

# About Circles USA

Circles USA works at national and local levels to reduce poverty. ~ We seek to inspire and equip communities to reduce poverty and remove the barriers that stand in the way.

WE HAVE A MODEL THAT WORKS ~ Our participants achieve a 39% increase in income after six months and a 78% increase in income after 18 months. Participants continue to increase their income—even after the 18-month period.

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## Circles USA (CUSA)

### Description:

Circles USA is not a faith-based program. It is intended for any community group, government agency, or nonprofit organization that seeks to reduce poverty. Yet, faith-based organizations do use the Circles model as a way to give their members an opportunity to work with their community.

### Stakeholder(s):

#### People Living in Poverty :

*When some people live in poverty, everyone in the community pays a price. Adults who cannot provide for their families and contribute to the community report feelings of isolation, shame, and depression.*

#### Communities :

*On the community level, having residents who depend on government assistance drains precious resources.*

*But when people achieve financial security, they experience a surge of pride and confidence. Often, they say they have regained their dignity, their value, and their humanity. And the local economy benefits as more families move off assistance and start contributing to the tax base.*

*The work of reducing poverty rests not only in the hands of those experiencing poverty but also in the hands of the communities around them. Poverty reduction is not simply a humanitarian goal — it's an economic imperative.*

#### Community Groups

#### Government Agencies

#### Nonprofit Organizations

#### Faith-Based Organizations

#### Circles USA Leadership Team

#### Kamatara Johnson :

*Executive Director (Albuquerque, NM) ~ Kamatara has grown into the ED position formerly supporting CUSA as the Chief Learning Officer. With a master's degree in organizational leadership, 25 years of experience in secondary education, and a deep connection with our Circles chapters, Kamatara holds the space for collaboration, innovation, and empowerment for all the people in our Circles family.*

#### Yvette Trujillo :

*Chief Learning Officer (Albuquerque, NM) ~ Yvette is responsible for supporting Circles USA communications, curriculum, coaching, and training for the national network. With 25 years of experience in for-profits and nonprofits, training, management, and systems-building, Yvette maintains the inner integrity of CUSA with a lens for equity.*

#### Gena Atcher :

*Administrative Coordinator (Rapid City, SD) ~ Gena began working for Circles USA in 2006. She manages general inquiries, materials distribution, contract negotiations, accounting,*

*and events. In addition to fully supporting our national staff, Gena connects our chapters to resources, best practices, and each other to support our thriving network. She can be reached at (505) 225-7991 and Gena@CirclesUSA.org*

#### Courtney Cowan :

*Information Systems and Design Manager (Lowell, AR) ~ Courtney manages Circles USA's national data system and trains Circles chapters on how to use it. She also serves as a graphic designer for Circles USA and creates websites, logos, brochures, manuals, guides, and reports for its chapters.*

#### Scott Miller :

*Founder (Albuquerque, NM) ~ Since the late 1970s, Scott has initiated numerous projects in North America to help families and communities more effectively address poverty. He has spent decades developing tools and best practices for helping low income people navigate their way out of poverty for good. Scott is the author of several books about poverty reduction.*

#### Circles USA Board of Directors

#### Joan Kuriansky :

*Board Chair and former Executive Director of Wider Opportunities for Women (Washington, DC) ~ Joan Kuriansky, Chair of the Circles USA Board since May 2007, is the creator of our 6-point policy platform addressing six key issues our chapters flagged as high priority for poverty alleviation. She has worked in the social justice field throughout her versatile career as an attorney; executive director of local and national non-profits; and board member or volunteer at local, national, and international levels. As Executive Director of Women Against Abuse (Phil. PA); the Older Women's League (DC); and Wider Opportunities for Women (DC), she has addressed issues including social security, pension, and health care reform; violence against women; and many issues related to economic self-sufficiency for women and families. Joan brings a Jewish lens to supporting issues of social justice and human rights to the U.S., Israel, and other countries; particularly those in Russia and Ukraine.*

#### Jim Masters :

*Board Treasurer and President of Center for Community Futures (Berkeley, CA) ~ James I. Masters is President/Director/Owner of the Center for Community Futures in Berkeley, CA. He has worked with over 500 Community Action Agencies and Head Start programs since 1966. Jim has developed and delivered more than 300 professional development and capacity building seminars, webinars, publications, and other*

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*Stakeholders (continued)*

staff development activities for OEO, CSA, NACAA, NASCSP, regional and state associations, and individual agencies, as well as serving on CUSA's Board (since 2006) and presenting at our national leadership conferences. Jim has a BA in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Kansas and a MS in International Business (with Honors), from St. Mary's Graduate School of Business, Moraga, California.

**Jennifer Pelling :**

Board Member and Director of Tsuha Foundation (San Diego, CA) ~ Jennifer Pelling is a founding member of the Tsuha Foundation and a documentary film producer. She believes in the power of stories to break down stereotypes, promote constructive dialogue, and engage people in social change. She is particularly interested in narratives related to inequity, Christianity, identity, and connection. Jennifer's previous experience includes consulting and project management (Accenture), homeschooling her children, and teaching at a charter school. She graduated from Hamilton College with a B.A. in Mathematics and Computer Science.

**Christy Vines :**

Board Member and President & CEO of Ideos (Westlake Village, CA) ~ Christy Vines, a member of the Circles USA Board since October 2020, is an empathy expert, thought leader, and social commentator. After leaving a professional career in national security and global conflict, she leads Ideos Institute's research in the field of Empathic Intelligence and its application to conflict transformation, social capital, communal resiliency, and servant leadership. You may remember her powerful presentation at our virtual conference in April of 2021, "The Power of Empathy in Creating Systems Level Change." Christy is the executive producer of the 2022 documentary film *Dialogue Lab: America*, a moving take on the current state of division and polarization in America. She is currently working on her first book, titled *Empathic Intelligence: Empathic Leadership for our Time*. Christy is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School.

**Circles USA Consulting & Support Team****Amy Brooks :**

Content Writer & Editor (Lexington, KY)

**Jeannie Chaffin :**

Poverty Alleviation Systems Consultant (Washington, DC)

**Sarah Critchlow :**

Executive Director, CE Lab, Economic Development (Albuquerque, NM)

**Mark Lautman :**

Founder, CE Lab, Economic Development (Albuquerque, NM)

**Lynette Fields :**

Expansion Advisor, Director of Poverty Solutions Group (Orlando, FL)

**Adam Hartnett :**

Southern Regional Coach with Circles Central Florida (Orlando, FL)

**Jenny Lipfert :**

Graphic Designer (Cornish, NH)

**Julie Liske :**

Midwest Regional Coach and National Facilitator (Oxford, MI)

**Sherrri Nee :**

Curriculum Development (Portland, OR)

**Lise Porter :**

Mental Health Specialist (Glendale, CA)

**Helen Rai :**

Mid-Atlantic Regional Coach (Richmond, VA)

**Chris Tinney :**

Sales Ambassador (Las Vegas, NV)

**Jeff Tuscano :**

Western Regional Coach (St. George, UT)

**Karen Todd :**

Western Regional Coach (St. George, UT)

**John Wilson :**

Liaison to Community Action Network (Chalk Hill, PA)

**CUSA Partners :**

The Circles model is unique because it easily integrates into existing support agencies. A Circles chapter can be launched by a range of organizations, including a social service agency, a food bank, a chamber of commerce, or a church. Circles chapters across the country have been started and/or supported by the nonprofit organizations, foundations, and corporations listed below.

**AARP Foundation :****Bread for the World****Catholic Charities USA****Community Economics Laboratory****Charles & Janice Miller Leadership Fund****Community Action :**

Services and Food Bank

**Community Action Partnership :**

America's Poverty Fighting Network

**Family Promise :**

Building communities, strengthening lives

**Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta****Fremont Area Community Foundation****Goodwill****Neighborhood Connections :**

Good Samaritan Ministries

**Ideos****Leap Fund**

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*Stakeholders (continued)*

**Mary Catherine Bunting**  
**Poverty Solutions Group**  
**Synchrony**  
**The Prosperity Agenda**  
**The University of Western Australia**  
**Trover Family Foundation**  
**Tsuha Foundation**

**The United Methodist Church :**  
*Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors. The people of The United Methodist Church*

**United Way**

**Workman Wacker Family Foundation**

**SPARQ at Stanford University :**

*Circles also builds partnerships to advance its poverty-reduction efforts through research and development. For example, Circles USA's recent partnership with SPARQ at Stanford University provided chapters with new qualitative and quantitative metrics for evaluation.*

## Vision

Everyone has enough money, meaning, and friends to thrive

## Mission

To reduce poverty and remove the barriers that stand in the way

## Values

### **Nonpartisanship:**

... a solution to poverty exists, and it is nonpartisan. Many conservatives believe the answer lies in people accepting more personal responsibility. Many liberals believe the key to reducing poverty involves providing more benefits.

### **Cooperation:**

At Circles USA, we believe the right and the left can work together to reduce and eradicate poverty. Our model focuses both on what individuals can do to change their situations and on what communities can do to remove the barriers that stand in their way.

### **Respect:**

Respect all people

### **Relationships:**

Nurture supportive and accountable relationships

### **Change:**

Create long-term personal and systemic change

### **Empowerment:**

Foster empowerment

### **Engagement:**

Engage individuals and communities

## 1. Poverty

### *Reduce poverty*

WE REDUCE POVERTY ~ Circles USA gathers middle-income and high-income volunteers to support families in poverty. Surrounded by people who have landed jobs, negotiated a lease, or managed credit card debt, for example, people experiencing poverty are more equipped to achieve long-term financial stability.

#### 1.1. Gatherings & Matches

*Gather people who are motivated to move out of poverty and match them with middle-income and high-income volunteers*

##### **Stakeholder(s):**

##### **Circles USA Chapters :**

*A Circles USA chapter gathers people who are motivated to move out of poverty and matches them with middle-income and high-income volunteers who can support and encourage them on their journey.*

*these relationships help families climb out of poverty and achieve financial stability. The opportunities and obstacles families experience are shared with the larger community, so successes can be celebrated and the barriers can be overcome.*

##### **Circle Leaders :**

*Through online or in-person training and weekly meetings, participants (called Circle Leaders) build friendships with volunteers (called Allies). Over time,*

##### **Allies**

#### 1.2. Chapters

*Launch new Circles chapters and helps existing chapters expand into multiple locations*

Circles USA helps launch new Circles chapters and helps existing chapters expand into multiple locations within a community.

#### 1.3. Cliff Effect

*Assist local chapters in identifying and eliminating the Cliff Effect*

Circles USA also assists local chapters in identifying and eliminating the Cliff Effect. This is the unfortunate occurrence where a wage increase triggers the loss of benefits worth more than the wage increase. Our research helps each community estimate the income levels that prompt the loss of benefits such as Medicaid, child care, SNAP (food stamps), and housing assistance.

#### 1.4. Consulting

*Offer consulting services to those in the process of creating new programs that focus on poverty reduction*

Circles USA also offers consulting services to government agencies, business groups, and nonprofit organizations that are in the process of creating new programs that focus on poverty reduction. Given our 20 years of research and development in this field, we are adept at building unique programs that provide paths out of poverty. Circles USA CEO Scott C. Miller is available for leadership development, organizational development, and public speaking engagements.

##### **Stakeholder(s):**

**Government Agencies**  
**Business Groups**

**Nonprofit Organizations**

## 2. Communities

### *Change communities*

WE CHANGE COMMUNITIES ~ While participants are navigating their way out of poverty, their successes and challenges are shared with local community leaders. The barriers that keep people in poverty are identified, discussed, and often resolved.

### **Administrative Information**

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