



# Evaluation Report

National Circles Campaign

First Quarter, 2010

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## SUMMARY

The Circles Campaign is an approach of Move the Mountain Leadership Center, launched nationally in 2007 following 10 years of program development and evaluation. Its goal is to end poverty, not just address it. At its heart are matched Circles. Each Circle Leader is a low-income community resident, who is matched with two or more middle class Circle Allies. Circles meet monthly to focus on the goals Circle Leaders have established to move into permanent self-sufficiency and discuss the barriers that Circle Leaders face in their daily efforts to move out of poverty.

Each community's Circles Campaign is led by a Guiding Coalition who ensures that these efforts to address individual level issues are matched by a significant and focused effort to identify and address community-level and structural barriers to the full inclusion of its lower-income members. The expected outcomes of the Circles are increased social capital for Circle Leaders, which help them attain increased self-sufficiency; and a transformed public attitude about poverty and a community commitment to end poverty.

The Circles Campaign is based on building social capital. At the center of each Circle is a Circle Leader, who is a low-income community resident. Circle Leaders are each matched with two or more Circle Allies, who are middle and upper middle class volunteers. Circle Leaders and Circle Allies meet monthly to discuss the barriers that Circle Leaders face in their daily efforts to become more self-sufficient and they jointly identify solutions which Allies help Leaders implement. Each community's Circles Campaign is led by a Guiding Coalition who ensure that these efforts to address individual level issues are matched by a significant and focused effort to identify and address community-level and structural barriers to the full inclusion of its lower-income members. The expected outcomes of the program are increased social capital for Circle Leaders, which help them attain increased self-sufficiency; and a transformed public attitude about poverty and a community commitment to end poverty.

Circles are conducted in cohorts, 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 a training for Circle Leaders as a group, using the *Getting Ahead* curriculum developed by 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 learn methods to build self-sufficiency through development of financial, social, and emotional resources. It also empowers them to take a leadership role in addressing causes of poverty that lie in the community. When the group completes the *Getting Ahead* curriculum, each Circle Leader is matched with Circle Allies and begins monthly meetings with them, but also continue weekly meetings with the other Leaders in their cohort.

While Circle Leaders are working through the Getting Ahead curriculum, their future Allies are receiving training in a parallel curriculum, Bridges Out of Poverty, which is designed to educate members of the middle class about the hidden rules of poverty and train them to address causes of poverty.

Other features of each community's Circles Campaign include:

- A Lead Agency that takes responsibility for overall management and oversight of the program, including staffing, training, coordinating operations, and securing adequate resources to ensure sustainability
- Community Meetings, held weekly, to bring together Circle Leaders, Circle Allies, and other interested community members for support and networking opportunities
- Big View Meetings, held monthly, to focus on community-level and system barriers and causes of poverty and promote concrete, focused action to address them
- Leadership and oversight from a Guiding Coalition, which includes low-income families, community leaders including elected and appointed officials as well as leaders in other capacities, and volunteers

Move the Mountain is leading a national Circles Campaign with implementation currently in 40 communities in 18 states. The initial purpose of the Circles Campaign is to inspire and equip 50 pilot communities to help 1,000 low-income out of poverty permanently. Through national partnerships with United Methodist Church, Goodwill, and Bridges out of Poverty, Circles will expand throughout the nation and influence the commitment and capacity of the nation to eventually end poverty.

*The United Way of Lane County conducted a comprehensive assessment of the National Circles Campaign. Their 52 page report of their analysis included this summary: "The model offered by Move the Mountain through its Circles Campaign is theoretically sound, creative, flexible and strongly endorsed by its practitioners. "*

Assessing the Circles Campaign:

A Report for the United Way of Lane County March 2009



#### EVALUATION METHODS

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 with 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 for 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 most

*Inspiring and Equipping Communities to End Poverty*

important goals the Circle Leader has for the coming six months as part of Circles, and (for follow-up administrations of the survey) the goals that have been accomplished during the preceding six months as part of involvement in Circles. Move the Mountain staff trained staff in participating sites in the use of the instruments.

#### EVALUATION RESULTS

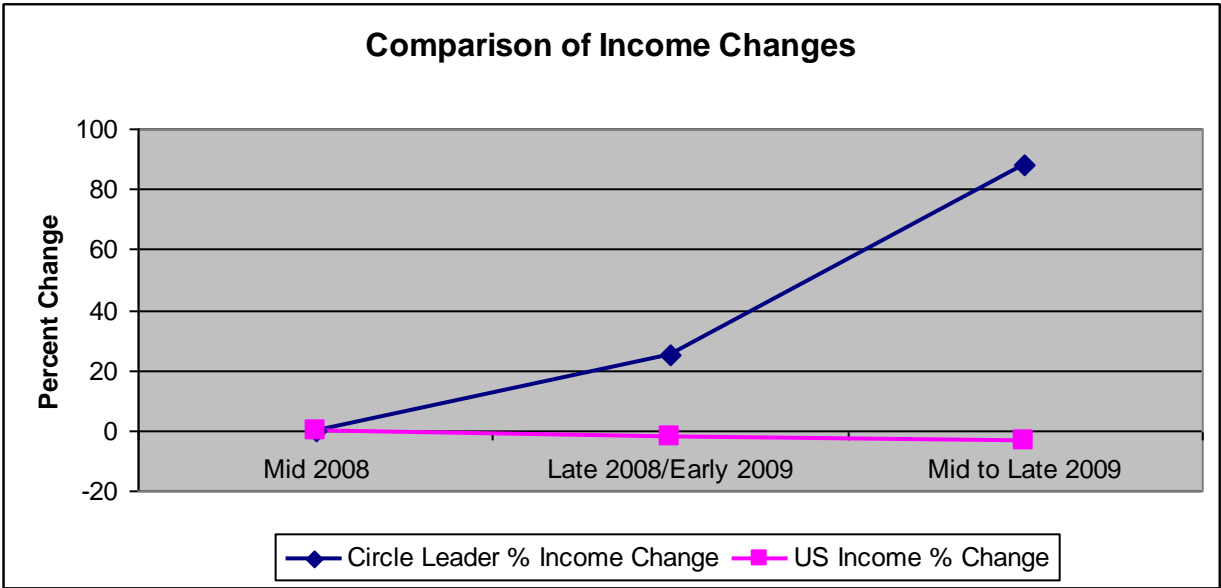
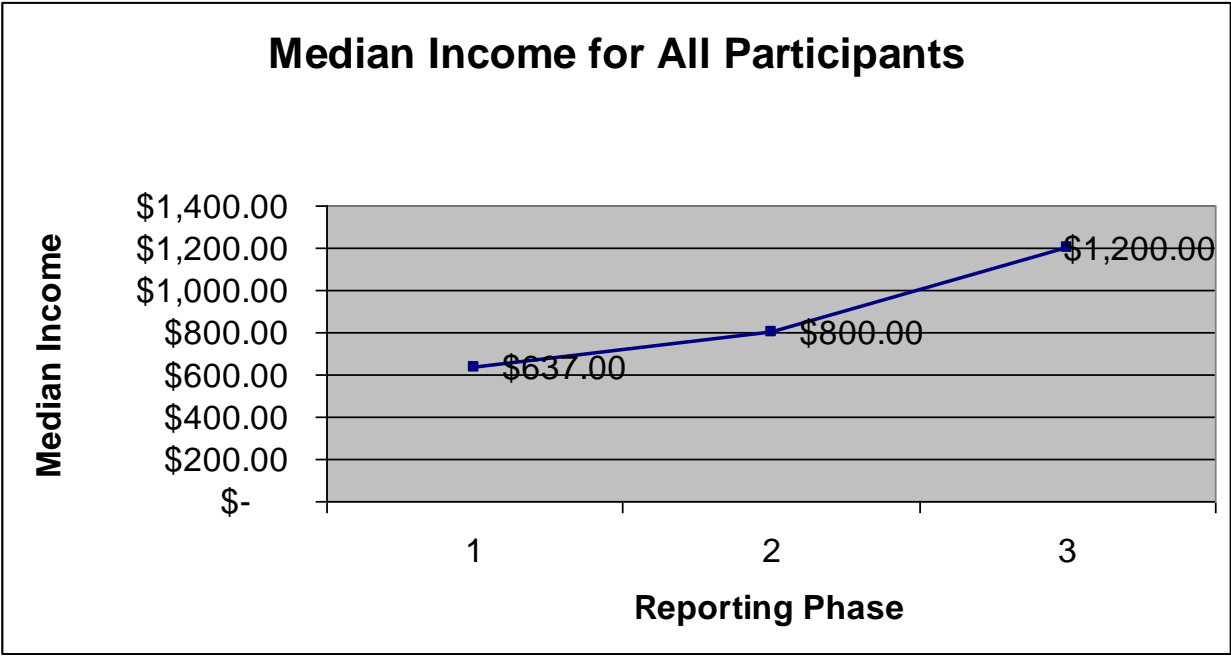
The Circle Leader Progress report is completed at baseline (within no more than one month after beginning the *Getting Ahead* curriculum, with answers as of the date that *Getting Ahead* began), again at the end of *Getting Ahead*, and thereafter every six months while the participant remains engaged. Data collection began in July 2008. 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 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	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**

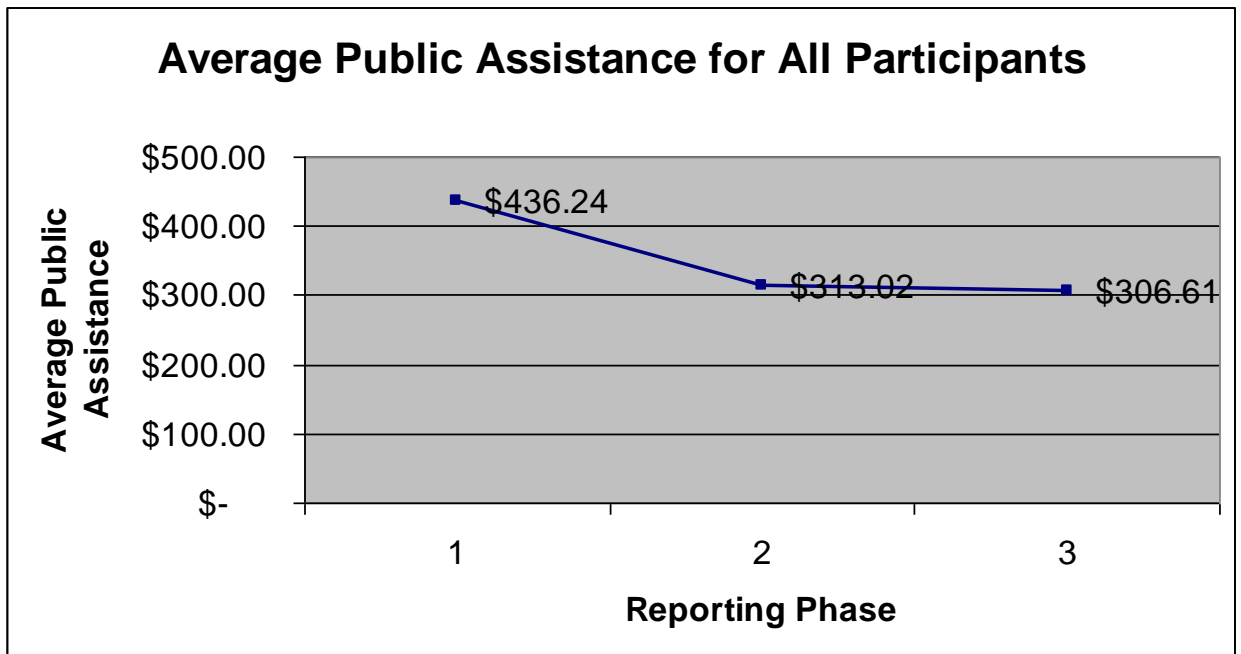
Over the course of the three data collection points, 54% of the Circle Leaders indicated that they had obtained a better paying job. This change is paralleled by a marked increase in median income. The Circle Leaders' median income increased from \$634/month to \$1200/month. This is an 88% increase. This 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.



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”. At data collection period 1 (pre Getting Ahead), the average answer to this question was 4 friends. After Getting Ahead this increased to 7 and at data point #3, six months after Getting Ahead, the average number of “friends I can count on” was 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

Data collection within the National Circles Campaign is an on-going process. Subsequent reports will include additional communities and increasing numbers of subjects. This report is a first step in documenting the benefits of the National Campaign for the low income families who are involved.

## 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 Benefits Received	\$436	\$313	\$306
Average Assets	\$604	\$468	\$941
Average Liabilities	\$12,174	\$8480	\$13,884
Average Number of “friends I can count on”	4	7	9