.peaceconnections.org