

How to End – Not Reduce – Poverty One Family at a Time

Ames, IA – Roughly 12% of Americans live in poverty today and are unable to consistently pay for basic needs. That's according to federal guidelines established in the 1960's that have not factored in the increasing costs of housing, healthcare, utilities or transportation in the last four decades. The number of people under the real poverty line in the U.S. could be two to three times higher. Non-profit organizations and government agencies are attempting to eradicate poverty, but the numbers show they are not succeeding.

"It's time to rock the boat," proclaims Scott Miller, CEO of Move the Mountain Leadership Center – which provides training, technical assistance, consulting and coaching to leaders and communities who are focused on ending poverty. "It's caused by numerous factors so we need to understand that there is no quick fix. Poverty CAN be dismantled, but it's going to take a radical change in the mindset within our individual communities."

Miller believes there are two ways out of poverty: education and social capital, "One of the largest common denominators for those living in poverty is social isolation. Think about it. People with adequate and more-than-adequate incomes simply don't mingle with people with low incomes and vice versa."

In his new book "Until It's Gone: Ending Poverty in Our Nation, in Our Lifetime," Miller says this social compartmentalization leads to a popular denial that there is little to no poverty in a community, and, if there is, then those people are getting what they deserve.

Enter the Circles™ Campaign, which creates partnerships among individual volunteers ("allies") and families ("leaders") pursuing economic well-being. Miller developed the approach in order to systematically support communities in addressing poverty. By partnering impoverished families with those who have middle and upper income means, the community learns from both sides of the "tracks" what will work to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty.

"We're not throwing money at the problem," explains Miller. "Instead, the Circle allies, consisting of two to three community members, join families in solving their specific challenges of getting out of poverty while working together to approach the complex community dynamics that hold so many others in poverty."

As documented in "Until It's Gone," one Circle leader discovered her allies don't just give her things, "I appreciated that Circles is not a hand-out program, it's a hand-up program." She adds, "They are very educational. We each have a financial ally, a relationship ally and an educational ally." Miller points out that people aided by the Circles are expected to giveback in any way possible to the cause in an effort to maximize the campaign's efforts.

For "those with enough" wanting to help one struggling family at a time, Miller offers the following tips:

- Join a Circle: "People living in poverty need friendly contacts in the community as they find new ways to make ends meet."
- Donate a car: "Without reliable transportation, finding a job that pays a livable-wage is extremely difficult."
- Encourage participation: "When properly motivated, places of worship and civic organizations will get involved in ending poverty."
- Give generously: "Seek out organizations that provide emergency cash while promoting long-term self-sufficiency planning."
- Be alert to opportunities for helping people out of social isolation: "Bridge the gap to change their life and yours for the better."

Having dedicated his whole professional life to the cause, Miller still believes poverty will no longer exist when enough people realize that it can and should be ended. "It's going to be hard work. However, if we are committed, if we have regular discussions about how to proceed and if we follow through by acting on good ideas, we CAN eventually end poverty one family at a time."

About the Author

Scott Miller is co-founder and CEO of Move the Mountain. For more than twenty years Scott has provided training and consulting across the country helping communities understand and engage in high impact strategies to end poverty. He leads MTM's Circles™ Campaign, which provides for a direct relationship and support between community volunteers and low-income families. Despite being from an upper middle income family and attaining his bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a major in Organizational Behavior, Miller went into social work because he felt making differences in people's lives and their communities were callings he could not ignore. "Until It's Gone: Ending Poverty in Our Nation in our Lifetime" is

his second book. For more information about Move the Mountain, the Circles™ Campaign or Miller, log onto www.MoveTheMountain.org.

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