

Lives Transformed: Audrey Lee

The Circles USA model supports people's efforts to deepen and expand what they think is possible: for themselves, their families, and their communities. As Circle Leaders reach milestones in their journeys toward financial stability, we document their achievements as **Lives Transformed** stories to highlight joy and hope as valuable tools in combating poverty.

This year's *Lives Transformed* awardees were nominated from among thousands of exceptional Circle Leaders nationwide. Though their backgrounds and experiences vary, each exemplifies Circles USA's core values of perseverance, initiative, and service to their chapters and communities. Congratulations to our 2024 Lives Transformed cohort!

I was raised in Sacramento, California, where my family initially lived in a two-bedroom apartment until I completed the third grade. Subsequently, we relocated to a two-story house and moved several times after the sixth grade. As the eldest of four siblings, I would characterize my family life as both chaotic and emotionally intense. During this time I operated in a state of survival mode—often without realizing it.

My stepfather worked tirelessly to provide for us. He ensured that our bills were paid and that I had the school supplies and uniforms I needed. While my mom handled the bills, I also noticed her spending habits. Money was never openly discussed in our home. I learned the importance of hard work and the responsibility of paying bills.

Upon moving to South Carolina, I found myself unsure of how to make my way through the season I was experiencing. I learned about Deep Well from various sources and they truly became a tremendous blessing in my life. I felt incredibly thankful for the support I received, and I wanted to give back by volunteering as an interpreter at Deep Well. It was there that I met Shavonne [Vasquez, Chapter Manager, Circles Hilton Head Island]. She explained the idea of Circles to me, and I instantly realized that this was just what I was looking for. I frequently refer to the Circles team as my pillars of support.



Audrey with children Agusta (1) and Lilly (11)

Throughout this journey, I faced many setbacks, which are natural parts of growth and transformation. At first it was challenging to be so open with strangers. But I realized that, to make meaningful changes in my life, I had to learn to trust and communicate with my support network. It can be uncomfortable and chaotic,



Audrey with son Gavin (8)

and at times it felt like things were getting worse. There were moments when I considered giving up, but my Circles support system wouldn't let me. They hold me accountable to myself, allowing me to extend that accountability to those who believe in me and invest their support. The unwavering faith and encouragement from my pillars have been instrumental in helping me navigate every obstacle and setback I've encountered so far.

Each Ally possesses their own unique strengths and abilities. Yet one common quality I observe in all of them is their unwavering support and commitment to every leader, whether they are new or emerging from the program.

Some beliefs that help me succeed as a Circle Leader are Grace, Resolve, and Commitment. Extend grace to yourself and others, recognizing that everyone is on their unique journey toward growth, which may manifest differently for each individual. Demonstrate resolve and resilience by standing firm during challenging times and maintaining your course. And foster a commitment to yourself first, and subsequently to the program, understanding that both elements are interconnected and essential for success. In 2025, I aim to embody these beliefs by investing significantly in my education and improving my credit score to facilitate the purchase of my first home for my children.

Regardless of your current stage in life—whether single, married, divorced, or otherwise—you have the strength to persevere. If a single mother with no family support, relying solely on her faith and three children, can succeed, then you can as well.

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