

Circles of Support

Celebrating Community Involvement

Circles of Support started as a pilot program called Community Voices of Duluth in 2003 with five participants and 12 allies. As we come to the end of 2008, we felt that it would be encouraging to celebrate what has occurred in Circles of Support this year.

Participant Involvement: to date, we have 18 participant families involved; 22 adults, 27 children and 13 adolescents.

Ally/Volunteer Involvement: to date, we have 29 ally families Involved; 31 adults, 14 children and 8 adolescents. That's a total of 115 people that are currently involved in Circles of Support. We have held four Big View Community Forums on Poverty and have hosted 124 community members at these forums.

Circles Celebrates 2008 Highlights

- Through regional collaboration and grassroots lobbying, the Legislative Committee to End Poverty has recommended and publicly endorsed Circles of Support as a viable community engagement strategy. This recommendation has been adopted in the final report to the Minnesota Legislature to End Poverty by 2020.
- Fit City Duluth, a community health initiative, has partnered with Circles of Support to develop a community garden as a strategy to help low-income citizens have better access to healthy foods.
- Program participants and allies are taking part in Financial Literacy Classes and Asset Development Programs.
- Allies are continually offering informal support, referrals for employment and specialized services in support of participants.
- Allies are advocating on behalf of participants to secure non-subsidized childcare for those enrolled in continuing education.
- Low income participants are giving back to the community through volunteerism, community education presentations, and peer support.

And More Highlights

- One participant's dental issue was resolved with ally support that included securing an appointment out-of-town, driving more than 200 miles, and providing childcare.
- Four allies have donated a total of \$1,250 to the Good Neighbor Fund to assist participants with childcare and unanticipated crisis costs.
- One participant has agreed to receive training and represent Circles of Support-Duluth in public policy advocacy at the state level.
- Four stories written about Circles of Support and the issues of low-income citizens and were featured in the *Duluth News Tribune*.
- One generously donated vehicle helped a participant overcome their transportation barrier.
- Three allies participated in the production of two ally recruitment commercials.
- Three participants have received help and support to move.
- Eleven people involved in Circles have given presentations to educate the community about poverty issues within Duluth and surrounding communities.

AND so much more has occurred in Circles of Support that there's not enough paper to capture it all. We know that it's because of Duluth's commitment to this process. Thank you for investing in the people of our community!

Community stakeholders represented at the Big View Forums:

CHUM
Duluth Transit Authority
Housing Access Center
Minnesota Power
St. Louis County Human Resources
St. Louis County Attorney Melanie Ford
County Commissioners Steve O'Neil and Dennis Fink
Duluth Human Rights Office
City Councilor Tony Cuneo
Teachers from ISD-709

Community Partnerships

YWCA
Peace Church
NAACP
East Hillside PATCH
Dr. Robert Powless
H.T. Klatzky & Associates
Northland Foundation
Woodland Hills (ASSA)
SMDC Foundation
ASDIC- Duluth Alliance
County Commissioners
Duluth City Officials
Human Rights Office
Fit-City Duluth
Indian Parent Group
Social Activist Tony LaDeaux
Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial
St. Louis County Human Services
Head Start Parent Policy Council
Indian Commission Representatives
Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation
Peace Church's Dismantling Racism Committee
Minnesota Chippewa Tribe—Employment Program
Race Culture and Achievement Gap Representatives
Students and Staff from UMD, LSC, CSS, FDLT+CC
Circles of Support participants and ally/volunteers



Circles of Support is Making a Difference

40 Years After the Kerner Commission Report

“Nothing
will be
done until
people of
goodwill
put their
bodies and
their souls
in motion.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 1968

Xavier Bell, Program Manager of Circles of Support

The problems of poverty are complex, however; the lack of social interaction across socio-economic and cultural barriers was identified as the “root cause” of poverty in the Kerner report of 1968. The Kerner Commission report offered specific recommendations to address the issues of poverty, after a series of tragic events that occurred in Detroit and other major cities. Shortly after the release of the report, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. surmised the following:

The Kerner Commission came out with its report just a few days ago and then made specific recommendations. Nothing has been done! And I submit that nothing will be done until people of goodwill put their bodies and their souls in motion. And it will be the kind of soul force brought into being as a result of this confrontation that I believe will make the difference.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 1968

“Hindsight is twenty-twenty,” and as we reflect on King’s words these past 40 years, very little has been done to bring people of goodwill together to end poverty in our country.

However, Circles of Support is making a difference in Duluth. Circles of Support started as a pilot program at the end of 2003 with only 9 low-income participants and 11 ally/volunteers. Today over 115 people are involved in Circles of Support. Circles of Support is a fairly new initiative that not only envisions the dream of ending poverty, it engages people in the community in order for it to happen. Circles is not a government program, but rather a high-impact strategy designed to build relationships across societal barriers, as we focus on the root causes of poverty, one family at a time. Circles of Support reaches out to people in Duluth and offers opportunities for people in poverty to contribute their unique gifts and talents to the community. In turn, as they develop new friendships and relationships, our entire community is strengthened.

As we consider the future of our community, it is encouraging to be a part of process that truly does embody the words of a great American icon. To read the report visit: <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf>



*Making a Difference:
Jetaun Wheeler’s Circle:
Back Row: Jerry
Cleveland, Marge
Anderson, Lorrain
Carlson, Ron Carlson.
Front Row: Byron,
La’Shawn, Jetaun,
Kaelah*