



**CIRCLES™
IMPLEMENTATION
PLAN**

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County of Lambton
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Preamble

In November 2006, County of Lambton staff prepared a child poverty report that reviewed various local socio-economic data including housing, income and child care. It was determined that 1.09 out of every 6 children (18.16%) in the County were living below the Low Income Cut Off¹ (LICO) for the area. At the November 29, 2006 meeting of Lambton County Council a motion was approved to establish a task force to develop a report with recommendations and strategies that focus on reducing the number of children living in poverty in the County of Lambton.

The Child Poverty Task Force was formed in early 2007 and met regularly to become informed of the issues regarding child poverty and various community models to address solutions.

At their first meeting the task force established a work plan in an effort to deliver a report by years' end to Council. The Task Force's next step was defining poverty for the County of Lambton. The process followed started with a staff working group providing several definitions to the task force who discussed the merits of each. The task force then directed the staff working group to draft a definition that took into consideration several points raised in their discussions and combined the ideas captured in two of the working definitions that had been provided. The task force then finalized and adopted the following definition:

Poverty is when a person or a community is deprived of, or lacks the essential resources required, for a minimum standard of well-being.

These resources include the necessities of daily living such as food, safe drinking water, clothing, shelter, health care, access to information, education, social status, political power or the opportunity excludes them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in society.

The creation of the social tag line “**Today’s Child...Tomorrow’s Future**” that is identified with the Task Force’s work followed a similar process and occurred simultaneously as the development of the definition for poverty. The staff working group provided many examples of social tag lines to the task force who then directed staff to create three or four drafts based on points made at the task force meetings. The task force then finalized their decision with the above tag line.

¹ Low Income Cut Off (LICO) is defined as the level at which a Canadian family spends 70% or more of its income on food, clothing and shelter leaving the family in straightened circumstances with little money for other expenses. Updated regularly with income and cost of living data, the amount varies according to family size and community size, resulting in 35 separate LICOs for Canada. It is Statistics Canada's preferred basis for defining Canada's official poverty line. Retrieved November 20, 2007 from http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/archive/fb94/fs_povbk.htm

The final initiative of the task force as per the Terms of Reference was to, “examine community based models of reducing poverty that are action orientated and builds on existing community and individual assets”. For this initiative a process similar to the other initiatives was followed. Due to the vast number of models available, the staff working group was asked to review several types of models and examples of each, and prepare summaries of three different community based models of poverty reduction. Three models were investigated for suitability in the County of Lambton context. They are; the Family Self-sufficiency Scale Model, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Circles™ model. Although it was felt that either of the models would reduce the depth of child poverty in the community, it was the decision of the Task Force to pursue more information and details about implementing the Circles™ Model based on the following:

Action Orientated – All three of the models reviewed were considered to contain elements of action, in that the individuals or families living in poverty are involved in helping themselves. However, the Family Self-sufficiency Scale Model contained minimal action in involving others in the community as compared to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and Circles™ campaign model.

Community Involvement – The Circles™ model more actively involved the community than the other models. The Family Self-sufficiency Scale Model had little focus on involving the community while the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework Model addressed community building and systemic factors. However, the Circles™ model includes a comprehensive framework for community involvement, including partnerships across class lines, business and other sectors of the community including the not for profit and private sector businesses as well as government. It was also felt by the Task Force that the model could actually be implemented by either the public, private or not-for-profit sector or a combination thereof.

Addressing Root Causes – All three models addressed the root causes of poverty by not just focusing on the financial aspect of poverty and its symptoms. All models discussed various other elements of poverty and the importance of addressing them as a means of reducing the depth of poverty.

Potential for Change – The Family Self-sufficiency Scale model demonstrated potential for real change but mainly on the individual or family. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework model also showed the potential for individual change as well as potential for systemic change. This too was the case for the Circles™ model which additionally indicated the potential for community change with it involving all classes of society.

Compliment Existing Community Programs – It was felt by the Task Force that all three models could utilize some of the existing programs and services in the community. However, the Task Force felt the Circles™ model would be the best fit because there were already portions of the program established (i.e. Getting Ahead workshop, Bridges training). As a result, much of the ground work has been started so the start up process would be shorter offering the ability to start addressing the issues of poverty in the community quickly in order to help people exit poverty sooner.

Successful Model – All three of the models claim success in achieving their goals. Each of course records different data but the Task Force felt the Circles™ model and its data reflected more of what was wanted to be achieved locally.

Other statistics that indicated the success of the model included data from Itasca County Minnesota, where 7 of the first 10 families participating in the program who were on welfare at the time, left this social program within the first 20 months of joining the Circles™ initiative. As well of the first 25 Circles™ participants in the program, 13 increased their income from an average of \$351 per month to \$1150 a month for an average increase of \$725 a month. In Missouri Valley, Missouri, 24 of 127 Circles™ participants started new jobs, with average earnings within the group increasing from \$860 to \$1759 a month. In Des Moines, Iowa, 58% of families reported an increase in earned income, which increased from approximately \$593 a month to \$1619 a month.

At the April 16, 2008 meeting of Council the Poverty Task Force reported its findings and recommended that the County adopt the Circles™ model of poverty reduction as the community based model that focuses on reducing the number of children living in poverty in the County of Lambton. In their presentation the Task Force also recommended that staff develop an implementation and funding strategy for the Circles™ model.

Circles™ Campaign

Circles™ is an innovative model based on a body of research suggesting that in order for families with low income to improve their situations, they must have bonding social capital within the community, bridging social capital to access the resources contained by higher income networks, and linking social capital that connects the first two with public institutions.

Each Circle™ initiative consists of a family working to get out of poverty and several middle and upper income allies who befriend them and lend support. The family is the Circle Leader, setting direction for activities. With the help and friendship of their allies, each family sets and achieves goals unique to their own needs.

Getting Ahead is a comprehensive curriculum in which Circle Leaders learn to use the hidden rules of class to build up financial, emotional, and social resources. Leaders also research the causes of poverty in their community.

Bridges out of Poverty is a training program that provides Allies with community planning tools to address poverty and teaches the hidden rules of class. Weekly Community Meetings gather Circle Leaders, Circle Allies, and other interested community members to provide support and networking opportunities. At Big View Meetings, held once per month, all the causes of poverty in the community are addressed over time, including community and system barriers.

Each Circles™ initiative is developed and designed by a guiding coalition, composed of community leaders, families with low income, elected and appointed officials, and volunteers. The coalition works to change the mind set and policies of their community with respect to poverty.²

² Move the Mountain Leadership Centre – Circles™ National Campaign Brochure

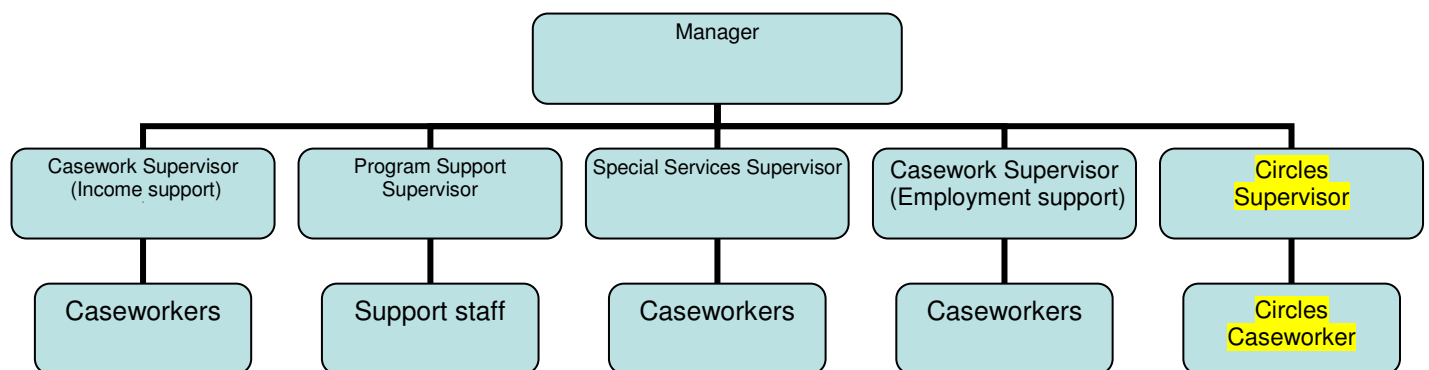
Integration of Circles™ into Ontario Works

“Why not just let government and private agencies do the job of getting people out of poverty? The poverty rate has not dropped significantly since 1965. Why? Because society has been expecting government and social service agencies to take care of the poor and there is nothing that individuals can, or should do. The truth is, without building relationships across socioeconomic class lines, there will never be enough resources, great ideas, and support to substantially reduce poverty”.³

It will take all sectors of society to be involved in order to eradicate poverty in the Circles™ model. However, someone must lead the process of implementation. The Task Force indicated that the County of Lambton with one of its chief values being “Caring” is in the best position to be the lead organization for implementing this model. From an infrastructure and capacity point of view the County is best suited to be the lead agency.

Due to the size and scope of this initiative two staff will be required to be added to the Ontario Works program in the Social Services department. A Circles™ Supervisor and Caseworker are to be hired and incorporated into the staff structure (see figure 1 below) as a Circles™ Team. These two staff positions are required to lead the Circles program development and delivery. Existing program support staff will be utilized to provide clerical support to the Circles team. Existing employment support caseworkers will continue to provide workshop development and facilitation which prepares individuals for Circles participation as well as provide intensive case management supports as allowed under the Ontario Works program mandate.

Figure 1: Staff Structure



³ Retrieved February 12, 2008 from <http://www.movethemountain.org/default.aspx>

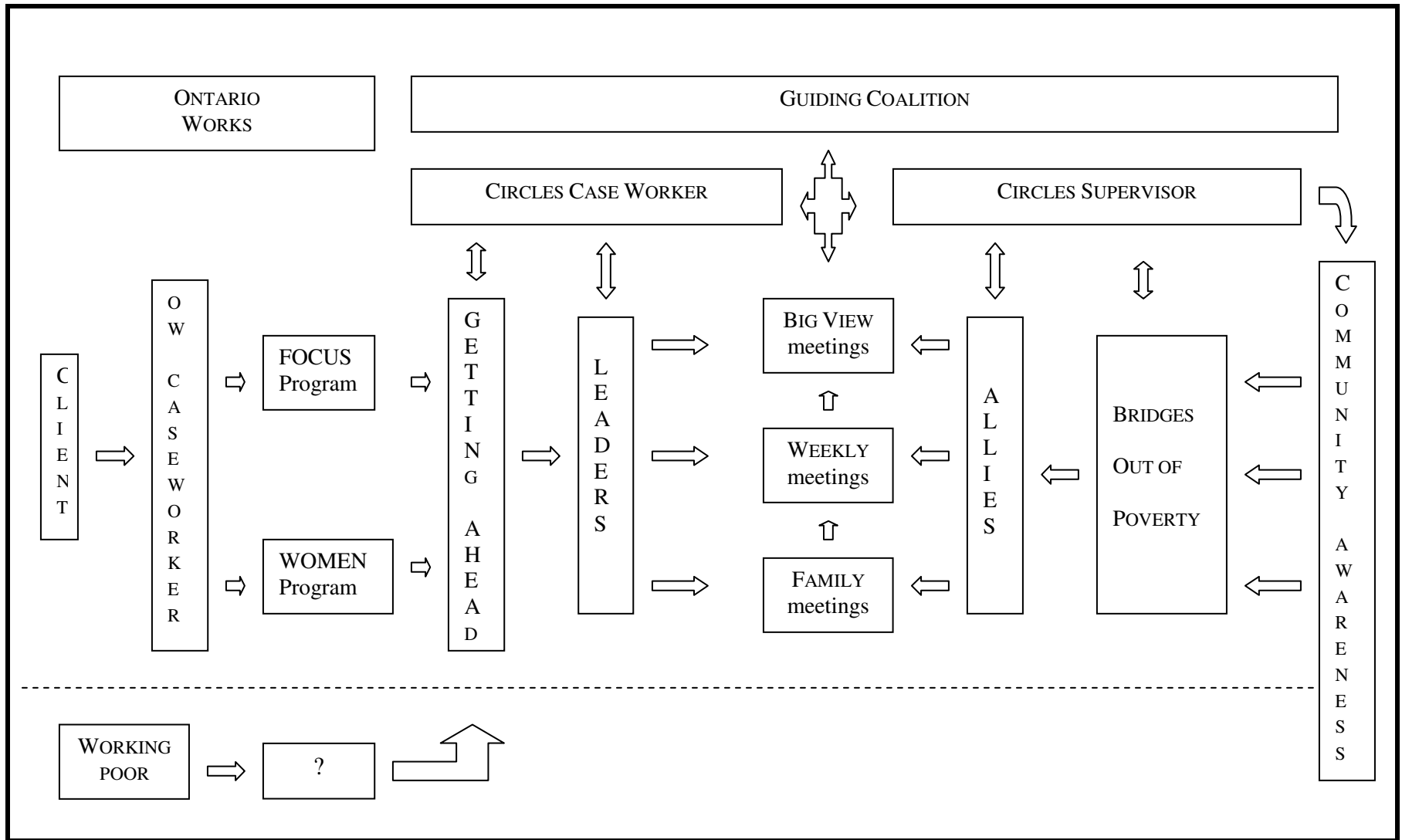
An agreement with Move the Mountain will be negotiated to ensure the greatest potential for an expedient and successful implementation of the model. The services provided under this agreement would include: three on-site visits to provide support and assistance and delivery of the weekly Circle™ meetings; registration for 4 Circles™ Hands on Training sessions; monthly phone and email coaching with Circles™ staff; 2 registrations for the national MTM community of best practices session; Circles™ materials, templates and marketing material; Inclusion in national proposals to fund local initiatives and to participate in the Circles™ Campaign; Fund development coaching and support; inclusion in early innovators community of practice for planning and testing consistency of Circles™ model; Enrollment into Circles™ Campaign; Use of Circles™ trademark. The supports provided through this agreement would also enhance the long term sustainability of the initiative.

It is proposed that in the first two years of the Lambton initiative participants will be individuals who are in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) assistance or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Figure 2 on the following page outlines the schematic of the program. Current Ontario Works employment programming complements and supports the Circles model and will be adjusted in such a manner as to benefit all social assistance recipients whether they choose to participate in Circles or not. Adjustments will be made to programming, including but not limited to workshop scheduling, workshop design and content, referral processes, caseload assignment, realignment of duties for OW vs Circles etc. The Circles caseworker will provide additional supports not available under the Ontario Works program mandate, including the provision of continued support to individuals who exit social assistance.

Once the program is operational, it will be expanded to include individuals and families in the County of Lambton in rural communities and those who live in poverty but are not in receipt of social assistance. These individuals are more commonly referred to as the working poor. The expansion of Circles™ will serve the greater community and further promote the community capacity building framework upon which Circles™ is based. It is expected that the interest generated by community presentations designed to engage Allies will create the environment for program expansion.

It is true the model lends itself to the fact the private sector could implement this model. However, it is the intention in the beginning that this sector will be involved extensively as volunteers in the program as Allies, support resources and members of the Guiding Coalition. The Task Force also felt the model would be the easiest to replicate on a small scale at first utilizing the social assistance caseload with the potential to grow/expand to others throughout the community.

Figure 2: Program Schematic



Program Design and Delivery

Program Design:

Guiding Coalition - To oversee the implementation of the Circles™ Campaign a community body is to be established called the “Guiding Coalition”. The Guiding Coalition is a cross-representative group that includes people from all economic classes and races who are committed to building their community and ending poverty. Guiding Coalition members attend an orientation on the Circles™ model and a workshop on “*Bridges out of Poverty*”.

Members of the County of Lambton’s Child Poverty Task Force have indicated the desire to continue working toward ending poverty in the community. The structure of the Task Force with its varied sector representation is an excellent base for establishing the Guiding Coalition which members of the Task Force could transition into.

The Circles™ Supervisor would have responsibility for establishing the Coalition and consideration should be given to having a minimum of two members from each sector representing: elected officials, professional business, faith, health profession, education, poverty advocates and people in poverty. The Coalition should also have representation from police and the social services sector.

Each member of the Guiding Coalition should have the following have three goals:

1. Use their role within the community and relevant stakeholder groups to gain the community’s commitment to the Circles™ initiative.
2. Provide their energy and resources to contribute to the Guiding Coalition leading and implementing the Circles™ initiative.
3. Increase their own awareness and urgency regarding poverty by actively building relationships across race and class lines, and modeling the way.

Circles™ Supervisor - This new supervisor position will represent the County of Lambton as the lead agency in the Circles™ initiative and have responsibility for the overall implementation of the Circles™ campaign. The role of the Circles™ Supervisor is to facilitate the Guiding Coalition in all its responsibilities. The Circles™ Supervisor will have the skills to bridge class lines to recruit and train middle-class and wealthy community members, and provide training to work collaboratively with low-income Circles™ members. The Circles™ Supervisor is responsible to ensure that Guiding Coalition teams recruit and retain Circles™ leaders and Circles™ allies; provide Circles™ leader orientations; lead the weekly Community Leadership meetings, Circles™ ally orientations and meetings. This position will also be responsible to develop and support the chair of the Guiding Coalition.

Circles™ Caseworker – This new caseworker position is responsible for working with Circles™ leaders’ families on assessment and initial goal setting, educating Circles™ allies

and Circles™ leaders about system resources and limitations, and helping Circles™ achieve goals (encouraging and providing information rather than doing what they can be doing themselves).

Support staff – The role is to provide administrative support to the Circles™ supervisor and caseworker including implementation of a tracking system for the purposes of monitoring the program as well as financial administrative support. Existing staff resources will be used to provide the necessary supports.

Training and Development - Circles™ is trademarked and therefore requires permission to use the name. Entering into an agreement with Move the Mountain (MTM) provides this permission as well as the following professional training and development:

- Three on-site visits to provide support and assistance and delivery of the weekly circle meetings;
- Registration for 4 Circles™ Hands on Training sessions;
- Monthly phone and email coaching with Circles staff;
- 2 registrations for the national MTM community of best practices session;
- Circles™ materials, templates and marketing material;
- Enrollment into Circles™ Campaign;
- Use of Circles™ trademark.
- Inclusion in national proposals to fund local initiatives and to participate in the Circles™ Campaign;
- Fund development coaching and support;
- Access to Foundation Search detailed information on local, state and regional funding sources;
- Inclusion in early innovators community of practice for planning and testing consistency of Circles™ model;

Entering into an agreement with MTM, creates the greatest potential for an expedient and successful implementation of this model. Also the supports provided through this agreement would also enhance the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Monitoring – In the first year of the program the collection of statistical data related to the program will be collected and analyzed for the purpose of establishing benchmarks for the Circles™ program. The following will be collected for evaluation and benchmarking purposes:

- Number of Leaders
- Average annual change in earnings of Leaders
- Number of exits from Social Assistance (employment related)
- Number of exits from Social Assistance (education related)
- Cost savings to Social Assistance related to exits
- Number of Allies
- Number of programs related to Circles (new and existing)

Program Delivery:

Leader Recruitment - A Circle™ Leader is someone that is working towards moving out of poverty. They may be single or part of a family unit. Potential Circle™ Leaders will be recruited from the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP) caseloads that have participated in the “Getting Ahead” workshop.

The “Getting Ahead” workshop may be accessed in one of two manners. Clients will participate in “Getting Ahead” if, as part of the individual service plan, they are a participant in the F.O.C.U.S. program (a six week full time training program in Ontario Works). Clients may also participate in the “Getting Ahead” workshop as a participant in the W.O.M.E.N. program (an intensive program for victims of domestic violence).

Once a social assistance client has successfully completed the “Getting Ahead” workshop they will be assigned to the Circles™ Caseworker. The caseworker then reviews their individual plans of change with each client. They also begin the process of matching the new Circle™ Leader with Allies.

Ally Recruitment – Circle™ Allies are volunteer community members who want to be in a supportive, intentional, befriending relationship with an individual or family working to get out of poverty. The Allies are recruited from middle and upper income earners who have participated in the “Bridges Out of Poverty” training program. Anyone interested in becoming an Ally will be required to submit a resume and indicate what type of assistance they are able to provide a Circles™ Leader.

“Bridges Out of Poverty” sessions, delivered by trained leaders, is a training program that provides Allies with planning tools to address poverty and teaches the hidden rules of class. The sessions are also a valuable marketing tool to increase the community’s awareness of poverty in general. Sessions will target many areas in the community including, but not limited to, faith groups, banking, education, private business, social agencies, etc. This training initiative has proven to be an effective marketing tool already and has generated a pool of interested allies.

A marketing plan will be developed by the Circles™ Supervisor for the purpose of target marketing potential Allies. Creation of an information presentation model that is adaptable to various lengths of time will be required. The presentation should focus on stimulating interest in attending the full day “Bridges Out of Poverty” workshop as well as educating those present in general about the Circles™ movement in the community.

Circle™ Forming – The Circles™ Supervisor and Caseworker will work together in screening and recruiting all Leaders and Allies. Intake interviews and strength based assessment will be utilized to assess possible matches.

Allies will have identified their area of interest or social capital in resume format and Leaders will review and select their Allies accordingly as per their individual needs. Once the selection process is completed and the matches made, staff will support and coach the circle meetings.

Circle™ Meetings - A Circle™ Leader is responsible for her or his Family Circle; convening, leading, and giving and receiving support. She or he will work with the Allies to complete the plan that was developed in the *Getting Ahead* workshop. Circle™ Allies meet with the Circle™ Leader to figure out how to accomplish her or his plan at least once a month or more often informally if desired.

Weekly Community meetings coordinated by the caseworker and with instruction focusing on ending poverty are held in an appropriate location (i.e. a church basement). They can involve a pot luck meal involving five (5) or six (6) leaders. Best practices indicate that these Weekly Community Meetings need to include a community meal, childcare and programming for the children, community building, leadership development opportunities, and programming and activities to support the work of the Circle™ Leaders in moving out of poverty. Although the focus is on the Leaders, Allies and Guiding-coalition members are encouraged to attend.

Typically, the fourth Weekly Community Meeting of the month is the Big View Meeting. Circle™ Leaders, Circle™ Allies and interested community members meet to address the systems barriers and roadblocks families are experiencing in their efforts to move out of poverty. They are educational (i.e. guest speakers) and results-oriented (to change the goals of the system), with action plans developed to address the systems barriers that families are experiencing. The barriers addressed can come from the Circles™ Leaders and Circles™ Allies concrete experiences, issues raised during “*Getting Ahead*” investigations or agreed-upon systems issues identified through local, provincial, and national associations. The Big View Meeting is used to address all causes of poverty. Existing services and program resources in the community may also be involved at these meetings including, but not limited to; the Women’s Interval Home of Sarnia-Lambton Inc., Lambton College-Job Connect, Y-RASP, Child Care, Best Start hubs and their partner agencies, Families and Schools Together (FAST), Community Health Services, Social Housing Services and Ontario Works.

Case Management – Initially, Circle Leaders will be social assistance recipients and therefore eligible for employment supports available under the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs. Ontario Works caseworkers will continue to maintain responsibility for the provision of financial and employment assistance for OW recipients, and will maintain responsibility for the provision of employment assistance to participating ODSP recipients. While in receipt of social assistance the Circle Leader will benefit from the support of two caseworkers, one dedicated to the provision of assistance as provided under the Ontario Works mandate and another dedicated to the provision of assistance from the community to support the individual’s transition out of poverty. On exiting from social assistance, the Circle Leader will benefit from the continued support provided by the Circle Caseworker and community supports.

Financial Plan

Budget:

DESCRIPTION	COST
Staffing	\$150,000.00
Circles™ Purchase of Service Contract	\$ 31,000.00
Training (Allies, Leaders, Staff)	\$ 18,000.00
Transportation (Leaders, staff)	\$ 8,000.00
Police checks for Allies	\$ 1,000.00
Equipment (LCD, laptop)	\$ 3,500.00
Marketing (ads, mail outs, brochures)	\$ 500.00
Program meeting materials and supplies	\$ 15,000.00
Total	\$227,000.00

Funding:

The annual cost of implementing the Circles™ campaign in Lambton should have no increased impact on the County levy. This will be due to the significant social assistance savings anticipated over the course of the next few years (\$976,284 net in 2009) as a result of the uploading of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The cumulative savings through 2011 due to the full uploading of ODSP cost of administration and client benefits will be just over 6.5 million dollars.

There are other sources of social assistance savings described below that could also be accessed to ensure no increased levy impact including: savings due to increased earnings and exits from social assistance and the Ontario Child Benefit/Social Assistance (OCB/SA) Restructuring Savings.

Social assistance savings due to increased earnings and exits from social assistance are a result of both the FOCUS and WOMEN programs. The savings for 36 months for all 52 participants of the FOCUS program have total \$410,467.75 gross/82,093.55 net. The WOMEN program for the first 18 months has resulted in savings of \$42,481 gross/8,496 net.

There is an expectation by the province that restructuring savings are to be reinvested. Although it is difficult to project the savings to be realized for 2009 because of a potential general increase in rates, a conservative estimate would indicate County savings available for reinvestment would be around \$171,000 for next year.

In addition to the sources of funding as a result of social assistance savings described above the Circles™ Campaign, once fully implemented, has the potential in part to be self funding. For every family unit of three (2 parent, 1 child) that exits social assistance there will be a resulting savings of approximately \$12,000.00 annually (\$2,400 net). In addition there would be savings in benefits and employment support expenses.

The exit of 25 families (circle™ leaders) from social assistance annually would result in an annual savings of approximately \$300,000.00 gross in government spending (\$60,000 net). The projected annual budget for implementing and integrating Circles™ into the Ontario Works program is \$227,000.00 annually. Therefore in order to achieve a balanced budget in regards to government spending the Circles™ campaign would require 19 clients exiting social assistance annually or a 75% success rate.

Conclusion

The integration of Circles into the Ontario Works program will provide a solution to the ongoing problem of a lack of coordinated supports in the community for families and individuals that live in poverty after exiting social assistance. Once implemented the future growth of the Circles campaign in the community has the potential to reach all families living in poverty.

Utilizing the anticipated savings to be realized in 2009 and beyond because of the uploading of the Ontario Disability Support Program, Circles can be implemented with no increased impact to the current levy.