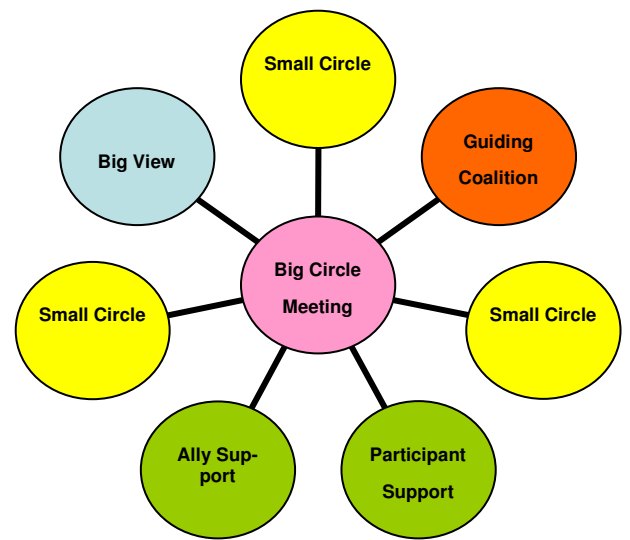


# Circles of Hope

"...an effective community engagement strategy for reducing and eliminating poverty..."<sup>1</sup>



## We all need:

- Money enough to live without having to choose one necessity over another.
- Meaning and education enough to be our best self in the many roles we play.
- Friends enough to offer us support and mentorship.

As Christians, we believe underlying the above is the need for faith in God.

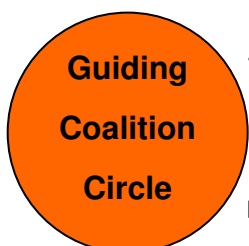
## In a Circles of Support ministry, like Circles of Hope,

- "...**Low-income people** receive personalized support from community volunteers, increase their ability to access community resources and opportunities, and develop hope for their futures..."
- "...**Community volunteers** learn what it takes for people to leave poverty permanently. [They]...learn to identify and address the policies and systems that need to change in order to make 'leaving poverty' possible."<sup>1</sup>

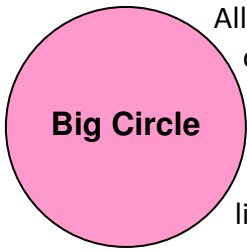
**Participants** are individuals or families living in poverty who need healthy relationships, who want to increase their self-reliance and who desire to break out of the cycle of poverty. They could be those already being given relief by your churches, those referred by other non-profit or county workers, and/or others you would like to target.

**Allies** are Christian men and women with stable financial resources who want to befriend a participant family. They work alongside the participant family to focus on reaching family-prioritized goals of increasing income, acquiring needed education or training, and enhancing personal social capital.

## The Circles



This circle is made up of participants, allies, church leaders and Starfish Ministries staff. This group leads the Circles with the goal of increasing community ownership over time. They make decisions related to program operations such as ally recruitment, fund raising and community education.



All current and prospective allies and participants meet together for a meal and discussion/seminar on designated topic. The main idea is to share social capital – “the capacity of a person or group to utilize social relationships to mobilize resources and resolve common problems.” Meets regularly – monthly, twice a month or every week. Volunteers with differing skills and interests are needed to provide and serve the meal, to provide a program for the children, current and/or potential allies to interact with the adults at the “Big Circle” meeting as well as speakers and other leaders.

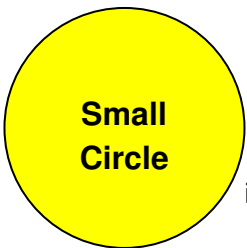
**Agenda:** 6:00 p.m. **Meal** for the whole family

6:30 p.m. Children dismissed to **childcare**

6:45 p.m. Big Circles meeting

- Open with prayer, announcements and Testimony
- Share “New and Good”
- Topic on Money, Meaning or Friends
- Close in elective small group prayer

8:00 p.m. Dismissed



The adults from one participant family and 2-3 allies meet to discuss the participant’s goals, brainstorm strategies to overcome barriers and decide on realistic actions to be taken before the next meeting. The goal is to use the group’s resources to help the participant move out of poverty. It is run by the participant. It meets regularly at a place and time determined by the members.

## The Process

Those who want to be part of a Small Circle must regularly attend the Big Circle and complete an application. They are screened for their understanding of the purpose of Circles and their level of motivation to make change.

Allies must also regularly attend the Big Circles and fill out an application. A Circles leader interviews the potential ally and then they attend an orientation/training session.

Once allies have been identified, a Circles leader meets with the participant family to refine their goals. After that, a Circles leader facilitates both the introduction of the allies to the participant and the ending of the formal relationship. They also maintain contact with the participant and allies regularly to assess progress and identify barriers and to be a resource.

### For more information, contact:

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Circles Of Hope is a joint ministry of Pease Christian Reformed Church and Starfish Ministries.