



Episode Transcript

S1E6: Advancement

Yvette Trujillo Welcome to The Big View: Ending Poverty in Your Community. My name is Yvette Trujillo, and I am the Chief Integrity Officer at Circles USA. And as always, I am joined by the wonderful Kamatara Johnson, who is our Executive Director. Hey, Kamatara.

Kamatara Johnson Hi, Yvette.

YT So we are with Circles USA and at Circles, our mission is building community to end poverty through intentional friendships, personal transformation, and systemic change led by the people closest to the challenge. And our vision for the future that we want to be living into is all individuals live in equitable and thriving communities where poverty no longer exists.

KJ Oh, that gets me every time. Thank you for stating that. I just want to keep stating, just stay anchored in that. Thank you.

YT Yeah. Let's say it over and over and over again, which we get to. And this podcast is all about getting a better understanding, a higher level understanding of the experience of poverty. So we take that 30,000 foot level view of poverty, and we break it down into these bite sized chunks to help you understand what's actually happening for folks.

What are they living through and how you can make a real difference right where you are, right in your community. So what we've learned is that there are, there are stages to prosperity and we've been doing this work for 25 years at Circles USA in the anti-poverty arena. And this pattern has emerged over and over again. And we've put them into this package of Five Stages to Prosperity.

And so in that process, of moving from surviving to thriving, there are five key stages. And so the first is Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Readiness, Placement, and the final stage is Advancement, which is what we're going to be diving into today.

KJ Ah, we have come so far.

YT Yep.

KJ And last week we were talking about Placement and really having a place that that I have chosen that is conscious, that I am in and this is great. And then during Advancement, how do I deepen that now? Like, yes, this is where I want to be. I have found it. This is the thing. There's still a little bit more to be done.

So this is where, during the Advancement stage, I'm finally getting to financial stability and wellness, where it's not this ongoing pressing concern. Like, no, I've made it. My spending plan is looking great. I have emergency funds, like I financially, I am solid. That's a fantastic place. I mean, that's one piece of the puzzle here, but that's a big piece of the puzzle.

But beyond that, in this Advancement stage, I've also advanced my confidence in myself and who I am, and that I have something valuable to offer in how I interact with work and my family members and community members and how, you know, how am I interacting in the world. I have confidence and a sense of purpose, and—I hope—that deep sense of meaning and belonging, because I'm contributing to my community and I'm continuing to engage in my personal and professional growth.

But I've also, at this point, I've built resilience against future crises because life happens. Like, you never you never know what's going to happen. There could be that car accident, someone could pass away, you know, a factory closes, like stuff happens. But now, because I have financial, emotional and personal, physical stability, wellness, you know, all of that. It's okay.

Something could happen, and I am still okay. Which means I have officially left poverty behind permanently. And that's an amazing statement to say. I have left poverty behind permanently. Wow, what a journey.

YT And how many, how many of us? You know, we may not have experienced financial poverty, right? But if you have been living this life and not feeling like you belonged anywhere, to get to a stage of life where you belong, I mean, how many of us that have never experienced poverty before are looking for meaning? And I mean that that's certainly something that I, I talk about in my personal life a lot. And so like this journey is really when we get to this point. This is where we're thriving.

KJ Yes.

YT This is where, like, life is good. And challenges can come. And it's not always perfect. And, you know, not always rainbows and butterflies, right?

KJ [Laughs] Yes.

YT But that's not what thriving is. But when those challenges arise, when those hard times come, you have what you need and you have a sense of knowing that you have what you need to move through those challenging times that will come. It's just a fact of life.

They're not... it's not horrible. You just, how do you, how do you how do you live with that? How do you get to the other side of that?

And that is thriving. That is truly being able to engage with life and to bring yourself fully to life. And I just, I think of, of, of get from getting from Crisis Intervention, where you're just trying to live to survive to get to the next day, to get to the next week... Like next year, next month, is kind of outside of view. To a point where, like, you're thriving. You're thriving. You've gone through all of these stages building upon each other.

Truly do, like that begins to expand its reach into more and more of our society, of our culture, of all people. That just because you have money to do things, doesn't mean that you're thriving.

KJ Right. Or satisfied or happy. And during this Advancement stage, beyond the initial Placement, we do want to ask "How?". How am I continuing to grow and continuing to contribute? Because there's an elevated level of growth and improvement and achievement and, and connection that's happening. So it's really exciting, whether it's in the workplace or in the community, to have this new experience.

And I and I think we've been using the whole treading water analogy, and I think in crisis, yes, we're treading water, just dog paddling, trying to keep our head above water. And then, you know, stabilization. And we're just like get, get, get some floaties, like some water wings like, oh my God, you know, help me stay afloat better.

So then by the end of Stabilization okay, we've got a boat. And then, you know, during Readiness like, well, what what do we need on this boat? Oh, we need two oars and we need to go in this direction. And then in, you know, Placement. Okay. Now we're using this, this boat to, to go do something like, okay, we're, we're fishing and we're really getting out there and serving a purpose.

And now, you know, we can maybe get a little bit bigger boat and we could get a motor on it, and we might be able to teach other people how to fish. And then we might we have like a whole fishing culture, like, you know, you can just see the expansive ripples, like it's exponential at this point. It's deep, it's wide, it's reaching.

And it's like, I also think of when there's a really strong old tree that has the roots that go way down even beyond what you can see. And then it reaches way up and then it becomes a habitat for all different, you know, animals and plants and all different things and shade for humans or whatever. It's like, it's like that interweaving building that is like the heart of building community to end poverty is like, now we've really strong people and really strong community because we have done this together.

And look how far we have come. And when we want to have a a society that works for all people, that's fully inclusive, how do we do that? How do we get there? So everyone is striving and like, wow, we've done this together. So there's just such staying power. And I think of, let's say, the multi generational impact of this because

now I've spent, let's say, more time with my community and more time with my children, and maybe I can spend time with my grandbabies, or I can spend time with my neighbors.

And then like there's that, that ripple where everyone is benefiting from from this. And then I continue to advance, say, my opportunities. I might take on higher responsibilities, or I might get a promotion, or I'm honing my skills. So I'm still having that substantial impact, doing something really positive. And it's just, it's like, it just keeps building and building and building to to be this beautiful, almost like inheritance for the community and the next generation in that community, which is so beautiful.

That's what we want to pass on to our babies. That would be amazing.

YT Right. And I'm hearing, I'm hearing in this stage, like, you know, as we begin, as we move through the stages that we can see further and further and further, but that what what happens here is that like, I want like I get to have a say and I want to be satisfied with my life. I want to have a sense of satisfaction with my life.

And so it's no longer about getting what I need and meeting my needs. Your needs are met. What is satisfying for you? What is joyful for you? And we can stretch beyond the requirements into like peaceful, satisfied action and and that ultimate, you know, self-actualization. Like what, how do I contribute? What difference am I making? And and how do I play a part in this new ecosystem that I belong to?

KJ Yeah.

YT Right? That I am an active part of and contributing member.

KJ So we have to ask the community question here. We always think, well like what... If I were a community member, what do I need to ask at this stage,? Which is, okay, are there, let's say employment opportunities that do have a line of sight for advancement or growth or development? Or is this a dead end? Or are there, you know, beautiful civic engagements and faith based organizations or like, you know, the Girl Scouts, the 4-H, the beautiful things that we have in our communities that are just so, like, you know, vibrant and exciting? Like, do we have those going in our community and are they accessible to people?

Like, how do new people get in? Like, in this new found time that I have in my job as Executive Director, and now that I'm almost an empty nester, and I don't have to work extra jobs or extra gigs, I reconnected with music and I, I could get into the New Mexico Symphonic Chorus because I could see the entry ramp.

I could see when auditions where, I could get myself there. So like, for communities, could we evaluate, what opportunities do we have in our community for personal and professional advancement? Are there continuing education classes—that are just beautiful, like the University of New Mexico has amazing continuing ed classes for just the general public, about all different topics, they're amazing.

What volunteer opportunities are there? Albuquerque has a beautiful app called The One App that connects everyone together. It's almost like a volunteer dating service. It's beautiful and and we get connected and we get to do gorgeous things. Or like what, what is training up the next generation of leaders in in workplaces and then thinking, how do I pay it forward?

It's so much more than just money. It's like, yes, there's financial stability, of course, and there's, you know, the food, the shelter, the clothing, the jobs, the childcare, of course. Yes. And, the prosperity of life, the richness in the heart and the mind and the connections and then the impact for future generations is that holistic approach and and why we keep coming back to community and we keep coming back to compassion.

You just have compassion for folks, where this is a new experience to, to believe in a community, to believe in people. That people could be good and that we could do good things together, and that I am safe and I have something to offer. And yes, here's the whole package. Well, now in Advancement, we're just doing it. Like we're, we're in it.

It's humming,, it's beautiful. And and life is really satisfying. That, that to me is prosperity.

YT And I keep having the image, Kamatara, that beautiful ecosystem of the tree that you that you talked about. Like that just, like, when we do this work together, the work serves everyone that's involved. And it's not that we are just serving people that are experiencing poverty. Yeah, we are, but in so doing, we are all served. Because now we have a more vibrant, diverse ecosystem.

That beautiful, thriving life of this tree that you, the image that you built. [Laughs] I'm like, I've got birds flying around, it's fantastic, I hear lots of sounds. But it's this like, this recognition that when we do this kind of work in our community and we do it together, we are creating a thriving, beautiful, rich, prosperous community to live in, that we very intimately belong to.

KJ Yes. And we intentionally co-created it together. So there is a seat for everyone at the table. Everyone has a right to thrive, deserves to have that deep sense of meaning and belonging, deserves to reach their dreams and and to feel valued and seen and heard and contributing. And that mutual reciprocity that goes on, like everyone deserves to have that.

And that is the the mission and vision of Circles USA. In fact, will you say the vision one more time?

YT I will. So, the vision is that all individuals live in equitable, thriving communities where poverty no longer exists.

KJ Oh, and there it is.

YT There it is. Oh my goodness. Well, this has been a wonderful journey to have taken with you, Kamatara, and with all of you that have joined us. We hope, we hope beyond hope that this has been, information that inspires you, to move into community and to make the difference that only you can make.

So thanks again for joining us. Thank you so much, Kamatara, for your passion, for for how brilliant you are in this arena. I've enjoyed, I've enjoyed it immensely.

KJ Thank you as well, Yvette. You're so insightful and a wonderful partner and an excellent host. So to all of you out there who are in community, remember, we are always building community to end poverty. Thank you so much for all that you do.