

What is an Ally?

The Circles Approach

Circles® assists families and individuals (Circle Leaders) living on lower incomes and in poverty with having enough resources; reasons and relationships to thrive in their lives. Three times per month, Circle Leaders meet with community volunteers (Allies) over dinner and programming driven by the Circles community. Allies (2-4 per Circle Leader) also support Circle Leaders with their six monthly goals.

The Role of Ally:

Circle Leaders are most successful when they have people in their lives to support them. Allies do this in many different ways according to aspects such as availability; skills and personality. Essentially Allies empower their Circle Leader by:

- Being a friend
- Offering emotional support as needed
- Helping evaluate and clarify goals into manageable steps
- Sharing life experience and advice when asked
- Meeting at least once each month with their Circle Leader outside of Circles

The Benefits of Volunteering

By serving as an Ally, volunteers will have an opportunity to work closely with one family and make a real difference in their own backyard. Allies have the unique chance to build meaningful relationships across income lines and witness the impact of their work first-hand. Allies become a part of the Circles community and can serve as individuals, couples or families. **Dinner and children's programming are also provided** for all volunteers and their children at each Circles meeting. The toughest challenge a Circle Ally faces is the instinct to 'rescue' Circle Leaders. Circle Leaders cannot learn to cope with the hurdles that block his or her pathway if a well-meaning ally tries to 'fix' the problems. Instead, the Ally's role is to walk beside the Circle Leader, helping link to the resources and support necessary for the Circle Leader to be successful.

Allies commit to:

- Attending at least one Circles meeting per month
- Pass a background check
- Attend a training session and 'Bridges out of Poverty' workshop
- Befriending their Circle Leader

"I really enjoy being a part of this opportunity. It is stretching me to think in a different and new way. I am more aware of the impact living in poverty has on the whole person and the courage it to work past and through those barriers."

*Circles Muskoka
Ally volunteer*

"I have learned so much about myself and others through being an Ally – it has been a very enriching experience."

*Circles Muskoka
Ally volunteer*



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the time commitment for being an Ally?

In general, each month you will spend 4-6 hours with your Circle Leader and Circle. This time is expected to be spent in two to three 2-hour Circles community weekly meetings and individual meet ups with your Circle (Circle Leader and Allies). Time commitment does vary from Ally to Ally and we work with this flexibility at Circles as everyone is at different volunteer stages in life.

Is my commitment to this Circle long-term?

Unless circumstances dictate otherwise (e.g., relationship conflict or life-changing situation) you will be expected to be a part of your Circle for a **minimum of 18 months** and your role will start with a 3-month probationary period. It takes time to get to know a person or family and develop the kind of trust necessary for this model to work. It also takes time for Circle Leaders to move from poverty to economic self-sufficiency. There is no average time for a person to become 'self-sufficient' as everyone is in different circumstances.

Am I expected to make a monetary donation to my Circle Leader?

Allies provide relationship and non-monetary support for the Circle Leader. They are encouraged not to give money as the aim of Circles is to increase economic self-sufficiency. You will not be expected to do anything that is above and beyond your own boundaries.

What supports will I receive?

The Circles Coach is available to Allies for regular check-ins and support. Support meetings can also be scheduled as a part of Community Meetings for Allies who feel they need a little extra help as they work with Circle Leaders. No one should struggle alone; support is always available and it is important to ask for help when needed. Volunteer Allies will be supervised and supported by the Coach.

How is the Circle Leader's progress evaluated?

A Circle Leader's progress is evaluated on the Circle Leader's Progress Report throughout the duration of their participation in Circles. This will be completed in conjunction with the coach; Circle Leader and Allies Every six months.

How will our Circle know when the Leader is ready to leave Circles?

In most cases this will become evident through circumstances. The Circle Leader will have surmounted the obstacles holding them back and will have reached all or most of their goals set during Progress Checks. The decision for a Leader to leave Circles will be undertaken in consultation with the Circle Leaders; Allies and coach.