



# EUROPEAN HANDBOOK

# ***European Handbook***

**COSA, Circles of Support and Accountability**

**Disclaimer**

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## Preface

*He drew a circle that shut me out —*

*Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.*

*But Love and I had the wit to win:*

*We drew a circle that took him in.*

*Edwin Markham, "Outwitted"*

It was June, 1994 and Dr. Bill Palmer, a psychologist at one of our federal penitentiaries was driving Charlie back to the community after he had served every day of his 7 year sentence for a sexual offense against a young boy.

I had known Charlie for 15 years through my previous work with a ministry of friendship that linked prisoners with Christian sponsors. Now I was serving as a pastor in a small Mennonite congregation in Hamilton, a steel-producing town with a population of less than 500,000 people.

Bill had called me a few months before wondering if we could put Charlie on a Mennonite farm upon release, in a caring and structured home without children. He was 41 years old but he had been raised in foster homes and large institutions where he himself had been sexually abused as a child.

Trying to place Charlie on a farm proved futile, but I told Bill that maybe we could create a 'circle of support' for Charlie in Hamilton. I recruited members from my congregation and community to be part of a small circle so that Charlie would have somebody in the community when he landed, like a surrogate family. We informally called our group 'Charlie's Angels'.

We had no idea what we were getting in for!

At the beginning, when this all started, we never conceived of this as a program. We just wanted to do something to help one guy, Charlie. I also knew that if nothing was done there would be another victim.

Within two days of his release the police made his picture available to the media and warned the community of his presence among us. He was front page news. One headline read, '*Streets of Fear*'. The school boards photocopied the press release and gave it to the primary schools in our region. When the flyer landed on the desk of my 8 year old son, he picked it up and announced. "*I know him! He was at our place for supper last night.*"

The police mounted 24 hour surveillance on Charlie because they felt sure he would re-offend within a short period. We heard later that the cost of the 6 week surveillance amounted to more than \$ 350,000 in 1994 dollars. All of this community uproar was unnerving for our little community. We had two congregational meetings at which everyone was invited to speak. Fears for our kids were expressed. What resources did we have as a little group to cope with this complex, polarizing issue?

In the midst of the discussion, dear Eleanor, one of the most vulnerable of our community, spoke up, "*If Jesus hadn't welcomed me, where would I be today?*" The group decided unanimously to welcome Charlie, recognizing that we would all need to work together to help him avoid problem situations.

Charlie's circle met with him regularly. Individually we contacted him every day, taking him to do laundry, to shop for groceries and to find furniture for his apartment. And we would listen, listen, listen.

For the first 6 weeks every time we took Charlie out of his apartment major crime detectives in two unmarked cars followed us everywhere. The principal detective actually attended some of our circle meetings and gradually the police became supportive of what we were trying to do.

Charlie's circle of support filled a number of roles: *advocating with the system* to secure the benefits that were rightfully his; *confronting* Charlie about his attitudes and behaviour; *walking* with him through emergencies; *providing financial* backing when his kitten needed emergency surgery; *mediating* landlord-tenant conflicts; and

*celebrating* anniversaries, milestones and all the small advances in Charlie's journey of reintegration. The circle felt keenly a dual responsibility: to be a **caring** community for Charlie in the midst of the hostility of the larger community, but also to a **responsible** community, concerned that there be no more victims. We always hoped that our presence might avert a situation in which another child would be hurt.

Three months after Charlie's release to Hamilton, another high profile offender named Wray returned to the City of Toronto and colleagues who had been observing and supporting our efforts in Hamilton created the second Circle of Support and Accountability. Before we knew it, a movement had begun - a community-based response that allowed ordinary citizens to move from fearful rejection to active, compassionate involvement, supported by experienced professionals in creating sanctuaries where despised offenders could be treated with respect but also with accountability.

Both Charlie and Wray lived with chronic medical conditions. Charlie lived on his own in Hamilton for 12 years before he died of a heart attack. Wray lived 14 years in Toronto before succumbing to cancer. Neither man ever committed another sexual offense. For both men their community of support remained steadfast and a profound, mutual caring emerged that transformed us all.

In 'Tattoos on the Heart', Fr. Gregory Boyle writes about a lifetime of ministry with gang members in Los Angeles. *"What is the delivery system for resilience", he asks? "In part, it's the loving caring adult who pays attention. It's the community of unconditional love, representing the very 'no matter whatness' of God."*

Circles of Support and Accountability are just that – 'deliveries systems of resilience' for offenders and communities who are both trying to put the pieces together again. Often the natural, visceral response in our communities is to clamour for exclusion when an offender returns from prison. As circles of unconditional, tough love we can make an incredible impact in restoring wholeness right where we live.

I am amazed and inspired to see how you in the European community have joined this movement. I am confident that you will add to this surprising narrative of grace.

Harry Nigh  
Toronto, September 2011

## Acknowledgements

Circles of Support and Accountability have proven to be a welcome complement to sex offender treatment and reintegration efforts by probation in different national contexts. There is growing interest in Circles from different European countries. An international cooperation between British, Dutch and Belgian organisations (Circles Europe: Together for Safety; CTS) has led to the joint application for a two year grant from the Daphne III program of the European Union to support the international proliferation of COSA throughout Europe. This grant enabled the production of the European handbook and co-financed the introduction of COSA to Belgium, some extra pilot Circles in the Netherlands and the further development of Circles standards, assisted by Circles UK as a consultant.

Partners in this cooperation were (in alphabetical order):

- Avans Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice
- Circles-NL (Dutch national COSA organisation)
- Circles UK (English national COSA organisation)
- Dutch Probation Organisation (Reclassering Nederland)
- House of Justice Antwerp (Justitiehuis Antwerpen, Belgian Probation Organisation)
- The European Organisation for Probation (CEP)
- Tilburg University, department of Social Studies

This European Handbook brings together the lessons learnt from Circle projects in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium and aims to support the implementation of Circles in other European countries while maintaining the high quality of deliverance that has been established thus far. This task could not have been accomplished without the substantial contribution of the following members of CTS, who monitored the process and reviewed the text several times:

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A special word of thank is owed to Reverend Harry Nigh, the 'Founding father' of the Circles concept, for writing a preface to this Handbook.

Finally, I would like to thank all project members, volunteers, core members and professionals who were willing to share their knowledge and experiences to let others profit from them.

Mechtild Höing (Researcher, Tilburg University, Avans University of Applied Sciences)



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## *Guide to the European Handbook*

This handbook provides new COSA initiatives with all necessary information to start a project that meets the quality standards that have proven to be effective.

Chapter 1 gives a basic overview over the Circles' aims by outlining the type of problems that emerge from sex offenders re-entering society. Concerns from the various parties involved are described, as well as practical and ethical concerns. Subsequently, the way COSA addresses these problems is described with attention for the different models for Circles that are evolving in Canada and in Europe. Next, the European model is explained in more detail from a practical viewpoint – how do Circle projects actually work? Finally, theoretical evidence for this model is derived from contemporary theories on sexual offending and effective interventions, and the theory of change for Circles is briefly explained.

Chapter 2 outlines the necessary groundwork, which is to be done before a COSA initiative can be started: a thorough evaluation of the feasibility of Circles and of the national judicial context, in order to have a clear picture of the strengths and difficulties a COSA project is going to encounter in the development process. Also, some no-go criteria are formulated, stating that under specific conditions it may be wiser not to start Circles.

In chapter 3 the necessary steps in the implementation process are described. The requirements that need to be in place are defined and best practices and lessons learnt are shared, from acquiring sustained finances, to volunteer recruiting, to project monitoring and evaluation.

Chapter 4 provides a guide to protocols and manuals and offers an overview of all materials available under a license agreement with Circles UK. In a standardized format their aims, utilization and target groups are described.

Chapter 5 is a monitoring and evaluation guide which describes the different monitoring and evaluation procedures that ensure accountability of the project on various levels, from monitoring Circle meetings to evaluation of adherence to the code of practice for the whole project.

Chapter 6 deals with research issues, linking different types of research to different developmental stages of a Circle Project. Different research types and –strategies are briefly explained, practical and ethical concerns in doing research into COSA are described and an overview over examples of the different research strategies – from adaptation studies to effect studies – is given.



# **1 COSA: what it is and how it works**

## **1.1 The problem with sex offenders re-entering society**

Why would any given society want to provide sex offenders with a Circle of Support and Accountability? The first Canadian Circle initiative gave us a simple answer, rooted in deeply felt beliefs about humanity and in compassion of a religious community: because we want no more victims and because no one is disposable. In our more secular Western European societies the answer to this question needs to be more elaborate and rational – and needs to be legitimized by scientific evidence. The short cut to this answer is: because Circles try to meet the various concerns of all those that are confronted with the problem of sex offenders re-entering and re-integrating into society.

### **Victim concerns: the impact of sexual abuse and the need to heal**

Becoming a victim of sexual abuse is a very real and not very uncommon risk in all societies. Representative national prevalence studies show that in European countries 12 - 36% of all women and 3 - 18% of all men report being sexually abused as a child (Martinez, 2006). The differences are due to actual differences in prevalence rates and differences in the definition of (types of) sexual abuse and violence.

In past decades, the detrimental consequences of sexual abuse have been studied extensively and are widely acknowledged throughout western countries. Experiences of sexual abuse are among the most pathogenic traumatic events in human life. They can have a negative influence on the development of a stable, healthy personality, on the development of a healthy, fulfilling sexual life and on general mental and physical health. In addition, once a person has experienced sexual violence the risk of re-victimization is higher than the original risk. The material and immaterial costs of being victimised can be high, both to the victim and to society. Not all victims develop serious mental health problems. Age of onset, relation with the perpetrator, the nature of the abuse, a general vulnerability stemming from early childhood experiences are significant moderators. Also, the immediate emotional response of the victim, the appraisal of the event and the social support being offered are relevant mediators in recovering from the trauma. Alternatively, rejecting and blaming reactions from friends, family and professionals can add up to the burden and lead to secondary traumatisation (Ullman, 1999).

Judith Herman (1992, 2005) is a long time researcher and advocate of victims' needs in the process of recovery. Based on in-depth interviews with male and female survivors of sexual and/or domestic violence she identified several basic needs that have to be met in order to overcome trauma (2005). The first priority for victims is safety for themselves and others who are dependent on them (e.g. children). For victims, preventing perpetrators from committing new crimes to them or others is more important than punishment for crimes already committed. Rehabilitation of the offender into the community - although seen as a desirable goal - is viewed with scepticism in case of their own perpetrator, based on an educated estimation of risk. Lengthy periods of supervision and control of the offender are often necessary in the victim's perception. Retributive as well as restorative elements are part of the victim's views on how the justice system should function in order to serve their need for reconciliation – not between victim and perpetrator but between the victim and his/her community. In the victim's view, exposure and even disgracing of the perpetrator are key to the restoration of these bonds, because in the abusive act a moral balance was knocked down by the perpetrator: the victim's rights and dignity were violated in order to serve the perpetrators own means. Community vindication thus legitimizes the victim's claim of entitlement to dignity and basic human rights. A more restorative view is expressed in the victim's interest in repairing the damage for the sake of the future, rather than to avenge the past through lengthy punishment. But their main interest is in relieving their own burden of shame and humiliation first – by putting the blame where it belongs and by holding perpetrators accountable with the support of the community (Herman, 2005, McAlinden, 2007).

### **Society concerns: the need for safety and social cohesion**

In the past decades, the need for safety is not only expressed by victims of sexual violence, but has also become a growing concern of communities at large, especially in Western countries. In this respect, sociologists speak of 'fear



driven societies' (e.g. Bauman, 2007). This need for safety is expressed in reaction to all kinds of criminal threats to community values, and especially and most intense in reaction to the sexual abuse of children. When news about paedophiles re-entering society gets in the open, this often causes emotional upheaval and –in some cases- violent outbursts of community fear and anger. In fact it were these kinds of community reactions that led to the start of the first COSA Circle.

According to Boutellier (2011), this need for safety is a way for citizens to express the need for social organisation and social cohesion that all human societies need to address in order to survive and sustain a peaceful way of living together. Following the erosion of traditional moral institutions and values like faith, church, unions and family, e.g. there is a need for a new organizing framework for survival and peaceful cohabitation. Punitive systems in this context transcend their original function to canalize revenge into proportionate vindication, to prevent new crimes and to re-habilitate the offender: now these systems also function to express the moral standards of society. Because moral standards and values have become highly individualized in our societies, the boundaries of individual freedom have been collectively chosen as the grid that needs to be secured in order to survive and maintain social cohesion.

Safety (and also 'security') has become an organizing principle for society - or at least is presented as a reasonable option by those who believe in a 'safe new world' (Boutellier, 2011). While the need for safety seems to grow in a more and more undefined world, the trust in the power and competency of politicians and governments to secure these needs has declined. There is a growing call for civil commitment and participation of members of society in order to make safety a shared responsibility. Neighbourhood watches and notification orders are examples of citizens being involved in the 'operation safety'.

Participation - joining in - is seen not only as an effective way to maintain security, but also to prevent people from becoming criminals. Social cohesion is not only realised by setting the boundaries of individual freedom, the key extra principle is to provide people with a sense of belonging by which they feel compelled to incorporate and maintain shared values and standards.

In this respect, society is also the place where people inherit and build their social capital. Social capital is a sociological concept that has been much theorized upon by 'the great three', Bordieu, Coleman and Putnam. The latter has introduced the concept to a larger audience, describing social capital as 'features of a society that help facilitate and coordinate actions within that society. These features include social networks, norms of reciprocity, and levels of trust' (Pell, 2006). The recent focus in Western societies on the boundaries of individual freedom as a new grid for safety ("don'ts") is thus complemented by social capital ("do's").

### **Sex offenders' concerns: the impact of guilt and the need for re-habilitation**

Offenders who have trespassed the boundaries of other individuals' freedom place themselves outside the community of shared values. Their self-exclusion is – if the offender is caught - followed and affirmed by exclusion from the community by court decision. Detention not only serves as punishment for the offender and electronic monitoring or conditional release not only help to manage his risks: these measures also lead to a complete or partial exclusion from his earlier habitat. Loss of social capital (job, housing, contact with the social network) is inevitable. Stigmatisation is an even more effective way to block the road back into society.

The emotional reaction of the offender to his offence may vary, but those who admit their offence usually feel shame and guilt (Gudjonsson, 2006). Particularly shame is a self-devaluating emotion that may lead to social withdrawal, while guilt may activate pro-social behaviour and prevent the punished individual from retaliation (Hopfensitz & Reuben, 2009). Accepting responsibility and feeling guilt however may also increase feelings of shame and thus lead to ego damage, because of their self devaluating effects. Some authors have argued that sex offenders' minimizing the offence may be an effort to secure the survival of the ego (Rogers & Dickey, 1991).

*"To me, Circles is just another tool in my box... it will not be there forever so I've used the times we've had together to help me understand myself and early on I realised that unless I was completely honest with my Circles I couldn't expect them to help me or for there to be any trust or respect."*

Len,  
Core member  
QPSW, 2008

While rates of sex offender recidivism are on average low (less than 15%; mean follow up 6 years, Hanson & Morton Bourgon, 2005), the perception in society of the dangerousness of sex offenders is different. Shaming of sex offenders is becoming more and more common practice in Western societies, and evidence of its detrimental effects on re-integration is growing. Public sex offender shaming has a devastating effect on his or her social network, families and friends. Return to the old job becomes difficult if not impossible, and new jobs are often below their level of competence. Employees and colleagues are lied to about the offence. Feelings of isolation and despair are very common as are feelings of persecution (Robbers, 2009).

In most European countries, the offenders' need to develop profound change of behaviours and beliefs in order to be able to stay away from trouble is met by offering him some kind of sex offender treatment. Mostly the objectives of sex offender treatment are aimed at risk reduction through acquiring relapse prevention strategies and change of cognitive distortions that support sexual offensive behaviour. Deviant sexual fantasies and patterns of arousal are more difficult to influence and are sought to be controlled through enhancing of self-regulation skills. In the past decennium the 'What works' paradigm has had a tremendous influence on sex offender treatment and interventions and some authors argue that this has led to a one-sided focus on criminogenic needs of offenders that is to be complemented with the acknowledgement of offenders' basic human needs (Ward & Steward, 2003) and human rights (Mc Neill, 2009).

Sex offenders face a complex problem in their process of rehabilitation: on one hand they need to acknowledge the impact of both their offensive behaviour and their personal guilt and take responsibility, on the other hand they have to hide this aspect of their personal history from others, and lead a double life in order to be able to re-integrate.

### **Practical concerns: limited effects of common practices**

Victims and the society at large ask for effective ways to prevent recidivism and restoration of community bonds. However approaches to relapse prevention differ between countries, four general categories can be distinguished: (preventive) detention, sex offender treatment, interventions by probation organisations, and, more recently, specific sex offender laws like notification and restriction orders. Often a combination (e.g. (preventive) detention and sex offender treatment; sex offender treatment and electronic monitoring) is applied. The effectiveness of these approaches varies.

At this moment, the concerns mentioned above are not effectively met by exclusion strategies towards the management of sex offenders in society. Examples of exclusion strategies are long term (preventive) detention and specific sex offender laws like restrictive orders and notification orders. While (preventive) detention (without treatment) is effective by definition for the time of the detention period, proof of post-release effectiveness has yet to be delivered. The effects of registration, public notification and restrictive orders are probably counterproductive. First studies show that residence restrictions lead to an increase in dynamic risk factors and registration orders do not contribute to more effective prevention of relapse (Levenson & Cotter, 2005, Mercado, Alvarez & Levenson, 2008, Freeman and Sandler, 2009).

The effectiveness of other strategies, like sex offender treatment and probation is still limited. In recent years cognitive behavioural therapies have shown to be able to reduce the re-offence rates by 36%, though not as effectively as organic treatment like chemical or surgical castration (Lösel & Schmucker, 2005).

Probation activities can be divided into three categories: supervision and monitoring, community reintegration planning and training programmes. The contributions of some of these efforts to relapse prevention for all kinds of offenders have been reviewed extensively by Lipsey and Cullen (2007). In their review of meta analyses supervision by parole officers reduced recidivism by 2 – 8%. Whether these figures are representative of the effectiveness of supervision on sex offenders is not clear. Recent evaluations show that community integration planning is effectively contributing to the reduction of risk factors like unemployment and housing problems (Weijers & More, 2010; Willis & Grace, 2008). The effects of transferring the responsibility for sex offender management in the community to professionals (versus commitment and empowerment through community involvement) on feelings of fear and anxiety in society are yet to be evaluated.

### **Ethical concerns: the balance between criminogenic needs and human needs**

Concerns with treatment effectiveness have dominated the scientific discourse since Martinsons review in 1974 (Nothing works) and have culminated in the more positive Andrews & Bonta's 'What works' criteria (2003), including the Risk Needs Responsivity (RNR) model, that has been widely accepted as the most valid, data-driven model for offender assessment and rehabilitation. Lately, this perspective has been criticised for being too limited and too focussed on criminogenic needs alone. In the 'Good Lives Model' of prevention of reoffending (Ward & Stewart, 2003; Ward & Gannon, 2006), the importance of a more comprehensive approach, including also primary human needs of the offender into his life plan, has been stressed. When discussing sex offender rehabilitation, Ward (2009) argues, a normative perspective has to be included into the discourse to complement the scientific (evidence-based) view and ethical questions need to be addressed as well as issues of best practice on risk reduction.

Mc Neill (2009) marks the difference between normative and utilitarian principles by posing the question: Is rehabilitation of sex offenders viewed as an end in itself or as a means to achieve reduced recidivism? He stresses the need for professional reflection on the role of probation: what is its principal concern - public protection or offender rehabilitation? The first is impossible without the latter, according to Mc Neill (2009).

A communitarian approach to rehabilitation is an attempt to overcome the false dichotomy between the concerns of the offender on one side and those of the victim and the community on the other. Duff (2001) outlines a communicative theory of punishment for these approaches by stating that all parties involved are members of a normative community and are bound and protected by liberal democratic values of autonomy, freedom, privacy and pluralism. Human rights and human dignity are basic concepts and values to be respected, while offenders need to be included and at the same time need to be held accountable (and take responsibility for their crimes). Repentance, reform (of behaviour) and reconciliation are main goals of rehabilitation in this view.

In the communitarian view, restorative justice is a two sided process: not only is the offender expected to restore damage done to the victim and society, by acknowledging responsibility and changing his behavior - the community is also restoring the harm done to the offender's resources and opportunities (through social exclusion, detention and punishment) by getting involved and actively supporting his re-entry into society (Raynor & Robinson, 2009; Duff 2001).

## **1.2 COSA: a pragmatic and ethical approach**

Circles of Support and Accountability are a both pragmatic and ethical approach to the problem of sex offenders re-entering society. They combine an inclusive strategy with respect for the victims' and society's needs for safety with respect for the basic human needs of the sex offender and his need for rehabilitation. A key feature is the involvement of the local community offering a protected and protecting area for the sex offender to change.

### **The Canadian projects**

Circles started in Canada in 1994 as a community reaction (instigated by Reverend Harry Nigh, former Mennonite minister and now a Community Chaplain of the Canadian Correctional Services) to the release of a high risk sex

offender to a small town in Ontario. Soon this example proved to be successful and was followed by a second Circle in another town.

The Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario provided Stewardship to what was from that moment on called the Community Reintegration Project – “Circles of Support and Accountability” and the Solicitor General provided some funding to start the further dissemination of the Circles approach. The Correctional Services Chaplaincy provided assistance by incorporating COSA into their Community Chaplaincy projects and by providing basic materials like project guidelines and training manuals through a website<sup>1</sup>. Today there are over 18 sites where currently 200 Circles are running (COSA Ottawa, 2011).

The Canadian COSA projects are explicitly focussing on WED sex offenders (sex offenders who have no form of support after serving their sentence), while there are also Circles for sex offenders under a LISO (Long term supervision order), but these are not to be called COSA.

The regional COSA projects are managed by a regional project-coordinator and usually run under a Board of Directors or are driven by Faith communities. Connections with local institutions are established through their representation in a Steering Committee or an Advisory Board. In the day to day functioning of the Circles, good relationships with local professionals are of great importance. Professionals assist COSA on a voluntary basis as advisors or trainers. A local project coordinator (LPC) assists and facilitates Circles on a day to day basis and supports the forging of a healthy Circle dynamic. The LPC also is the ‘liaison officer’ to the professionals involved with a specific Circle and keeps the professional community informed about COSA in general. Although there is no national COSA organisation, in the past years Canadian Circle projects have met on an annual basis and in 2010 collectively managed to raise substantial funding from Canada’s National Crime Prevention Centre for a five year National demonstration project. This project aims at providing Circles for 50 more core members per year and to conduct an independent evaluation of Circles effectiveness in reducing sexual recidivism (COSA Ottawa, 2010). The project will be managed by the Church Council on Corrections and Justice.

Since COSA has been developed and disseminated through local faith communities and the Chaplaincy of the CSC, the involvement of church organisations with COSA in Canada is a natural consequence. In Canada, the COSA is viewed not only as a means to prevent recidivism, but also as a way to community building within a faith driven framework of community values. This is also reflected in the double mission statement of COSA: “No more victims” and “no one is disposable”.

### **COSA in the UK**

The success of Canadian COSA projects was transferred into the UK through another faith community, the Quakers. In 2002 they managed to acquire government funding for four pilot projects, of which three were meant to operate on a regional scale and one operating on a national scale. The national project was run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) and served sex offenders who left the LFF clinic and returned to their local residence throughout the country. Now the clinic is closed and the Circle project of the LFF consists of a mobile team of Circle consultants who assist with the starting of Circles on request. Of the three regional projects, one appeared not to be able to recruit enough volunteers to actually operate Circles, the remaining two projects were combined into one larger project. This project (the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles Project, HTV Circles) proved to be very successful and a model for other local and regional projects to emerge. In 2008 HTV Circles became an independent Circles providing organisation. In the same year a national Circles charity, called Circles UK, was established as an umbrella organisation to provide support to other new projects through training and education, media representation and providing basic materials like training materials and other guidelines. Circles UK ensures the maintenance of consistency of quality standards in regional projects through a membership/licensing system. Regional and local projects are members of Circles UK and can renew their membership licence on an annual basis on the successful completion of an operational review of compliance with the national standards. Circles UK is funded in part by the Ministry of Justice, the member projects are funded from a variety of sources. Up to now there have been more than 150 Circles run in the UK through 11 member projects.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/proj-guid/index-eng.shtml>.

The English Circles basically follow the Canadian principle of support and accountability but operate within a different national legal context. In the UK all sex offenders who are released into society are contained within MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements). In MAPPA all relevant professional institutions are mandated to work together in the supervision and support of registered sexual and/or violent offenders most of them being on conditional release. A key feature of the Circles in the UK is their close connection to MAPPA. MAPPA have to be supportive of new Circle projects, and MAPPA are informed about all Circle proceedings through Circle minutes. Together with the Circle coordinator MAPPA decide about issues of risk and the need for intervention from outside the Circle. Volunteers are obliged to inform MAPPA about risky behaviour and any transgression of conditions for release by the core member. Thus MAPPA in fact form a formalised outer Circle.

In the English model COSA have made a distinct move into a more secular, more formalised and professionalized approach. The twofold mission of the Canadian projects is encapsulated in a single aim: “no more victims”. Rehabilitation of sex offenders no longer appears to be a goal in itself but is a function of preventive and restorative justice.

### **Circles in the Netherlands**

In 2008 the English COSA model was introduced to the Dutch Probation Organisation (Reclassering Nederland, RN) through the Centre on Public Safety and Criminal Justice (Expertisecentrum Veiligheid, EV) of Avans University of Applied Sciences. The strengths of the COSA approach were immediately acknowledged by RN and by the beginning of 2009 government funding for a Dutch pilot was acquired by a partnership of RN and EV. The Dutch project is closely working together with Circles UK, having acquired the English basic materials and protocols through a license agreement. However, first an adaptation study was conducted in order to evaluate what changes to the COSA model were necessary in the Dutch context, as the judicial system, forensic mental health care and professional network and public opinion may be quite different (Höing, Caspers, Vogelvang, 2009). In the Dutch judicial system for instance, there is no mandatory treatment of sex offenders in prison, neither is there a mandatory co-operation during probation between professionals like in the English MAPPA. On the other hand, the Dutch system offers extensive and long term mental health care within secured institutions (TBS) for offenders with a psychiatric and/or sexual disorder. In the Dutch situation, COSA is reserved for sex offenders with a moderate to high risk of reoffending and a high need for social support, who are on a conditional release with a court supervision order of at least 12 months. Additionally the core member must have followed at least some kind of sex-offender therapy in which they have established some insights about their offence cycle and risk signals.

In the course of 2009 a Dutch national project organisation (Circles-NL) was developed, one regional Circle project was established where two Circle coordinators were trained, volunteers were recruited, assessed and trained, and core members and professionals were selected. By the end of the year two pilot Circles were able to start. Since government funding was prolonged for another year, a second regional project and new Circles were planned in 2010. But the recruiting of volunteers appeared to be very difficult. Only after a coordinated mass-media campaign in the summer of 2010, after which more than 100 men and women volunteered, the project could expand. At the end of 2011 four regional Circle projects are now operational with 16 Circles.

### **The Belgian COSA project**

In 2009 the successful cooperation between Circles UK, Circles-NL (represented through RN and EV) inspired parties to acquire European funding for further European dissemination of Circles. Together with the Belgian counterpart of RN- the Flemish Probation Organisation (Justitiehuis Antwerpen), the European Probation Organisation (CEP) and the University of Tilburg, funding was acquired from the EU Daphne III funds, enabling them to start a European project (Circles Europe: Together for Safety; CTS). This European partnership encompasses a Belgian pilot project, the development of joint strategies to support further dissemination in Europe and the start of research on the effects of Circles. Within this Daphne funded project, the Belgian pilot is run as a regional Circles project, and is provided with basic materials and training facilities through Circles-NL, since structural financing is not yet established. In Belgium also an adaptation study was conducted to explore the Belgium situation and be able to fit the model into the Belgian context (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010).

Finding staff to build a regional project appeared to be extremely difficult, since the Antwerp House of Justice was not allowed to employ Circle coordinators. Finally one Circle coordinator was contracted from another organisation (Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk, CAW) that offers community based treatment for sex offenders, but unfortunately had to stop his activities. The recruiting of volunteers for a first Circle also appears to be difficult, but media like national newspapers and tv programmes are being more and more involved to spread information about COSA in Belgium. While the political and professional support for the COSA approach is evident, this has not yet lead to structural financial support, due to the political situation at the moment.

### **European interest and dissemination**

In recent years the COSA concept has gained more and more attention of professionals within forensic mental health care, probation organisations and other stakeholders in different European countries. Since COSA seems to become better known and is perceived as a possible answer to national problems in sex offender management, creating a European platform for the dissemination of COSA seems to be a logical development. One step into that direction is the deliverance of a European handbook, in which basic information about COSA is given and the implementation expertise from different countries is brought together and shared through practical guidelines and references.

CTS thinks it is important to support and keep on track with national initiatives, in order not to lose control on the quality of the COSA concept. Hasty and ill-informed implementation of COSA should be avoided, since negative results (= recidivism) could damage the whole project and credibility and reputation of Circles wherever they are in operation. In the future, hopefully a European platform will be able to act as a centre for certification and quality control and offer guidance to new initiatives. After having done the necessary ground work, interested parties should be able to acquire a license that includes the necessary materials and get started.

## **1.3 Circle dynamics: how Circles are operated**

The Canadian model shows differences from the English and Dutch COSA model on some essential features. The Canadian Circles are particularly meant for WED offenders, with no Court Supervision Order that enables intervention when things get out of control. Also, professionals are participating in the outer Circles on a voluntary basis, and need not be involved directly with the core member. Since there is no licensing organisation or monitoring of program integrity and quality standards, there may be great regional differences between projects. The English and the Dutch model show only minor differences. The way Circles are operated within this European model will be described in detail below, with different modalities briefly explained.

### **National Circles Organisation**

On a national level, in the UK and in the Netherlands, Circles are supported by a National Circles Organisation, that aids to the development and management of regional and local Circle projects through the deliverance of basic materials and protocols, a training for regional Project coordinators and Circle coordinators and by offering consult and advice for regional Project coordinators. The National Circles Organisation monitors the program integrity and quality of deliverance of regional Circle projects through an auditing system. The National Circles Organisation informs national stakeholders and the general public about Circles and supports and coordinates scientific research on Circles. It can also provide a co-ordinated national response on behalf of Circles to the media when necessary.

### **Circle projects**

Circles are operated through a regional or local Circle project organisation. In the Dutch projects, at least one project coordinator and two Circle coordinators are employed, the UK projects and the Belgian project sometimes operate with only one Circle coordinator.

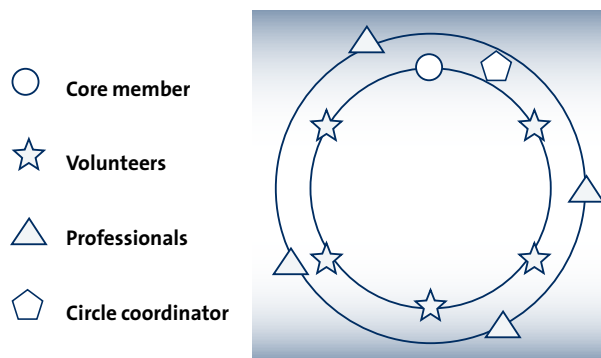
The project organisation recruits, selects and trains volunteers, selects core members, informs professionals in the outer Circle, and maintains and monitors all quality standards for the deliverance of Circles, described in the code of practice. The regional and/or local project organisation is assisted by a steering committee or advisory committee in which local stakeholders and experts are represented.

### The Circle model

COSA is aimed at preventing recidivism by addressing some of the key risk-factors for reoffending: social isolation and emotional loneliness.

A Circle provides a medium to high-risk sex offender with a group of 3 – 6 trained volunteers, preferably from the local community, who meet with the sex offender (core member in a Circle) on a weekly basis. Volunteers support the core member by modelling pro-social behaviour, offering moral support and assisting with practical needs. They hold the core member accountable by challenging pro-offending attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. The volunteers are assisted by an outer Circle of professionals. Volunteers report their concerns to the professionals who – when necessary - can take appropriate measures to prevent the core member from reoffending. Volunteers do so not directly, but via a Circle coordinator whose task it is to mediate between inner and outer Circle and support and supervise the Circle process.

Figure 1: The Circles model



### The inner Circle

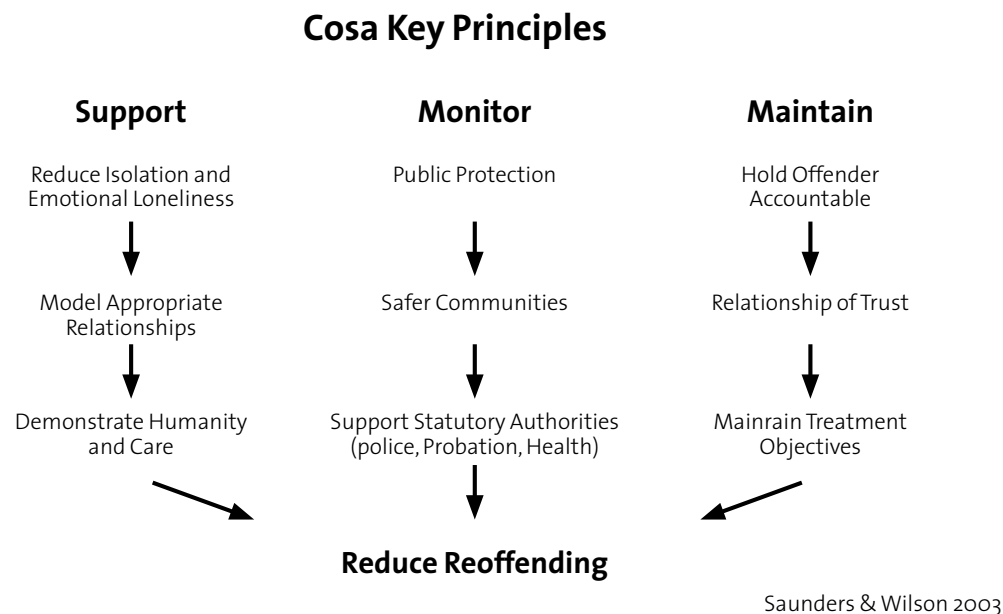
The inner Circle is constituted of the core member and preferably four to six volunteers. In specific cases a well functioning Circle may choose to go on with less members, but should be able to maintain a sufficient level of personal contact.

The core member is a sex offender who is not completely denying his offence, who has been sentenced and has a medium to high risk of reoffending and a high need for social support. He is participating in a Circle voluntarily and is willing to subscribe to the Circles goal: no more victims. He must be - at least to some extent - willing and able to share information about his offence and his personal risk factors with the volunteers.

The Circle volunteers are recruited from the local community and are carefully selected, screened and trained by the Circle coordinators. The inner Circle should reflect the diversity in the community and be constituted of both male and female members from different ages and backgrounds. Although a Circle should offer core members the opportunity to learn from different perspectives, all Circle volunteers should share some key qualities. Competent Circle volunteers are able to express empathy and belief in restorative justice. They have good communication skills, are good problem solvers and teamworkers. They have a balanced lifestyle and can handle emotions of self and others. They can set and maintain clear boundaries, and act in a respectful and constructive manner. They also should be able to accept supervision and support from the Circle coordinator. The selection procedure and training of volunteers is described in Chapter 3 of this Handbook. Circle volunteers must be insured and get compensated for all costs they make in their function. Some basic safety rules are set up in order to prevent any unnecessary risk. The Circle coordinator is informed about all contacts between volunteers and core member through minutes of Circle meetings and individual contacts (including telephone calls).

The Circle's goal is to prevent the core member from offending again. It does so through three basic principles:

Figure 2: COSA Key Principles



The Circle's main function is to reduce the likelihood of reoffending by providing the core member with a temporary surrogate social network, and to help him or her to establish a supportive social network of his own. Usually a Circle lasts for about one year and a half, but in some cases it may be necessary to maintain a Circle for a very long or even lifelong period. In all cases a Circle goes through different stages. In order to establish a good working relationship, all Circle volunteers meet a couple of times without the core member. In these meetings they get to know each other, deal with practical issues like day, time and location of the Circle meetings and exchange telephone numbers. After these initial meetings, the core member is introduced to the Circle and the Circle starts to meet on a weekly basis and offers 24/7 support to the core member by telephone. During the first weeks, starting with the very first meeting, the core members' offence, his offence cycle and risk factors are openly discussed. This part of the Circle process usually lasts about 8 weeks, but this is very dependent on the ability of the core member to understand and share his relapse prevention plan. This phase provides the volunteers and core member with a certain basis of shared knowledge that enables open communication (no secrets) and provides volunteers with the information they need for their monitoring function. Although a necessary phase, it is not sufficient to make the Circle 'work'. It is important that the monitoring function of the Circle is embedded in a trusting relationship, that is built through offering practical and moral support, treating the core member as an equal member of society and acknowledging his strengths and responsibilities. In order to work on the building of a supporting social network of his own, the Circle supports and encourages the development of social and communication skills, for example through modelling behaviour. A Circle may also engage in social activities with the core member in order to offer 'training on the spot'. After some time the Circle may decide to lower the frequency or attendance of their meetings and may start one-on-one meetings with the core member. A formal Circle (called phase 1) may evolve into a less formal stage (phase 2) and finally into an informal stage, when the core member, volunteers and the Circle coordinator feel a Circle is no longer necessary, based on a thorough evaluation. Usually, in an informal stage, one of the volunteers stays in contact with the core member as a mentor, which means they are having contact on a less frequent basis (e.g. once a month) to be in touch with the core members process. An informal Circle can be 'revived' and become formal again whenever necessary.



*“The four members are of all ages and backgrounds and I found myself assessing them in the same way I guess that they were assessing me and it was a little uncomfortable, especially as at our initial meeting they were quite confrontational, asking many searching questions, and I found myself having to struggle hard not to get defensive but to be honest and keep an open mind as to how we would all progress. I came away feeling “Is this really for me? Do I want to come back here again?” I decided to persevere and it was worth it, for over the months I have been with them they have proved to be staunch allies, people I can trust and rely on. That, to a man in my position, given my offences, is not quantifiable in the value of restoring my self-esteem, lack of which is a huge factor in sex offending against children. I really feel now that I am becoming a part of the community again and that is a powerful tool to keep me on the straight and narrow – something to live up to – a commitment which I cannot, must not, revoke.”*

*Harry,*

*Core Member*

*QPSW, 2005*

### **The outer Circle**

The outer Circle is formed by the professionals who are involved in the core member's process of re-entering society. Usually the following organisations and professionals are involved: forensic mental health care (therapist), probation organisation (probation officer) and local police officer, preferably with special assignment to the neighbourhood where the core member lives. Also local welfare organisations or housing institutions may be directly involved in the reintegration process of a specific core member and can be represented in the outer Circle. Members of the outer Circle have their own professional responsibility and involvement with the core member and operate within the rules and regulations of their organisation and profession. Often one of these professionals is the one who suggests participation in a Circle to the core member and refers him to a regional Circle project. It is good practice to introduce volunteers and professionals to each other in the beginning of a Circle or invite professionals into the Circle during the first weeks. Thus inner and outer Circle get to know each other and are able to exchange views and expectations and set clear boundaries between their distinct roles. In an ongoing Circle the role of the outer Circle is primarily to support the core member in his functioning within the Circle (as part of their own professional involvement with the core member) and to give advice to volunteers (through the Circle coordinator) on specific topics. They monitor the Circle process through monthly updates from the Circle coordinator.

In the Netherlands, the outer Circle holds periodically network meetings, organised by the Circle coordinator (e.g. twice a year) to evaluate the Circle and the process of the core member. In the UK, cases are discussed regularly by professionals at the MAPPA meeting. In case of immediate risk the professionals are informed directly through the Circle coordinator in order to be able to take whatever steps are necessary to prevent relapse, e.g. inform justice authorities. Professionals of the outer Circle often are involved in the training programme for volunteers.

### **The role of the Circle coordinator**

Each Circle is supported and supervised by a Circle coordinator, who is a professional with specific expertise in coaching and supervision on one hand, and expertise in sex offender management on the other hand. In the Netherlands Circle coordinators are professionals from the probation organisation, but in other countries other organisations may be able to deliver the necessary expertise.

The role of the Circle coordinator is crucial in the whole Circle process. He or she is involved in the recruiting, selection, training and supervision of volunteers. In the UK, in established projects, experienced volunteers are assisting the Circle coordinator with recruiting and organizing tasks, but the selection, training and supervision, should only be undertaken by a coordinator who is an appropriately qualified professional.

Together with the regional project coordinator, the Circle coordinator is assessing the core member's appropriateness for a Circle, and delivers the training for volunteers together with a co-trainer. The Circle coordinator – together with other members of the regional project - evaluates the core members needs and the volunteers competences and matches both in order to build a functional and effective Circle for a specific core

member. The Circle coordinator deals with all practical issues that need to be solved before a Circle can get started. He or she supports the Circle process by attending the first three preparatory meetings (without core member) and the first Circle meeting with the core member. After that, the Circle coordinator steps back and is informed about the ongoing Circle through Circle minutes from the volunteers and through contact minutes. The Circle coordinator contacts the volunteer(s) whenever the minutes give him or her reason to. Whenever necessary, the Circle coordinator may suggest interventions to the volunteers and/or attend Circle meetings. Volunteers are also individually supported and supervised by the Circle coordinator through quarterly evaluation interviews, in which all concerns and individual issues can be discussed. Whenever necessary, the volunteers may consult the Circle coordinator in between. Also on a quarterly basis, the Circle coordinator assists the volunteers in the evaluation of the core member's dynamic risk and strengths with the Dynamic Risk Review, a standardized evaluation instrument. Apart from that, in the Netherlands, the regional project offers a 24/7 back-up by telephone to the inner Circle – in case of any emergency that might occur. To be able to supply such a back up system, Dutch regional projects appoint at least two Circle coordinators and a regional project coordinator. The volunteers also get a list with all telephone numbers of each other and the project members. In the UK, Circle volunteers are provided with contact cards, so that in the event of a problem there is a professional person they can call. As a last resort they are told and know that the Police will respond 24/7.

*“The early meetings were full of getting to know each other, sorting out our boundaries, our place in the Circle, and letting each other know what we liked and disliked. Some of these meetings were also testy and tense. An underlying threat from the Core Member would warn off an unwanted question. This is dangerous territory for the Core Member, a kind of “don’t go there” or “don’t look inside”. “What right have you to ask me that?”. I would ask myself, “what was that all about?” Why not ask that? This is where the training kicks in and I realised how useful it was.*

*James,  
Circle Volunteer  
QPSW, 2008*

### Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the inner Circle, between inner- and outer Circle and between members of the outer Circle is – apart from the personal engagement of the volunteers - one of the strengths of the Circles model. The key motto ‘no secrets’ forms the basis of this open exchange of information. From the very first Circle meeting on, the core member is invited to talk freely about what will help avoid reoffending and the risk factors he experiences in daily life. Volunteers and core member sign a Circle agreement in which rules about honesty, openness, privacy policies and exchange of information with each other and with other institutions are set. Basic information about each Circle meeting and each individual or telephone contact with the core member is delivered to the Circle coordinator through minutes, written by one of the volunteers. If necessary, the Circle coordinator is informed immediately by telephone. The Circle coordinator delivers monthly reports to the outer Circle members about the proceedings of the Circle and issues that need attention. In case of alarming situations or acute risk the Circle and the Circle coordinator decide whether members of the outer Circle should be informed immediately in order to be able to react directly and in an adequate way. Whenever necessary, but at least twice a year, the outer Circle should meet and exchange information and views about the core members’ process in the Circle.

Getting information about the core member from professionals may be helpful for the Circle, but is often restrained by privacy policies of professionals organisations. A possible solution to this is to invite the professional into the Circle where he or she can directly ask the core member’s permission to deliver information or may assist the core member in delivering the information himself.

### Local support

Each Circle project is situated within a local network of organisations who are involved in sex offender rehabilitation and risk management. Although the constellation of all organisations in the field may vary from region to region, it is important that the Circles project is well introduced and known to these institutions, both on the management level and on the level of workers, since they often may be asked to get involved as members of an outer Circle. Periodically these organisations should be informed about the developments in the Circle project for example through a local conference or (mini) symposium. Since the re-integration of sex offenders into society is often also an issue of public safety and managing public opinion, it is also important to establish good relationships with the local administration and local newspapers.

### National support

On a national level, the success and financial sustainability of Circles is dependant on government policies, justice authorities' decisions, non-governmental sources of income such as charitable trusts and not in the least, public opinion. Therefore it is important to establish and maintain supportive relationships with influential persons within national boards and for instance the justice department, with journalists from national media and to keep them well informed. Since the first goal of Circles is 'no more victims', especially victim organisations can be important ambassadors for Circles although they may have an understandable suspicion towards them, and sense of injustice where they are seen to receive government funding.

## 1.4 The theory behind the practice of Circles

The Circles concept has been developed from a pragmatic viewpoint, based on ethical values, religious motives and community needs, rather than scientific knowledge on effective prevention strategies. Nevertheless, Circles have proven to be highly effective. In Canada, two recidivism studies (Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo, 2007a and Wilson, Cortoni & Mc Whinnie, 2009) have shown the potential of Circles to reduce sexual recidivism as well as general recidivism substantially (70% resp. 83% less sexual offending than matched controls; see chapter 6 for a more detailed description of these studies). When closely examined, the effective mechanisms in Circles are in accordance with contemporary theories about effective prevention of sexual reoffending. Below, these theories are briefly outlined.

Sex offenders on average appear to show relative low sexual recidivism rates, compared to other offenders and offence types (10 - 15% within five years, Hanson & Bussiere, 1998). But the risk of reoffending is a very permanent one. Sexual delinquents, especially child abusers, seem to have more problems than other delinquents to change their behaviour and life style permanently and effectively. When longer follow-up periods are taken into account it appears that 52% of child abusers reoffend within 25 years and 23% of rapists (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998). This has of course consequences for the kind of support they need in this process. Theories about how this is best accomplished are dependent on the views on the nature of the deficits that lead to sexual offending and reoffending (a theory of problem) and the views on how these deficits can be effectively altered into competencies that help to avoid reoffending (a theory of change). Below we will outline the most prominent examples of both types of theory, their empirical evidence and how they relate to the COSA model of change.

### Theoretical models of sex-offending and recidivism

Finkelhor's pre-condition theory of sexual offending (Finkelhor, 1984; also described in O'Reilly & Carr, 2004 and Ward & Beech, 2006) was the first model that tried to explain why and how some men are capable of violating one of the strongest taboos in our society: to have sex with children and/or consume child-pornography. Based on literature about sex offenders he distinguished four factors that he assumed to contribute:

1. Emotional congruence with children;
2. Deviant sexual arousal (e.g. by children);
3. Blocking of appropriate sexual gratification;
4. Failing inhibition of inappropriate sexual behaviour.

In order for sexual abuse to occur, four pre-conditions must be fulfilled: motivation, overcoming of internal inhibition, overcoming or avoiding external inhibitions and overcoming the resistance of the victim (e.g. by first establishing and then exploiting an emotional relationship). According to Finkelhor, the four pre-conditions are met in a temporal sequence: each precondition builds upon the previous. While Finkelhor's model offers more of a categorisation and labelling of theoretical building blocks, others have tried to develop a more causal framework for the processes that lead to sexual offending.

Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory (1990) is based on their work with sex offenders who have been sentenced (and thus represent the more extreme end of a scale). They describe how these sex offenders have grown up under harsh and abusive parenting conditions and thus developed distorted internal schema's of relationships, sex and aggression. Adverse conditions hinder the development of adequate social competences and self-regulation. In adolescence – when peer-relationships become more and more important - this process leads to a 'syndrome of social inadequacy'. The attachment and behaviour problems acquired early in childhood then may lead to aggressive sexual abuse of younger, more vulnerable children. These experiences have the capacity to evoke and – through masturbation – reinforce deviant sexual fantasies and abusive sexual behaviour.

In their quadripartite model Hall and Hirschman(1992) have located four factors that contribute to sexual offending in general and should be further investigated when looking for an explanation: physiological sexual arousal, inaccurate cognitions that justify sexual aggression, affective dyscontrol (i.e. the lack of skills to control negative emotional states), and personality problems. With the explicit attention for cognitive distortions their model explains how sexual fantasies and motivations are transferred into conscious and sometimes planned actions. Affective dyscontrol is the main mechanism behind the disinhibition of normally suppressed impulses. While the three fore mentioned factors are states that can vary rapidly during time, personality problems that emerge from adverse experiences in childhood and youth are of a more stable character (traits).

Ward & Siegert (2002) have made efforts to combine the need to differentiate between subtypes of sex offenders and the search for a unifying concept to explain child sexual abuse. They argue that there are four different mechanisms or pathway's that may lead to child sexual abuse, accounting for five subtypes of sex offenders, based on the dominant mechanism. A combination of all pathways is typical for the fifth, most disturbed subtype. The four pathways are: intimacy and social skill deficits, distorted sexual scripts, emotional self regulation problems and anti-social cognitions. In the fifth pathway all dysfunctional mechanisms occur, but the sexual script is deviant in a typical way: these sex offenders have an early and distinctive preference for children as sexual objects, and therefore they can be described as 'core pedophiles'.

Ward & Beech (2006; also described in Ward & Gannon, 2006) have tried to knit the best elements of the above mentioned theories together with more general ideas about human functioning and neuropsychology into an 'Integrated theory of sexual offending'. In this model, they identify three sets of factors that usually influence human behaviour (biological, socio-ecological and neuropsychological). The origins of human behaviour are located in the neuropsychological functioning of the brain. Biological factors influence brain development and thereby vulnerability to sexual abusive behaviour. These factors are: evolutionary selection processes, genes and neurobiological features of the brain. Socio-ecological factors are the former (distal) or current (proximal) natural, social and cultural environment of the offender and his personal circumstances, which are key contributors to sexual offending through processes of social learning. Both biological pre-conditions and socio-ecological influences are processed in the neuropsychological functioning of the individual brain through three distinctive, but interlocked systems: the motivational/emotional system that primarily identifies and evaluates emotional states and translates them into goals, the 'action selection and control' system that translates goals into actions and the 'perception and memory' system that constructs mental representations of incoming sensory information and thus provides the cognitions (or cognitive distortions) both other systems work with.

In this theory, sexually aggressive behaviour is basically interpreted as maladaptive behaviour. Distinctive features in the biological and socio-ecological antecedents of a person can contribute to clinical symptoms that may lead into sexually abusive behaviour. Since problems may occur in all three systems and in a variation of combinations, the explanation of individual sexually abusive behaviours is also very variable. Nevertheless four clusters of problems are usually described in sex offender literature:

- emotional regulation problems;
- cognitive distortions;
- social difficulties; and
- deviant sexual arousal.

Each of these clusters reflect dysfunction in one or more of the three neuropsychological systems. These vulnerabilities may or may not result in sexually aggressive behaviour. According to Ward and Beech it is basically the influence of proximal socio-ecological factors (acute triggers) that lead to sexually abusive behaviour in the first place and that abusive behaviour in some cases in itself (through a positive feed-back loop) contributes to worsen the situation of the offender and maintains the sexual abusive behaviour. More distal ecological factors (like cultural beliefs and/or policies that support or discourage sexual abusive behaviour) enable sexual aggression to occur or even to maintain sexual offending.

There is growing evidence for some of the key factors of these models. Hanson & Morton-Bourgon (2004) have executed a meta analysis on 95 recidivism studies involving more than 31,000 sex offenders and 2,000 recidivism predictions. They identified the following significant predictors of sexual recidivism:

- deviant sexual arousal;
- anti-social orientation/lifestyle instability;
- sexual preoccupation;
- emotional identification with children;
- hostility;
- general self regulation deficits; and
- attitudes tolerant of sexual assault.

However low social skills and loneliness are perceived to be common in sex offenders, they were not directly related to persistent sex offending in their study. The authors assume that it is not these deficits alone, but the dysfunctional strategies to cope with them (like turning to children) that are increasing the risk to reoffend. The same explanation is given for the fact that negative emotional states (i.e. depression and anxiety) are very common in sex offenders, but show no direct relationship with recidivism (Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2004).

While this study has contributed hugely to the knowledge on sex offender recidivism, a critical remark is necessary, since the recidivism studies in this meta-study rarely involve proximal ecological factors (like deviant social networks, social marginalisation, probation interventions e.g.).

### **Theoretical models of change**

Theoretical models of sex offending explain why sex offending happens in the first place, and identify the determinants of sexual offending. Interventions that aim at preventing recidivism of course should take into account these determinants, and target them. Processes of behavioural change however have to take into account not only the determinants of sexual offending, but also evidence about effective ways to work on them. What is needed are theories of change. Some of the most influential are outlined briefly below.

In the past decade, the Risk/Needs/Responsivity model (RNR-model, Andrews and Bonta, 2003) has become a very influential theory guiding treatment and training efforts to reduce recidivism. Based upon a large number of effect studies, Andrews and Bonta identify several preconditions to optimize intervention effectiveness. They describe three

basic principles. The risk principle states that the level of intensity of interventions should meet the level of risk. The most intensive treatment and intervention efforts should be allocated to offenders with highest risk of reoffending. Not only because these offenders need longer and more intensive treatment, but also because too intensive interventions imposed on low risk offenders can have negative effects, due to the stigmatising effect and spill over of negative values and behaviours from more delinquent members in treatment groups. The needs principle states that intervention targets should concentrate on the criminogenic needs of the offender. The responsivity principle states that interventions should be tailored to the learning style of the offender, his motivation and the strengths and handicaps of both himself and his social context. Derived from effect studies, this model is also supported by evidence from more recent studies. Research by Lovens, Lowenkamp & Latessa (2009) supports the risk principle. Evidence for the responsivity principle is gathered by Looman, Dickie and Abercen (2005).

There is a growing concern in the field of experts however, that dealing with criminogenic needs alone is only one way to look at prevention of recidivism. Effective treatment is only gained in case of treatment attendance, and treatment dropout is a serious problem and risk factor for reoffending. The Good Lives Model (Ward & Stewart, 2003; Ward & Gannon, 2006) is a more holistic approach to risk reduction and addresses the problem of lacking motivation. In the Good Lives Model sex offenders are seen as beings that seek for primary human goods as we all do. Primary human goods are activities, experiences and emotional states that contribute to our well being, like relatedness and intimacy, autonomy and agency. Sexual (re)offending is seen as a failure in the strategies to achieve these primary goods. The main goals of behavior change therefore should be to acknowledge the acceptable primary goals behind the behavior, and to address inappropriate strategies and train skills and cognitions to develop acceptable and healthy goal seeking behavior and self regulating competences. Evidence for the effectiveness of this approach is given by Simons, McCullar & Taylor (2008). Wilson & Yates (2009) argue that an integration of the RNR and the Good Lives Model may best serve sex offenders to make sustainable behavior changes and develop a responsible self determined lifestyle by addressing not only problem areas and risk factors, but also by developing strengths and enhancing protective factors.

Another new theoretical viewpoint on preventing recidivism is taken by authors like Farral and Calverley (2006) and Maruna & Toch (2003). They support the idea of striving for primary goods like agency, autonomy and intimacy as a key motivating factor. They place the offenders behaviour in a more biographical context in which the building and changing of a narrative identity is a key concept. They explicitly include the experiences and evaluations of an offender after his release in their theory. The absence of recidivism is described not as an outcome of treatment or intervention, but as a result of an individual process a former offender may or may not go through – becoming a desister or not. In this process, six underlying processes or stages that a desister goes through are described by Farral and Calverly (2006). First, while in detention, desistance from crime is not necessarily an internal virtue, but imposed on the incarcerated mainly by lack of opportunity. Being exposed to hospitalising conditions and antisocial peers in prison may even have a negative effect on social skills and increase the risk of reoffending once released. In the period following detention, in most cases monitoring by probation officer or other institutions in the field of sex offender management is also only an external incentive to the desistance process. But well timed reintegration efforts may be first contributions to the (re) building of a positive identity, free from crime. Housing and work are crucial, since they may challenge new or old social skills and require adequate role behaviour, different from that being an offender. Also these experiences may lead to a (renewed) sense of citizenship and participation in society, with all obligations and rights coming along with it. To maintain this status of inclusion egocentric values and antisocial behaviours must be left behind – the former offender has something to lose. However, he also realises that his opportunities in life from now on are restricted by societies' judgement on offenders, and feelings of being victimised and resentment can slow down the process of building a pro-social identity. At this point the balance may turn to desistance or recidivism. The choice of environment may be crucial, since situations and locations come along with role expectancies and thus structure the behaviour. Desisters deliberately choose to stay away from situations and locations that may trigger negative or offending behaviour. In a parallel process

desisters learn over time to structure their emotions and to handle the negative states that go along with negative aspects of their self image.

The motors of these processes, according to McNeill (2009), are three characteristics of the offender and his environment: his human capital (skills and social competences), his social capital (the quality of his social network – in terms of bonding within intimate relationships, linking him to external resources and bridging diverse lifestyles and life experiences) and the transitions in his narrative identity – the cognitions he holds about himself and his accompanying motivations.

### **The COSA model of change**

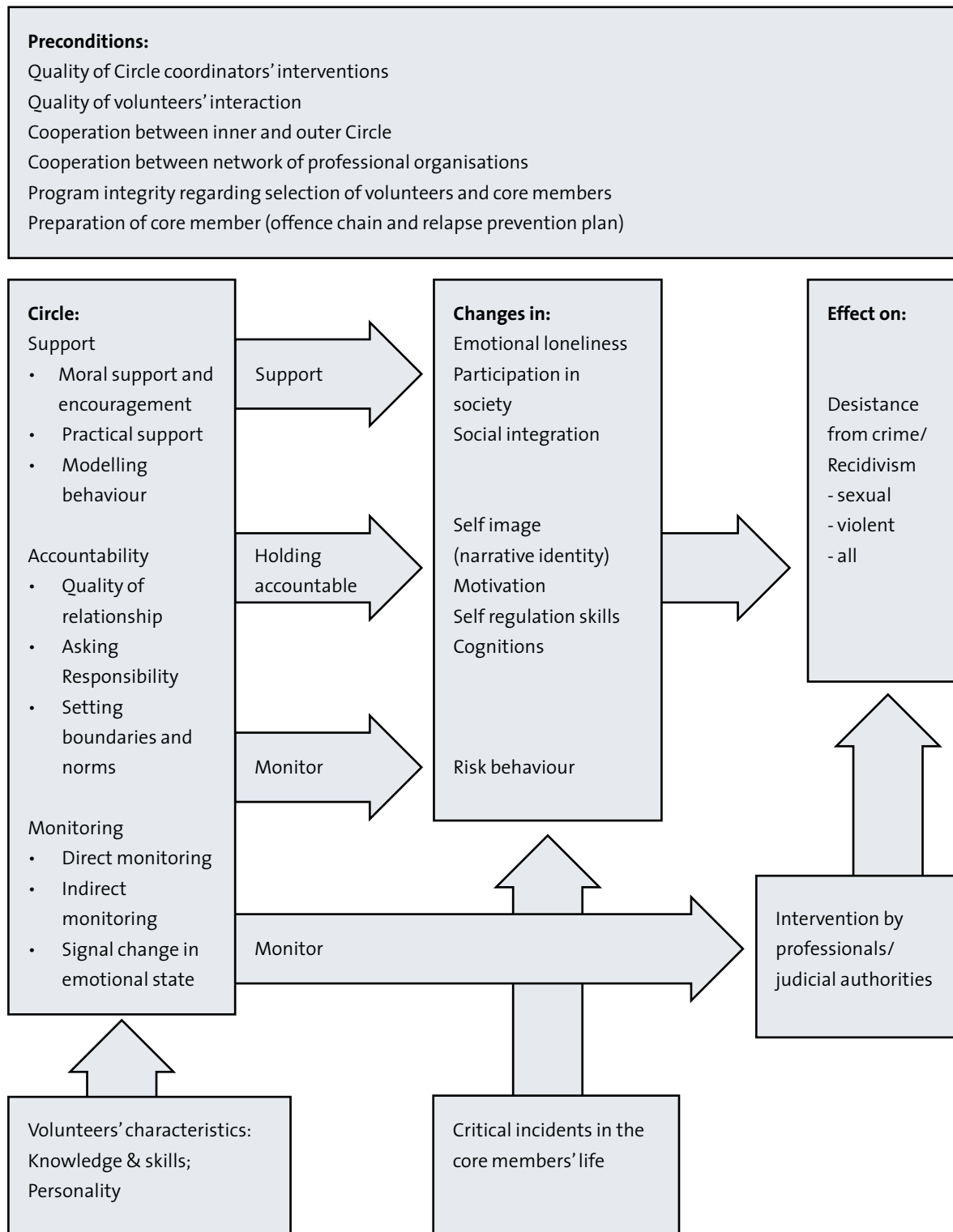
The COSA model includes aspects of different models of change as described above, thus building theoretical evidence for effectiveness. It is in line with the RNR model, since Circles are most appropriately provided to medium to high risk sex offenders with issues of particular isolation and high need for social support. The responsivity principle is met by a careful selection of volunteers and thorough matching of volunteers with the sex offenders needs. The holistic and strengths based approach of the Good lives/Self-regulation model is also represented in COSA, both in the humanistic view on sex offender reintegration as in the fact that Circles work with the sex offender as a whole person with acceptable primary goals but inadequate skills and strategies to achieve them. The key feature of COSA, the selfless engagement of citizens, is addressing one of the primary needs in the Good Lives Model (relatedness to others). Core members often voice their appreciation of the Circle as being the group of people there for them, with motivation other than professional interest, with its negative components, in their eyes, of working for money and possessing power and authority (Hanvey, Philpot & Wilson, 2011)

Finally, the model acknowledges the fact that sustainable desistance is a process that takes time and knows its relapses. Therefore Circles offer long term support and in some cases - when necessary - life time guidance. Circles however add a unique aspect to these models: change does not only come from the sex offender himself, but also from society (through the volunteers) that takes responsibility for the safe resocialisation of sex offenders.

The COSA model of change is based on three mechanisms that contribute to the prevention of recidivism (Wilson, Mc Whinnie & Wilson, 2008): support, monitoring and accountability. The model is closely related to the 'desistance as process' theory in that the Circle efforts are targeted at building and enforcing human and social capital, and supporting and encouraging the development of a positive narrative identity. Social capital is built by offering a surrogate social network and supporting the development of an own social network and/or enhance the quality and management of relationships within the existing social network of the core member.

The building of human capital (social skills, adequate coping strategies, self regulation skills) is supported by offering modelling behaviour, holding the core member accountable for his actions and encouraging him to practice and enforce the skills and strategies he has learned in sex offender therapy. Building a positive narrative identity is supported by offering the core member a safe space to incorporate his offence history into the narrative about himself and to experience that this is not leading to exclusion and rejection by others as long as he is accepting responsibility and allows to be held accountable. The unique monitoring role of the Circle addresses the fact that desistance is not a linear process and that not all core members are at all times able to show appropriate coping strategies to refrain from reoffending. The monitoring capacity of professionals organisations like police and probation is enhanced by frequent contacts and explicitly discussing the emotional state of the core member and confront him with signals of deterioration, thus reducing the opportunity to isolate himself and fall back into problem behaviour unnoticed. The exchange of this kind of information with professionals in the outer Circle allows for immediate and adequate intervention.

Figure 3: The COSA model of change



Important preconditions for the effectiveness of this model are program integrity with regard to selection and training of volunteers and the selection of core members (he must be able to give insight into his personal risk factors and offence chain (scenario), which implies some kind of sex offender treatment<sup>2</sup>). Also, the monitoring function asks for good working alliances between the inner and outer Circle and cooperation between professionals in the

<sup>2</sup> Some Circles however, have proven to be effective with core members who have not had treatment, who don't have insight into their behaviour. In this case, a Circle probably needs to last considerably longer or even life long. An example of this is Charlie from the very first Circle.



organisations involved in sex offender management. The function of the Circle itself (the quality of volunteers interactions) is highly influenced by Circle coordinator supervision and interventions (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011).

Personal characteristics of individual volunteers (knowledge & skills, personality) contribute to the Circle dynamics and the level of model integrity (balanced execution of support, monitoring and accountability), while personal characteristics of the core member (level of risk, need for support) determine the possible range of change in dynamic risk and protective factors.

*“Circle members provide a stepping-stone between the formal support of agencies and informal support such as family and friends. There is a heightened sense of self-value for the core member, knowing that he is meeting with a group of individuals who are not being paid to spend time with him. In the cases where these men have little or no informal support, it would be right to question their investment in society and their non-abusing life. Through the absence of informal support they lack the level of monitoring that can be provided simply through the presence of people who care. Circle members, however, provide more than a model of relationships that we hope the core member will develop within his wider community; they are an informed group of volunteers who are able to hold the core member to account in a proactive and supportive manner. This information can then be challenged and shared with other organisations as appropriate.”*

Linda Ricks

Treatment Manager

QPSW, 2005

### The need for high quality deliverance of Circles

The theoretical model of change which explains how Circles can be effective in reducing sex offenders recidivism outlines the need for program integrity (adherence to guidelines and protocols in operating Circles) and model integrity (establishing a balanced and healthy group process within the Circle). Managing high risk sex offenders in society is not an easy task and volunteers at all times should be protected from negative consequences of their work within the Circle. Also the COSA model should be protected from hasty and ill advised implementation that can cause failure of the approach (in preventing recidivism) and can damage Circle projects in other regions.

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## ***2 Getting started: COSA in the National Context***

The news about COSA is gradually spreading throughout western countries. After having started in Canada in 1994, the UK has adopted and further developed the model since 2002. The UK model has been introduced in the Netherlands in 2009 and in Belgium in 2010. Circle projects have also been developed in the US and Ireland.

### **Organisations that develop a COSA initiative**

Circles of support and accountability have initially been developed in Canada by a local Church community. The model has then been recognized as potentially effective and has been adopted by the Chaplaincy of Correctional Services of Canada (CSC), who delivers guidelines, training materials and support to local COSA initiatives through its website, and also delivers some financial support. Local Circle initiatives in Canada are often run by church congregations, assisted by a steering committee in which local stakeholders are represented. The national Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC) is functioning as an umbrella organisation for coordination between 15 sites (of 16 in Canada) that participate in a national project to stimulate research and quality development of COSA.

The kind of organisations that have started or are operating local COSA projects in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium are diverse:

Outside the justice context:

- Church congregations
- Welfare institutions
- Charity organisations
- Educational Institutes

Within the justice context:

- Probation services
- Sex offender treatment facilities
- Organisations in the field of crime prevention or restorative justice
- Partnerships between police, probation and others

### **The need for assessment of the national context**

COSA is not a simple method or a protocol, that can be copied and pasted into any given national context. COSA is based on community involvement and involvement of a local network of professional organisations. Since Europe counts almost 50 different sovereign states and each nation has its own jurisdiction and set of institutions involved in sex offender management, the possibilities for COSA and the issues that need to be solved to install Circle projects are too many to be accounted for in a European Handbook.

The unique approach of Circles of Support and Accountability requires a thorough assessment of the feasibility of Circles within the given national context and research into the possibilities and needs for adaptation of the model within its ultimate – and not negotiable - quality standards. Any organisation thinking of introducing COSA for the first time and developing a COSA initiative should start with an adaptation study.

In this chapter a blueprint is given for such an assessment of the national context. Based on the experiences in the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium, a checklist of 'no go' criteria for feasibility is provided. If some basic conditions are completely absent, further investigation is probably a waste of money, and these issues should be dealt with first.

In order to outline the project needs, the definitions of core concepts for any Circle initiative are given (see box: definitions). Then the issues that need to be addressed in the assessment are outlined and illustrated with examples of issues in countries that already have done an adaptation study.

To carry out an adaptation study, it is advised to contact a research institute that is experienced in the field of probation. Having an overview over national jurisdiction, probation and aftercare organisation is helpful to guarantee that all issues are dealt with.

## 2.1 'No Go' Criteria

- The problem of sexual violence is denied by the government
- There is very little or no chance to find sustained financial support for Circle projects
- There is very little or no professional expertise available in sex offender treatment
- There is no structured risk assessment available to circle projects and circle staff members are not competent to apply structured risk assessment by themselves.
- There are no legal possibilities for mandated supervision of sex offenders
- There are no professional institutions that are involved in sex offender rehabilitation
- The project organisation has no legal status and is not involved in the local network of sex offender aftercare
- There is no willingness to comply to the basic quality standards of COSA (the code of practice)
- There is no willingness to cooperate with other Circle Projects in an international framework
- There is no likely engagement of citizens in some form of non-paid activities for community development or community justice

### *Denial of the prevalence of sexual violence by the government:*

Sexual offences occur in any society, although prevalence rates differ from country to country. Risk management of sex offenders re-entering society is primarily the responsibility of any national government in order to protect citizens from risk of being victimized. If the problem of sexual offending is not recognized by the national government, basic human rights of citizens are not acknowledged, and money and efforts should be directed to the recognition of victims needs first.

### *No chance of sustained financing:*

Circles are operated by volunteers, but are installed and supervised by a professional organisation in order to guarantee basic quality standards and safety for volunteers and core members. Circle projects need a careful preparation which has appeared to be a time-consuming and costly process (QPSW, 2005; Höing & Vogelvang, 2011). After a project organisation is developed and local partnerships are established, Circles need to be able to operate in stable conditions in order to meet the risk and responsibility they are dealing with. If financing of the supportive structure is not guaranteed for at least two years, it is better not to expose volunteers and core members to these responsibilities at all.

### *No expertise in sex offender treatment available:*

Circles offer support, monitoring and accountability by focussing on specific risk and needs of the core member. Therefore the Circle (including the core member) needs to have - or be able to acquire - some basic understanding of the specific offending behaviour, specific risk factors and relapse prevention strategies. If sex offender treatment is not available, at least there should be professional expertise in the outer Circle to provide volunteers with necessary information and training. If not, the quality of the COSA model cannot be guaranteed.

### *No legal options for mandated supervision and intervention:*

The primary goal of Circles is: 'no more victims'. Since processes of behaviour change take a long time with occasional setbacks, levels of risk of reoffending will vary during the course of the Circle and may become dangerously high. In such a case professional organisations need to be able (and responsible) to intervene and need to have legal options to withdraw the core member from society. If there is no judicial framework for swift intervention, volunteers are exposed to a responsibility that is probably exceeding their possibilities.

### *No professional institutions involved in sex offender rehabilitation:*

In line with the previous, sex offender management in society is primarily the responsibility of the government and of professional institutions. Circle projects need to be able to embed Circles in a local infrastructure of professionals in order to provide Circles with the necessary outer Circle. If no professional organisations are available, the basic quality standards of Circle projects cannot be met.

### *No legal status and no local embedding:*

Based on the experiences so far, organisations that develop COSA initiatives should have some experience with offender rehabilitation and volunteering or seek for partnerships that ensure incorporation of such expertise into the project. The organisations should be part of the local infrastructure of aftercare for sex offenders. Also, the organisation should have a legal status in order to be able to hire personnel and offer insurance to the volunteers.

### *No willingness to comply with the code of practice:*

Circles have shown to be effective when basic quality standards are met. Compliance with the code of practice ensures these quality requirements. If standards are not met this is not only harmful for the status and funding of local projects, but also for the COSA – model in general and for COSA initiatives in other countries.

### *No willingness to cooperate in an international context:*

The COSA concept is being closely watched by a growing international community of experts and policymakers. Since all COSA initiatives are negatively influenced when national projects fail to live up to the quality standards, there is a need for international cooperation and exchange of information.

### *No tradition of citizens involved in unpaid community building activities:*

Circles are in principle and concept based on a volunteer, unpaid, 'work-force'. A large part of their effectiveness is due to the particular relationship formed by selfless engagement of 'ordinary' members of the local community with the core member, with no professional power dynamic at play. Such volunteers can of course provide information which could result in the core member being recalled to prison, but so too can any responsible member of society. It is not unusual for core members to voice their appreciation of the Circle as being the group of people there for them, with motivation other than professional interest, with its negative components, in their eyes, of money, power and authority (Hanvey, Philpot & Wilson 2011).

## **2.2 Definitions**

A clear understanding of basic quality requirements for Circle projects is necessary to be able to evaluate the results of a national adaptation study and translate them into recommendations. In the box below some basic concepts that are used throughout this European handbook are defined.

### *Code of practice*

The code of practice is a list of connected mandatory standards that describe the quality requirements for any local Circle project. A national code of practice is in line with those of other countries, and is only adapted to specific national circumstances, without changing the COSA model itself.

### *Circle project*

A Circle project is a local or regional partnership or organisation that has the primary task to develop and operate one or more Circles of support and accountability. A Circle project consists preferably of a project coordinator, or manager, at least one Circle coordinator\* and is advised by a steering committee.

A Circle project works in compliance with the national code of practice.



### *Circle*

A Circle of support and accountability consists of an inner Circle and an outer Circle and a mediating Circle coordinator. The inner Circle is formed by a sex offender (core member) and three to six volunteers. The Circles' aim is to prevent new victims of sexual violence and to support the core member to establish a responsible, offence free life. The outer Circle is formed by professionals.

### *Core member*

A core member is a sex offender with a medium to high risk of reoffending and a high need for social support, and is voluntarily participating in a Circle and willing to discuss his personal risk and problems openly with volunteers.

### *Circle volunteer*

A Circle volunteer is a fellow citizen who has passed the selection process and a training program provided by the regional Circle project and is willing to support and if necessary hold the core member accountable for his or her behaviour.

### *Professional in the Outer Circle*

A professional in the Outer Circle is a trained and experienced professional who is - through his or her function within the organisation he or she works for - involved in and responsible for the aftercare of the core member and is willing to comply to the expectations of a Circle project.

### *Circle coordinator*

A Circle coordinator is a professional, who is trained and experienced in working with sex offenders and coaching volunteers and who is pivotal in the communication between inner and outer Circle and for the accountability between Circle and the organisations in the local network.

\*The Dutch standard is to assign two Circle coordinators, but this is a more expensive model. In the UK, projects with only one staff member have been able to operate Circles successfully. With only one coordinator, sickness, vacation and supervision have to be arranged very carefully.

## **2.3 Issues for a national adaptation study**

Before starting a new Circles initiative, it is advised to undertake a feasibility study or an adaptation study (if feasibility is guaranteed since all 'no go' criteria are checked at forehand). There are several parts of the national landscape of sex offender management that should be explored.

- The societal and political climate towards sex offender rehabilitation
- Possible financial resources for Circle projects
- The judicial context
- Availability of sex offender treatment
- Infrastructure for sex offender aftercare and risk management
- Volunteering

### **Evaluate the societal and political climate towards sex offender rehabilitation**

The start of Circle projects usually triggers the public opinion and provokes both negative and positive reactions. In order to estimate the kind and amount of resistance or support any new Circle initiative is likely to expect, it is advised to describe the societal and political climate towards sex offenders. Usually the awareness of the magnitude and impact of sexual victimisation is affecting the support for preventive efforts. Since this type of

awareness is often raised by women's movement and child protection movement, in countries where these movements have gained terrain, sex offender management and treatment is more developed. (Frenken, 1999). The societal climate can be described by public and expert opinion and shared values towards offender rehabilitation and restorative justice. Of course, the general opinion (and policies) may be changing due to incidents that have been extensively covered in the media (Konrad & Lau, 2010; de Kogel & Nagtegaal, 2006).

In the UK, local and national newspapers, especially tabloids, have reacted very fiercely and generally in negative wordings to the start of new Circle projects. In the Netherlands and Belgium, the public opinion also is usually very suspicious of any sex offender re – entering society. Here, local and national media however have proven to be helpful in explaining the COSA principle to a wider public.

The political climate can be described by the general attitude of politicians, especially of the leading parties within the legislative power, towards sex offender rehabilitation and restorative justice. Is the political opinion informed by scientific and professional expertise or rather by 'gut feelings' of fearful citizens? What are opinions about restorative justice, or about naming and shaming of sex offenders? What are opinions about registration and notification? What are recent trends in national politics regarding rehabilitation and restorative justice?

*"When Circles of Support and Accountability in the Thames Valley first became operational in April 2002 the task in front of us seemed enormous. Four months later Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells were murdered in Soham, Cambridgeshire. The media's insatiable need to feed off such a terrible event resulted in the Circles office becoming a media circus and our introduction to the wider public was informed through national headlines such as "What a Waste of Our Cash". The pilot site in Hampshire also had to establish itself within the historical context of the previous riots in Paulsgrove, Portsmouth, following the News of the World's "Name and Shame" campaign. However the experience of "Circles" over the past three years has been that there exists within our communities an abundance of individuals appalled by those elements of the media who prey upon people's fear, and given the opportunity these individuals have been willing to engage in a constructive and positive process whereby their role in Circles has been to hold the offender accountable through support."*

Chris Wilson,  
Project Manager  
QPSW, 2005

### Evaluate the possibilities of sustainable financing of Circle projects

Sustained financial support for Circle projects is crucial. Some amount of structural financing from the government (especially the justice department) is not only helpful, but also expresses the willingness of the government to address the problem of sex offender management in society. However, up to now, no European government has guaranteed structural financing of Circle projects. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Justice has financed Circle projects for the pilot period, followed by further time-limited project funding for two years. In many countries church organisations or charity funds are contributing to probation services, or delivering probation services themselves. It will be helpful for any starting organisation to have an overview of possible funds and to do a brief assessment of their willingness to contribute to Circle projects.

In the UK, local Circle projects are financed from a diversity of funds including co-financing through police and probation organisations. ([www.Circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.Circles-uk.org.uk)).  
In Belgium, due to political uncertainties, sustainable funding is still a problem.

## Describe the judicial context

### *Penal climate*

The description of the judicial context should encompass information about the penal climate regarding sex offenders, especially the type and duration of punitive measures imposed upon sex offenders and the general conditions in prison. This kind of information gives insight into the conditions that sex offenders have been exposed to, prior to entering a Circle and will be useful information to incorporate into the volunteer training.

In England, Germany and Belgium there are special sanctions to protect society from the risk of recidivism of serious violent and sexual offenders. Through these sanctions, it is possible to impose indeterminate prison sentences, or extend the sentence or keep someone detained once his sentence has been served. In England this is called *life sentence*, *imprisonment for public protection* and *extended sentence*, in Germany *Sicherungsverwahrung* and in Belgium *terbeschikkingstelling van de regering* (de Kogel & Nagtegaal, 2006).

### *Conditional release*

Since COSA is usually offered within a context of court ordered supervision<sup>3</sup> (often at least for the first year of the Circle) a description of the different legal frameworks and modalities of conditional release, conditional sentences, or suspended sentences is necessary to identify target groups for potential core members. Also the types of conditions need to be explained.

In England and Belgium, the parole period may be extended time and again.

In the Netherlands and Germany, parole is time-restricted. Germany is considering a bill to make the *Führungsaufsicht* unrestricted in time (de Kogel & Nagtegaal, 2006).

### *Risk assessment*

COSA should be reserved to sex offender with moderate and high risk of reoffending. This implies a thorough and valid risk assessment. Not all countries have yet established 'state of the art' procedures for risk assessment. The policies and practices regarding risk assessment and risk management therefore should be investigated. Who is assessing risk at what moment with what purpose and with what kind of instruments? If risk assessment is not provided by the judicial system, Circle projects themselves need to do the necessary risk assessment on behalf of the selection of core members. Evidence based risk assessment is also necessary for any future research into the effectiveness of Circles.

In the UK, structured risk assessment of offenders through the OASys (Offender Assessment System) is routinely used for all offenders that need a pre-sentence report, requested by the court. In the aftercare, structured assessment of risk and the identification of the factors that have contributed to offending, are the starting points for all work with offenders. For sexual and violent offenders, the approved assessment tools throughout England and Wales are OASys, Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000; NOMS/PPU, 2009).

In Germany, structured risk assessment is not yet common practice, for instance the decision to place sex offenders in preventive detention is usually based on clinical judgement with incomplete data (Habermeyer et al, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> This is partly a matter of funding priorities.

### *Aftercare and risk management*

In most European countries probation activities like assistance to and supervision of offenders are executed by state funded government bodies. In some countries probation services are delivered by private organisations (Van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008). In the adaptation study the kind of activities of probation services and the organisations and policies involved in risk management need to be described in order to have a clear picture of the kind of services already available for the core member and the needs that are not served and probably need special attention by a Circle. This is necessary information for the adaptation of the volunteer training programme. The organisations involved need to be assessed in order to adapt the guidelines for the requirements of the outer Circle.

In Latvia, the State Probation Service (SPS) supervises offenders on conditional release and offers individual case management in order to draft and coordinate a rehabilitation plan. The State Probation Service offers several programmes to support the reintegration of offenders, including cognitive behavioural interventions and resettlement programs, which include housing in a half way house, financed by SPS (Zeibote 2008 in: Van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008).

In Spain, offering offender aftercare and social assistance is the responsibility of the general vice-directorate of open environment and alternative measures within the directorate general of Penitentiary Institutions. Supervision and social interventions are carried out by social workers both inside and outside open environment prisons through interview, training programs and searching and coordination of community services for the target group (Espartero, 2008 in: Van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008).

## **Assess treatment facilities for sex offenders**

### *Treatment providers*

One of the basic functions of a Circle is the reduction of risk of recidivism through monitoring risk and holding the core member accountable for reacting to risk in an adequate way. To be able to do so, risk factors and relapse prevention strategies are openly discussed within the Circle. This implies that the core member must have at least some insight into his own risk factors and relevant relapse prevention strategies (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011). Therefore the core member should have been or should be in sex offender treatment. The Circle then can build on treatment goals and reinforce them in a natural environment. The availability of sex offender treatment should be assessed. In order to be able to identify the organisations that can be involved in a Circle project and deliver professionals for the outer Circle, also an overview of possible providers should be given.

In Belgium, sex-offender treatment is usually mandatory for sexual delinquents who apply for conditional release and is provided by assigned forensic teams within Mental Health Care institutions and Welfare institutions. Treatment attendance and progress is guided and supervised by the justice assistant. On an individual basis mental health care and welfare-institutions may start sex-offender treatment with those who are to be released soon, in order to bridge the gap between incarceration and living in the outside, but the facilities are very limited (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010).

### *Treatment modalities*

An assessment of sex offender treatment must describe the modalities in which sex offender treatment is offered (e.g. in prison or in the community, ambulant versus residential). The timing of the start of a Circle is influenced by

the modality in which offender treatment is available. When specific sex offender treatment is offered in prison or the core member has been in sex offender therapy in forensic psychiatric care, a Circle can start almost directly after the (conditional) release of the core member. If not, core members should be admitted to sex offender treatment after release. In many countries mandated specific sex offender treatment is a condition for suspended sentence or probation. If mandated sex offender treatment is not available a core member will probably need specific assistance from the Circle in identifying his personal risk.

In the Netherlands, high risk sex offenders can get a hospital order for mandated residential forensic psychiatric care if they are diagnosed with psychiatric disorder (or personality disorder). The forensic psychiatric institutions have a wide range of forms of treatment. However, not every person is given the treatment that seems to be most promising according to literature, and in many cases, the treatment is not given 'according to protocol' (De Kogel & Nagtegaal, 2006). A lot of sex offenders however go to prison, where no sex offender treatment is offered at all.

In Sweden there are specific sex offender treatment programs in prison which are being evaluated by an accreditation committee (Hasselrot & Fielding, 2010).

In Belgium, since there is no specific sex-offender therapy in prison, and the number of treatment facilities for interned sex offenders is very limited, treatment often only starts after the (conditional) release is effected. In recent years, more and more sex – offenders choose to serve their term to the end instead of applying for early release in order to avoid mandatory treatment and long term supervision. (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010).

### *Treatment models and treatment goals*

United States' and Canadian Sex offender treatment programs have been highly influential in the development of sex offender treatment in Europe, and many countries have adopted these programs (de Kogel & Nagtegaal, 2006). Most popular treatment models in the US and Canada are the cognitive behavioural model (CBT), relapse prevention (RP) and the self regulation- Good Lives Model (SR-GLM) (McGrath et al. 2009). Often, a combination of approaches is used, especially CBT and RP. The type of treatment model used is probably of consequence to the core members needs when entering a Circle. However, all of these specific sex offender treatment models in general should provide the core member with basic skills to discuss risk factors and relevant relapse prevention strategies within the Circle. More generic treatment approaches like training basic life skills or aggression management are probably less supportive to the Circles' goals.

## **Describe the professional network of sex offender management**

### *Professional networks and partnerships*

The development of professional networks and partnerships in the management of sex offenders re-entering society has primarily two goals: protection of public safety on one hand and serving sex offender aftercare needs in order to reduce risk of recidivism on the other.

Risk management of sex offenders re-entering society and protecting public safety in many countries is a task of several organisations in the field. In many cases the following organisations are involved: police, prosecution, probation, municipality, forensic mental health facilities. On the other hand, the institutions that are involved in sex offender aftercare can also include housing corporations, welfare institutions, employment agencies etc. Not only the parties involved, but also the degree co-operation and formalisation of this cooperation will differ from country to country. Since COSA is to be embedded in the local professional networks and partnerships, it is important to map the organisations involved and assess policies and practices regarding the coordination.

In the UK, the supervision and aftercare of sex offenders re-entering society is coordinated by MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements). MAPPA are mandated local partnerships (by the Criminal Justice act, 2003) between, police, probation and prison services, who are operating as the 'responsible authority' in the aftercare of sex offenders and other violent offenders. This local cooperation is also mandated for other partners in the professional network, like social welfare, employment agencies, housing corporation and electronic supervision services (NOMS/PPU 2009). In the UK, Circles are functioning within the MAPPA.

In Belgium the most relevant agencies that are involved in the managing of sex offenders during their re-socialisation process are: the probation organisation (houses of justice), the ambulant treatment facilities for interned sex offenders, the specialized forensic teams for the treatment of sex offenders within mental health institutions and public welfare institutions, the police force and the federal prosecution office. Cooperation between these agencies is less formalised than in the UK, especially direct information sharing between the probation officer and the police is not common practice, and is in fact not in line with the working guidelines of the House of Justice (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010).

*"A good example of how Circles have worked effectively with the hostel is the case of Peter, a 60-year-old entrenched predatory paedophile. Peter has convictions for sexually offending against children over a period of 25 years. His offences ranged from inappropriate touching of young girls to child abduction and rape. Due to his high risk of reoffending Peter had been made the subject of a Sex Offender Order, which contained many conditions to protect the public. Peter breached this order and was sent to prison. It was upon release from this sentence that he arrived at the hostel. It soon became evident that Peter had a low IQ. One of the conditions of Peter's order was not to go within 40 metres of a children's playground. When asked to demonstrate how far 40 metres was, Peter was unable to do so, therefore staff gave him a visible demonstration of the distance. However, his powers of retention were somewhat limited and all information given to him needed to be constantly reinforced. Circles were approached as it was obvious Peter's level of risk would necessitate a very high degree of monitoring."*

*Sheila,*

*Senior Probation Officer*

*QPSW, 2005*

### *Exchange of information*

An important precondition for COSA is a well established basis of co-operation and clear information sharing agreements with the local organisations, as they deliver the professionals for the outer Circle. These professionals need to be well-informed about the process of the core member, in order to be able to intervene in time – when necessary – and prevent recidivism. Laws, policies and practices concerning the sharing of information between organisations involved in the local networks should be assessed in order to deal with difficulties at forehand.

Forensic mental health organisations in the Netherlands are restricted in their information sharing by privacy laws. With the probation organisation, however, a bilateral information sharing protocol has been agreed. Also, within the context of local networks concerned with public safety (Veiligheidshuizen) an information sharing covenant between all parties has been agreed upon. Exchange of information between outer Circle and inner Circle is the responsibility of the Circle coordinator, who is a professional of the probation organisation (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011).

## Describe possibilities for recruitment of volunteers

No Circle project without volunteers – which is why the most exciting part of starting a COSA initiative is the recruitment of volunteers. In the assessment of the national context it is advised to investigate the problems and opportunities that can be expected in the recruitment process when starting a Circle initiative.

### *Social climate*

In many countries, the involvement of members of the community in processes of public protection and change is becoming more and more positively evaluated. Participation, nodal governance<sup>4</sup> and the ‘big society’ are some key concepts of this trend. An adaptation study should describe the societal climate towards volunteering. Is it very common or very unusual to volunteer for community services? What are trends in volunteering in recent years? Who is volunteering - in terms of age, gender, education level etc.? What kind of community services are delivered by volunteers? What are general motivations of volunteers? These kind of questions help to estimate the amount of community support for COSA volunteering and to address potential volunteers in an appropriate manner by information brochures and local or national media campaigns. In many western societies there is a growing awareness of the need for a pluralistic approach to volunteer recruitment, engagement and management. The role of the government in supporting and facilitating volunteerism can be understood in different ways (Merril & Safrit, 2003).

### *Volunteer organisations*

Organisations that are involved in support, coordination and management of volunteers can be helpful in the recruitment process, or deliver valuable information about successful strategies, especially local organisations. However, it must be very clear that COSA volunteers need to follow a specific training and are going to deliver highly specialized volunteer services. Therefore in the adaptation study it is necessary to assess not only the goals and activities of these organisations, but also their practices and policies with respect to volunteer management and their willingness to cooperate with a Circle project.

### *Expertise and experiences in volunteering & rehabilitation of (sex) offenders*

In many European countries, probation services started in the 19th century as activities of charitable and religious institutions and were delivered by non-professional volunteers. This kind of volunteerism was more and more professionalised and in most countries, the government has now taken over the probation activities. In the central and eastern part of Europe (the former communist countries) there is little or no tradition of voluntary (probation) work, these activities have always been carried out by paid workers (Van Kalmthout & Durnescu, 2008). Voluntarism and offender rehabilitation therefore are not to be taken for granted in all countries. An assessment of organisations that are experienced in working with volunteers in the field of offender aftercare and rehabilitation is helpful in order to localise organisations that are probably able to deliver volunteers and/or Circle coordinators who are experienced in coaching volunteers in this field.

In the UK, there are many organisations involved in engaging and managing volunteers in the criminal justice field. Also, in the MAPPA, non-professionals are involved in the risk management of sex offenders (Armstrong et al, 2008).

In Belgium a specialised welfare organisation known as Assistance services for Law Subjects (Justitieel Welzijnswerk, JWW) offers support and assistance to detainees and their families. These organisations are familiar with recruiting and working with volunteers, although due to a substantial budget cuts, these activities are now very limited (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Nodal governance is an elaboration of contemporary network theory explaining how a variety of actors operating within social systems interact along networks to govern the systems they inhabit. (Burris, Drahos & Shearing, 2005)

### Assess the views and support of stakeholders

National adaptation studies have been carried out in Scotland (Armstrong et al, 2008), the Netherlands (Höing, Caspers & Vogelvang, 2009) and Belgium (Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans, 2010). In all studies, interviews with stakeholders were conducted to assess the views, experiences and possible support. These stakeholders were professionals from a variety of state or private organisations, both on a local and a national level.

Key stakeholders to be involved in an adaptation study are probably:

- government representatives (especially from Ministry of Justice)
- local government administrations
- police
- public prosecutors
- probation organisations
- local public safety networks
- prison services
- forensic psychiatric services
- welfare organisations
- volunteer organisations

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## 3 COSA in real life: the implementation process



Introducing a new COSA initiative in a given context is like going on a challenging journey without knowing all the details. A basic road map can be provided, but many experiences underway will be unique and will ask for tailored solutions. In this chapter, the basic steps, and challenges of the implementation process will be described, based on the experiences in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium so far.

### 3.1 Basic requirements

Not being a quick-fix, any COSA initiative needs months of preparation (9 months is not unusual, as it appears in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium; Hoing & Vogelvang, 2011). Some basic requirements need to be in place, in order to prevent incomplete and therefore ineffective implementation, which can lead to unsafe practices and can damage the whole COSA enterprise. This vital work needs to be done and is also a way for all involved to really grasp the principles of what COSA is all about: a bold community response to fear and anxiety, based on inclusion, openness and hope.

In the box, the basic requirements for a successful implementation process are outlined. They are described in more detail below.




1. Financial resources to develop and sustain Circle projects
2. An adaptation study
3. A comprehensive description of the method
4. An implementation plan (scenario, time-table for dissemination, milestones)
5. A strategic communication plan
6. A network of professional organisations in the field of risk management
7. Personnel that is capable and willing to run Circle projects
8. An organisational structure of the Circle project with clear description of tasks and responsibilities, lines of communication and span of control
9. Systematically research and quality management and monitoring, in co-operation with a research institute
10. International cooperation with Circle Projects in other European Countries

*In order to help the reader understand what might be considered 'mandatory' standards of organisation and operational delivery, as opposed to 'good and desirable' practice, a symbol appears in the margin indicating the status proposed in this hand-book. Where the symbol  this indicates a definite and non-negotiable standard vital to achieve the European COSA brand. Where the symbol  then this represents good practice, with a recognition that local variations and resources may mean a different approach to achieve COSA aims is acknowledged.*

#### Financial resources

As stated in chapter 2, sufficient financial resources to start a COSA project are absolutely necessary to guarantee sustainability. The necessary budget should at least cover the following expenses:

Material costs for Circles:

-  any expenses regarding volunteers (travel expenses, phones and phone costs, insurance, etc.);
-  facilities for weekly Circle meetings (room, drinks, etc.);
-  facilities for training and social meetings (room, drinks, lunches, etc.).

Professional staff cost for Circles projects:

- ✓ preferably two (part-time) professional Circle coordinators in one Circle project (max. 10 Circles per 1 fte)<sup>5</sup>;
- ! a local/regional project coordinator;
- ! a steering committee (expenses for meetings, drinks, etc.);
- ! office costs: rent, stationary, archive, computers, printers, travel expenses;
- ! training costs: training of Circle coordinators (in any experienced country or by qualified national trainers).

A national COSA organisation (optional in the beginning, but then the tasks should be executed by regional/local projects):

- ✓ a project coordinator;
- ✓ a quality manager;
- ✓ a trainer/supervisor to train and supervise Circle coordinators;
- ✓ a communication & media expert;
- ✓ an office manager;
- ! an advisory board (expenses for meetings, etc.);
- ! annual meetings with professionals (room, drinks, lunches, etc.);
- ! material costs (e.g. rent, folders and brochures, paperwork, archive, computers, printers, travel expenses).

Research costs (personnel, material costs, travel expenses) for:

- ! an adaptation study;
- ! a process evaluation;
- ✓ an effect evaluation (over time).

- ✓ Costs for international cooperation (travel costs, translation of materials).

The costs of developing national and regional support for COSA are easily underestimated. Giving presentations, attending conferences and congresses and personal communication are all time consuming but necessary to develop a fertile soil for any Circle project. Also, in the beginning, much time has to be invested into volunteer recruitment and selection, involving probably much travel costs. Depending on the scale of the project it is possible to start with a regional or local project first and incorporate necessary functions of a national organisation (quality management, training and supervision of Circle coordinators, communication and media, etc.). If the Circle project expands and multiplies, a national Circles organisation can be developed in a second stage.

The estimation of research costs should be done in cooperation with a research institute, since it is difficult for non-researchers to adequately budget the requirements. The costs of international cooperation should at least cover two annual visits to international COSA meetings for two people. If necessary, also costs for translation of materials should be included in the budget.

## **! Adaptation study**

The requirements for an adaptation study have already been outlined in Chapter 2 of this Handbook.

## **! Comprehensive description of the method**

It is absolutely necessary to provide all people involved in a COSA initiative with correct and comprehensive information about goals, principles and implications of COSA and to describe the procedures that need to be followed to ensure high quality deliverance of Circles.

Because of the appealing simplicity of the basic idea and structure, COSA is easily misunderstood as being a 'simple' intervention, which it is not. To be able to live up to the goals and principles, a high level of communication, cooperation and program integrity is needed. At different steps in the implementation process a sometimes large

and diverse group of stakeholders have to be informed about COSA and they will be informed by different COSA staff members.

- ✓ In order to develop a shared body of knowledge and values, and prevent the growth of false expectations or role confusion it is necessary to develop clear and comprehensive written information to this end. Also standard presentation sheets are very helpful. The information should be tailored to the needs of the specific audience and user. Circle coordinators, (regional) project coordinators and quality managers are in need of the most detailed information, since they are basically responsible for the quality of deliverance.

In each type of material at least some key topics should be covered:

- values and goals of COSA (no more victims, no secrets)
- the target group (medium/high risk - high need sex offender)
- the volunteers (diversity in background, non-professionals, local community members)
- the structure of a Circle (inner/outer Circle, Circle coordinator)
- the three functions of a Circle (support, monitor, hold accountable)
- the interaction between inner and outer Circle
- tasks and responsibilities of those addressed
- procedures to be followed by those addressed
- research
- where to get more information

Types of information material that has proven to be useful so far are:

For the general public:

- Website

For stakeholders:

- Presentations
- (Executive summary of) adaptation study

For professionals in the outer Circle:

- Information brochure

For future volunteers:

- Information brochure

For future core members:

- Information brochure

For selected volunteers:

- COSA training and information handbook

For (regional) Circle project staff: all mentioned above, plus:

- Code of practice
- Implementation guide
- Organisational plan
- Strategic communication plan

- Training manuals (project staff training, volunteer training)
- Supervising plan
- Monitoring and evaluation guide
- Exit strategies for planned and unpredicted situations

For auditing staff:

- Audit manual

For research staff: all mentioned above, plus:

- Research manual

Useful websites are: [www.Circles-uk.com](http://www.Circles-uk.com) and [www.cosanederland.nl](http://www.cosanederland.nl). There are also diverse Canadian websites giving information about COSA.

See annex 1 for COSA websites.

See annex 2 for examples of information brochures of Circles UK.

The protocols and manuals for the (regional) project staff are described more detailed in chapter 4. The monitoring and evaluation guide is explained in chapter 5. A basic research manual is given in chapter 6.

## ! Implementation plan

An implementation plan outlines the scenario and steps that must be taken, provides a time table for dissemination and defines milestones. Based on the experiences in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium necessary steps include the following (milestones are bold):

- **Kick-off: Inform stakeholders about project plan (nationally, regionally)**
- Build partnerships with regional stakeholders
- Form a board of advisors (national) and steering committee (regional)
- Build a (national and/or regional) project organisation
- Train project staff (Circle coordinators/regional project manager)
- **Inform general public about project plan through mass media (nationally)**
- Recruit, select and train volunteers
- Recruit core members
- Recruit professionals for the outer Circle
- Build a supervision and coaching structure for Circle coordinators
- Build an evaluation and audit structure
- Develop an extended training program for volunteers
- Organize social events and information meetings to support project commitment
- **Inform stakeholders about project proceedings**
- **Inform general public about project proceedings**
- **Acquire sustained financing**

Best practices and lessons learned in the implementation process are described more detailed below (chapter 3.2).

## ! Strategic communication plan

Sex offender management in society is a very sensitive topic in most European countries, and easily raises fears and concerns. All dissemination of information about the project should be carefully planned. Goals, target groups, lead staff member, protocols for volunteer engagement with the media and messages to be conveyed should be defined in a strategic communication plan from the very beginning.

In the UK, Netherlands and Belgium, media and communication experts in participating organisations have been very helpful in the development of such a plan and assisted with contacting the media and building helpful relationships with editors and journalists working for local and national media.

### **Network of professional organisations**

The implementation of COSA asks for cooperation between regional or local organisations involved in sex offender management and after-care services. Professionals from these organisations are asked to participate in the outer Circle and to exchange information between each other and with the Circle coordinator, in order to maintain a shared view on the process of the core member and to be able to intervene in a coordinated way in case of increased risk or special needs of the core member.

! At least the following organisations should be cooperating in a Circles project:

- Probation organisation
- Sex offender treatment facility
- Local police<sup>6</sup>
- Public prosecutor

These key partners should have or develop clear protocols and agreements about information sharing that comply with national privacy laws.

Probably many other local or regional organisations can be helpful partners in a regional Circle project, in order to support the volunteers or the core member in case of special needs:

- Organisation to support volunteering
- Welfare organisations
- Housing corporations
- Local government

### ! **Personnel that is capable and willing to run Circle projects**

On a day to day basis, Circles should be supported and guided by Circle coordinators, who – in the European model - have relevant professional backgrounds and experience. Their main concern is model integrity (does the Circle establish a trusting relationship and provide the three basic functions to contribute to relapse prevention?). In order to achieve a high quality inner Circle, the primary responsibility of the Circle coordinator is the selection and training of dedicated Circle volunteers, monitoring, coaching and supervision of the Circle process and of the individual volunteers and the evaluation and exchange of the information within the Circle.

! Circle coordinators must:

- be experienced in working with volunteers;
- have strong knowledge and skills in group training;
- have strong knowledge and skills in group coaching and management; and
- have good knowledge and skills in sex offender risk evaluation and rehabilitation.

! They should be team players and be able to establish and sustain excellent working alliances with all parties involved. A Circle coordinator should have a clear understanding of the COSA values, principles and procedures; therefore all future Circle coordinators need to follow the extensive COSA project staff training program.

Being a Circle coordinator is not a nine-to-five job. Most Circles meet in evening hours and Circle attendance is necessary in the first four Circle meetings. Attendance also may be advisable from time to time as the Circle proceeds. On the other hand, being a Circle coordinator is a challenging job that involves flexibility, autonomy and responsibility and offers a high level of immaterial gratification and work satisfaction (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011). Due to different professional cultures and attitudes towards working with volunteers, the way in which volunteers are

<sup>6</sup> In Belgium, this would imply a change in policy, since the probation organisation is not allowed to convey information to the local police, except for administrative data.

supported by the outer Circle is different. In the UK, all volunteers are given contact cards with details of the various professionals involved with the core member, so that someone can be contacted. All volunteers are told, should there be an issue and they cannot immediately contact anyone on the contact card they should contact the Police who are paid to be there 24/7. In the Netherlands, professionals in the outer Circle cannot be contacted directly by volunteers, therefore Circle coordinators operate as 24/7 backing for Circle volunteers, who can call them when a situation calls for immediate action or supervision. Therefore, regional projects in the Netherlands employ two (part-time) Circle coordinators who can work together and take shifts. In the UK, sometimes a less expensive model is maintained, involving only one project coordinator who is also a Circle coordinator, and who is answering to a project board.

- ✓ Where there are regional project coordinators, they should also be professionals. Their main responsibility is: to inform local and regional stakeholders and develop regional support and assist development of local support for the Circle projects; to make sure that Circles are incorporated in a local network of sex offender management; recruit volunteers and core members; supervise the program integrity (make sure all procedures are followed as intended); organise training and social events; and take care of the safe administration and storage of all project information. Informing local and regional media may also be one of the project coordinators responsibilities.
  - ! Regional project coordinators should have good communication skills, presentation and organising skills, should be team players and – since they screen future core members - should have expert knowledge in sex offender risk assessment and rehabilitation. Future project coordinators also need to follow the extensive COSA project staff training.
  - ! The organisational structure of the Circle project.  
A new COSA initiative may start on a local or regional level, a national level or both. There are some functions that can only be developed on a local or regional scale:
    - Recruiting, selecting and training volunteers for a Circle
    - Building and coaching a Circle
    - Developing a local network of professional organisations that participate in the outer Circle
  - ✓ Other necessary functions of a COSA initiative may first be developed on a regional scale, but with the proliferation of new Circle projects throughout a country it is advised to build a national consultation and support agency that provides these functions:
    - Training and supervision of project coordinators and Circle coordinators
    - Development of training programmes and monitoring and evaluation manuals and procedures
    - Development of information materials
    - Quality management and support
    - Research
    - Media contacts
    - Advocacy
- As a Circle initiative expands and regional and national functions split up, it is important to develop a clear description of tasks and responsibilities, communication lines and span of control.
- ! All Circle projects should be assisted by an external steering committee or advisory board that advises, supervises and evaluates the project progress and efficiency and supports local and regional embedding of the project.
  - ! Any national consultation and support agency (program bureau) should also be overseen by a steering committee or an advisory board that also can support the advocacy and media and communication function of the nation agency. Such a body must have clear terms of reference, responsibility and liabilities.

### **Research, quality management and monitoring**

Accountability is not only a function of the inner Circle, also the project as a whole needs to guarantee a certain

level of accountability. In most cases a COSA initiative will be sustained by public funding and therefore needs to guarantee quality standards and be able to deliver evidence of its results. COSA also aims to serve public interests in enhancing public safety and reducing risk of sexual offending. These expectations need to be realistic and therefore any COSA initiative should be able to provide information about its results, its quality and its limitations.

High quality deliverance of the COSA model needs to be ensured and supported by rules and guidelines that are laid out in a mandatory code of practice with respective protocols and manuals which are to be followed strictly by the project staff. They are monitored through quality assurance procedures like supervision and a regular review and auditing system.

The process of first implementation will deliver a wealth of information for the further development and for future Circle projects. Also the outcome of the implementation process must be evaluated in order to account for the money and effort spent. It is advised to cooperate with a research institute to conduct a process evaluation. In later stages, when COSA is heading past the first pilots, the effects of Circles should be monitored in order to be able to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about successful sex offender rehabilitation and risk reduction. Several research strategies are available and outlined in chapter 6.

### **International cooperation with Circle Projects in other European Countries**

The growing international interest in COSA as an alternative and complementary service alongside existing sex offender rehabilitation practices points to the potential of COSA in the eyes of professionals in the field. Since Circles deal with high risks, existing and developing projects are also closely watched by public, professionals and policy makers. International cooperation between Circle projects can be very helpful when introducing COSA to a wider audience. Experienced Circle staff from other countries can have a useful consulting function and can give presentations or interviews and answer questions about the practical implications of the COSA approach. Especially mass media are asking for experienced ‘ambassadors’ when paying attention to COSA. In the early stages of project development this kind of experience and examples can only be delivered by projects that have been in place for a longer time.

International cooperation is also necessary to guarantee the COSA concept is not drifting away from its original principles and values and is able to sustain the high level of quality standards. International exchange of research results and project development issues can give momentum to any new Circle initiative.

## **3.2 The implementation process: best practices and lessons learned**

In the following section successful implementation strategies and lessons learned will be outlined, based on the experiences in the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium.

### **Project financing**

Both in the UK and in the Netherlands the first COSA pilots were financed through government funding (Ministry of Justice). In the UK, financial resources were initially guaranteed for three pilot programmes over a number of years; in the Netherlands the initial finances were guaranteed for one year and one pilot location. Getting financial support from the government was achieved through an influential lobby of experts and through international cooperation with other projects. First hand information from those who have successfully operated Circles for years appears to be a key success factor in developing support from experts and to acquire financing. Examples of how these experts contributed to the successful introduction are described below.

In the UK, the Quaker organisation, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, who had close connections to the Mennonite church in Canada – (who developed the concept of COSA) together with the charity the Lucy Faithfull Foundation introduced COSA to the Home Office through a conference.



“The Home Office agreed to co-host the workshop, which took place in June 2001. Five Canadians flew over – a Director of Parole, a member of Toronto Police sexual assault squad, a psychologist from the Correctional Services, the Executive Director of Circles and the National Chaplaincy Coordinator. At the meeting were representatives of: Home Office, parole, police, probation, prisons, sex offender treatment, chaplaincy, Victim Support, NSPCC and several churches.”  
QPSW (2003)

In the Netherlands, Avans University of Applied Sciences and a regional office of the Dutch probation organisation (Reclassering Nederland) introduced COSA to professionals and policymakers in a symposium to which Circles UK had been invited to give a presentation on COSA. This presentation was received with enthusiasm. After this, the director of the Dutch Probation organisation – who had been present - lobbied vigorously and successfully with the Ministry of Justice. The following year a grant was provided for the preparation of one regional pilot project.

The success of this international cooperation has led to the joint application (together with The Belgian Probation Organisation (Justitiehuis Antwerpen, House of Justice Antwerp) and other partners) for a two year grant from the Daphne III program of the European Union to support the international proliferation of COSA throughout Europe.

Also, the evidence of the effectiveness of COSA provided by the research so far (for detailed description see chapter 6) appears to be very convincing for experts and policy makers (Pasmans, 2011).

In Belgium, gaining sustained finances has been a major concern from the beginning. Here the situation was complicated by the fact that the most recent elections have led to a political impasse and government formation is still in progress. The interim Minister of Welfare was highly enthusiastic about the initiative, but not able to offer political commitment and funding in this situation.

Also, the Belgian pilot was introduced by a regional branch of the Belgian probation organisation (Justitiehuis Antwerpen, House of Justice Antwerp). The project coordinators feel that – being a regional organisation - they lack the connections and power to lobby successfully at a federal political level. They argue that - taking into account the level of political influence needed - a COSA initiative should better be introduced by a national agency in the field of sex offender management (Pasmans, 2011). Through regional contacts however, they have managed to acquire some financial support for the next years from the municipality and other partners.

In Belgium, the sustainability of the first pilot project and further development of the Circles project after the Daphne funding will be sought by turning it into an autonomous non-profit organisation, that is able to acquire funding and hire personnel.

### **National and regional support from stakeholders**

Apart from financial support, gaining national and regional support from stakeholders appears to be relatively straight-forward, since the COSA model has an obvious and appealing logic and effectiveness in the eyes of rehabilitation experts and politicians. Successful strategies to inform them include presentations at conferences, symposia and training sessions. More specific information will best be conveyed through bilateral communication.

- ✓ It is important to inform stakeholders on different organisational levels, to make sure that both managers and personnel in executive functions are well informed (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011).
- ✓ Contacting volunteering organisations in an early stage may be helpful, but needs careful communication and relationship management, since COSA may be viewed as a possible competitor for recruiting volunteers. Also, concerns about volunteer safety and insurance and specific training needs must be dealt with (Pasmans, 2011). On

the other hand, once shared goals can be established, the help and expertise of these organisations in volunteer recruitment and raising political support and public awareness can be very valuable.

It has also been the experience in the UK that developing a good understanding and links with organisations representing and providing support through help lines, and self-help groups for survivors of sexual abuse is vital from a number of viewpoints. Firstly, because the shared aim of ‘no more victims’ unites the services, secondly it is important for Circles organisations to listen to the experiences and views of those who have been abused, and thirdly to prevent the media from being able to present organisations committed to reducing sexual abuse and its awful impact in their awareness-raising work as being in opposition and bitter competition for scarce resources.

Also it is helpful if well known and influential people in the Justice and Welfare domain act as ambassadors of a COSA project or take part in a steering committee. These need not be experts in the field of sex offender aftercare, their contribution is one of a role model to influence the public opinion.

The support of stakeholders can be made visible to the general public and the political arena by inviting them to take place in a national or regional steering committee or advisory board. In the UK the support of child protection organisation has been very meaningful in the acceptance of Circle projects by a wider public.

### **Project set up and organisation**

In the UK and the Netherlands a division of tasks and responsibilities between a national level (Circles UK; Circles-NL) and a regional level (regional Circle projects) has been successful. While in the UK a national organisation and office emerged from the first regional Circle projects, in the Netherlands, a national bureau was formed right from the start of the project, and the regional projects were instigated by the national bureau. In Belgium, the COSA initiative started as a regional project driven by a regional probation organisation, and no national bureau was formed. According to the project coordinator this meant that the project lacked the contacts for political influence on a national level which hindered the implementation process. In some cases the Dutch national bureau could provide support, which appeared to be very helpful.

On the national level, Circles UK and Circles-NL support and monitor regional Circle projects and generate national support for COSA by informing professionals, policymakers and the general public about the method. They initiate and coordinate research on Circles. They develop a training programme for volunteers and deliver a training for Circle- and regional coordinators.

In the UK, Circles UK is operating as an autonomous voluntary sector organisation, accredited by the Ministry of Justice for its Circles development work, while in the Netherlands, the national bureau is a cooperation in which Avans University of Applied Sciences and Reclassering Nederland participate and delegate professionals. Both approaches have pro's and con's. A separate organisation guarantees a clear positioning of Circles as an autonomous partner in the field of sex offender aftercare – but on the other hand may set it in direct competition with regional or local projects in finding long-term funding. In case of a partnership between two or more organisations cultural differences and practices may complicate the development of a shared body of knowledge, values and practices, but it can also enhance the quality through sharing and exchange of specific expertise.

Circles are operated by regional Circle projects or local co-ordinators, who generate support for Circles within the network of local organisations, recruit and train Circle volunteers, recruit core members, and build, support and monitor Circles.

- ! At the start of a new project, a local steering committee needs to be established, with written terms of reference, that helps with the preparation and later monitoring of the regional project, within the guidelines of the code of practice.

In the UK, local Circle projects are operated by partnerships in different constellations per county. These partnerships comprise statutory and voluntary sector organisations and one of these agencies on behalf of the partnership will hire personnel, ensure the volunteers are covered by their insurance policy etc. In the Netherlands, regional projects are operated by delegated professionals of the Dutch Probation organisation (RN). Here COSA has developed more as one of the methods of RN.

In the UK, all Circle projects work closely together with MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements). MAPPA result from the 'Criminal Justice Act' (2003) which mandates the cooperation between Police, Prosecution and Probation organisations as a 'responsible service' for the aftercare of violent and sexual offenders. Also other local partners are mandated to work together. In the UK, the functions of the outer Circle are formalised within MAPPA and executed by MAPPA professionals. In the Netherlands, there are also local safety networks (called safety houses) involving police, probation, public prosecution and other organisations. Cooperation however is not mandated, but based on a covenant, encouraged by the municipalities in order to enhance public safety. In the Dutch regional projects the local safety house are represented in the steering committee.

In Belgium, the regional project is also closely working together with a network of professional organisations (Stuurgroep Alternatieve maatregelen; SAM) involved in supervision of alternative sanctions for offenders. These cooperation's appear to be very useful for the embedding of Circles in the total of sex offender aftercare services (Pasmans, 2011).

### **Recruiting and training Circle projects' staff**

✓ When starting a COSA initiative, best practices concerning the recruiting and training of Circles project staff are:

- Hire preferably two (part-time) Circle coordinators per regional project (where resources permit).

Starting as a new Circle coordinator in a new project is a very challenging task. Many issues will need creative solutions and questions and uncertainties will arise around all kinds of issues once a Circle is running, especially around group dynamics and risk. Having a fellow Circle coordinator allows mutual support and exchange of experiences around worries and successes. Also back up in case of illness or vacation is a must since a Circle doesn't stop. However, since this is a costly model, projects with a single coordinator appear to work well in the UK if the coordinator is answering to a project board which is supervising the project.

- Arrange for the first Circle project staff to follow the COSA staff training and the volunteer training in a more experienced project abroad.

The complexity of COSA procedures and the nature of the risk involved makes a high quality training necessary for the project staff. The international cooperation between COSA initiatives enables new projects to learn from experienced partners and to consult them with any questions that will arise during the training. Training material can be obtained via a license from Circles UK.

### **Recruiting and selecting volunteers**

Finding enough volunteers to start a Circle is of course crucial to any new COSA initiative. Experiences in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium show that a combination of local and national dissemination of information about COSA is working best. Especially if respected media (TV and national newspapers) are reporting positively about COSA.

✓ A media campaign can be very effective. Since these media often ask for pictures or interviews with volunteers – which new COSA initiatives of course cannot provide –, support from Circle projects abroad is very helpful in this stage of a project. For instance, an interview with a UK volunteer appeared in a Dutch news item on national TV. Later, Dutch volunteers also gave interviews in national newspapers and appeared in a television show, together with the CEO of the Dutch probation organisation. In the Netherlands within a couple of weeks about 100 new volunteers had applied. Dutch COSA experts have given interviews in a Belgian TV show and in a national

newspaper – as a consequence of this, 20 volunteers applied, enabling the start of the first Circles in Belgium. In the UK, where media attention is often less favourable towards COSA, nevertheless negative media attention frequently leads to interest from new volunteers. Here, negative media coverage by tabloids has led to countering reactions from the general public and led to a public debate about sex offenders in the community.

Using volunteers to recruit volunteers is a powerful method because of the modelling effect. Careful selection and preparation of volunteers for these media tasks however is necessary, since they often are not aware of the way media appearance can affect their personal lives and the Circle they are involved in.

! The media strategy should cover these arrangements, including some training and preparation for the volunteer in advance.

! The application of a volunteer should be followed up by immediate and personal response of the project organisation. A written application form is used to obtain all necessary information from the volunteer, but the selection process is best started shortly after the information is received through a personal interview by one of the Circle coordinators.

In the Netherlands in two different regional projects two different strategies have been tested: in one region applying volunteers were invited to an information meeting before having a personal selection interview, in the other region all applying volunteers were directly personally interviewed at their home. With the first strategy, the drop out was 64%, since many volunteers never showed up at the information meeting, while with the second strategy the drop out rate was only 25% (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011).

! All volunteers (and staff) must pass a criminal records check to make sure they have no sexual offending history themselves. Any other offences volunteers committed in the past should be evaluated with regard to severity and impact on the volunteer selection criteria.

*“Due to the confidence the Core Member built up in the group and his understanding and acceptance that he was accountable to the group, the Circle was able to gain information on his relationships and any risks involved. With regard to risk this was clearly an area at the forefront of the Circle’s work and the Core Member had access to the other Circle members via their mobile phones and was able to contact them and discuss any problems or issues such as having inappropriate thoughts or concerns about reoffending. The Circles volunteers always came across as both professional and conscientious, always able to communicate with other agencies and the Core Member. As an available resource for specific/targeted offenders, I believe Circles of Support and Accountability to be an asset to our overall management of offenders serving their sentence in the community.”*

Tom,  
Probation Officer  
QPSW, 2008

## ! Preparing pilot Circles

Preparing and building pilot Circles is a task of the Circle coordinator. The following steps have to be taken in this process:

### 1. Select and inform the core member

Make sure the core member is meeting the selection criteria and no exclusion criteria are present.

Selection criteria are:

- Sex offender
- Motivated to participate in a Circle
- Able and willing to share information about risk and relapse prevention strategies with Circle members
- Medium to high risk of reoffending
- High need for social support

Exclusion criteria are:

- Psychopath (e.g. high scores on the PCL-R)
- Intellectually disabled
- Minor (under 18)

The level of risk should be assessed through structured risk assessment according to the state of the art procedures, and not be based on clinical judgement alone. This is necessary to guarantee that COSA is reserved for medium to high risk sex offenders. Also future research into the effectiveness of Circles makes structured risk assessment absolutely necessary. Make sure the core member is voluntarily joining a Circle and is not manipulated to do so. Motivation to change is a key factor in COSA which should not be compromised. This motivation can be somewhat external at the beginning (e.g. when participation in the Circle is highly recommended by the probation officer), it needs to be transformed into an internal motivation during the Circle process. A combination of personal and written information about COSA is appreciated by core members (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011).

## **!** 2. *Recruit and inform professionals in the outer Circle*

Make sure all professionals involved in the aftercare of the core member are informed about their clients' involvement in a Circle, and have a clear understanding of their role as a professional in the outer Circle. Explain the way the information is shared between inner and outer Circle and solve any issues around privacy regulations at forehand. This may introduce new forms of cooperation in the local network and needs careful attention and clear protocols. In Belgium for instance information sharing between probation and police is not a standard procedure, except in very urgent cases. In the Netherlands also the involvement of the police asks for special attention and communication efforts. Also, therapists often are prohibited to share information about their clients through their professional codes. Written consent of core members and specific information sharing protocols may be necessary.

## **!** 3. *Select volunteers carefully for this particular Circle*

Volunteers that have passed the selection process and the training must be interviewed about their preferences and sensitivities with regard to a core member. The forging of a Circle is a delicate process that needs to take into account these issues. For instance, experiences with sexual abuse of a certain type within the own social network of the volunteer may be a key motivator for volunteering, but the volunteer may choose not to want to work with this specific type of offender. Also the core member will be interviewed about his preferences and sensitivities with regard to volunteers. For example if he has been abused by a very dominant father himself, he may have difficulties to deal with a very dominant male in his Circle. On the other hand, it may be a challenging experience that helps him overcome his past.

In order to provide the core member with a rich social network that enhances his social capital in the greatest possible extent, it is important to build a diverse Circle, involving volunteers of different ages, sexes and backgrounds. In case of special needs of the core member, it is advised to engage volunteers with special skills to match these.

## **!** 4. *Solve practical issues:*

- Find a suitable location for Circle meetings
- Buy pre paid cell phones for Circle volunteers
- Organise insurance for volunteers

The location for Circle meetings should be confidential, discrete and neutral. The core member is making essential changes in his life and is trying to regain his place in society. The location for Circle meetings should reflect this process and therefore should not be connected to detention or probation. On the other hand, the location should enable anonymity in order to prevent negative attention to the Circle. Examples of appropriate meeting places are community centres, church facilities and professional education institutions. Finding an appropriate, low budget location that is available on a fixed day each week for a very long period of time is often very difficult and therefore the search is best started at the very beginning of a project.

- ✓ As the Circle progresses, Circle meetings can be also held in the core members house, and purely social meetings can be held in a café or a sports accommodation, providing there are no risks for the core member to indulge dangerous fantasies or 'groom' children, young people or vulnerable adults at the location.

#### ✓ 5. *Introduce volunteers to each other*

Organize three Circle meetings prior to the formal commencement of the Circle without the core member present to ensure that volunteers feel comfortable enough with each other to start the Circle with the core member.

### **Quality management and supervision**

The management and supervision of quality standards is a shared responsibility of the regional project staff, steering committees and the national bureau and has two objectives: to support model integrity (to enable the inner Circle to develop a trusting relationship from which all three Circle functions are emerging in a balanced way) and to ensure program integrity (make sure that the project is in line with the devised and agreed national or regional 'code of practice' and all procedures are followed up as they are meant to, in order to guarantee the high quality support for the inner Circle). Some helpful procedures are developed by Circles UK and implemented also in the Netherlands and Belgium:

- ! Monitoring of Circle progress by Circle coordinators through Circle minutes
- ! Structured quarterly evaluation of the core members' process with the Dynamic Risk Review
- ✓ Supervision and coaching of Circle coordinators by an external professional supervisor
- ! Quarterly assessment of volunteers' specific support, coaching and training needs
- ! Additional training program for volunteers tailored to their needs
- ✓ Peer-coaching for Circle volunteers
- ! Supervision of regional project quality by regional steering committee
- ! Research into model and program integrity
- ✓ Annual auditing through external and peer auditors

These instruments and procedures are explained in more detail in chapter 4: 'Guide to protocols and manuals' and chapter 5: 'Monitoring and evaluation guide'.

### **Obtaining and ensuring commitment**

A COSA Circle is a long term approach that benefits from long term commitment of volunteers, professionals and project staff. It is good practice in the European projects to support the commitment of all involved in a COSA initiative by regular social meetings or educational meetings like lectures, conferences or symposia.

These meetings offer the opportunity to exchange COSA experiences and expertise and to build and renew social ties that support the motivation to stay engaged in Circles. Especially volunteers can benefit from these meetings. In the UK, a national Circles conference is organized each year for all COSA professionals, volunteers and projects staff and other interested people. Also core members may be invited to this annual conference and in some cases contribute through personal testimonies about their own process and the process of their Circle. Other social events can be an annual celebration at birthdays and appropriate with volunteers and core members of one regional project. Volunteers' commitment may also benefit from peer coaching. In Belgium, COSA volunteers are also invited to other (non-COSA related) public activities of the House of Justice.

#### ✓ **Information about the project**

As a COSA initiative is on its way, stakeholders, professionals, volunteers and the general public should be informed about the proceedings from time to time. In the UK and the Netherlands a digital periodical newsletter is distributed through a mailing list by the national bureau or organisation, to keep everybody informed. Anyone who is interested can apply for this newsletter.

The general public is informed through a website and through the media. To this end, in the Netherlands and Belgium, projects staff and media experts of the organisations that are involved in the national program bureau developed good contacts with dedicated journalist and editors.

### Timing of project development

Starting a new Circle project requires a lot of ground work as described above. Project staff will gradually become more experienced and should be granted some 'learning time', before the maximum amount of Circles is dedicated to their supervision. This makes projects more expensive in the beginning, compared to fully operational and experienced regional projects. Also, new regional projects should be able to profit from earlier experiences. If proliferation of COSA throughout the country is undertaken by a single organisation (e.g. a national probation organisation), it is important to utilize the experience of first projects. Therefore gradual expanding the number of Circle projects is advised.

## 3.3 References

Elliot, I. & Beech, A. (2011). *A cost-benefit analysis of Circles of Support and Accountability*. Reading: Circles UK.

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Pasmans, V. (2011). Personal communication. Interview held on April 26, 2011.

QPSW (2003). *Circles of Support and Accountability in the Thames Valley. Interim Report November 2003*. London: Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

## 4 Guide to protocols and manuals

### 4.1 Introduction

The quality standards of COSA are outlined in a body of protocols and manuals, covering different aspects of implementation. There are some materials that are obligatory for any COSA project (marked !). These protocols and manuals are delivered under a license agreement and may be obtainable through Circles UK or a planned European platform which would regulate the proper use of such materials. Poor implementation in any country can lead to reduced effectiveness and bad publicity and can harm Circle projects in other countries too. Therefore in this European handbook, only the goals and contents headings of these protocols manuals are outlined, and the complete documents are not provided. Other materials are advised for being helpful, but are not obligatory in the establishment and operation of COSA (marked ✓).

The documents will be described in a standardized fashion, giving information about:

Aim  
Content  
To whom this document should be available (target group)  
At what moment in the implementation process this document should be made available  
Other remarks

The following documents described here are :

The code of practice  
Implementation guide  
Organisational plan  
Strategic communication plan  
Training program for Circle coordinators  
Training manual for volunteer training  
Volunteer application form  
Volunteer policy plan  
Volunteer agreement  
Supervision and coaching protocol  
Core member referral form  
Core member needs evaluation form  
Protocol for the selection of a core member  
Intervention protocol for professionals in the outer Circle  
Circle agreement  
Exit strategy

**Documents and manuals that are used for monitoring and evaluation purposes are described in chapter 5.**



## ! 4.2 Code of practice

Aim	This document describes the criteria for starting, operating and managing 'Circles of Support and Accountability' (Circles), with which all organisations and persons who have or seek a formal relationship with a national COSA initiative need to comply.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A comprehensive description of the primary goals and fundamental values of COSA;</li> <li>2. Definition of core concepts of COSA, in order to develop a shared language;</li> <li>3. A short description of the theoretical model behind Circles;</li> <li>4. A description of mandatory operational principles on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- organisational structure and project accountability</li> <li>- financial management and control</li> <li>- planning and monitoring</li> <li>- personnel and volunteers</li> <li>- representation of Circles</li> <li>- effective services and processes</li> <li>- public safety and risk management.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Target group	Steering committees; Circle project staff; Professional organisations and volunteer organisations that operate Circles or want to start Circles.
Availability	The code of practice should be present and available for all members of the target group from the beginning of the implementation process, providing they have satisfied a national COSA organisation, or holding agency, as to their commitment to the COSA model, can evidence sustainability in the mid-term, and have a solid infrastructure for management and governance.
Other remarks	Adaptations of this document may be necessary due to the national context, but must always be supervised by the license holder.

## ! 4.3 Implementation guide

Aim	The aim of the implementation guide is to instruct future project coordinators and project staff about the necessary preconditions for any Circles project and the steps that have to be taken in the implementation process in order to maintain program integrity.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A short description of COSA, the primary goals and fundamental values, and the theoretical model;</li> <li>2. Description of organisational structure of the COSA initiative;</li> <li>3. Preconditions for Circle projects to start;</li> <li>4. Description of steps and procedures in the preparation stage of a Circle project, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building regional<sup>7</sup> support and a regional network</li> <li>- recruitment and selection of volunteers</li> <li>- building an inner Circle</li> <li>- building an outer Circle;</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. Description of steps and procedures in the operational stage of a project, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- planning of Circle meetings</li> <li>- coaching and supervision of volunteers</li> <li>- evaluation of Circle process.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Target group	Regional project staff; Regional steering committee.

<sup>7</sup> Where the word 'regional' is used it is not intended to imply that this tier of organisation is vital to the COSA structure, and some COSA initiatives will begin and remain at a geographically confined and 'local' level. The words 'regional' and 'local' will therefore be used inter-changeably, at times one being the more suited level of organisation than the other, or being a fore-runner to the other

Availability	This document should be available before the start of a regional project. Due to growing practical expertise, it will need to be adapted in the course of the implementation process by constant exchange of information between regional projects and a national bureau.
Other remarks	Since changes in the document may be necessary beforehand due to specific national conditions, an adaptation study should be conducted, in order to assess the feasibility of the implementation conditions and processes.
	The implementation guide is a leading document in any evaluation of program integrity.

#### ✓ 4.4 Organisational plan

Aim	The following elements form the organisational structure of the COSA project and describe the tasks and responsibilities of national and regional project staff.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of tasks, responsibilities and members of the national steering committee;</li> <li>2. Description of tasks, responsibilities and members of the regional steering committee;</li> <li>3. Description of tasks, responsibilities and members of the national bureau;</li> <li>4. Description of tasks, responsibilities and members of the regional projects;</li> <li>5. Description of other associate functions, e.g. research.</li> </ol>
Target group	Grant provider; National and regional steering committees; National and regional project staff.
Availability	The organisational plan should be agreed upon by the funders and all steering committees involved in the preparation stage of a Circles project.
Other remarks	The organisation plan is a document that will need regular updating when a Circles project is expanding.

#### ! 4.5 Strategic communication plan

Aim	To support effective media communication in order to manage risks associated with interest from the press and wider public.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic information about COSA and the project;</li> <li>2. Situation analysis: challenges and supportive features in the media landscape;</li> <li>3. Core messages;</li> <li>4. Target groups and communication aims;</li> <li>5. Communication media per target group;</li> <li>6. Scheduling of communication actions, recommendations and roles / training;</li> <li>7. Practical tips: dealing with the media / crisis management.</li> </ol>
Target group	Steering committees; National and regional project staff; Volunteers.
Availability	It is advised to develop a strategic communication plan early in the preparatory phase of a project and especially inform volunteers, since they may be approached by the media.
Other remarks	Circle initiatives easily attract media attention. This attention can be very useful in the recruiting of volunteers, but always needs to be dealt with carefully, in order to prevent the dissemination of incorrect information.

## ! 4.6 Training program for Circle coordinators training

Aim	To provide a schedule for the three day training of Circle coordinators.
Content (not necessarily in this order)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic information on COSA and project organisation;</li> <li>2. Basic materials: code of practice, implementation plan, evaluation and monitoring guide;</li> <li>3. Core member selection;</li> <li>4. Volunteer selection, training and coaching;</li> <li>5. How to deal with risk and responsibilities; consultation and supervision;</li> <li>6. Exit strategies;</li> <li>7. Theoretical background of the COSA model &amp; scientific research;</li> <li>8. Licence agreement and availability of materials.</li> </ol>
Target group	Project managers; Circle coordinators; Trainer/supervisor; All others involved in the training.
Availability	The training program and materials need to be available for all involved well before the first training of Circle coordinators.
Other remarks	The Circle coordinators training is delivered by the national bureau. If no national bureau is in place, the trainer/supervisor and the first Circle coordinators need to access this training abroad from another country experienced in delivery of COSA.

## ! 4.7 Training manual for volunteer training

Aim	To provide Circle coordinators with all background information needed for the volunteer training and their coaching and supervision role.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Background information about COSA               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theoretical background</li> <li>- Organisation</li> <li>- Volunteers;</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Volunteer selection interview;</li> <li>3. Training starters (to break the ice and support group process in the training);</li> <li>4. Values and history of COSA;</li> <li>5. Roles and responsibilities of volunteers;</li> <li>6. Working with professionals;</li> <li>7. Public safety: risk and risk management, basic models and methodologies of working with Sex offenders;</li> <li>8. Volunteers self-care needs;</li> <li>9. Supervising and managing volunteers;</li> <li>10. Profile and training demands for Circle coordinators.</li> </ol>
Target group	Circle coordinators; Trainer/Supervisor; Co-trainers (e.g. professionals in the outer Circles).
Availability	The manual for the volunteer training must be available for the Circle coordinators before they start with the recruiting and selection of volunteers.
Other remarks	Future Circle coordinators must have taken part in the Circle coordinators training and in a volunteer training themselves, before they can deliver the volunteer training. The training manual needs adaptation tot the specific national context, regarding information about the COSA projects and its embedding in the network of sex offender aftercare and information about sex offender treatment.

## ! 4.8 Volunteer application form

Aim	The volunteer application form is asking for all information needed in the first selection of volunteers.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contact information;</li> <li>2. Experiences in work and volunteering;</li> <li>3. Relevant skills and expertise;</li> <li>4. Motivation;</li> <li>5. Availability;</li> <li>6. References</li> <li>7. Consent to check criminal background.</li> </ol>
Target group	Volunteers; Project coordinators; and/or Circle coordinators.
Availability	The volunteer application form needs to be available from the start of the recruiting activities. Volunteers who apply will be asked to fill in this form before the first personal interview.
Other remarks	Make sure all volunteer information is safely filed.

## ! 4.9 Volunteer training resource book

Aim	To provide Circle volunteers with all information needed during the initial training.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mission statement, principles and values of COSA;</li> <li>2. Basic information about the COSA model;</li> <li>3. Risk management: the network of organisations;</li> <li>4. Circle process model;</li> <li>5. Tasks and responsibilities of volunteers;</li> <li>6. Examples of Circles;</li> <li>7. Volunteer support and supervision;</li> <li>8. Personal boundaries and self regulation;</li> <li>9. Personal statements of volunteers, core members and professionals.</li> </ol>
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinators; Regional project coordinators.
Availability	All volunteers get the training resource book before or on the day of the training. It provides all material they will need during the initial training and they can use it as a reminder afterwards.

## ! 4.10 Volunteer policy plan

Aim	To provide volunteers with all information they need for their performance in the inner Circle.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mission statement, principles and values of COSA;</li> <li>2. Privacy regulations;</li> <li>3. Volunteer profile, selection and de-selection criteria;</li> <li>4. Tasks and responsibilities of volunteers;</li> <li>5. Basic training and additional training program;</li> <li>6. Circle process: different types of Circles and procedures, the first Circle meetings;</li> <li>7. Volunteer support and supervision;</li> <li>8. Personal boundaries and self regulation;</li> <li>9. Circle agreement;</li> <li>10. Other volunteer jobs within the project;</li> <li>11. Practical issues;</li> <li>12. Safety regulations;</li> <li>13. Complaint procedure.</li> </ol>
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinators; Regional project coordinator.
Availability	<p>The volunteer policy plan is one of the first documents that should be available in the course of the implementation process. Since recruiting, selecting and training volunteers is crucial to the project, all project members should have a shared knowledge on volunteer policies, so that any questions of future volunteers can be answered correctly.</p> <p>Volunteers receive the volunteer policy plan in the course of the initial volunteer training.</p>
Other remarks	The volunteer policy plan needs to be adapted to the national project conditions. Any adaptations however need to comply with the code of practice and the implementation plan.

## ! 4.11 Volunteer agreement

Aim	A formal and signed declaration of compliance with the volunteer policy plan.
Content	Statement of being informed about volunteer policies and willingness to comply.
Target group	Volunteers; Project coordinator; Circle coordinator.
Availability	The volunteer agreement is signed when a volunteer is definitely taking part in the project.

## ! 4.12 Core member referral form

Aim	To provide the regional Circle coordinator with all information needed for the selection of the core member.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Client's contact information, name, date of birth, criminal history;</li> <li>2. Referring professional contact information;</li> <li>3. Agreement of information sharing;</li> <li>4. Judicial information about the client;</li> <li>5. Motivation for referral;</li> <li>6. Risk assessment;</li> <li>7. Treatment information;</li> <li>8. Victim information;</li> <li>9. Specific needs, relapse prevention plan if extant;</li> <li>10. Other professionals involved in aftercare.</li> </ol>
Target group	Professionals in the regional network of sex offender aftercare; Project coordinators; Circle coordinators.
Availability	<p>This format should be made available to professionals in the local network in the process of core member recruitment.</p> <p>In the Netherlands, this form is used as a checklist for an intake consult with the referring professional and for the gathering of the information needed, since most information is available for project coordinators through the national files of the probation organisation.</p>
Other remarks	Make sure all core member information is safely filed.

## ! 4.13 Core member needs and resources profile

Aim	To provide regional/local projects with information about the needs of the future core member.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contact information;</li> <li>2. Information about conviction(s);</li> <li>3. Personal documents needs/relapse prevention plan ;</li> <li>4. Living conditions;</li> <li>5. Household management skills;</li> <li>6. Mobility;</li> <li>7. Work;</li> <li>8. Income;</li> <li>9. Health;</li> <li>10. Leisure time;</li> <li>11. Relationships;</li> <li>12. Treatment;</li> <li>13. Offence history;</li> <li>14. Relapse prevention strategies;</li> <li>15. Rehabilitation skills and fears;</li> <li>16. Agreement to share information.</li> </ol>
Target group	Future core members; Regional project coordinator; Circle coordinator.
Availability	The core member information form should be available when core members are being referred by professionals.
Other remarks	Make sure all core member information is safely filed.

#### ✓ 4.14 Core member selection protocol

Aim	To provide regional/local projects with information about necessary steps in the selection of core member, thus ensuring program integrity.
Content	1. Selection criteria; 2. Selection procedure.
Target group	Regional/local steering group; Regional/local project coordinator; Circle coordinators; Referring professional.
Availability	The core member selection protocol should be available from the beginning of the core member recruiting. The protocol will need adaptation to the national context.
Other remarks	This document is important in any evaluation of program integrity.

#### ! 4.15 Circle agreement

Aim	The Circle agreement is the basis of the Circle, it holds all Circle members accountable to the main goals of the Circle: no more victims.
Content	1. Compliance with Circle targets; 2. Compliance with Circle procedures; 3. Compliance with Circle supervision; 4. Agreement to being a 'good Circle member'; 5. Names and signatures of all Circle members, including the core member.
Target group	Volunteers; Core member; Circle coordinator.
Availability	The Circle agreement is signed by all Circle members in the first Circle meeting with the core member.

#### ✓ 4.16 Intervention protocol for professionals in the outer Circle

Aim	To inform professionals in the outer Circle about COSA, and their role and responsibilities in the outer Circle.
Content	1. General information about COSA; 2. Information about how Circles proceed; 3. Information about the project organisation; 4. Theoretical model of COSA; 5. Operational principles of COSA; 6. Operational procedures of COSA - selection of core members - selection of volunteers - forging of a Circle; 7. Procedures in the operational stage of a Circle.
Target group	Professionals in the outer Circle.
Availability	This document is helpful in the dissemination of correct information about COSA and should be made available to professionals who are referring core members and/or are involved in the outer Circle.

## ! 4.17 Exit strategy

Aim	To inform local and regional project organisations about necessary steps in the safe closure of a project.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Introduction;</li><li>2. Project governance actions;</li><li>3. Operational actions.</li></ol>
Target group	Local/regional project coordinator; Local/regional steering committee.
Availability	The exit strategy should be available to project staff and steering committees prior to the commencement of operations of a circle project.
Other remarks	To develop an exit and contingency strategy to ensure the health and safety of staff, volunteers, core members and the community in case of closure of the project is one of the requirements in the code of practice.





## 5 Monitoring and evaluation guide

### 5.1 Introduction

Monitoring and evaluating COSA processes is a core activity of (national) project coordinators and of steering committees. There are three main reasons to put much effort into this:

- When you are introducing a new initiative like COSA, your activities will probably be against the political grain and against public opinion on sex offenders re-entering society. Your COSA project will be put under the looking glass and will be held accountable for the quality of deliverance and outcome – at least by the grant provider. Transparency and accountability are not only core features of the inner Circle, but also of the project as a whole.
- As a project provider you will feel the need to monitor and evaluate the processes that are going on in your project and in Circles in order to be able to comply with the code of practice, to identify bottlenecks and challenges, to learn from successful strategies and thereby improve the quality of Circles and of the whole endeavour.
- Scientific research into COSA and its effects is a must in order to legitimize the approach and the financial expenditures that are necessary to maintain the project. Also research on COSA is contributing to the national and international body of knowledge on secure sex offender reintegration and successful rehabilitation strategies. The monitoring and evaluation tools that are developed so far offer a wealth of information for research ends.

In the following paragraphs, aims and procedures of monitoring and evaluation are outlined and the instruments are described in more detail. The instruments are available under the license agreement.

### 5.2 Aims and procedures

#### Aims

The main purpose of all monitoring and evaluation strategies is to support and improve program integrity and to learn from experiences and use them to improve the project. By program integrity we mean: adherence of all project members to the procedures and protocols that are developed to support and supervise the work of the inner Circle - which is where it all happens, and what makes COSA such an effective approach. Under the licence agreement, projects are mandated to develop sound monitoring and evaluation procedures, in order to be able to intervene and support when necessary. Obligatory procedures are marked **!**, best practices that are not obligatory are marked **✓**.

#### Procedures

In the European model, a system of stepped monitoring and evaluation is developed. This system is outlined shortly below, and is described in more detail in 5.3.

#### **!** *Evaluation of volunteer training*

The volunteer training is evaluated for instance through a short questionnaire that is filled in by volunteers before and after the training and measures perceived knowledge and skills on relevant topics. Also personal interviews are held with all volunteers after the training.

#### **!** *Minutes of all Circle meetings and all individual contact*

The volunteers write minutes of all Circle meetings and individual contacts and mail them to the Circle coordinator as soon as possible.

**! Quarterly<sup>8</sup> reports to outer Circle and program bureau**

The Circle coordinator writes quarterly reports to the members of the outer Circle about the process of the core members and any issues that are of relevance to them.

The Circle coordinator writes quarterly reports to the program bureau about the proceedings of the Circle, the contacts with the core member, the group dynamics in the Circle, the process of the core member and issues that are rising in the outer Circle.

**! Regular evaluation of dynamic risk of the core member**

On a regular basis (e.g. every three months) the volunteers and the Circle coordinator hold a Circle meeting without the core member to evaluate the core members process with a standardized instrument, the 'Dynamic Risk Review'. The scores in this instrument are obtained through discussion, leading to consensus.

**! Regular evaluation with individual volunteers**

On a regular basis (e.g. every three months), but also in between if necessary, the Circle coordinator has an individual interview with each Circle volunteer to evaluate his or her contribution and identify any specific coaching and training needs.

**✓ Circle coordinator supervision**

Every six weeks, all Circle coordinators meet in supervision groups with an external supervisor, to discuss any issues that are related to the deliverance of COSA services. The supervisor monitors the program integrity.

**✓ Quarterly project reports**

Every three months the regional Circle coordinator reports to the national program bureau and the steering committee about the project proceedings and delivers data on number of Circle volunteers, formal and informal Circles<sup>9</sup>, number of core member referrals, etc.)

**✓ Annual audit: project membership review and renewal**

Once a year the national bureau and a member of a different project visit Circle projects and assess the adherence to the code of practice and additional support needs through interviews, file research and interviews with volunteers and/or professionals. In the Netherlands a phased audit plan has been developed for projects that are still in a developing process.

## 5.3 Instruments

For each step in the monitoring and evaluation process formats and tools have been designed. These instrument are described below.

**✓ Evaluation of training**

Name	Training needs questionnaire
Aim	To assess training needs before and after the volunteer training.
Content	1. Name of volunteer; 2. Knowledge items; 3. Skills items; 4. Additional treatment needs.
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinators; Trainer/supervisor.

<sup>8</sup> In the Netherlands, these are monthly reports

<sup>9</sup> An informal Circle is a Circle that has been dissolved, but keeps in touch with a core member through one or more volunteers who infrequently are in contact with the core member.

Implementation	There are two questionnaires that cover identical items: one to measure needs before the training, one to measure knowledge and skills after the training. The pre-training assessment can be used to identify specific training needs of a group that can be given specific attention in the training. The post- training evaluation can identify training needs that have not been met sufficiently and can be dealt with in an additional training programme.
Other remarks	The questionnaire has the format of a Likert scale and contains 15 knowledge items and 11 skills items and an open end question to assess additional training needs.

## ! Circle minutes and contact minutes

Name	Circle minutes
Aim	Monitoring of Circle process and process of core member.
Content	1. Circle identification + date of Circle meeting; 2. Short description of Circle meeting; 3. Comments on process of core member; 4. Comments on groups process/group dynamics; 5. Action plans/agreements made.
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinator.
Implementation	Circle minutes are written after each Circle meeting and sent to the Circle coordinator. The Circle coordinator reads the Circle minutes weekly and if necessary contacts Circle members to get more information or to coach the Circle.
Other remarks	Circle minutes are an important information source for a Circle coordinator. In order to be informative, Circle minutes should not be too formal. It is important that volunteers feel free to express their observations and concerns in a personal way, to convey the mood and processes in the Circle.
	Circle minutes need to be encrypted if sent by e-mail.

Name	Contact minutes
Aim	Monitoring of Circle process and process of core member.
Content	1. Circle identification code + date of contact; 2. Who initiated the contact; 3. Comments on subjects of conversation and/or type of activities; 4. Comments on the meeting.
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinator.
Implementation	Contact reports are written after each contact between the core member and one or more volunteers and sent to the Circle coordinator. The Circle coordinator monitors the contact reports and if necessary contacts Circle member to get more information or to coach the Circle.
Other remarks	All other Circle members are informed about intermediate contacts between the core member and the volunteer in the following Circle meeting.
	Contact reports need to be encrypted, if sent by e-mail.

**! Quarterly<sup>10</sup> reports to outer Circle and program bureau**

Name	Quarterly reports to professionals in the outer Circle
Aim	Monitoring of Circle by outer Circle.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name of core member and period of report;</li> <li>2. Positive changes in the core member;</li> <li>3. Signals related to risk;</li> <li>4. Actions taken to deal with acute risk factors;</li> <li>5. Actions taken to support core member.</li> </ol>
Target group	Professionals in the outer Circle; Circle coordinator.
Implementation	The Circle coordinator writes these monthly reports to professionals, based on Circle minutes and other information he or she gets from the inner Circle. If necessary, the Circle coordinator contacts professionals immediately.
Other remarks	In the UK, the outer Circle is formalized within MAPPA – therefore reports are sent to MAPPA.

Name	Quarterly reports to the program bureau
Aim	Monitoring of program and model integrity.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Circle code;</li> <li>2. Circle information (start, frequency of meetings, individual meetings, attendance of Circle coordinator, etc.);</li> <li>3. Observations on group process;</li> <li>4. Actions of Circle coordinator to support group process;</li> <li>5. Observations on core member (positive changes in the core member, signals related to risk);</li> <li>6. Actions taken to deal with acute risk factors;</li> <li>7. Actions taken to support core member;</li> <li>8. Observations about outer Circle (co-operation, issues that need attention, actions taken etc.);</li> <li>9. General: issues that need attention next month.</li> </ol>
Target group	Circle coordinators; Regional project coordinator; Program bureau (trainer supervisor).
Implementation	These more elaborate quarterly reports are an important instrument for regional coordinators and the program bureau (especially trainer/supervisor) to monitor Circle processes. Unsolved issues emerging from these reports can be dealt with in supervision and/or may lead to adaptations in procedures. Also, in case of recidivism, the project can account for the process in the Circle and the steps taken.
Other remarks	The information in these monthly reports is valuable for any process evaluation of your project.

<sup>10</sup> Monthly in the Netherlands

### ! Regular evaluation of dynamic risk of the core member

Name	Dynamic Risk Review
Aim	Regular monitoring of dynamic risk and protective factors of core member to a schedule set by the national or regional manager.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Circle code, no. of evaluation, date;</li> <li>2. Evaluation of dynamic risk and protective factors in four clusters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sexual interest</li> <li>- Offence related cognitions and attitude</li> <li>- Relationships</li> <li>- Self regulation.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinator; Program bureau.
Implementation	The DRR is scored by the Circle coordinator, after consulting with volunteers in an evaluation meeting without the core member present. Scores can be computed into a sum score, according to a scoring manual. Score development is used to identify progress or gaps in Circle (monitoring) activities. The anonymous DRR is sent to the national program bureau for research purposes.
Other remarks	Core members should be informed about the outcome of the evaluation.

### ! Regular evaluation of volunteers

Name	Topic list for regular evaluation interviews
Aim	To monitor specific coaching needs of volunteers and other issues related to the inner Circle to a schedule set by the national or regional manager.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Perception of volunteering;</li> <li>2. Evaluation of impact of being a COSA volunteer;</li> <li>3. Evaluation of group process;</li> <li>4. Evaluation of core member process and goals;</li> <li>5. Motivation.</li> </ol>
Target group	Volunteers; Circle coordinators.
Implementation	Circle coordinators use this topic list in individual interviews with the volunteers and make written reports on relevant issues. They communicate specific training needs to the trainer/supervisor.
Other remarks	The evaluation interviews should be conducted on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly) in an informal, pleasant way in which the volunteer feels comfortable to discuss any issues that are relevant. The topic list therefore should help the Circle coordinator not to forget any important issues and should not 'dictate' the line of conversation.

## ✓ Quarterly project reports

Name	Quarterly project reports
Aim	Monitoring of regional Circle projects.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project identification and period of report;</li> <li>2. Number of active Circles;</li> <li>3. Information on recidivism and risk behaviour of core members;</li> <li>4. Accounts on volunteers (active, passive, drop outs, waiting for training etc.);</li> <li>5. Accounts of media activities;</li> <li>6. Accounts of other PR activities;</li> <li>7. Request for support, adaptation of materials etc..</li> </ol>
Target group	Regional project coordinator; Program Bureau (Quality manager); Steering committees.
Implementation	The regional project coordinator sends quarterly reports to the Program Bureau. The reports are monitored by the Quality manager.
Other remarks	These more statistical data of these quarterly reports are valuable for process and product evaluations of your project.

## ✓ Annual audit<sup>11</sup>

Name	Audit plan
Aim	To ensure all Circles Coordinators and Managers are clear as to the various stages and processes of the auditing process. In the UK, audits are linked to membership review and renewal under a licence agreement, in the Netherlands, the main aim of an audit is to support projects in maintaining program integrity, quality standards and to adhere to the code of practice. To inform and engage Coordinators and managers for the role of Co-reviewer.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to the purpose and process;</li> <li>2. The 5 review stages/timetable;</li> <li>3. Reviewing the requirements;</li> <li>4. The process principles;</li> <li>5. Gathering evidence;</li> <li>6. Roll-out stages.</li> </ol>
Target group	Project staff; Steering committees; Co-reviewers.
Implementation	The audit plan is sent to all Circle projects who work under the code of practice.

Name	Review form
Aim	To gather evidence about adherence to the code of practice.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Requirements (items from the code of practice);</li> <li>2. Supporting evidence;</li> <li>3. Self Assessment Comments by Project on evidence provided;</li> <li>4. To be demonstrated evidence.</li> </ol>
Target group	National bureau, lead-auditor; Project staff; Co-auditors; Steering committees.

<sup>11</sup> Circles-NL is working with an interim audit procedure, since ultimate decisions about the auditing process in the Dutch national conditions have not been taken yet, therefore the audit procedure of Circles UK is presented here.

Implementation	This form is used to gather and document the results of an audit in a summarized and standardized way.
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Name	Review Report
Aim	To inform project staff of reviewed projects about strengths and weaknesses of their project. To inform the national bureau about the quality of Circle projects and their specific support needs.
Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project &amp; audit information;</li> <li>2. Deficits;</li> <li>3. Deficit action plan;</li> <li>4. Comments of project staff;</li> <li>5. Outstanding/innovative practices.</li> </ol>
Target group	Local/regional project staff; Local/regional steering committees; National circles organisation.
Implementation	The review report is sent to the audited project and its steering committee by the auditors.





## 6 How to gather and use evidence

### 6.1 Introduction

COSA has been developed as a practise based approach, out of a strong belief in ethical and practical principles and was less derived from theoretical insights into sex offender relapse prevention. The call for ‘evidence based practise’, however, is growing in social intervention policies and funding, which means that interventions more and more have to provide proof that money has been well spent and goals are being met.

This may sound as if research is only imposed on Circle projects from the outside, that the results will only be used to be accountable to these external parties, and that they will hardly benefit from it. Nothing could be further from the truth, because Circle projects themselves have to take many decisions in the course of project development. Therefore projects also are in need of valid and reliable information in order to make educated choices, for example about the selection of core members or the volunteer training. Ongoing research into project development and project outcome and effects is a way to inform these choices. External accountability and internal development can be very well combined.

#### Applied Research

These types of research in social sciences are usually referred to as ‘applied research’. Applied research is different from so-called fundamental research in its focus on accumulation and distribution of knowledge in order to improve (the application of) policies and practices, whereas fundamental research is focused on testing theories and generating new theories. Applied research leads to more practical but often only locally valid knowledge, fundamental research leads to more abstract but often more generally valid knowledge. Both types of research need to go hand in hand. In the long run, COSA projects can be subject to both types of research, but applied research is most plausible in the process of initial implementation of COSA projects. Project coordinators should be able to initiate and monitor research, but should not conduct research themselves. It is advised to seek cooperation with researchers from qualified research institutes or universities.

Being closely connected to problems and questions that emerge from the daily work of professionals in the field, applied research in program deliverance, program outcome and program efficacy has three key features (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008):

- Linkage: the type of research should be linked to the developmental stage of the intervention
- Embeddedness: research into interventions should ‘fit’ into the procedures of program deliverance, research procedures should not ‘add up’ to the workload of professionals, but be incorporated into their daily routine and into the registration logistics as much as possible
- Usefulness: research data should be useful on several levels, from the professional who is delivering the service, to the manager of institutions involved, to national policy makers.

Strategies to make sure these three research conditions are met as much as possible will be outlined in the next paragraphs.

### 6.2 Project development and research strategies

Research into COSA should be linked to the developmental stage of a project. As Circle projects are going through different stages of development and proliferation, there is a natural development in research questions that emerge from praxis. At each stage different types of research questions and –consequently - different research strategies are necessary. For each stage, there is a variety in research strategies available to applied research in the social sciences. The table below shows the combinations of these, based on experiences in COSA projects so far. Key features of the diverse research strategies are explained below, in order to inform project coordinators.

Suggestions for further reading are made in the reference list.

The first two types of studies (feasibility study and adaptation study) can be executed by project staff with research experience; the more evaluative types of study should be conducted by an external, independent researcher, to prevent that biased viewpoints influence the research findings.

Table 1: Research strategies

Developmental stage & tasks	Research Question	Type of study	Research strategy
Project proposal: Orientation on project goals, acquisition of funding	Is a COSA project feasible in the given national context?	Feasibility study (§ 6.2.1)	Desk research Interviews with COSA experts Interviews with stakeholders Focus groups
Pilot preparation: Development of procedures and manuals	What adaptations need to be made to COSA standards and procedures given the specific national and regional context?	Adaptation study (§ 6.2.2)	Desk research Interviews Focus groups
Pilot implementation: Supervision of quality standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do the national and local adaptations to COSA standards prove to be valid en workable in real life?</li> <li>2. How does the implementation of the pilot proceed and how can the implementation process be improved in order to meet quality standards?</li> </ol>	Pilot implementation evaluation (§ 6.2.3)	Participant observation Interviews Focus groups Logbook
Sustained implementation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementation of quality management routines and</li> <li>2. Deliverance of short-term goals</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the extent of program integrity and model integrity? Do COSA projects deliver services as intended, when compared to quality standards?</li> <li>2. Are re-integration and rehabilitation being reached as short-term effects<sup>12</sup> ?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Process evaluation (§ 6.2.4)</li> <li>2. Output evaluation (§ 6.2.5)</li> </ol>	Documentation / In-depth case-analysis Interviews
Further proliferation of COSA projects: Advocacy	Are prevention of new victims and long-standing desistance from crime being reached as long-term outcomes of COSA projects? Do Circles meet the goal: No more victims?	Combined output and outcome (or product) evaluation (§ 6.2.5)	Multiple case study Recidivism study

<sup>12</sup> In the theoretical model of change (Ch 1), the following short-term effects are to be expected: decreased emotional loneliness and risk behaviour, and improved participation in society, social integration, self image (narrative identity), motivation, self regulation skills and cognitions.

Program improvement and broad implementation: Program accountability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do COSA projects cause the desired output and outcomes or do they contribute significantly and substantially to these? In other words, are COSA projects effective ?</li> <li>2. Which practices / interventions within the COSA model are effective ingredients in the general target population and in subgroups?</li> </ol>	Effect evaluation (§ 6.2.6)	Longitudinal multiple case study Quasi experimental design Recidivism study with matched controls
Broad implementation: Program accountability	Are COSA projects cost-effective?	Cost–benefit analysis (§ 6.2.7)	Literature review Secondary data analysis

## 6.2.1 Feasibility study

### Features

A feasibility study is a kind of market research to inform decision makers about the possible market opportunities and the expected impact and results of a project (Thompson, 2005). A feasibility study for a particular project can provide information about:

- The current situation and its urgency (what is the exact nature and scope of the problem, what are client, victim, professional and societal needs and demands, is there a market for the project?)
- The business model (characteristics of the proposed product or service)
- Competitors in the market (are there alternative products or services already in the market?)
- Technical issues (requirements for product or service deliverance: how do we produce the service, what is needed?)
- Organisational issues (what are organisational requirements to product or service deliverance?)
- Legal issues (does the product or service align with legal requirements?)
- Economical issues (what are possible costs of the new product or service and do they match the benefits?)
- Scheduling (what is the time-frame in which the new product or service can be developed and delivered?).

As more extensively described in chapter 2 of this handbook, a feasibility study of COSA should at least thoroughly assess the following:

- The societal and political climate for sex offender rehabilitation
- Possible financial resources for Circle projects and their sustainability
- The judicial context
- Availability of sex offender treatment
- The professional infrastructure of sex offender aftercare and risk management.

### Strategies

#### Desk research

Desk research is literally doing research at your desk (with the help of internet) with the aim to get an overview of what is already known about the topic of your research. Research into the feasibility of a COSA projects should

start with a review of all accessible literature and documents about COSA, in order to get a comprehensive picture of what COSA is and what implications a COSA project might have. The websites of COSA projects in Canada, the UK and the Netherlands (see appendix 1) can provide a lot of initial information, and this European handbook provides an overview based on the COSA literature and documents available thus far. Desk research also allows you to review news media coverage and reactions on news websites concerning sex offender rehabilitation, in order to get an idea of the probable media reactions to the COSA project. In addition, documentation of local and national administration policies regarding sex offender management are subject of desk research.

### *Interviews with COSA experts*

To enliven the knowledge on paper about the requirements for COSA project implementation interviewing more experienced COSA experts can be very helpful. Visits to COSA projects abroad and interviews with project staff can provide a more realistic view on the barriers and challenges that go along with project implementation and on which could be anticipated.

### *Interviews with stakeholders*

Desk research as described above results in a comprehensive picture of what COSA currently is. The next step in a feasibility study is to assess the opinions of experts and stakeholders in sex offender aftercare about what COSA will be in the local situation. These experts and stakeholders of course need to be informed thoroughly about COSA before they can express their opinion. Face to face interviews are the most practical way to do this. These interviews can have a triple function: firstly they generate the data that are needed, secondly they serve as a dissemination tool, since they offer the opportunity to inform stakeholders about COSA, and thirdly, they also are a tool for building local and national working alliances.

### *Focus groups*

It is possible to organize focus groups instead of individual interviews, because they are more economical and produce important interaction-based results. Focus groups are (usually semi- structured) group interviews around a central subject and involve around six to eight people who meet once for a period of around two hours. Focus groups generate data by interaction between group participants, thus sharpening and refining individual responses to a more considered level (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010).

## **6.2.2 Adaptation study**

### **Features**

An adaptation study for COSA project implementation assesses the core elements of COSA protocols and practices and the need for adaptations of these to the national context of sex offender management in the community on both a national and local level.

Core elements of COSA protocols and practises to assess are:

- Selection criteria and processes for core members and volunteers
- Quality standards and protocols for Circle deliverance
- Quality standards and protocols for project management and supervision.

As more extensively described in chapter 3 of this handbook, in order to be able to foresee necessary adaptations to the existing protocols, an adaptation study of COSA should at least thoroughly assess the national context regarding:

- The judicial context
- Professional infrastructure regarding sex offender treatment
- Professional infrastructure and common practices regarding sex offender aftercare and risk management
- Volunteering.

## Strategies

### *Desk research*

Doing desk research as a part of an adaptation study involves review of documents about COSA procedures and principles, and of local and national policies regarding legal issues and sex offender management in the community. It may be difficult to obtain this information. So called 'grey literature', unpublished documents and policies, may be acquired through experts in the fields.

### *Interviews with professionals and managers*

Since there is often a gap between written policies and common practice, interviews with professionals and managers in the field are necessary to get a realistic picture of the infrastructure and common practices regarding sex offender aftercare and risk management. These interviews also give the opportunity to assess the views, experiences and possible support, if this has not already been part of a feasibility study. In particular, rules and regulations regarding information exchange should be assessed. We suggest interviewing professionals both on a management and on a worker level, since both have different and valid perspectives on COSA implementation requirements.

It is often possible and more economic to combine a feasibility and adaptation study.

## 6.2.3 Pilot implementation evaluation

### Features

Implementation studies evaluate the implementation process of a new procedure or method in a comprehensive way: 'What is happening and why?' (Werner, 2004).

Key issues in any implementation study are (Werner, 2004):

- What are the program goals, what is the concept and design? Are they based on sound theory and practice, and, if not, in what respects?
- Does the responsible agency (or agencies) have the resources and capacity available and in place to implement the program as planned, and if not, what is needed?
- Does the program, as resulted from the adaptation, really show us that it is suited to its environment?
- Are program processes and systems operating as planned, and, if not, how are they operated and why?
- Is the program reaching the intended target population with the appropriate services, at the planned rate and "dosage," and, if not, what causes this?
- Are clients achieving desired outputs and outcomes, and, if not, what are plausible causes of lacking or undesired output and outcomes?

Implementation processes are evaluated on two levels: assessment of discrepancies between plans and actual practices and evaluating the short-term outputs and long-term outcome through explanation of the way the implementation is proceeding and achieving results (or not). To explain the results of an implementation process a theoretical model for successful implementation of innovations is needed. Greenhalgh et al. (2004) provide such a theoretical framework.

Many of the advantages of an implementation study that are outlined by Werner (2004) are confirmed by COSA experiences so far. An implementation study is useful to provide rapid feedback to program managers during the pilots formative period (formative evaluation). It provides rich contextual and cultural information, therefore accounting for specific organisational and cultural issues and sensitivities. It provides information about the COSA project 'as it really is', since the implementation study is describing the process in its natural environment. And finally, an implementation study provides focussed and strategic information where and when necessary. Specific information needs can be dealt with through more detailing of research questions and focussing research to specific implementation issues or time-periods.

## Strategies

In general, implementation research can be done by an external independent researcher, who monitors the process from an objective point of view, or, alternatively, through a more participative research approach like action research, involving all relevant parties in actively examining actions and reflecting critically on them in order to improve results. In both cases the following strategies for data collection are useful.

### *Documentary analysis*

To assess the goals, planned processes and procedures of COSA pilots, project documents (after adaptation) should be analysed and compared to the data that are gathered in the field. In implementation processes, this might be a distinctively complex task, since protocols and documents are often being further developed and refined, partly based on the information that is gathered through the implementation research itself (Höing & Vogelvang, 2011). Informative documents in COSA projects are: the code of practice, the project plan, the implementation plan, the implementation protocol, training manuals and the monitoring and evaluation guide.

### *Project logbook*

A useful strategy for data collection in implementation studies of COSA projects is keeping a 'project logbook', entering all kinds of qualitative and quantitative information about processes and strategies throughout the initial implementation. Input from different levels (management and workers, support staff) will provide a comprehensive picture and background information on key decisions during the project development.

### *Participant observation*

Participant observation (meaning that the researcher is also taking part in pilot activities) can be applied in situations like project meetings, training sessions and Circle meetings to gather data on complex issues like cultural differences, management and decision making styles, coaching techniques etc. In the case of Circle sessions, attendance of an external researcher is not recommended. The Circle coordinator can act as data collector.

### *Interviews*

When conducting interviews in the course of an implementation study, the choice of respondents of course is crucial. To assess all processes going on in a COSA project, it is necessary to interview (representatives of) all parties involved: core members, volunteers, professionals in the outer Circle, and project staff. Managers of institutions involved in a local COSA project should be included to gain information about the level of embedding of COSA in local networks and of management constraints to implementation of COSA.

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups in the course of implementation research can deliver data on specific aspects of the pilot, like evaluation of training programs, successful strategies to recruit volunteers, bottlenecks in information exchange and many other topics.

## 6.2.4 Process evaluation

### Features

A process evaluation is dealing exclusively with the question: is the program delivered as intended? A process evaluation can be part of the implementation study during a pilot, but should also be conducted when project deliverance has reached a more definite stage. Process evaluations are delivering only preliminary data when conducted in the formative stage of the project, when processes still may be adapted and further tailored to specific national or local needs. After the formative stage it is advised to repeat process evaluations when the project is 'settled', thereby securing model fidelity in the long run.

Usually, a 'program' or 'intervention' is defined as "a set of clearly described, goal directed, theory based and systematic activities for a specified target group with specified needs, with a specified duration and frequency" (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). COSA projects do not entirely fit this description. We therefore propose to use a distinction between program integrity and model integrity.

Service delivery on a project level is standardized and prescribed through implementation standards like the code of practice and the implementation protocol, and adherence to these protocols is – in this context - referred to as '*program integrity*'. Measuring program integrity of Circles not only involves the evaluation of adherence to implementation protocols, but also the evaluation of organisational preconditions, something which is not common practice in the evaluation of interventions (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008).

Service delivery on a Circles level, is deliberately unspecified (within some boundaries), because each Circle must be allowed to develop a unique approach and momentum, tailored to the core members specific needs and personality and allowing volunteers to invest their specific expertise and competencies. Nevertheless, Circles are supposed to achieve a balanced way in delivering support, monitoring capacity and holding the core member accountable, and to build a supportive local network of professionals.

In the context of COSA, proper delivery of these core elements of the Circles model is referred to as '*model integrity*'.

Consequently, process evaluations of COSA projects will deal with following questions:

Regarding program integrity:

- Do the core members meet the selection criteria?
- Do the volunteers meet the selection criteria?
- Do Circle coordinators meet the function requirements?
- Does the supervision and coaching of the Circle meet the requirements of the implementation protocol?
- Do the project organisation and monitoring processes meet the requirements of the implementation protocol?
- Does the constellation of the outer Circle meet the requirements of the implementation protocol?

Regarding model integrity:

- Are the three key functions of the COSA model (support, monitoring, holding accountable) established within the Circle within a reasonable time frame and in a balanced way?
- Are the Circle activities tailored to the specific needs of the particular core member?
- Do inner and outer Circle co-operate as intended?

Delivering an intervention as designed - and as theoretically and empirically validated - is viewed as a precondition for program effectiveness (Andrews and Bonta, 2003), therefore process evaluations should precede or at least accompany effect studies.

## Strategies

The level of detail of a process evaluation is a matter of choice, depending on the purpose of the study (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). A general process evaluation of Circles may be undertaken by gathering data in retrospect, e.g. through interviews with Circle coordinators or project coordinators.

A more detailed and more valid evaluation of program and model integrity however is highly dependent on naturalistic data collection (collecting data as they occur naturally). To get a realistic account of 'what happens', Circles need to be followed on the spot, avoiding as much as possible biased views that reflect hidden agenda's, management policies, and good intentions rather than the real challenges, difficulties and dilemma's any Circle project is encountering. Observation and participant observation are often used as methods to collect data in such a context (Ritchie and Lewis, 2010), but in case of evaluation of a Circle process, these methods are not viable. Any kind of observation by a researcher would interfere with the process being studied.



### *Documentary analysis*

A next best solution is to work with data that are collected within the project itself for internal selection, monitoring and evaluation purposes, and to conduct a documentary analysis.

Examples of documents that are useful for this purpose are described in paragraph 6.4.

In the Dutch Circle project, a short questionnaire to evaluate the balance between the three Circle functions (support, monitoring, holding accountable) is developed (Circle functions evaluation form) and is administered by the volunteers and Circle coordinator together with the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR), a structured assessment of risk and protective factors.

### *Interviews*

For a better understanding of ‘what is happening’, additional in-depths interviews with core members, volunteers, professionals and project staff can help to interpret the outcome of the documentary analysis.

## **6.2.5 Outcome evaluation**

### **Features**

An outcome evaluation measures to what extent the middle- and long-term goals of an intervention have been achieved (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). Outcome evaluation is descriptive research rather than explanatory, and involves measuring and often quantifying results of an activity rather than providing information about processes, causes and consequences. An outcome evaluation informs project managers, policy makers and funding agencies about the productivity and success of the financial and personal efforts that are made.

Usually, outcome evaluations rely heavily on quantitative data, providing managers and funding organisations with ‘objective’ arguments to underpin their decisions. Examples of quantitative data are:

- The time a Circle needs to help the core member to achieve specified goals
- The number of Circles a project is providing
- The rate of recidivism of core members, or
- The number of volunteers from a local community involved in a COSA project.

Qualitative data however are extremely useful to give colour and meaning to numbers and rates and are helpful in understanding the results. Also, the combination of both types of data through triangulation can support the validity of the results (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010).

### *Specification of goals*

A key feature of outcome evaluation is the comparison of the desired outcome with the real outcome. In order to be measured in a reliable and valid manner, desired outcome goals must be specified in observable indicators, must be stable over time and must be shared and identically described by the people involved in the activities to achieve them (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). Also the level of evaluation should be specified, as goals are defined (and can be evaluated) at an individual case level (the core members’ goals), at an intervention level (the goals of Circles) and at an institutional level (the goals of Circle projects as a whole).

Generally speaking, the overarching goals of COSA can be derived from the COSA mission statement and seem to be quite clear: prevention of recidivism by core members, offender rehabilitation and a safer community. But even on a general level, choosing measurable indicators of these goals is difficult. What is considered as recidivism? Only sex crimes or also all other types of crimes? What do we count as recidivism? Self reported violations of law or probation rules? New arrests? New convictions? Any decision will have a huge impact on the outcome. Rehabilitation also is a complex, multidimensional, multifaceted phenomenon, including personal recovery, community re-integration and

adaptation to social norms by participation and citizenship. Each of these concepts needs further operationalization to render them measurable. Defining the concept of a safer community may be even more challenging, since subjective perceptions of safety and objective criteria often show quite different results.

General goals can be broken up into specific, more concrete goals on different levels, and this 'goal tree' reflects the theoretical model of change of COSA. Nevertheless, general goals should also be measured independently (and not through accumulation of specific goals), since the assumptions behind the theoretical model of change need to be proven empirically (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008).

Specific goals on the different levels should be shared and defined by those who are involved. Goals on an individual case level relate to the process of the core member and are defined and shared by the core member and his Circle. Examples of goals on an individual case level are: "the core member has a better relationship with his brother", or: "the core member develops adequate leisure activities".

Goals on an intervention level relate to the specific functions of the COSA model. Examples of shared goals on the Circles level are: "the Circles provide support, monitoring capacity and support treatment goals"; or: "members of the outer Circle exchange information about the core member on a structural basis".

Examples of shared goals on an institutional level relate to the function of COSA projects in the field of sex offender management in the community. Examples of goals on an institutional level are: "The COSA project is structurally embedded in the local professional network of sex offender management", or: "the COSA project is appreciated and supported by the local community through volunteers to operate Circles".

Defining indicators for these goals may be a difficult but also very educating task for project members, and is supporting agency and commitment.

## Strategies

### *Goal achievement*

Measurement of goal achievement may take on two different perspectives, reflecting two different research purposes: measurement of achieved change compared to starting conditions to inform further improvement of the approach (formative evaluation) or measurement of the status quo compared to norms, for instance to inform program funders (summative measurement) (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). Also, a combination of both is possible.

In the first case, the outcome evaluation is typically conducted through a baseline measurement at the start of a Circle or Circles project and an outcome measurement after a pre-defined amount of time. In the latter case, the outcome evaluation is based on a single measurement at a specified moment in the Circle and/or project process.

The strategies and instruments for data collection that can be applied are numerous. To do justice to the complex nature of Circle projects and the different goals at different levels, multiple case studies are a good choice as a research strategy. Case studies can provide detailed and in-depth information as they can integrate different perspectives and levels of analysis. Especially when numbers of Circles are still small, they can generate a wealth of information about outcome indicators. Another strength of case studies is their ability to connect the outcome to the context in which activities take place (Flyvbjerg, 2011). On the other hand, a multiple case study design can become very complex and time consuming.

Quantitative outcome data can be collected by administering standardized instruments that are tailored for specific goals or are measuring specific goal related concepts (like social support, self esteem or dynamic risk). Documentary analysis of monitoring and evaluation tools that are used by COSA projects (like the Dynamic risk review, monthly

reports to the program bureau, quarterly project reports to the program bureau) provide both quantitative and qualitative data, while interviews and focus groups can provide qualitative information about the context.

### Recidivism

Research into recidivism needs a different approach. As mentioned before, the definition of 'recidivism' is critical and should be well defined. A specification of re-offending of the recidivist gives insight into the nature and seriousness of the recidivism. Also, the source of information and the follow-up period should be specified.

#### *From the Hanson & Bussiere meta-analysis of recidivism studies (1998):*

"The most common measures of recidivism were reconviction (84%), arrests (54%), self reports (25%), and parole violations (16%). Multiple indexes of recidivism were used in 27 of 61 studies (44%). The most common sources of recidivism information were national criminal justice records (41%), state or provincial records (41%), records from treatment programs (29%), and self-reports (25%). Other sources (e.g., child protection records) were used in 25% of the studies. In 43% of the studies, the source of the recidivism information was not reported. The reported follow-up periods ranged from 6 months to 23 years (median = 48 months; mean = 66 months)."

Usually, recidivism studies generate only quantitative data (number of offenders who reoffend with specified types of offences). Since Circles have a distinct monitoring role, the evaluation of recidivism of core members can also take into account all kinds of problem behaviour and rule violations that lead to specific preventive interventions, either by the inner Circle or by professionals in the outer Circle. Also, the qualitative information available through Circle minutes and monthly reports give insight into the context in which problem behaviour occurs and the contribution of Circles to the prevention of recidivism. The Bates et al. studies on recidivism of core members in the UK (2008, 2011) are examples of this kind of recidivism study.

## 6.2.6 Effect evaluation

### Features

The main goal of an effect evaluation is to assess if:

- An intervention is achieving what it intended to
- If the problems that were targeted are reduced to an acceptable level
- If these effects can (at least to a significant degree) be contributed to the intervention and are not (only) caused by other factors than the intervention itself.

Gathering evidence about significant change (in problems) and the unique contribution of the program to this change distinguishes an effect evaluation from mere outcome evaluation (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). This implies that the status quo at the beginning of the program must be assessed, the intended outcome of a Circle must be specified, acceptable levels of problems must be defined and that other factors occurring during the Circle must be taken into account.

In some cases, effect studies compare different interventions to find out which one is more effective, or to what degree a new intervention is able to achieve better results. Also, this is a strategy that can be applied when a comparison between an intervention and no intervention is unethical (because of the immediate needs of the client).

Usually effects are measured in a quantitative way, allowing statistical procedures to calculate the degree of change, while accounting for other factors (occurring systematically and non-systematically) and to produce

figures that can be compared to other research of program effectiveness. To be able to calculate effects in this way, a basic assumption is, that the program is delivered in the same way by all service providers, otherwise it is not clear if the effect can be contributed to the program. This assumption is not always being met, but is rarely measured in effect studies. Also the quality of the therapeutic alliance is seldom measured, as an independent factor – ignoring the fact that ‘who works’ is as important as ‘what works’. Therefore, an effect evaluation in our opinion should always be accompanied by an evaluation of the model integrity and the program integrity, to inform the interpretation of results of effect studies.

Quantitative effect studies provide information about the amount of change that has taken place and the legitimacy of claims for effectiveness, but they do not explain why change happens. This needs to be specified in a theoretical model of change which is linking causes of problems, problem phenomena, and effective activities to reduce causes of problems to a desired outcome. A theoretical model of change needs further empirical validation - which is something an effect study can contribute to, if it is taking into account specific concepts that are described in model of change and are linked to specific aspects of the program.

A theoretical model of change is – by the way - not necessary to prove program effectiveness. Sometimes practise based interventions prove to be highly effective, while the underlying mechanisms are not yet understood. A typical example is EMDR – a widely used and effective therapy to reduce PTSS symptoms - of which the effective mechanisms are still not yet clear. COSA also falls into this category. It is a purely practise based approach, based on common sense and general sociological knowledge, that appears to be highly effective in the first effect studies, while a first theoretical model of change has been developed much later.

## Strategies

Effects of Circles can be measured in terms of short term or intermediate effects or outputs (changes on dynamic risk and protective factors that indicate a lower risk of reoffending) and long term or ultimate effects or outcomes (lower rates of reoffending). A comprehensive discussion of the available research strategies is beyond the scope of this handbook, therefore only the essential features of different strategies are outlined.

### *Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT's)*

The golden standard to measure program effectiveness is a randomized controlled trial (RCT), or, at least researchers have believed so for a long time. In a typical RCT design, appropriate candidates are randomly and in equal numbers assigned to two groups: one who does receive the treatment and one who does not. Target variables are measured pre- and post-test, and often the sustainability of effects is measured through follow-up measurement. In sex offender programs, level of risk is a typical target variable, implying that level of risk is a reliable predictor of recidivism. Through random assignment it is assured that groups do not differ from each other on relevant characteristics that could influence the possible outcome (like level of problems at the start). It is believed that by random assignment all other characteristics are levelled out. Both groups ideally stem from the same context and are assessed at the same time, to make sure that time elapsed and specific events in the context are not influencing the outcome. Lately, the appropriateness of RCT's for measuring effects in a realistic context has been questioned (Marshall & Marshall, 2007) and alternatives have been suggested. RCT's are not a feasible option for effect studies into COSA. A major problem arises from a key feature of the approach itself, as core members need to be motivated and willingly and voluntarily enter a Circle by choice – making random assignment impossible.

### *Repeated case studies (N = 1 studies)*

The next best option to an RCT is to conduct a number of case studies (repeated n = 1 studies) in which scores of participants are not compared to a more or less identical control group, but to their own scores before the treatment condition. Key assumption is, that changes in scores that coincide with the start of a treatment may be attributed to the treatment. If these co- incidents can be repeated (e.g. by lowering the level of treatment or inserting no-treatment- periods) the evidence is even stronger (Kazdin, 1981). The higher the number of cases that

show the same pattern of scores, the stronger the evidence. More than eight case studies in a row - at the absence of conflicting data - form an acceptable alternative to an RCT, according to the American Psychological Association (Task force, 1995 in: Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008).

A repeated case studies design requires continuous measurement with instruments that have good psychometric qualities and provide norms for clinical cut-off scores (indicating the score that fall into the 'normal' range (Harkins & Beech, 2006, Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). Also change should be measured by several indicators for success (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). In the case of Circles, dynamic risk and protective factors are typically the variables we are interested in. To obtain a reliable baseline, pre-test scores must be measured at least twice before the start of a Circle. This approach offers the opportunity to follow the core member in his process and gather qualitative material about the context of change as well (like critical incidents in the core members life, quality of his social network, group processes in the Circle).

### *Quasi experimental design*

In a quasi experimental design, two different groups are compared, but group assignment is not following a random procedure, but is based on naturally occurring groups. Group comparison can be based on actual comparison (follow participants during their process) or post hoc comparison. In post hoc comparison, groups (one who followed the intervention, one who did not get the intervention or followed another intervention) are selected from a larger sample, of which pre and post treatment data are available. Groups need to be matched on pre treatment levels of the outcome variable and relevant demographic variables (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). For example, if in a given national context, all sex offenders are being assessed for their dynamic risk with a structured risk assessment tool and this is done repeatedly during their term of conditional release, the post Circle scores of core members could be compared to a matched group of controls who have not participated in a Circle.

### *Recidivism study with matched controls*

Another strategy to measure effect is to compare available scores on relevant outcome measures (like recidivism) with scores of matched controls. Pairs of participants should be matched on relevant characteristics (like level of risk post-release, type of offence, living area etc.), with the intervention as testing variable. This strategy is applied by Wilson c.s. in the Canadian effect studies (paragraph 6.4).

### *Recidivism studies with expectancy rates*

When matched controls are not available for a recidivism study, an alternative strategy may be actuarial evaluation, comparing rates of re-offending with expected rates, based on actuarial risk, assessed through reliable risk assessment (Marshall, 2006).

## **Remarks**

Some cautious remarks have to be made regarding the interpretation of results of effect studies.

### *Definition of recidivism*

As stated earlier, the definition of recidivism needs to be clear: since COSA aims to support the core member in achieving a more balance life style, free from offending, not only sexual recidivism should be measured, but all (violent and other) recidivism, and positive effects should be demonstrated on all types of offences.

### *Dropout*

In order to benefit from a Circle, a core member needs to stay in it for a certain amount of time. The time needed to achieve sustained change is not clear: Circles last as long as needed. Early drop out (against the advice of Circle members) needs to be identified and analysed, because sex offenders who drop out of Circles early may represent a subgroup of the sample with specific characteristics (like higher scores on anti-social behaviour or autism), indicating that Circles are less appropriate for this group. Drop out can camouflage low efficacy.

### *Dark numbers*

A major problem with recidivism studies is the fact that recidivism is almost by definition underreported in official records, thus not reflecting actual recidivism (and thus overestimating program effectiveness). Estimates from the US show that only 40% of sexual crimes are reported, of which only 42% lead to arrest, of which 62% lead to conviction (Laws & Ward, 2011). Also recidivism can be counted differently: by selfreport, by arrests, by reconvictions or re-incarcerations. Possibly core members are more at the attention of prosecutors, thus having a higher probability of getting arrested. The extra monitoring capacity a Circle provides, may lead to a higher probability of detection of recidivism.

### *Age crime curve*

A well established fact in general criminology and specific sex offender research is the age crime curve (Laws & Ward, 2011), indicating that aging has a positive effect in itself on crime rates. The older offenders are, the less they are inclined to commit offences, and if they do, the seriousness of offences declines with age. Therefore, long term follow-up studies represent not only the effect of Circles, but also the effect of aging, and comparison groups should therefore always be matched on age.

### *Ceiling effect*

The (extra) effects that can be expected from Circles depend partly on the alternatives that are available for sex offenders. The impressive effects Wilson c.s have demonstrated in Canada are partly due to the fact that core members in Canada typically belong to a very specific group of offenders (Warrant Expiry Date - WED – prisoners), who have the highest risk of reoffending, but are released into the community without formal community supervision or aftercare (Wilson, 2009). In such conditions, COSA is able to achieve a very significant improvement. In many countries, sex offender management in the community includes mandated treatment and court ordered supervision for several years, often including support by probation organisations. Under such conditions, the ‘extra’ contribution of Circles to the re-integration process and reduction of recidivism will probably be less.

## **6.2.7 Cost-benefit evaluation**

### **Features**

A cost-benefit evaluation estimates the financial benefits of an intervention by linking efficacy to efficiency. A cost evaluation answers questions like:

- Is the money spent on the intervention paying off?
- How much does each euro spent on offender therapy (or any other intervention) return in savings? (e.g. due to crime reduction, which means less tax money spent on the criminal justice processes and victim costs).

The question whether investment in a certain intervention is worthwhile, is not only a matter of economical considerations, since effects can turn out on different dimensions, that can not easily be calculated in euro's. Subjective public safety is an effect that is difficult to value. Effects on different dimensions can be calculated through a cost-effect analysis, comparing costs of different alternatives with predicted outcome, without monetizing the effects (Ecorys & Verwey-Jonker, 2008).

### **Strategies**

Positive cost-benefit evaluations are a persuasive argument to inform decision makers in their allocation of tax payers money, but need to be carried out in a transparent and comprehensive way, in order not to evoke false expectations. A cost-benefit analysis of Circles is complex and requires a number of assumptions. This includes: a reliable estimate of the number of crimes that are prevented through Circles within a fixed time frame (e.g. per year), a reliable estimate of the costs of reconvictions, and a reliable estimate of the costs of Circles per core member. Also, the value of the money spent and saved needs to be comparable. Cost estimations must account for inflation and costs must be rated in the same currency in a particular year.

A cost benefit analysis is carried out through review of effect studies to calculate possible crime reduction (sometimes secondary data analysis is needed), a review of literature on national crime-cost calculations, and detailed information (gathered through documentary analysis or interviews) from the project management about Circle costs.

An extensive description of strategies for cost–benefit analyses is beyond the scope of this handbook. Boardman, Greenberg, Vining & Weimer (2005) and Ecorys & Verwey-Jonker, (2008; in Dutch) provide an overview.

## 6.3 Strategies for research management

Doing research is not a core business of volunteers, professionals and project staff involved in COSA projects. Nevertheless, volunteers, professionals and project staff are holders of a wealth of information and knowledge about Circle projects, Circle proceedings and Circle outcome. According to the second principle of applied research – embeddedness –, procedures to obtain this implicit knowledge should interfere as little as possible with the day to day routine of projects.

### Cooperation between research and project staff

Good practices to support the cooperation between researchers and workers in COSA projects are (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2010):

- Provide a clear research protocol that outlines:
  - research objectives and purposes
  - requirements for data collection (e.g. a clear description of the required activities of different project staff members, timing of activities)
  - roles and responsibilities of people involved in research activities
  - clear information on use of the data (interim feed-back, report, dissemination, confidentiality)
- Get clearance from people high in the project hierarchy (the management level) who are gatekeepers and let them introduce the research and stimulate participation of project staff
- Anticipate to concerns of project staff – most commonly additional time demands / agreement of partner agencies as to confidentiality and preserving anonymity of data
- Assign a single contact per regional project (e.g. the regional project coordinator) to monitor the collection of naturally occurring data and to assist with requirements for collection of generated data
- Keep the research infrastructure as simple as possible
- Be sensitive to cultural differences between settings, be flexible in the research approach where possible
- Provide (interim) feed-back of (preliminary) findings and discuss them with project members, on an individual case level as well as on an intervention and organisation level
- Provide information about the research regularly through newsletters or information bulletins.

### Use of project tools and activities for research purposes

Research instruments and procedures should be part of the routine project logistics as much as possible. The tables below show how standard tools and activities of Circle projects can be used to accumulate naturally occurring data for research purposes.

N.B. Apart from these tools and activities that help to gather naturally occurring data, additional data gathering through interviews, questionnaires, etc. will be necessary.

#### *Feasibility study*

Research objective	Project tool/activities	Naturally occurring data
Assess the support for COSA projects	Item list for interviews with stakeholders & written report of interview	Support, expectations, involvement

### Adapation study

Research objective	Project tool/activities	Naturally occurring data
Assess the needs of local professionals regarding project participation	Item list for interviews with local professionals & written report of interview	Needs, opportunities and bottlenecks for participation

### Implementation study

Research objective	Project tool/activities	Naturally occurring data
Assess implementation goals and plans regarding activities	Grant application Implementation protocol	Project plan Implementation goals
Monitor project development	Minutes of project board meetings	Processes and activities, dilemma's and decisions
Assess bottlenecks and successful strategies in project deliverance	Minutes of meetings of regional project teams	
Assess bottlenecks and successful strategies in volunteer recruitment	Registration of volunteer applications and selection results	Number of new volunteer applications following specific recruitment activities Number and reasons of de-selection and drop out
Assess bottlenecks and successful strategies in core member recruitment	Referral form for core member Checklist Regional project coordinator (RC)	Use of form, quality of information provided
	Core member needs evaluation form	Quality of information provided

### Process evaluation

Research objective	Project tool/activities	Naturally occurring data
Program integrity (selection criteria)	Core member selection protocol	Selection criteria and selection procedures
	Referral form for core member (NL: Checklist Regional Project Coordinator)	Level of risk Level of needs Date of risk evaluation Term of court ordered supervision Sex offender treatment Psychopathy Level of cognitive functioning Age
	Core member needs evaluation form	Motivation Specific needs
	Application letter of volunteers	Age/gender Motivation Stability
Experience/Skills	Item list for selection interviews & volunteers selection registration form	Motivation Stability Experience/Skills
Program integrity (training)	Evaluation of training Circle coordinators	Additional training needs



	Evaluation of training volunteers, questionnaire	Level of knowledge and skills Additional training needs
Program integrity (monitoring an supervision of Circles)	Quarterly reports of CC to program bureau	Frequency of individual and group supervision contact of CC with volunteers Frequency of Circle attendance of CC Frequency of contact of CC with professionals in outer Circle Nature of supportive interventions of CC
Model integrity (Circle functions and cooperation within inner Circle)	Quarterly reports of CC to program bureau	Description of Circle activities and group dynamics Description of core members' process
	Quarterly evaluation of Circle functions	Frequency of executing specific Circle functions
Model integrity (cooperation between inner and outer Circle)	Quarterly reports of CC to program bureau	Frequency of contact with individual professionals Frequency of outer Circle meetings
Model integrity (co-operation within outer Circle)	Monthly reports of CC to program bureau	Evaluation of contacts with and between outer Circle members

### *Outcome evaluation*

<b>Research objective</b>	<b>Project tool/activities</b>	<b>Naturally occurring data</b>
Assess outcome on an individual level	Quarterly reports of CC to program bureau	Description of core members' process
	DRR	Level of dynamic risk and protective factors
	Quarterly individual evaluation of volunteers (item list & written reports)	Evaluation of impact of being a COSA volunteer Evaluation of core member process and goals Motivation
	Quarterly reports of RC	Recidivism and problem behaviour
Assess outcome on an intervention level	Quarterly evaluation of Circle functions	Frequency of executing specific Circle functions
	DRR	Changes in level of dynamic risk and protective factors Accumulated data
	Quarterly reports of CC to program bureau	Outcome of contact with individual professionals Outcome of outer Circle meetings Evaluation of contacts with and between outer Circle members
Assess outcome on an organisational level	Quarterly reports of RC to program bureau	Number of active Circles Information on recidivism and risk behaviour of core members Accounts on volunteers (active, passive, drop outs, waiting for training, etc.) Accounts of media activities Accounts of other PR activities

## Effect study

Research objective	Project tool/activities	Naturally occurring data
Assess level of risk and need pre-Circle	Referral form for core member Checklist RC	Level of risk Level of needs Date of risk evaluation
Assess change within Circle	DRR	Changes in level of dynamic risk and protective factors
Assess problem behaviour, recidivism and drop out	Quarterly reports of RC to program bureau Quarterly reports of CC	Recidivism and problem behaviour Information about drop out

## Reduction of non-response and missing data

Failing research logistics lead to non-response and missing data, which affects the reliability and validity of results. Causes of non-response may occur on different levels and should be addressed accordingly (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2010):

Table 2: Improvement of research cooperation

Level	Constraint	Improvement by researcher
Core members	Distrust	Informed consent
	Motivation	Incentive (e.g. gift voucher)
	Ability	Individual assistance, solve practical barriers
Volunteers	Motivation	Informed consent, incentive (e.g. gift voucher)
	Ability/skills	Individual assistance, solve practical barriers, training (e.g. in use of the DRR, writing Circle minutes)
	Workload/time	Flexibility in planning appointments and locations
Project staff	Motivation	Feed-back of research results on an individual case level
	Work load	Flexibility in planning appointments and locations Monitoring of data collection
	Personality	Hold accountable to research agreements
	Abilities/skills	Provide training (e.g. use of DRR; writing monthly reports)
Project organisation	Poor implementation of research protocol	Introduction of research by project management Improve research infrastructure Monitoring of research process Keep research on the agenda through newsletters, feed-back etc. Early discussion of emergent findings
	Unclear project procedures	Feed-back to project developers: improve project procedures

Researcher(s)	Unclear research protocol	Improve research protocol
	Poor communication with project staff	Improve quantity and quality of communication, accessibility, seek face to face communication
	Motivation	Provide feed-back and de-briefing sessions, opportunities for reflection
	Ability/skills	Provide additional training (e.g. interview training) Provide critical reviews and peer-review Provide opportunities for others to contribute (steering committees, experts etc.)

Reasons for non-response should always be noted and if possible a non-response study should be undertaken.

### Ethical considerations

In any research involving individuals who provide detailed and personal information, there are some ethical aspects that need to be accounted for in the research protocol (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). In research involving sex offenders, these considerations may be even more important because of the high sensitivity of the information. Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, harm of participants and storage of data are issues to be dealt with in great caution.

An informed consent needs to be obtained from core members and volunteers who participate in research activities that gather specifically generated data (like questionnaires, interviews, etc.). An informed consent should provide the participant with information about the objectives and purpose of the study, the funding, the research team, use of data, requirements of participation, use of comments and ensures voluntary participation through written consent.

Anonymity means that the identity of those who are taking part in the research should not be known outside the research team. If this is not possible (because of small numbers or specific research conditions), respondents should be made aware of this before they decide to participate.

Confidentiality means that people outside the research team should not be able to attribute information or comments used in the report to individual participants in the study. Attribution may occur both direct (through names and roles mentioned in the report) or indirect through a combination of characteristics that may identify individual participants or a small group. Indirect attribution requires specific attention, since comments often need to be placed into their context, while too much detail about the context may identify the source of the information. In such cases, specific consent from the participant is needed to use these comments (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010).

Harm of participants through research may occur when interviews or questionnaires tap into sensitive areas of personal function or may trigger emotions or memories related to traumatic events in the past. Researchers should anticipate to possible harm and be able to detect signs of emotional impact and should be able to intervene adequately e.g. provide information about where to get support or professional help. Sensitive topics are best be dealt with in straightforward and direct questioning, to give the respondent the opportunity to refrain from answering. Indirect or manipulative questioning should be avoided. Building a respectful and confidential relationship during the interview, yet maintaining a neutral position are key qualities of competent interviewers. Interviewing core members may reveal specific information about risk for themselves or risk for others. This may lead to a confusion of roles for the researcher. In such cases, core members should be encouraged to take appropriate measures, like discussing these issues with their Circle or talking to their therapist, in order to prevent harm for themselves or others. Revealing sensitive information during an interview may be a way to ask for help in an indirect manner. Information should only be passed through by the interviewer after consent of the participant.

Data storage needs specific attention in research involving sex offenders and volunteers. The labelling of raw data should not interfere with the confidentiality that is promised, therefore identifying information like sampling documentation should be stored apart from raw data like questionnaires and interview recordings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2010). Archiving research material beyond research project termination needs written consent from participants.

## 6.4 Strategies for dissemination of results

The third feature of applied research is usefulness (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). Research data are useful on several levels, from the workers who are delivering the service, to the manager of institutions involved, to national stakeholders and policy makers. The concept of 'usefulness' implies conceptual as well as instrumental utilization.

Conceptual utilization refers to improvement and accumulation of knowledge about the intervention. More knowledge about Circles and their effectiveness can contribute to a better understanding of the possible impact and how this affects core members in their struggle to become responsible members of society. Also, a better understanding and knowledge of Circles can influence the public opinion on sex offender management in the community and can probably lead to a more realistic view, hopefully resulting in more support for restorative justice practices and more subjective public safety. Taking the problem of sex offender management - and the conflicts of views and emotions that go along with it - back to where it emerges in the first place (the community) also requires that valid information is taken back into the same community.

Instrumental utilization refers to knowledge that is being used to improve action: the feed-back leads to reflection on research results and their causes and to discussions about possible strategies to improve service deliverance. COSA projects for instance can use the results of an implementation evaluation to discuss bottlenecks in the volunteer selection and to design an action plan to improve the recruitment and selection process.

Research results can also be used to generate media attention to COSA projects – both to recruit volunteers and to advocate a more inclusive approach to sex offender management.

The strategies for dissemination of research results need to be tailored to the different levels and functions of utilization. Research results on COSA can be disseminated on four levels: the individual Circle level; the regional project management level, the national program level and the level of national stakeholders (e.g. experts, policy makers). The different types of utilization also require different approaches (table 3).

### Conceptual utilization

To improve conceptual utilization, the dissemination of research results must fit the cognitive skills and skills regarding the interpretation of research results of people on different levels. Also time constraints (workload) should be taken into account. The amount of information delivered and the style and medium of dissemination should be carefully thought through. A variety of options can be used:

- Brief research accounts, providing essential information in common language (fact sheets, newsletters, executive summaries, website information)
- Papers and poster presentations for experts, providing essential information in scientific language (for congresses)
- Oral presentations for research lays, providing essential information in common language and eliciting discussion points and questions (in project teams, steering committees, national program bureau, COSA symposium)
- Oral presentations for experts, providing detailed information in scientific language (congresses, expert meetings)
- Research reports, providing detailed information on research methods and outcome (for research funder, national program bureau, research participants)
- Articles in professional magazines, providing summarized information about research results
- Articles in peer reviewed scientific magazines, providing detailed & scientific information about the research method & results

- Press releases, providing basic information on key results of research, that cannot easily be misinterpreted
- Interviews in newspapers or radio/tv shows, to provide basic information about research findings in common language and to address frequently asked questions raised by the research findings.

### Instrumental utilization

To improve the instrumental utilization of research results on different levels, those who need to take action should be actively involved in the discussion of results and in formulating action plans. This requires the organisation of face to face meetings on several levels and with different groups in which research results can be presented and discussed in small groups.

Van Yperen & Veerman (2008) advise to use the following discussion protocol:

1. Are the results recognizable? (Are they in line with our observations?)
2. Are the results understandable? (Do we understand the causes?)
3. Are the results acceptable?
4. Are the results reason to take action?

To improve utilization of research results by others than those involved in COSA projects, or to generate input from experts, workshops on conferences and congresses may be a useful dissemination strategy. Professionals in the field can contribute to project development through discussion of research results and raising new research questions. Table 3 provides an overview of different dissemination strategies on different levels and different purposes.

Table 3: Dissemination strategies

	Individual case level	Regional project level	National program level	National stakeholders
<b>Conceptual utilization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DRR-score &amp; evaluation figures</li> <li>• Accumulated data showing process of core member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief research accounts for project team</li> <li>• Brief research accounts in regional newsletters for regional stakeholders</li> <li>• Presentation in project team</li> <li>• Presentation in regional network of professional organisations</li> <li>• Presentation in local steering committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research reports</li> <li>• Presentation in team</li> <li>• Presentation on COSA symposium</li> <li>• Presentation in national steering committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief research accounts via newsletter to national stakeholders</li> <li>• Brief research accounts via website</li> <li>• Articles in professional magazines</li> <li>• Articles in peer-reviewed scientific magazines</li> <li>• Oral presentation on congress or expert meeting</li> <li>• Paper presentation on congress</li> </ul>

<b>Instrumental utilization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inner Circle discussion (without and with core member)</li> <li>• Outer Circle discussion</li> </ul>	Discussion of research results, followed by action plan in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project team</li> <li>- Regional network of professional organisations</li> <li>- Steering committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and action plan within program bureau</li> <li>• Workshops on COSA symposium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops on congress or expert meeting</li> <li>• Bilateral meetings with policy makers (politicians, fund providing organisation)</li> </ul>
<b>Utilization for media attention</b>	none	Press releases of basic, anonymous information about number of Circles & volunteers, project development, effectiveness	Brief research accounts in newsletters to COSA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release of essential research results</li> <li>• Interviews in national newspapers and radio/tv shows</li> </ul>

### Individual case level

Individual Circles should be able to use the results of the information they provide. Feed-back on the outcome of the quarterly evaluation of Circle functions as well as feed-back of results of a process evaluation (model integrity and program integrity) can be very useful for Circles. Changes in scores on the DRR and evaluation of Circles function may generate new directions or approaches for the Circle. Information about model integrity can inform actions to improve both. Circles can be informed about these type of results through their Circle coordinator in face to face discussions.

Outer Circles can use the same research results, but probably will also be best informed in face tot face contact through Circle coordinators. Research results on an individual case level are not useful to generate or satisfy media attention, in fact this should be avoided at all costs, to safeguard the privacy or core members and volunteers.

### Regional and local project level

Information generated in the course of an implementation study is useful for project developers and project management at various stages of project preparation and pilot. Immediate feed-back of successful strategies (e.g. in volunteer recruitment) can be of great help for local project staff. Feed-back is best provided through face to face contact in combination with brief research accounts (e.g. summary of essential research findings), as workers not always take or find the time to read lengthy documents. Especially problems with program integrity and other bottlenecks that are identified by project staff on location should be brought under the attention of the project management, to ensure proper deliverance and to be able to assist with improvement. Since local steering committees have an advisory role to the project management, they should be informed separately and be able to discuss improvement plans separately before advising the regional project.

On a regional and/or local level, also the professional workers and the management of institutions in the network of sex offender aftercare should be informed about final results, to keep COSA on the agenda and to support the structural implementation.

### National program level

Project managers on a national level (like the program bureau's Circles UK or Circle NL) are best informed through official (interim) reports, since they often have to be transparent to funders and steering committees about rationales for decisions they have made. They can use research reports for their 'underpinning'. Also, they need to be able to make judgements about program integrity and the need to change implementation protocols or training and evaluation materials.

### **National stakeholder level**

The results of an implementation study provide national stakeholders (expert professionals, funders, policy makers) with information about the possibility of a successful proliferation, and can generate national support and more attention from national media.

On the longer run, national stakeholders will probably be more interested in the results of outcome and effect evaluations.

### **General public**

The general public should be aware of Circle projects and the outcome to be able to contribute to the political discussion about Circles. They can be informed through informative media coverage and easy accessible website publications.

## **6.5 Overview of research so far**

Research into the implementation, outcome and possible effects of COSA is still limited. In the paragraph below, examples of the different types of independent and scientific research that are published until now are briefly outlined.

### **Feasibility study**

Armstrong, Chistyakowa, Mackenzie & Malloch (2008) from the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research conducted a feasibility study for the Scottish Government. They reviewed the implementation experience of Circles in areas where they have and have not become features of sex offender management, identified distinctive features of the Scottish criminal justice policy and practice that might affect implementation of pilots, considered the implications for volunteers working with sex offenders, assessed the evidence for effectiveness so far and set out relevant feasibility issues in case a decision should be taken to proceed with Circles in Scotland. Their research strategy was threefold. First, they reviewed the available literature on COSA, both peer-reviewed and independent research and self evaluations of Circles projects. Second, they interviewed 31 Scottish stakeholders involved in or having knowledge on sex offender management in the community. Third, they conducted a field visit to the largest English Circles project, the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles project (HTVC), where they observed office operations and conducted interviews with project staff, representatives from local statutory agencies, Circle volunteers and core members (25 interviews in total). They identified several issues that need to be dealt with before a pilot should be started.

### **Adaptation studies**

Höing, Caspers & Vogelvang (2009) from the Avans Centre on Public Safety and Criminal Justice conducted an adaptation study for the Dutch Circles pilot project. They reviewed the implementation histories and experiences of the Canadian and English Circles projects, specifically the impact of criminal justice policies and practice on the organisation of Circle projects, assessed the characteristics of the possible target group for Dutch Circles, described the Dutch context of criminal justice policies and practice, especially in the field of sex offender aftercare, and outlined the opportunities and challenges for Circle projects. They assessed the English and Canadian experiences with volunteer recruitment, selection and training and described the Dutch societal context of volunteering, assessed the evidence for effectiveness so far, and, finally, described opinions of national and regional stakeholders on the opportunities and challenges for pilot Circles. The adaptation study was conducted through desk research, combined with (group) interviews with professionals from 21 different organisations involved in sex offender management in the community or volunteering, and experience and information gathered on a field trip to the English national Circles office (Circles UK). The study revealed some characteristics of the national context (e.g. no mandated sex offender treatment in prison) that need to be dealt with through adaptations of protocols.

Höing, Snatersen & Pasmans (2010) conducted a Belgian adaptation study along the same lines as the one described above and assessed the Belgian context and needs for adaptation for the Belgian pilot Circles.

## Implementation studies

Höing & Vogelvang (2011) conducted an implementation study into the first Dutch pilot Circles. They described the implementation process and the adaptations to the original plans and protocols that were needed in the process, the conditions of implementation at the start of the pilot and how they developed during the implementation process. Once the pilot implemented, they evaluated the program and model integrity of the first pilot Circles and described the experiences of inner and outer Circle members and managers in participating organisations. The research strategy was designed along the lines of a case study, gathering as much in-depth information as possible from different perspectives. Methods of data collection were: participant observation of the operations of the Dutch program bureau (Circles-NL), interviews at the start of the project with 6 project members, 9 volunteers, 2 core members, 5 professionals and 2 managers; project diaries of project staff, documentary analysis on implementation plans and protocols, project team minutes, Circle minutes, monthly reports from Circle coordinators and interviews at the end of the pilot period with 8 volunteers, 2 core members, 3 project members, 5 professionals in the outer Circles, and 2 managers from participating organisations. The study showed that overall the pilot implementation had been successful and resulted in many new ideas to improve the project.

## Process evaluation

An independent process evaluation of fully developed Circle projects has not yet been published.

## Outcome evaluation

Several outcome evaluations of fully developed Circle projects have been conducted in Canada and the UK.

Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo (2007a) evaluated the outcome of Circles in Canada as experienced by those who are involved. 24 core members, 57 volunteers, 16 professionals and 77 local community members completed a questionnaire about their experiences and the perceived outcome. 88% of core members felt supported in their re-integration process, 67% thought that they might have reoffended without a Circle and 48% thought Circle volunteers are positive role models. Volunteers report positive effects for themselves like more community integration (75%), feeling more emotional attached to others (54%), and increased self esteem is reported by 38% of the volunteers. The members of local community think that a sex offender re entering community would raise less feelings of anxiety and resent if he would participate in a Circle (67%) and of those who are aware of a Circle in their neighbourhood, 69% is 'happy' and 62% is 'relieved' that the core member receives support from a Circle.

Bates, Saunders & Wilson (2007) conducted a multiple case study on 16 Circles in the UK, evaluating the outcome of Circles with regard to Circle characteristics, Circle impact on prevention, core member characteristics and recidivism of core members. Recidivism was defined in several ways: reconviction, breach of sex offender prevention order (SOPO), recall following breach of conditions for parole and problem behaviour. The time at risk was at medium 18 months. Detailed information was gathered through documentary analysis on the core member files and through interviews with project staff. Of 16 core members, none was reconvicted, one was convicted for breach of SOPO, four were recalled for breach of parole conditions and five showed some kind of recidivist behaviour. A process evaluation showed that volunteers have positively contributed to the prevention of possibly offensive behaviour in seven Circles.

Bates, Macrae, Williams & Webb (2011) extended the above mentioned study in a new multiple case study of 60 core members, which had been followed up for an average of 36 months (range: 1 – 84 months). Outcome variables were reconviction, breach of SOPO, recall following breach of conditions for parole. Problem behaviour was dismissed as outcome variable, because the relationship with sexual offending is not clear. Qualitative data about the offenders' process had been gathered through documentary analysis on Circles files of 60 core members and categorized according to OASys pathways (a repeated structured assessment of offender criminogenic needs). Also, various characteristics of core members and their Circles are described (e.g. level of risk, length of detention, duration of the Circle, status of the Circle). Some detailed descriptions of exemplary cases elicit the impact of volunteer engagement



in Circles on core members. Bates et al. demonstrate that Circles can have a major impact on prevention of new crimes and stimulate healthy and pro social behaviour. They too conclude that early drop out, either through very early recalls or voluntary drop out (16.7%) is a new phenomenon, not observed in the earlier outcome study.

### Effect evaluation

Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo (2007b) conducted a first effect study, comparing recidivism rates of 60 core members of one pilot project with 60 controls, who were matched on risk, sex offender treatment, and period of detention. Also, rates of sexual reoffending were compared to expectancy rates. The medium follow-up period was 55 months for core members and 53 months for controls. The risk level of controls (assessed with Static 99 and RRASOR, both actuarial risk assessment tools) was slightly lower compared to the risk level of core members. While 16.7% of non core members sexually reoffended, which is in line with the expected recidivism rate, only 5% of core members did – a reduction of 70%, and significantly different from the expectancy rate. Also, core members offended less often with other than sexual offences (total re-offence rate 28.3% vs. 43.3% of controls), at a later moment (first re-offence after 22 months vs. 18 months with control subjects), and the impact of the offence was smaller than the impact of the offences committed by controls.

In 2009, Wilson, Cortoni & Mc Whinnie conducted a national replication of the first effect study, including 44 core members from Circle projects throughout the country, matched pair wise with 44 control subjects. The matching criteria were: risk for general criminality (measured by structured risk assessment), time and geographical location of release (within 90 days of each other, in the same location), time at risk, and treatment involvement. Actuarial and dynamic risk of sexual recidivism (Static 99, RRASOR, Phallometric testing) and actual recidivism (being charged for or being convicted for a new offence – sexual, violent - including sexual -, or any) was assessed through file information in the CSC Offender Management system, a database containing all relevant information on Canadian criminals. Groups were comparable on all matching criteria except Static 99 scores, with the comparison group showing a higher level of risk. Time at risk was 35 months for the COSA group vs. 38 months for the controls. COSA participants showed 83% less sexual reoffending, 73% less violent reoffending (including sexual) and 71% less general offending. In total, the COSA group showed 74% less charges and convictions than the comparison group. In a subsample, with equal Static 99 scores and time at risk (3 years), consisting of 19 core members and 18 controls, comparable results were found: none of the core members reoffended sexually compared to 5 controls, core members had 82% less violent re-offending and 83% less re-offending of any kind. Also, comparison with expectancy rates of the Static 99 (with separate norms for high risk and 'routine' offenders) underscored these results. Core members had a 88% lower recidivism compared to what would be expected for a high risk sample from their scores on the Static 99. When compared to norms for 'routine offenders' they didn't differ significantly from expected recidivism rates. The comparison group showed recidivism rates as expected by their Static 99 score both for high risk and 'routine' offenders.

In 2011, Bates & Wager conducted an effect study with a repeated measures design by assessing changes in risk in 13 core members over a period of approximately 12 months with three moments of measurement. Changes were assessed through the Dynamic Risk Review (see chapter 5). An initial analysis of dimensionality of the DRR (conducted over a total of 39 initial DRR's) revealed three subscales: inappropriate sexual attitudes, over-confident hostile sexualisation and inadequacy. When examining change case by case only two of the 13 individuals (15%) demonstrated a detrimental increase in scores across two of the subscales, no-one demonstrated consistently no change across the sub-scales and 9 (69%) demonstrated a positive decrease in scores across at least two of the subscales. In relation to the inappropriate sexual attitudes scale 61.5% demonstrated a positive reduction in scores, 2% were recorded as demonstrating no change and only 15% demonstrated a slight detrimental increase. Findings for the over-confident hostile sexualisation scale indicated that 15% remained unchanged, 77% were found to have a positive reduction in their scores and only 7.7% were recorded as demonstrating a detrimental increase in this factor.

Finally, with regard to the inadequacy subscale 61.5% were found to have a positive reduction, 7.7% did not complete the scale, 15% remained unchanged and a further 15% were recorded as demonstrating a detrimental increase (Bates & Wager, 2011).

## Cost effect evaluation

A first research into the cost-effectiveness of Circles was conducted in the UK, by Elliot & Beech (2011). They conducted a rapid evidence assessment (REA) based on the outcome study of Bates et al. (2011) and the effect studies of Wilson et al. (2007b & 2009). Based on a risk-norm design, comparing actual re-offence rates with norms based on structured risk assessment prior to participation in Circles, estimates of reduction of reoffending were calculated. The REA results combined to an estimate of 61% reduction in sexual re-offending and a 55% reduction in any re-offending (sexual and non-sexual). Given that all re-offending (not just sexual offences) will generate costs, the 55% reduction was used in the cost benefit analysis. The average baseline re-offending rate for sex offenders, against both children and adults, was established as 15.1% (Barnett et al. 2010). The costs of running a Circle were estimated to be £11,140 per Circle, per annum. Costs included in the analysis were direct costs (like salary for staff members, training, travel & telephone costs for volunteers etc), indirect costs (e.g. office running costs) but not costs for initial development of a project. The estimated cost however per re-offending was estimated to be £147,161 per offender. The researchers estimated tangible costs (direct costs of the criminal justice process) and a number of intangible costs (the indirect cost of crimes to health, education, and extra costs to policing) for re-offending. Extrapolating<sup>13</sup> these figures, the cost benefit ratio for savings in criminal justice expenditure through COSA, based on an hypothetical cohort of 100 offenders - 50 of whom receive COSA and 50 of whom do not - was 0.03, which is a rather modest financial savings on investment. However, the authors argue, when the total intangible costs (societal costs) of sexual offending are accepted as five-times the criminal costs, as is proposed by McGurk & Hazel (1998) and Miller et al. (1996), a saving of £654,044 can be predicted for a cohort of 50 core members. Extrapolating these figures, this amounts to a cost benefit ratio of 0.57 – meaning each £ invested is returning £ 0.57 in savings.

Any cost benefit analysis on COSA at this time can give only preliminary insight into cost-effectiveness. In the absence of national recidivism studies, the estimation of reduction in recidivism is highly dependant on the two Canadian recidivism studies of Circles, who probably show a higher reduction in recidivism than Circles elsewhere will do, due to the ceiling effect. Also, the estimation of the costs of Circles is compromised by the higher project development costs in the early days of a Circle project, the variety in organisational and financial models in Circle projects, and the variety in the duration of Circles. Finally, the real and total societal costs of reoffending (e.g. loss of tax income from victims) versus total societal benefits of successful re-integration (e.g. gain of tax income through core members, who otherwise had been on welfare) are difficult to establish and usually not taken into account.

## 6.6 Future research questions

The shortage of research into COSA leaves many research questions still unanswered. In the future, more, and more detailed studies into effects and effective processes of COSA are needed to gather evidence of the impact of Circles in different national settings.

Especially, prolonged effects of COSA need to be studied with national recidivism studies with matched controls and a follow-up of at least 5 years, preferably 10 years. More qualitative analyses of the process of desistance of core members who do not reoffend compared to those who did not participate in a Circle and, apparently, also did not reoffend, can shed light into the specific contribution of Circles and the effect of inclusive community involvement versus having to beat up against rejection and barriers on your own. Do core member really succeed in building an maintaining a pro-social network of their own? The impact of Circles on perceived community safety and community attitudes toward sex offender rehabilitation is also a question yet to be answered. First quantitative evaluations show promising results, but more extensive and qualitative field research can probably provide more insight into the community effects of Circles. Likewise, the impact of COSA on local professional networks in the field of sex offender management should further be investigated. Circles projects aim to build strategic alliances with professional agencies in the field and promote better information sharing and cooperation between professionals, but is this really achieved, and if so, how? Finally, more research is necessary to assess the effects of being a COSA volunteers.

<sup>13</sup> Extrapolation conducted by the author of this handbook, cost benefit-ratio was not included in Elliot & Beech, 2011

First evaluations and reviews show that participating in a Circle can have positive as well as negative effects (Wilson, 2007a; Snatersen 2011), but methodological sound effect studies have not yet been undertaken. Also, the richness of volunteer experiences and evaluations should be assessed in a qualitative way to provide the general public with an in-depth view into the resources to deal with highly complex situations that lie within the community itself.

## 6.7 References

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## ***Annex 1 COSA related websites***

### **European websites:**

<http://www.circles-uk.org.uk>

[www.cosanederland.nl](http://www.cosanederland.nl)

<http://www.sccjr.ac.uk/projects/Circles-of-Support-and-Accountability/82>

### **Canadian websites:**

[www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/proj-guid/index-eng.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/proj-guid/index-eng.shtml)

[www.cosabc.ca](http://www.cosabc.ca)

<http://cosa-ottawa.ca>

<http://alberta.mcc.org/programs/rjm/cosa>

### **US websites:**

<http://peace.fresno.edu/cosa>

[www.doc.state.mn.us/volunteer/mncosa.htm](http://www.doc.state.mn.us/volunteer/mncosa.htm)

<http://www.cosanebraska.org>

# The Circular

E-bulletin

October 2010



## The Bigger Picture...

This brief welcome and introduction to our autumn newsletter is being drafted just post the party conference season. Last was the Conservative event in Birmingham, and opportunity for Circles UK to have a modest presence, courtesy of a bursary award from the NCVO, and to do a little more 'to make friends and influence people'. There were a few criminal justice fringe on the 'rehabilitation revolution' with the future order of the day will be based on 'payment by results' and that "if you can prove you are reducing reoffending and find social investors, then you'll be in a strong position". Clearly we need to be thinking along some different and additional lines in terms of where we should be looking for 'financial backers'!

With the government's spending review announcement scheduled for the very same day as our national conference, we are all waiting to find out what the enforced cuts could mean for the future of Circles at local and national levels. At a time when some Projects are facing great uncertainty, while at the same time fresh developments are being explored in other areas, we need more than ever to be pooling our collective strengths and promoting an established, credible profile. To this end, our cost benefit study of Circles of Support and Accountability will be produced in January 2011. Before that, Circles UK will be producing a concise report, "The Case for Circles", which we trust will be of use in your local negotiations and presentations. Our media training for Coordinators on 10th November will hopefully increase individual confidence and competence in dealing with media opportunities, which if anything appear to be growing.

We have extraordinary and powerful stories to tell. Whether to political party conferences, local safeguarding boards or journalists, there is a case to be made as to why our communities simply cannot afford *not* to invest in Circles.

**Stephen Hanvey, CEO Circles UK**

## Presentation of Queen's Award to HTV Circles



The achievement of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles' Volunteers was marked on October 12<sup>th</sup> by the presentation of the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The award was presented by the Duke of Gloucester in front of a gathering of key stakeholders and friends of HTV Circles, including Sir Ian Blair, now Chairman of the Thames Valley Partnership. Over the summer four HTV Volunteers also had the opportunity to represent the Project at a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, where they joined other recipients of this year's award, which recognises outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups voluntarily devoting their time for the benefit of others.

Many congratulations to all the Volunteers and staff at HTV Circles!





## A Brief Read

**Chris Wilson, National Development Manager, Circles UK, outlines the growing body of literature discussing Circles of Support & Accountability**

If the success of a particular intervention is measured by its profile in academic publications, we can deduce that Circles of Support and Accountability is moving from the fringes of restorative based practice into the mainstream of risk management. The operational growth and success of Circles both in Canada and the United Kingdom is now beginning to be reflected by those persons who influence and analyse policy.

There has been much written on Circles over the past two decades in both academic and practice journals (see Circles UK Website) but apart from the David Wilson and Jon Silverman, 'Innocence Betrayed' (Polity 2002), published in the year that Circles were piloted in Britain, it is only recently that the subject has occupied the pages in academic books. The most notable of these, thus far has to be Anne Marie McAlinden's 'The Shaming of Sexual Offenders' (Published by Hart 2007). Anyone who heard Dr McAlinden's key note address at this year's NOTA conference will be aware of her enthusiasm for Circles and her book reflects that enthusiasm with an insight into how Circles has developed despite a 'cultural paradigm shift which has centred primarily on the need to control and manage risk through punitive and less tolerant means'. This book won the British Society of Criminology Prize

McAlinden can also be found writing about Circles in 'Managing High - Risk Sex Offenders in the Community' (Published by Willan 2010) edited by Karen Harrison. This is an excellent book giving both an overview and detailed account of issues relating to the title. Besides McAlinden, Ruth Mann and Mark Farmer talk of Circles in their chapter 'Issues of Policy', where Circles are discussed as a community response to a social problem. Also published this year by Willan was 'What Else Works?' Edited by Brayford, Cowe and Deering; Chapter 10, Contemporary sex offender treatment: incorporating circles of support and the Good Lives Model, written by Mark and Peter Carich, Chris Wilson and Martin Calder examines the way in which Circles are the practical application of the theoretical Good Lives Model.

2011 will see the subject of Circles expand into their own publications both here and in Canada. Robin Wilson et al are to publish a book in Canada by Safer Society, which will contain a chapter on the development of Circles in Britain, whilst we all eagerly await the publication of our own Circles book by Terry Philpot *et al.*, published by Jessica Kingsley.

If you are aware of any other book that features Circles of Support and Accountability, please let us know.

To link in with our annual conference, Bookmark are offering anyone connected to the Circles family the opportunity to purchase titles related to Circles work at a 20% discount throughout October via their Cyber-Bookstall at the following address:  
<http://www.booksyouneed.co.uk/professionalbooks/40-Working-with-Sex-Offenders/>

## International Association for the Treatment of Sexual Offenders, Oslo - 1st- 4th September

A place at this conference came as a consequence of our Daphne III engagement. Titled 'New Perspectives in Sex Offender Treatment', it was a fairly full-on progression of plenary talks, followed by multiple twenty-minute presentations in seminar format. With one on 'Circles of Support and Accountability' delivered by a Dutch colleague it was good to have the model presented to a truly international, albeit numerically modest audience. About a third of the thirty in the audience had heard of Circles.

For me the most engaging presentations were by Hanson and Rice, debating the various pros and cons of meta-analyses of treatment studies, and the 'reliability' of random control trials, particularly given accurate matching challenges. Some fascinating ethical issues were raised and of course some relevance to us given the four year research programme we have underway through Leeds University. There was an intriguingly titled seminar ("First I'll pick the potatoes") which never quite got to the gnostic significance of the phrase and left me pondering, not for the first time, how much was being lost in translation. Indeed, it was disconcerting every time I got in the hotel lift to be warned somewhat ominously by the sign 'Last 8 personnes' ('Last', I take it, can be happily translated as 'only').

There were some imaginative sessions; on work with female sex offenders (Charlene Steen) and 'Dealing with the Hidden Burden of Incest' (KT Pettersen). But I would be dishonest if I didn't confess the highlight to be a glorious evening Fjord boat trip, with a prawn and beer supper on board, in the company of Mechtild and Annemarie from the Netherlands Cirkels programme. We talked Circles all the time of course!

**Stephen Harvey, CEO Circles UK**

## The South West Road to Charitable Status

In 2010 The SMB of Circles Wessex (Dorset and Avon & Somerset) discussed and proposed a recommendation to form Circles South West, covering the south west region to include Devon & Cornwall, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire in addition to Dorset and Avon & Somerset.

Currently all the south west areas, except Gloucestershire have agreed to be part of Circles South West and it is hoped that Gloucestershire, having expressed an interest in Circles, will shortly join the regional group. Statutory agencies in Dorset, Wilts and Devon & Cornwall have allocated funds for the setting up of Circles South West and the Asst. Coordinator for Circles Wessex has agreed to undertake this task. It has been agreed that Circles SW will apply to become a charity after applying to become a private Company Limited by Guarantee; it is hoped that both will be accomplished by January 2011.

The new Circles South West Board of Trustees comprising representatives from Dorset, Wiltshire, Devon & Cornwall and Avon & Somerset, including 4 volunteers, met at the end of August and will be meeting again in early October primarily to agree, as a matter of priority, its immediate and future funding strategy.

The initially daunting task of becoming a charity and a private limited company has been partially aided by support from the Dorset Council for Voluntary Service. The drafting of most of the required documentation (Aims/Objectives/Structure, Policies & Procedures, Trustee policies, Vulnerable Adult Policy, Operational Procedures and the Governing Document for forming a company) are now in place with employment and HR policies to follow as required. Circles SW now awaits confirmation of registration with Companies House prior to their application to the Charity Commission.

Comments and/or exchange of practice and ideas from others who have travelled the charitable road or from those who might want to do so in the future would be most welcome.

**Seona Angell, Assistant Coordinator, Circles Wessex**

### Piloting Circles in Scotland

As you may well be aware a number of organisations and individuals have been campaigning for several years to establish a Pilot for Circles of Support and Accountability in Scotland. I am pleased to announce that a partnership between Fife Council, Fife Community Safety Partnership and Sacro are to take this idea forward and deliver the first Scottish COSA pilot, which will be based in Fife. The project has been funded for a year and will consist of a part time Coordinator with the aim of managing two Circles. I will undertake the coordinator role, and early tasks include awareness raising about the initiative and recruitment and training of a group of Volunteers to support the two "Core Members" within the Circles, who are still to be identified.

The success, or otherwise of any COSA project depends very much on the availability and commitment of quality Volunteers who are able to make a genuine contribution to Community Safety and Child Protection. As such, if there is anyone you know of who may be interested in volunteering for the project, or simply would like to find out more about it, please feel free to pass on my details.

In the meantime I will endeavour to keep interested parties up to speed with how the project is progressing. Additionally, if there is anything else I can do in terms of providing more information about the Pilot, please feel free to get in touch.

**Tim Richley, SACRO**  
[trichley@national.sacro.org.uk](mailto:trichley@national.sacro.org.uk)

### Introducing Wandle Valley Circles

**Clive Baulch, Project Manager at Stepping Stones Trust, introduces the newest member of the Circles family**

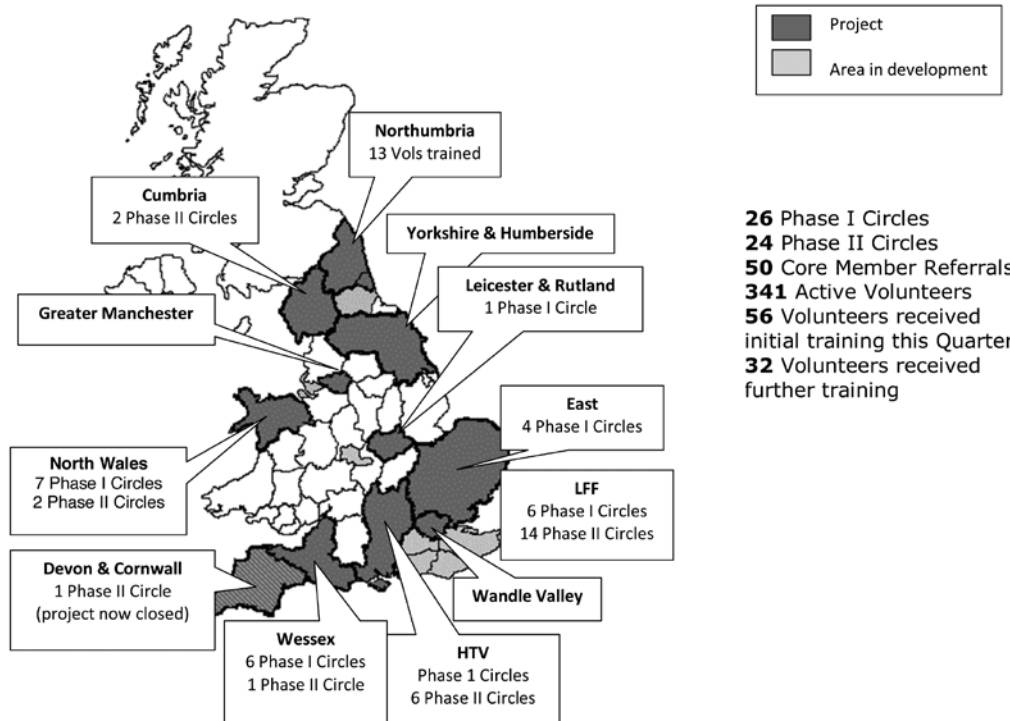
It has been more than two years in the planning stage but at long last ... we would like to introduce ourselves to you all. 'We' is the embryonic WANDLE VALLEY Circles Project which will be working closely with Bridge House, a hostel for five sex offenders in South West London. For a long time Bridge House have felt the need for a way to hold offenders in the community, which makes them more accountable while also ensuring their better integration into society. With 'Circles' we feel that we have found the ideal tool for doing this.

Bridge House is part of Stepping Stones Trust which is a small Christian charity with a strong Christian ethos. We feel that Circles is an appropriate vehicle for the sort of work which we wish to see being done at Bridge House and it throws up all sorts of issues for which a Christian-based circles project is ideally placed to help solve. We are now recruiting likely members for our first Circles project and we intend to recruit from members of the local churches.

Circles are an ideal way in which churches can demonstrate their commitment to the reform of Criminal Justice systems in England and Wales. The reform of criminal justice and the protection of children from sexual harm are hot topics in many churches. With Circles we are giving the churches a way to focus, a way to do something very constructive to protect children from harm and maybe reform Criminal Justice into the bargain.



## Quarterly Data – July to September



**26** Phase I Circles  
**24** Phase II Circles  
**50** Core Member Referrals  
**341** Active Volunteers  
**56** Volunteers received initial training this Quarter  
**32** Volunteers received further training

**Yorkshire and Humberside Circles of Support and Accountability (YHCOSA)**  
**Regional Co-ordinator**  
**£30,000 – £34,000 (+6% contributory pension) initial 1 year fixed term contract**  
**Full time (40 hours per week)**  
**Location flexible within the region**



We work in partnership with Police, Probation, local Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements and other professionals working in the field of child protection. Circles aim to prevent further sexual abuse, working with the objective of no more victims.

YHCOSA recruits, trains and supports volunteers to work with those who have committed sex offences recognising that with support and challenge, people have the ability to grow, learn and change their behaviour.

With a relevant qualification and/or experience, you will have gained knowledge and understanding of the assessment, treatment and management of sex offenders and be able to apply this to a community based approach.

The ability to recruit, train and manage volunteers to work with former offenders within an inclusive approach to risk management is an essential requirement, as is the ability to negotiate resources within agreed partnership frameworks. You will be required to work flexibly with occasional evening and weekend commitments.

Leading on from a successful pilot phase, you will further develop this innovative new project and establish its future across Yorkshire and Humberside.

Further details and an application pack can be obtained from [yandhcircles@gmail.com](mailto:yandhcircles@gmail.com) or by calling 07814 904102.

**Closing Date: 08/11/10 Interviews: 25/11/10**

YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IS A REGISTERED CHARITY (1131916) OPERATING AS A LIMITED COMPANY (07019648)

If you have any items you would like to be included in the next edition of The Circular, please email them to [info@circles-uk.org.uk](mailto:info@circles-uk.org.uk)

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