



CFUW Ontario Council
Standing Committees Meeting
Joint Morning Session
September 26, 2015

Topic: Bridges Out of Poverty

Speaker: Elaine Weir, Public Health Nurse, Certified Bridges Out of Poverty Facilitator and Circles GW Coordinator/Coach

With passion and humility, Elaine explained what it means to live in poverty and how people living a middle class or wealthy existence can't possibly understand how much our lives, goals, motivation, and relationships differ. She spent both the morning and afternoon providing insight and inspiration of what individuals and communities can do to break the cycle of poverty for individuals and groups.

Elaine Weir is a Public Health Nurse with Wellington-Dufferin Guelph Public Health. She brings more than 30 years of experience and expertise to the Bridges initiative. Elaine has worked in a variety of organizations including hospitals, communities and educational settings. Elaine's work as a public health nurse on the front lines has given her firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by individuals living in poverty.

Bridges Out of Poverty is a program developed in the United States by Ruby Payne to educate the community about poverty and people who live in poverty. The intention is that through education, professionals and other people in all sectors of the community will open their minds to the culture of poverty and build relationships to create a sustainable community.

The initiative involves three interconnected programs:

1) Bridges is the first step where individuals of middle and upper income become aware of the hidden rules of poverty (<http://circlesgw.ca/bridges/>). The purpose of the Bridges Out of Poverty program is to educate individuals with middle and upper incomes by looking at the four causes of poverty:

- * individual behaviour
- * community conditions
- * exploitation
- * political and economic structures

2) Getting Ahead is the program for individuals living in poverty to help these individuals become aware of resources that are available in the community, reflect on their own path and the factors that cause poverty. (<http://circlesgw.ca/getting-ahead/>).

3) Circles® is a community-based initiative that creates genuine relationships across economic boundaries. It matches people of low-income who have attended the Getting Ahead program with people of middle- and upper-income who have attended Bridges training. (<http://circlesgw.ca/circles/>)

Therefore, a "circle" consists of three types of people -

1. Circles® Leader - An individual or family of low income who is interested in becoming self-sufficient.
2. Allies - two or three volunteers for each Leader who engage in an intentional, caring relationship with an individual or family working to become self-sufficient.
3. The Coach - The Circles® Coach supports Circles® Leaders and Allies in fine-tuning personalized action plans. The Circles® coach is a paid position that has received specialized training to support and manage the Circles® program.

Circles® is a high-impact, 18-month-long voluntary strategy designed to:

- provide emotional and practical support
- assist with complex issues
- build the "social capital" of people living in low income situations
- show the community the very real barriers holding people in poverty
- walk with people in poverty and support positive changes in their lives

I would love to provide a copy of the excellent slides from Elaine's talk, but regrettably the slides are under copyright. For more information about the program in Guelph-Waterloo refer to the website <http://circlesgw.ca> or if you want to contact Elaine with questions or to discuss possibly speaking to your local club, email her at Elaine.Weir@wdgpublichealth.ca .

Anne Cordon, Chair
Status of Women & Human Rights Committee