

ONTARIO WORKS EMPLOYMENT INNOVATIONS
BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY / CIRCLES
EVALUATION # 2

OCTOBER 2018



Introduction

The enclosed report provides an update to the London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles Pilot Baseline Evaluation presented to London City Council in 2017. This report describes the impact of the programming and return on investment to date for the initiative including:

- Demographic information on those participating in Circles and trends related to their participation;
- Outcomes of program participation using priority metrics such as gaining employment, exits from Ontario Works, obtaining sustainable income and engagement in education;
- Outline of program impacts on the individuals and their families as collected from the evaluation interviews held in 2018;
- The local impact of the initiative in London including community engagement, systemic changes and key learnings about poverty in the London community; and
- Financial savings to Ontario Works caseload costs.

Key definitions discussed in this report include:

Circles Leader: a participant in a Circles group who is transitioning out of poverty;

Allies: a community volunteer in a Circles group who is not living in poverty and is assisting Circle Leaders to meet their goals; and

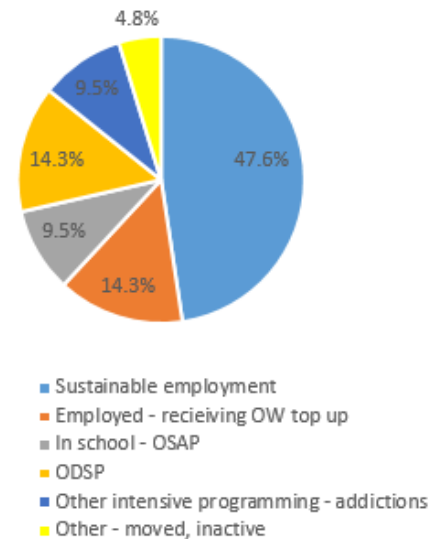
Circles Coach: a member of the staff team who coaches Circles Leaders to achieve their goals, and organizes the operations of one of the four Circles groups including volunteer management, meals, and child minding.

Highlights

London's Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative is a key contributor to the City of London's response to poverty. The initiative has achieved significant successes since its inception in 2014:

- 72 Individuals and families living in poverty have formed natural connections with one another;
- 81 Allies have provided encouragement support, and resources with participants, one another, and with guidance from their Coaches have been able to achieve a variety of successes:
 - children are enjoying a weekly meal routine with their Circles family;
 - young people are celebrating high school graduation;
 - Leaders are finding work, and returning to college to pursue careers; and Leaders who are early in their journey are rediscovering that they deserve happiness, getting motivated, and planning the steps needed to accomplish their goals;
- Financial savings to Ontario Works from exits from Ontario Works to sustainable income as well as the increase in Leaders employment income are growing and are expected to reach over \$430,000 per annum by June 2019;
- By June 2018, nearly 21 individuals and families (or 30%) had graduated Circles and almost 72% of graduates had graduated due to reaching their goal and having sustainable income;
- London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative has grown to be the largest Circles location in Canada;
- London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative has developed the first young adult/youth focused Circle in Canada;
- Circle Leaders were recruited to the London For All Leadership Council to lead implementation of London's plan to reduce poverty and have played key roles in public engagement and information and social marketing campaigns related to poverty in the London community such as *Poverty Over*;
- London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative has established learning networks outside of London - focused on poverty reduction through the Tamarack Institute's Vibrant Communities initiative; and

Fig. 1 - Outcomes of Circles Graduates



- London Circle Leaders have hosted focus groups to provide input on City of London strategic initiatives and priorities including Social Services Employment Services Update, Shift Public Transit Plan, Transit Subsidy and Food Security.

London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative continues to support individuals and families living in poverty transition toward economic self-sufficiency. Circles and Bridges Out of Poverty, in tandem, are creating systemic changes. This evaluation provides recent evidence that all of these goals are currently being achieved. For a complete description of the initiative and its components please see Reference A.

Updated Results of Investment

Further to the 2017 Baseline Evaluation, a demographic review identified Circle Leaders comprise a unique profile as compared to the general Ontario Works profile. Significantly:

- 73% of Circle Leaders shared that their parents had relied on social assistance or had grown up in poverty.
- Leaders have been receiving assistance for a longer period than average - 48 consecutive months compared to 34 months generally.

London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative was introduced as an innovative approach in addressing systemic challenges such as generational poverty, an increasing Ontario Works caseload and a low regional workforce participation rate. These key factors of generational poverty and low engagement continue to be reflected in the Circle Leader profile. A complete demographic profile is provided in Reference B.

In March 2018, a sample of fifteen Circle Leaders participated in one-to-one evaluation interviews with City of London staff to explore their experiences and to identify any changes to their situation since joining Circles.

The interviews provided insights into the impact that London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative is having on individuals and families living in poverty as well as providing insights into their journey.

A theme analysis was applied to the interview data. *Figure 2* identifies the main areas of change and improvement from the perspective of the participants and paints a picture of the impact of Circles on individuals, families and the London community.

Common themes of motivation, self-esteem and self-advocacy, as seen in *Figure 2* confirm the impact of London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative in strengthening

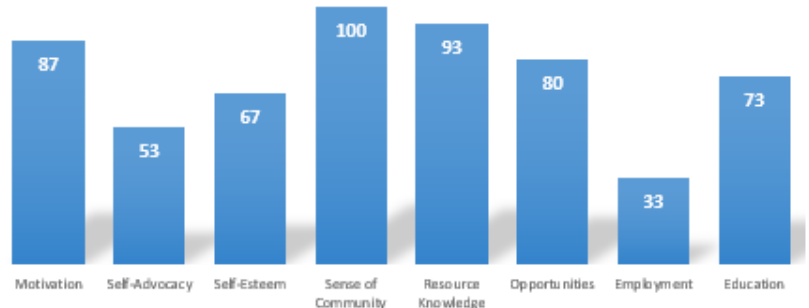


Fig. 2 Qualitative Themes Mentioned by Participants

these soft skills. These themes reaffirm the findings identified in the 2017 Baseline Evaluation (Figure 3) namely, that participation in Circles has significantly increased 6 key soft skills.

Three overarching themes emerged through the evaluation interviews that describe the journey that Circle Leaders follow during their participation. First, individuals and families participating in London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative became more motivated, confident and engaged in the labour force.

Secondly, individuals and families grew more stable which encourages longer term goal setting and future planning for sustainable employment. During the interviews they identified the support of a coach, and the peer support from London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative as key ingredients to being able to establish goals and set a plan in place to achieve them.

Finally, many described the positive impact that community building has had on their resources, namely their social capital. Their awareness of a larger network of informal and formal resources grew, and they experienced a reduction in isolation as they built a community of relationships prepared to assist them in achieving their personal goals. The report sections below provide context and explore the themes in greater detail and include participation outcomes on key success metrics.

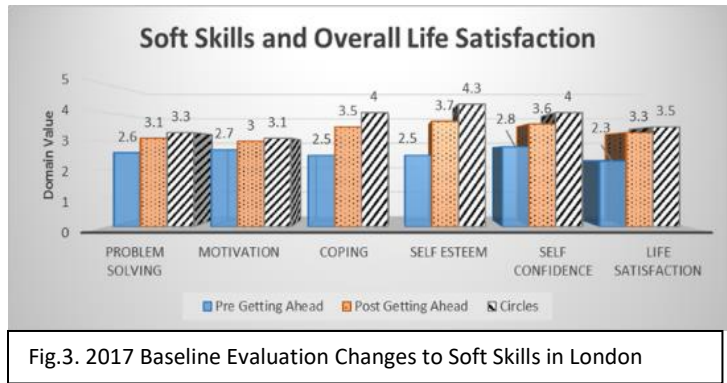


Fig.3. 2017 Baseline Evaluation Changes to Soft Skills in London

1. Individual’s Motivation, Confidence and Engagement with the Labour Force

“Circles has allowed me a voice. It has given me self-confidence that I didn’t have before. It has given me the chance to be alive” – Circles Leader

Circles London increases the motivation and confidence of individuals and families living in poverty and supports their engagement with the labour force. Close to 90% of those interviewed in 2018 described their motivation as improving through involvement with Circles. Factors identified which were catalysts to an increase in motivation included:

- The holistic investigation and self-assessment process through the Getting Ahead program;
- The individualized support from a Coach;
- The support of a peer group including other individuals living in poverty, and volunteers from the community; and
- Simply having a place to go and a routine of participating, contributing, and interacting with new people.

73% of Leaders interviewed shared that they had grown up in poverty or their parents received social assistance at some point

Outcome of Qualitative Interviews

Self-esteem also supports labour force participation. Within the sample group, a staggering 73% of participants shared that they had grown up in poverty or their parents had received social assistance at some point. This is evidenced in the evaluation data where Circle Leader interviewees shared instances where they had felt judged for living in poverty and felt like they were not good enough or didn't deserve what others seemed to have. Many described feeling isolated and feeling hopeless in that employment or a return to school was not going to be personally achievable. The longer a Circle Leader is unemployed the harder it is to re-enter the workforce.

"When you feel better about yourself, you are motivated to do better"

Improving self-esteem was commonly mentioned as a result of participating in London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative. Over 50% of those interviewed identified a feeling of empowerment and increased confidence and as a result individuals have begun to advocate for themselves and their families. Individuals shared that they were able to request specific assistance from their Ontario Works Caseworker such as referrals to employment services and financial assistance for expenses tied to engaging with the labour force (such as work clothing and equipment) which they were unwilling to request before. Individuals expressed feeling valued within their Circle group and encouraged to pursue new opportunities.

The Evaluation updated and validated the initial Baseline findings from 2017 which suggested the increase in Circle Leader motivation, self-esteem and other soft skills throughout their Circles journey were key factors in the individuals and families reengaging with the labour force.

Recently, London's labour participation rate, a key measure of engagement with the labour force, has under-performed against neighbouring cities and the national average. According to Statistics Canada, London's participation rate in May 2018 was approximately 61% compared to 65% nationally (*Figure 4*).

Labour Market Participation, May 2018

National	65.4%
Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge	68.2
Hamilton	64.7
London	61.2
Windsor	60.6

Fig. 4 Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0294-01 Labour force characteristics by census metropolitan area, three-month moving average, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, last 5 months

In 2017 London's Local Economic Planning Council (LEPC) identified several recommendations to increase the labour market participation rate for individuals experiencing personal and family challenges (Figure 5). These recommendations include providing peer support and other support groups to assist people in career exploration and decision making, and more wrap-around, holistically focused approaches.

London Economic Region: Labour Market Participation Final Report 2017 (Local Economic Planning Council)

For individuals experiencing Personal Challenges and Family Responsibility Challenges, suggestions reflect the need to address issues that are internal to the individual such as lack of confidence, work ethic and self-esteem, and issues that are external to the individual such as language barriers, lack of child care, and criminal record:

- Personal supports to help people who are in a career exploration/decision-making stage, in transition, or contemplating a return to work. These can include things like support groups, peer support, personal growth and development opportunities
- Opportunities for people who are temporarily out of the workforce to stay connected, such as courses and skill-building
- Wrap-around and holistic approach to assessing the needs of individuals
- Work place accommodations like flexible scheduling
- Access to child care.

Fig. 5 – London Economic Planning Council - Labour Market Participation Final Report February 2017
Retrieved from: http://www.localemploymentplanning.ca/images/uploads/labour_participation_final_report.pdf

The program outcomes identified in this report reflect a strong correlation between labour market participation, educational pursuits, and sense of belonging with supports offered by Circles London.

2. Individual's Growing Stability and Stronger Goal Setting and Planning

"It has given me connections and education but it also allowed me to step into my own power. I know now that I can create whatever life I want for me and my children"
– Circle Leader

The benefit of participating in London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative most identified by individuals and families to interviewers was access to information, and connection to opportunities and resources in London. Each participant shared that they learned at least one resource that was relevant to them. Many leaders

"Circles is like feeding your mind and your heart."

shared that they were able to find out about more programs through Circles than they had ever heard before. Findings suggest that access to information, and the support of the Circle, creates an environment where Leaders increase their, and are able to plan and set goals toward, economic self-sufficiency.

- 11 of the 15 people interviewed expressed they had some change in education since being a part of Circles ranging from skills training and certificate programs, to enrolling in College;

- By June 2018, nearly 21 individuals and families (or 30%) had graduated Circles and almost 72% of graduates had left due to reaching their goal and having sustainable income.

Participants identified three elements of the initiative that contributed to accessing services and resources:

- The support of coaches to find resources for their particular needs;
- Knowledge shared within their Circle by volunteer Allies and their peers; and
- Speakers brought into the weekly Circle meetings to share information. These speakers helped with things like budgeting, housing issues, legal advice etc.

Access to more information, resources, and support for longer term planning resulted in sustainable transitions off Ontario Works assistance and out of poverty. Figure 6 illustrates the outcomes for Circle Graduates. A large percentage, 47.6% have attained sustainable employment and have exited Ontario Works. Another large percentage 14.3% have increased their employment activity, however may be working part-time and may receive a small amount of financial support from Ontario Works to top up their income. Another 9.5% have transitioned into education and training. Figure 7 provides a profile of participants as of June 2018 and represents a specific moment in time. The pie chart demonstrates that the participants are still working towards their goals and not yet ready

Fig. 6 - Outcomes of Circles Graduates

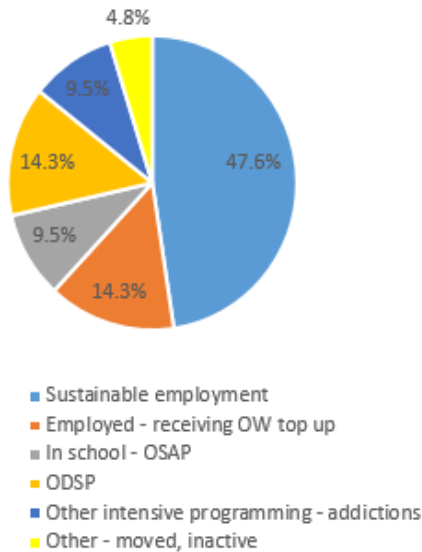
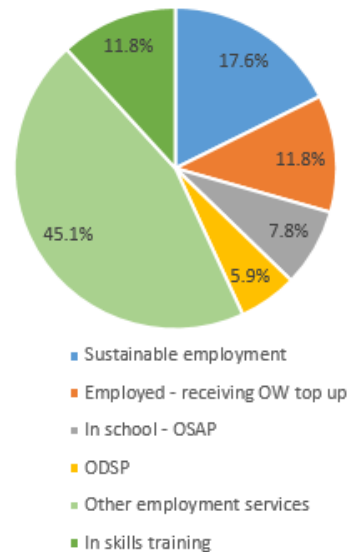


Fig. 7 - Current Status of Circles Participants



to graduate. Anecdotal information from Coaches suggest that this trend will continue as more Leaders find the resources and support to think longer term and pursue sustainable employment.

One Circle Leader shared an example of increased social capital where a Circle Ally provided him with child care and behavioral resources for his daughter through her connection with a local child care provider which resulted in an opportunity to pursue his employment goals while also providing care for his daughter.

Circle Leaders identified they were isolated and trying to make changes in their lives on their own prior to joining Circles. The changes were short-term focused or often not connected to action steps to achieve them. They shared that the consistent encouragement and structure of Circles assisted in setting and achieving goals. Participants are better equipped to accomplish their goals and to maintain these changes.

Savings to Ontario Works

Circle Leaders are becoming more economically self-sufficient as a result of increased motivation, longer term goal setting and supports to achieve those goals. One result of this self-sufficiency is direct savings to Ontario Works caseload costs as individuals and families earn income, return to school and exit Ontario Works. These savings are growing each year.

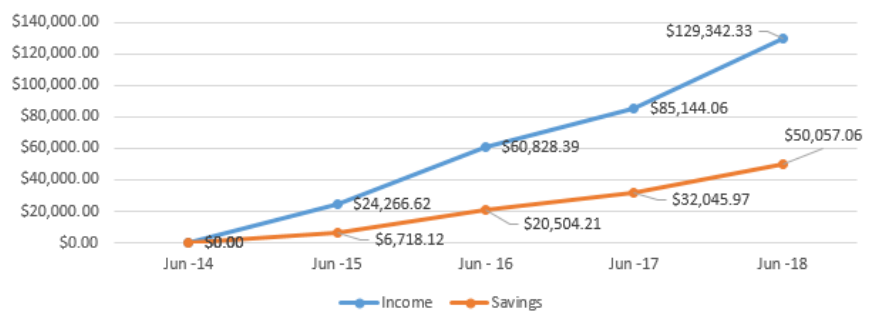
Savings to Ontario Works from all sources are projected to reach over \$430,000 per annum in 2019.

The two types of direct and quantifiable savings to Ontario Works with respect to Circles participation are:

- Net Savings due to Employment Activity
- Savings due to Exits from Ontario Works

As participants earn more income they become less reliant on Ontario Works and become more self sufficient. Initially when a Circle Leader starts to earn income, their Ontario Works financial supports are reduced. As a provincially directed incentive, the first \$200 of monthly earnings is not deducted from their Ontario Works support, however after this first \$200, their financial support is reduced by 50% of remaining earnings for the month. To date Circle Leaders who have gone from unemployment to employment have earned \$129,342.33 of which \$50,057.06 represents savings to Ontario Works, reflecting the growing economic self-sufficiency of clients. As sustainable work is found, it is more likely that a Circle Leader will exit entirely from Ontario Works.

Fig. 8 - Total Income Earned by Circle Leaders and Savings to Ontario Works

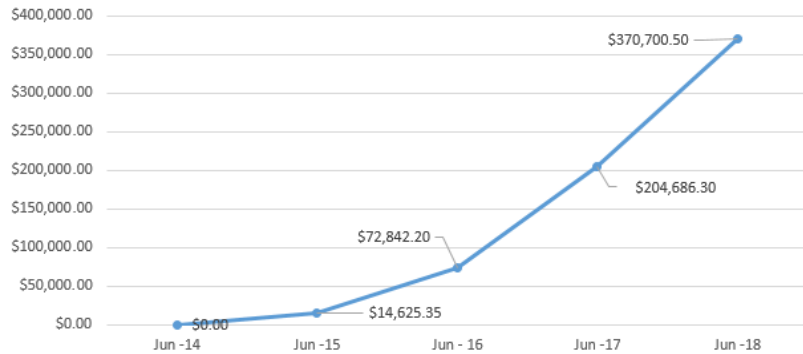


As described in Figure 8, total participant earned income has increased over time. In comparison, the savings to Ontario Works grows at a much lower rate and will be expected

to level off as participants exit Ontario Works support. The average monthly savings to Ontario Works is estimated to be \$2,000.

The second type of direct savings is due to exits from Ontario Works when sustainable income has been secured. The largest component of sustainable income is employment however, also includes exits to Ontario Disability Support Program, often a more stable and appropriate income source. Figure 9 shows the cumulative savings due to exits from Ontario Works either to employment, or other income sources to total \$370,700.50 as of June 2018.

Fig. 9 - Total Savings to Ontario Works due to Exits from Ontario Works by Circle Leaders

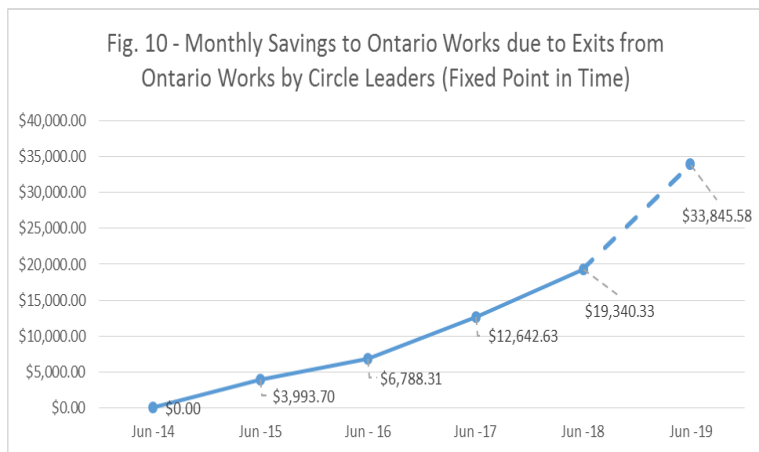


The combined impact of savings due to exits (Figure 9) and savings due to income (Figure 8) currently totals \$420,757.56 in savings.

Current Annual Savings and Projected Savings

In June 2018 the average monthly savings to Ontario Works from exits (Figure 10) was \$19,340. Assuming the steady annual growth of 70 to 80% in savings continues, as experienced in the last 4 years, the monthly savings in June 2019 is estimated to be \$33,845. When the \$2,000 per month savings based on average earned income is added to this amount, the estimated annualized savings would be \$430,140.

Fig. 10 - Monthly Savings to Ontario Works due to Exits from Ontario Works by Circle Leaders (Fixed Point in Time)



The key to the growth in savings is the focus on sustainable employment and retention so Circle Leaders do not return to Ontario Works.

Current and Ongoing Capacity

Each Circle has the capacity to engage 20 Circle Leaders. In June 2018, Circles was operating at 63% capacity due in part to a large number of individuals and families moving forward and graduating. In September 2018 the capacity utilization increased to 83%. Operating closer to full capacity will dramatically increase the savings due to the increased

number of eventual graduates. Currently the young adult Circle has the most available capacity. Operational plans for this group include it to be 100 % filled in early 2019. The strategic focus of Bridges / Circles London for 2019 is to strengthen the foundational elements of Circles including increasing volunteer Allies and community engagement to reach its full capacity.

A waiting list of Getting Ahead graduates who may be invited to Circles will be created once all Circle groups are at capacity. Estimates are that 30-40 new Circle Leaders per year will be required to replace Circle Leaders who graduate based on two years of participation.

3. Building an Aware and Responsive Community

**“It feels like London is trying to be proactive and doing something about poverty”
– Circles Leader**

London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative leverages the power of a caring and responsive community to support transitions of individuals and families out of poverty into economic self-sufficiency. Circle Leaders reach out to the wider community to find formal and informal resources to help them reach their goals, and contribute their lived experience, insights and solutions.

Three ways Circles Leaders have influenced and connected with Londoners are: Bridges out of Poverty workshops, London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative Guiding Coalition, and *London for All*.

“You now know you’re not alone,
changes your dynamic with people
and the community”

Circle Leaders contribute to Bridges Out of Poverty education workshops by sharing their lived experience with participants and assisting with facilitation. 1,211 London community members attended one of the 23 Bridges workshops held between June 2017 and June 2018.

In 2018, London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative partnered with King’s College School of Social Work in a project that matched Circle Leaders with a Master’s of Social Work class to review and update Bridges Out of Poverty workshop material to reflect local experiences, a Canadian perspective, poverty statistics, solutions and a call to action. The students visited each Circle twice and about 20 Circle Leaders, Allies and Coaches visited King’s College twice to explore poverty, create workshop material and test the material in the class.

London For All, the city's comprehensive approach in addressing poverty, is an important partner; representatives from London For All maintain an active leadership role on the London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative's Guiding Coalition. London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative has also established itself within the London for All plan as an active participant of the "Changing Mindsets" action table.

CHANGING MINDSETS

We want to build a stronger community. Changing mindsets and attitudes is the foundation for a culture shift to a community that sees the importance – and possibility – of ending poverty. More and more, Londoners are standing up and saying that they are not willing to settle for the status quo.

(London For All pg.15)

London Bridges Out of Poverty / Circles initiative is a key contributor to building a community response to poverty in London. Circle Leaders provide Londoners with an opportunity to learn about poverty that includes sharing the perspective and knowledge of individuals with experience.

- Four Circle Leaders were recruited to the London For All Leadership Council as members with lived experience;
- Circle Leaders and Allies have played key roles in public information and social marketing campaigns, including Poverty Over, and several Circle Leaders have been profiled extensively in the London Free Press and online as part of the campaigns;
- London Circle Leaders have hosted focus groups to provide input on the City of London Employment Services Update, Shift Public Transit Plan, Transit Subsidy research, and the Ontario government's investigation of young people not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

Summary / Next Steps

London's Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative was started as a pilot project in 2014. Initial results were promising and the initiative was expanded through the City Council Budget Process in 2016. Full capacity for all four Circles and a waiting list will be realized in early 2019.

Findings from this Evaluation Update are consistent with the 2017 Baseline Evaluation suggestions that individuals and families living in poverty are having positive, sustainable outcomes by participating in London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative.

Over the past two years of growth the Evaluation Update has identified many successes:

- 72% Circle Leaders have graduated due to economic self-sufficiency;
- 51 Circle Leaders currently active are engaging with education, training and employment services to assist them in building sustainable employment;
- Savings based on graduations from Circles are showing healthy growth;
- The initiative has become an important voice in the London community supporting public engagement and advocacy for system changes; and

- Individuals and families living in poverty are actively contributing to local poverty reduction efforts through London for All, Bridges Out of Poverty workshops, and London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative Guiding Coalition.

The initiative currently has capacity to offer space to more individuals and families living in poverty. Operational reviews have identified steps to fill this capacity by 2019.

Moving forward, London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative anticipates the following results in the year ahead:

- Achieving full capacity of 80 Circle Leaders and 80 Circle Allies with an established waiting list of potential Circle Leaders;
- A public launch of the former Bridges Out of Poverty workshop now titled, Rethink Poverty;
- An updated poverty awareness campaign through a partnership between London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative Guiding Coalition and London For All based on existing assets like Poverty Over and the If You Knew website;
- Updated volunteer program developed through volunteer expertise within the Guiding Coalition to supply their ongoing need for Allies, meal providers, child minders and community champions; and
- Enhanced data tracking through the Hometrak Circles database, organized by Circles Canada, to ensure a complete dataset for the on-going evaluation.

Reference A – Bridges Out of Poverty / Circles Initiative Background

London's Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles Initiative was introduced in 2014 as a transformational approach to ending poverty one family at a time.

In March 2016, through the multi-year budget process, City Council approved a budget allocation to continue and expand the capacity and scope of the initiative.

Since that time the initiative has grown to include four active Circle locations around the city which have served 72 individuals and families as of June 2018. London developed innovative approaches within the Circles model by creating a neighbourhood focused Circle at the White Oaks Family Centre in 2017, and a Circle for younger adults and youth in 2018 which is hosted by London Intercommunity Health Centre and supported by their Youth Outreach Workers.

The initiative is delivered through a partnership between Goodwill Industries Ontario Great Lakes and City of London Social Services and benefits from a community based Guiding Coalition of engaged individuals and service providers concerned about poverty in London.

The twelve member community based Guiding Coalition includes employment sector leaders, Fanshawe College, King's University College, United Way London Elgin Middlesex, London's Child and Youth Network, business, faith based organizations and service clubs.

There are three program components to the initiative: Bridges Out of Poverty workshops to grow awareness and understanding of poverty and motivate Londoners to take action, Getting Ahead workshops for individuals living in poverty to assess their personal situation, set goals and take action, and London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative where engaged Londoners meet individuals living in poverty and work together to transition to economic self-sufficiency and create community change.

Components of the Initiative

Circles

The goal of Circles is economic self-sufficiency for participants.

The initiative achieves this goal by growing intentional relationships between people struggling in poverty and receiving Ontario Works assistance (Circle Leaders) and those who are not in poverty and employed or retired (Allies). These relationships create opportunities for Circle Leaders to develop motivation, and self-confidence, stabilize and plan ahead, build a network of social relationships and find opportunities for employment and to return to school and training. Allies learn about the impacts of poverty in London and, together with Circle Leaders, they help identify systemic challenges and solutions.

Weekly Circle meetings begin with sharing a meal. Members including their children gather as a group to talk and discuss their lives and experiences. Community speakers are brought in to inform, share resources and opportunities or lead activities. Each month a

special meeting takes place where Circle Leaders and Allies explore and share insights into systemic barriers and challenges that make it difficult for individuals to escape poverty.

City of London Social Services and Goodwill Industries Ontario Great Lakes Coaches guide and support Circle Leaders to meet their individual goals with the assistance of an Ally who is matched with them. Circle Leaders and Allies meet at both the weekly meeting and one time per month on their own.

Getting Ahead

The goal of Getting Ahead is to increase participant's motivation for change, and provide tools to investigate their current circumstances and assist in planning.

Getting Ahead is an intensive, group based program offered by Goodwill Industries Ontario Great Lakes that individuals in poverty and on Ontario Works assistance complete prior to joining a Circle. Individuals are referred to Getting Ahead by their Ontario Works Caseworker.

Program participants work together over 12 weeks to explore their own unique backgrounds and situations, begin to visualize their "future story" and set initial goals to work toward.

Bridges out of Poverty

Bridges out of Poverty is a community education workshop for Londoners.

Using local examples, facts and examples, the reality of poverty in London is explored in an interactive and engaging way. Full-day workshops are held regularly for any Londoner to attend as well as tailored workshops for specific audiences and timeframes for groups such as schools, service clubs, and faith organizations. Individuals with lived experience recruited from London Bridges Out of Poverty/Circles initiative participate to share their personal experiences and insights.

Reference B - Socio Demographic Profile (At Time of Referral)

The following is an overview of demographic, educational, housing, income and other selected indicators for all 72 Circle Leaders. This is a baseline overview representing the status of Circle Leaders in the month that they entered Circles and as such may not be an accurate reflection of the current status of some Circle Leaders in areas such as income, employment status etc. Where appropriate comparisons are made to the overall Ontario Works caseload (City of London July 2016 extract) and Statistics Canada data (2016 Census for the City of London).

Age

- Circle Leaders range in age from 21 to 56 with an average age of 37 which is slightly higher than the average age of applicants on the Ontario Works caseload which is 34 years of age.

Gender

- Circle Leaders: 26% male and 74% female.
- City of London Ontario Works caseload: 48% male and 52% female.

Family Type

- 64% of the Circle Leaders are sole support parents compared to 27% of the Ontario Works caseload.
- 35% of the Circle Leaders are single compared to 64% of the Ontario Works caseload.
- 1% of the Circle Leaders are couples with families compared to 10% of the Ontario Works caseload.

Education

- 36% of Circle Leader have not completed high school compared to 42% of the Ontario works caseload.
- 29% of Circle Leaders have completed high school or equivalent compared to 34% of the Ontario Works caseload.
- 35% of Circle Leader have post-secondary education compared to 24% of the Ontario Works caseload.

Housing

- 70% of Circle Leaders reside in private market housing and 30% reside in housing that is subsidized/geared to income (RGI). According to the 2016 Census, 11% of Londoners reside in subsidized housing.
- 38% of Circle Leaders reside in housing that is affordable – monthly housing costs that do not exceed 30% of income. According to the 2016 Census, 54% of households in London reside in rental housing that is affordable.
- Aside from the issue of affordability, 94% of Circle Leaders reside in housing that they report as being “suitable.” Factors leading Circle Leaders to deem their accommodation “unsuitable” include issues around the overall neighborhood, physical access and lack of privacy.

Housing Stability and Homelessness

- 25% of Circle Leaders moved at least once in the year prior to entering Circles and 83% moved at least once in the preceding 5 years.
- The number of moves for Circle Leaders ranged from 0 to 3 in the previous year and 0 to 17 in the previous 5 years.
- According to the 2016 Census, 16% of Londoners had moved within the previous year and 43% had moved in the previous 5 years.
- 21% of Circle Leaders had experienced homelessness in the previous five years.

Ontario Works

- The average consecutive time on Ontario Works assistance for Circles Leaders was 48 months with a range of 3 months to 194 months.
- The average consecutive time on assistance for the overall Ontario Works caseload is 34 months.
- The majority of Circles Leaders have previous social assistance history (as applicants, spouses or dependents) prior to their current eligibility.

Employment

- 65 of the 72 Circle Leaders had paid employment history prior to their latest Ontario Works eligibility. The most common occupations were general labourer, retail sales clerk and bar/restaurant staff.
- Of the Circle Leaders with employment history, the average time since last employment was 61 months with a range of 0 to 168 months.
- 6 Circle Leaders had employment or self-employment income when entering the program.

Health Issues

- 31% of Circle Leaders reported at least one physical health issue. There were no patterns in the types of issues reported with examples including chronic pain, diabetes, hepatitis C.
- 40% of Circle Leaders reported that they were experiencing mental health issues. Depression followed by anxiety were the two most common mental health issue mentioned. For Circle Leaders with an employment history it appears that mental health issues seldom led to loss of employment, but rather that detachment from the labour market and/or financial issues preceded the emergence of mental health issues.
- 26% of Circle Leaders reported that they were experiencing or had experienced addiction issues. The primary substances of concern were opiates followed by alcohol and cocaine/crack cocaine.
- 13% of the Circle Leaders reported that they were experiencing both addiction and mental health issues (dual diagnosis).

Other Barriers

- 4% of Circle Leaders identified a lack of literacy skills as a barrier.
- 14% of Circle Leaders shared a history of domestic/family violence.

14% of Circle Leaders disclosed the existence of a criminal record which, in the absence of a record suspension, may limit educational and employment options.