

The Circles Campaign - Our First Year

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This has been an exciting year as we have developed the Circles Campaign with St. Luke's as the Lead Organization in Orange County. This time last year Mariam Mengistie, Director of Orlando Missions, Beth Witten, Co-Leader of Circles Guiding Coalition, and I were just returning from the Circles Hands-On Training, looking forward to building Circles in Orange County from the ground up. Since then, we've had quite the journey! In case you don't know, The Circles Campaign is a research-based model that partners lower-income families (Circle Leaders) with two to three upper or middle income families (Circle Allies) who agree to become friends and to work toward transformation together.

In May, I got to travel to Waco, Texas to become a certified Bridges Out of Poverty trainer through Dr. Ruby Payne's research group Aha! Process. Since then we've trained 26 St. Lukers in Bridges and we already have more training opportunities on deck! We've even had interest from local partner organizations in sharing this valuable resource.

During the summer, we began introducing Circles through our partnerships in East Winter Garden. We met with nonprofits, government partners and community leaders to introduce The Circles Campaign and its transformation with lower-income families. During the late summer and early fall, we established the internal Guiding Coalition, the decision making body for the Orange County Circles Campaign. This Guiding Coalition developed our training and recruitment criteria, crafted our annual budget and began to work with The Circles Campaign's data and measurement tools. Our Guiding Coalition even began developing measurements for Allies' progress in Circles, an unprecedented measurement for the Circles Campaign!

This winter we accepted applications for Circle Leaders and Allies and began training both groups in preparation for their embarking on this adventure together. On Sunday, February 9 our Circle Leaders completed 24 hours of training at the Jessie Brock Community Center in Winter Garden. This accomplishment was made possible by the dedicated efforts of the Leaders, a partnership with the City of Winter Garden and trained St. Lukers who offered their time and their gifts to make this possible. We celebrated as we hosted the very first Getting Ahead in a Just Getting' By World Graduation with seven graduates and 42 community members present! One Circle Leader reflected on her journey so far by saying, *"Circles has made me see that when we come together as one, we all can move the mountains and not just faint because we see the mountain... Teamwork ALWAYS makes dreams come true."*

When asked about how Circles has affected him, one Ally who helped to make the Circle Leader training possible, said *"It has demonstrated that we all have assets to give and those assets can be the foundation of a relationship based on reciprocity vs. giver and receiver."* Circles weekly meetings started this month and we are celebrating the assets of all our Circle Leaders and Allies, and using those assets to transform lives, one family at a time.



To learn more about Circles contact Meghan Killingsworth for dates, times, and locations for the next Circles informational meeting.

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