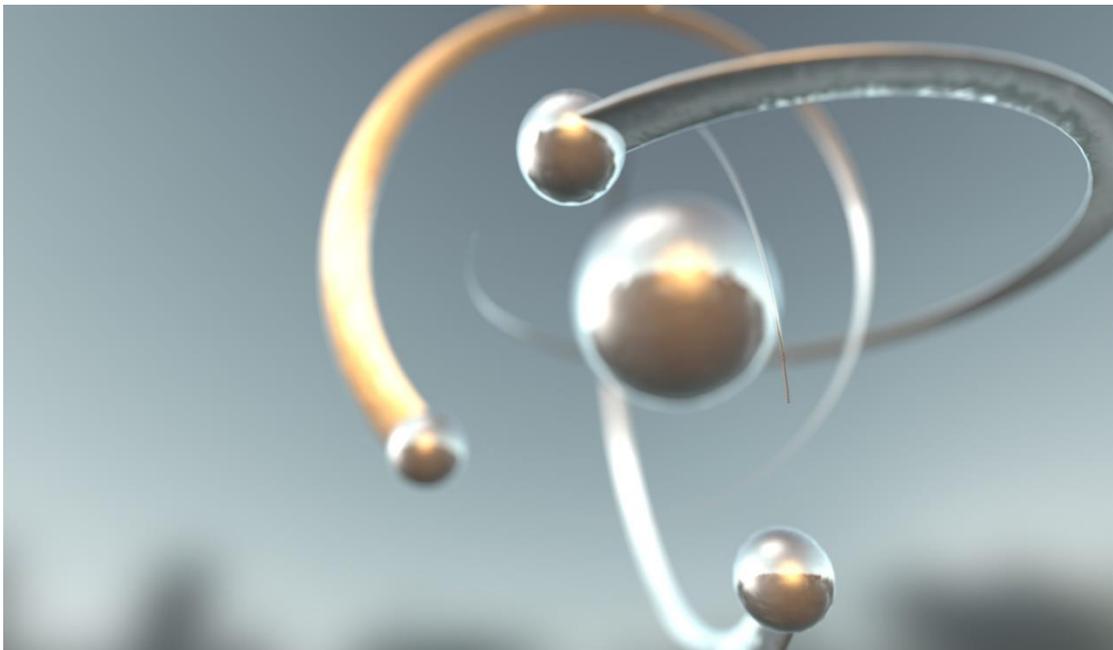


**Assessing the impact of Circles of Support and
Accountability on the reintegration of adults
convicted of sexual offences in the community**

Final Report

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Abbreviations and Glossary

CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CoSA – Circles of Support and Accountability
CPA – Contract Package Area
CRC – Community Rehabilitation Company
CSOD – Child Sex Offender Disclosure
ETE – Education Training and Employment
GLM – Good Lives Model
IOM – Integrated Offender Management
IPP – Imprisonment for the Public Protection
LDU – Local Delivery Unit
MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MoJ – Ministry of Justice
Mutuals – Probation Trusts becoming Public Service Mutuals enabling them to bid as providers of rehabilitation services
NewCo – government owned holding companies
NOMS - National Offender Management Service
NPS – National Probation Service
OM – Offender Manager
PCC – Police and Crime Commissioner
Primes – main providers of private rehabilitation services
PPU – Public Protection Unit
RM2000 – Risk Matrix 2000
RNR – Risk Needs Responsivity
RRTSAG – Reducing Re-offending Third Sector Advisory Group
SOPO – Sexual Offences Prevention Order
TOM - Target Operating Model
TR – Transforming Rehabilitation
VCO – Voluntary Community Organisation
VCSE – Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

Preface

This report is based on research that was conducted from the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University. From May 2013, the research team included Professor Susanne Karstedt, Professor Terry Thomas, PhD Candidate and Researcher David Thompson and Professor Birgit Völlm. For a certain time period between 2010 and May 2013 the research team included Dr Catherine Appleton and Professor Anthea Hucklesby.

This report was authored by a team of academics working in Leeds. This team was led by Professor Karstedt, and the interviews were conducted by David Thompson; the draft text was jointly written by Professor Terry Thomas and David Thompson and finalised by the whole team. Chapter Five was written by David Thompson.

The research and production of the report also received invaluable help from Stephen Hanvey; funding was provided by the Wates Foundation. We express our gratitude to the National Offender Management Service National Research Committee and University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee for their support with this application.

We would like to thank all participants who agreed to be interviewed and especially the Coordinators who were invaluable in facilitating the research

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Executive Summary

Sexual offending is a serious and uniquely invasive form of offending. When the victims are children the violation is even more harmful. The subject of sexual offending and the appropriate response to such offending has moved steadily up political and public agendas over the last 15 -20 years. Successive Governments have introduced laws and policies to manage and contain the person living in the community who has been convicted for sexual offences and to enhance the levels of public protection to that community.

A complementary approach to managing people in the community has been that based on ideas of restorative justice and the GLM (Good Lives Model). Rather than identify 'deficits', risks and other 'negatives' that needed treatment, managing or 'exclusion', these approaches seek to work with the sex offender and to 'include' them back into society as better functioning members of that society. It particularly focused on a person's 'positives' and 'strengths' rather than his or her 'deficits'. Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a prime example of this approach.

This report is about Circles of Support and Accountability and their work with sexual offenders. CoSA is a community-based initiative that originated in Canada whereby volunteers work with sex offenders living in the community where the majority of the offenders live having only recently been released from custodial sentences. CoSA Projects consist of a Coordinator who organises a team of volunteers who form a Circle to work with the offender known as the Core Member to help them resettle in the community after imprisonment. The Coordinator also liaises with the probation service and the police service to ensure that relevant information on the Core Member is fed back to them. *Circles UK* is the umbrella organisation of all regional CoSA Projects in England and Wales.

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Thompson and Professor Birgit Völlm. For a certain time period between 2010 and May 2013 the research team included Dr Catherine Appleton and Professor Anthea Hucklesby.

Funding for this study was generously provided by the Wates Foundation and they supported the project throughout its lifetime. The School of Law, University of Leeds, also provided financial and other support to facilitate the completion of this research project. To further disseminate the findings of the research, funding was awarded to David Thompson and Professor Susanne Karstedt by the University of Leeds Professional Services Sector Research and Innovation Hub.

This report was authored by a team of academics working in Leeds. This team was led by Professor Karstedt, and the interviews were conducted by David Thompson; the draft text was jointly written by Professor Terry Thomas and David Thompson and finalised by the whole team. Chapter Five was written by David Thompson.

This report is the result of a three year study. The original aim of the research was stated as ‘to assess the extent to which CoSA Projects contribute towards the reintegration of adult sex offenders into the community’. The more specific objectives of the research were to:

- Examine the frontline practices of CoSA;
- Describe the cohort of Core Members who have completed or are currently in a Circle;
- Explore the experiences of Core Members;
- Identify the key components which are associated with re-integration in the community;
- Explore the background, motivation and experiences of volunteers;
- Investigate the links between the operation of CoSA and statutory provisions for sex offenders, such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), probation and the police;
- Assess the relative importance of factors and services in the process of reintegration for sex offenders;
- Contribute towards the development of good practice.

The report is based on a literature review, collection of administrative data on Core Members, interviews with Core Members, interviews with volunteers and interviews with key stakeholders. 70 interviews were conducted, 30 with Core Members, 20 with volunteers, and 20 with key stakeholders from Police, Probation and Project

Coordinators, from a number of ongoing CoSA Projects in England and Wales. For all interviews, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was adopted. In addition, the Core Members and volunteers completed short questionnaires to collect socio-demographic data.

The report is divided into four Parts:

- (1) Circles of Support and Accountability - History, Development and Assessment;
- (2) Sex Offenders in the Community: the context - the statutory arrangements of public services working with sex offenders in the community and pending changes from the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda; the role of the private sector and the voluntary sector;
- (3) The findings of this study based on 70 interviews with offenders (Core Members), volunteers, and stakeholders - the Project Coordinators, Probation Officers, Police Officers working in Public Protection Units and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers holding positions within MAPPA. This Part examines the frontline practices and the experiences of the respective participants in Circles.
- (4) Review and Recommendations – This part includes a summary of the key findings from the research and recommendations and suggestions based on the findings.

This research and report focus on the experiences of those who are involved in CoSA, those who are Core Members and those who work as volunteers, Coordinators and stakeholders in and with Circles Projects. The research is not an assessment of the impact or efficiency of CoSA Projects in terms of recidivism, employment and other measures of wider integration. It is not a comparison with other types of programmes in this area. Instead this research assesses the experiences of those being in and working with a Circle, those who organise the Circle and those who work with CoSA in statutory agencies. On a cautious note, even if Core Members might give the subjective impression that they profit from a certain type of intervention, this might not be true if measured against objective measures of behavioural problems, recidivism, and other indicators. However the report represents a thorough assessment

of these experiences, independent of any measurement or indicator of reducing recidivism or reintegration. Overwhelmingly, these are positive experiences by all groups, and in particular the Core Members.

Summaries of Result Chapters

Circles of Support and Accountability – History, Development and Assessment

Circles of Support and Accountability originated in Canada and started in the UK in 2001. The practice of organising volunteers in this way to help rehabilitate people with convictions for sexual offences back into the community after custodial sentences has gradually spread across the country from its beginnings in the Thames Valley and Hampshire. A centralised coordinating body – *Circles UK* – now sets standards for Circles and accredits new Projects and monitors existing ones. Evaluation studies to date have demonstrated the achievements of Circles, but no evaluation studies which can generate sufficiently robust results on CoSA in England and Wales currently exists. Public awareness has been relatively low-key although there has been a degree of press and broadcast coverage. Other countries have taken an interest in Circles and the movement looks set to continue spreading.

Sex Offenders in the Community

The current ‘management’ of sex offenders in the community by the public statutory agencies include primarily the police, probation service and the prisons linked together in the local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Within these arrangements the emphasis in the past has been on ‘containing’ the released offender. More recently that emphasis has been revisited in the light of concepts of rehabilitation and resettlement. At a national level policies of rehabilitation have been the subject of intense debate as the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda of 2013-2014 seeks to implement major changes to our ways of assisting people released from custody. The private sector and the voluntary sector are envisaged as playing an important part in this changing landscape of rehabilitation. Organisations like *Circles UK* and individual Circles Projects will be seeking their own footing in this new world. The National Probation Service will be the obvious partner for *Circles UK* and Circles Projects because the National Probation Service are responsible for

supervising sex offenders in the community under the new regime. Given all the uncertainty surrounding *Transforming Rehabilitation* however, there is a possibility that some of the lowest risk sex offenders could be managed by the private sector and this presents another opportunity for partnerships for CoSA.

An initial assessment would suggest that Circles Projects will not experience the major changes that other parts of the rehabilitative services might experience. High risk sex offenders will continue to be managed by the National Probation Service and if required Circles of Support and Accountability will continue to work in partnership with the National Probation Service. Few changes are anticipated for the police and their Public Protection Units and their role of on-going risk assessment of offenders on the sex offender register.

The voluntary sector will be encouraged to form partnerships with the probation service (public and private). *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects are well placed for this change because the volunteers are committed to what they do with CoSA. *Circles UK* also has established a number of good practices for training and guidance for volunteers. In this way, *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects actually have an advantage over other providers. If the private sector do get involved with the management of sexual offenders, some volunteers might not be attracted to work with the private sector as easily as they have been attracted to the public sector. CoSA Projects have an advantage in attracting volunteers to work with offenders because they are mostly charitable organisations working not for profit. Thus they have a greater appeal for the outwardly motivated volunteers, who will prefer working for charities rather than for the private sector, if unpaid.

Frameworks of Change

The welfare approaches to working with offenders to help them back into society was somewhat restricted by the mid-1970s doubts about ‘what worked’. The resulting move was toward ‘just deserts’ sentencing and a ‘negative’ focus on an individual’s ‘deficits’ or ‘criminogenic needs’. This movement was referred to as the Risk, Needs, Responsivity (RNR) approach. In the late 1990s and early 2000s this ‘deficits’ approach was challenged by what was seen as a more ‘positive’ and ‘strengths-based’

approach. This means that offenders have the same basic human needs as everyone and strive for basic ‘primary human goods’ in order to live a reasonable life in society. This movement was referred to as the Good Lives Model (GLM). In turn the GLM also fitted with the growing restorative justice approaches emerging at the same time.

With its approach on ‘Support’ and ‘Accountability’ CoSA aims at integrating these different approaches. However, operating on a mix of risk-based and so called strengths-based approaches might explain some of the difficulties experienced in the work of CoSA by different groups.

The Volunteers: Key Findings

The use of volunteers to work alongside the professionals who deal with people convicted of sexual offences is the unique feature of Circles. Findings include how volunteers got started in this field, what motivated them, how they experienced recruitment and training and what they thought of the actual Circle meetings. Further, views on their working relationship with the Core Member and with their fellow volunteers were explored, as well as general views of Circles. The research probed into how they perceived concepts like ‘support’ and ‘accountability’ and how they might recognise signs of success and risk in their contact with the Core Members.

The volunteers were highly motivated. Nearly half of the volunteers stated they had initially volunteered to aid their own career prospects or expressed a voyeuristic desire to work with sex offenders, however, many changed their views having completed a Circle. The majority had volunteered for outward, more altruistic reasons. They had their expectations confirmed and have continued in their role with Circles. Training was highly thought of with most saying it added to their knowledge or provided a strong base for them to start working with Core Members. The relationship volunteers had with the Coordinator was also identified as important and providing a link to the Project as a whole. In some cases it was the ‘sales-pitch’ or enthusiasm of the Coordinator which encouraged the volunteers to join CoSA. The volunteers stressed that they felt the Coordinators were an ever-present support for them should they need it and were a respected source of knowledge.

What constituted a good meeting varied between the Circles and the individual needs of Core Members, though free-flowing and humorous meetings were seen as important. Outside of the formal meetings, volunteers met with Core Members at libraries, art galleries, café's and other venues according to the Core Members wishes or needs. These meetings outside of the formal settings were seen as pivotal in developing the Core Members' social skills and relationships, but also in helping them recognise the progress they were making. The volunteers felt Core Members enjoyed activities which were 'fun' though benefitted more from activities such as library visits or assisting at the job centre.

Volunteers had a realistic assessment of what they could achieve with Core Members. They felt they could not completely change their behaviour but they could 'nudge' them in the right direction through pro-social modelling. They all felt the importance of accepting the Core Member as a fellow-citizen rather than seeing him as a stigmatised 'outsider'. Providing a sense of structure and reliability in the Core Members life by attending the weekly meetings was also felt to be important by volunteers. Despite being unable to control behaviours or directly change the behaviour of Core Members, the volunteers did imply that via the Circle they could affect some changes (e.g. mannerisms and appearance) and provide an environment which offers something different to that which professionals give in supervision meetings or treatment programmes.

The interviews demonstrated the capacity of the volunteers to be supportive of the Core Member. In doing so, Circles in line with reintegrative shaming principles, express societies disapproval for the act while accepting the guilty party back into the community and thus help prevent future offending through a process of active reintegration.

There was apparent confusion regarding the meaning and limits of the word 'accountability'. The lack of a precise and shared understanding of this central concept remains significant. Some volunteers saw accountability to be about the past and the Core Members' original offence, whilst others saw it as being about the

present and future behaviour. Some volunteers felt that they as volunteers were ultimately accountable for any risky behaviours not being identified. Others felt that the role of the volunteers was limited to passing any instances of risky behaviours or disclosures of harm to the Coordinator. Despite this lack of clarity it is arguable that the volunteers are in fact holding Core Members to account and are able to effect some changes in their behaviour.

The Stakeholders: Key Findings

The professionals who worked with Circles collectively were seen as the 'stakeholders' and included the Coordinators of CoSA Projects, Police Officers, Probation Officers and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers. Project Coordinators have a pivotal role in Circle Project arrangements pulling everyone together and ensuring the service is delivered. The police has a slightly more distant role from the actual Circles but have clear views on the work they do. Probation Officers feel closer to the volunteers and are well informed on the work carried out. Both Police and Probation Officers feel that part of their role is to ensure the welfare of the volunteers.

The CoSA model was considered a good model by all stakeholders and was seen as adding an extra dimension to the work that they themselves could do with sex offenders. However, CoSA also offered something different from the professionals' contribution. There was broad agreement that the use of volunteers is good and volunteers were regarded positively by all respondents. Many of the stakeholders noted the levels of commitment displayed by the volunteers and the common-sense views which volunteers could bring to the role, which is unencumbered by professional training.

Most stakeholders did raise some concerns as to the need to protect volunteers from the Core Member or from the consequences of the actions of Core Members. Both Police and Probation Officers made this point about protection for the volunteers, albeit in slightly different ways. The Police saw protection in terms of ensuring that the volunteers had sufficient information about the potential Core Members. In contrast, the Probation Officers were concerned to directly intervene if they saw any

risk to the volunteers, and if necessary even by stopping a Circle. These risks included volunteers being in harms-way of a Core Members behaviour (e.g. offending or grooming etc); volunteers feeling mistreated by Core Members or being under-valued by the Criminal Justice System. The need to protect came from the Police Officers and Probation Officers rather than it was mentioned and requested by the volunteers, and in our material we did not find any such remarks from volunteers.

At the same time the volunteer's commitment and enthusiasm, as well as their motivation was questioned, especially by half of the Police Officers interviewed. This group raised questions as to the initial motivations for the volunteers engaging in CoSA although their knowledge of recruitment and training of volunteers was by their own admission, limited, and thus not based on accurate information. This should be of concern to Circles.

All Project Coordinators had previous links to Probation. They displayed the best understanding of CoSA and there was a consensus amongst them as to how CoSA should operate. Some Coordinators took on additional duties 'at the edges' of the formal role which had been unexpected but which were deemed to be important to maintaining the functioning of the Project. These additional duties could lead to stress among Coordinators.

Communication, Collaboration and Information Exchange

All stakeholders and the volunteers placed a high value on information exchange within Circle Projects. However, there were differences of opinion amongst them about the information flowing from and to Circles. The Probation Officers felt the flows of information to be quite strong and regular whereas the Police, who placed a high value on any information they received had mixed experiences. Some were just grateful for any information received from the Circle, but others found the degree of information not as forthcoming as they had expected.

A distinction was made between 'personal information' and other forms of information. 'Personal information' about the Core Member went from the professionals to the Circle volunteers and alternatively went from the volunteers to the

professionals. The Coordinators held a pivotal role in the centre of proceedings acting as a 'gatekeeper' and ensuring the movement of relevant 'personal information'. Personal information was the category of information that was of most concern. This was information that related to an identifiable person and could lay claim to being 'private' and needing a degree of 'confidentiality' surrounding it. The personal information about the Core Member coming into the Circle was generally very strong and positively received. Good communication channels existed and this incoming personal information was seen as part of the professionals' duty to 'protect' volunteers. This appeared to be an example of collaboration working at its best.

Personal information moving outward from the Circle to the professionals could be more problematic. Quite a number of professionals saw Circles as an extra set of 'eyes and ears' for the criminal justice system. Most of the time it worked well and was valued by the professionals, but sometimes there was a lack of clarity over the relevance of outward information from the Circles. Some professionals wanted to see 'any' information coming from the Circle because all was considered to be useful and supplementary to their own interventions and intelligence and contact with the Core Member. The Project Coordinators, however, saw it as their role to filter information and be the gatekeeper of the Circle and sometimes they kept the gate closed. In most instances this filtering was carried out in a responsible way with Coordinators making considered and defensible decisions on what information was being passed on. The *Circles UKs Code of Practice* states that information should be '*relevant to risk, progress and safety*'. These are arguably quite ambiguous and subjective terms and open to interpretation. Coordinators who are putting 'everything' through, could be deviating from the Code and using a 'precautionary logic' that implied it's 'better to be safe than sorry'.

The levels to which filtering is open to interpretation could create difficulties to all parties. At the centre the Core Member could be limiting their input of information to the Circle based on how much they think will be moved forward by the volunteers. The volunteers consider how much they should pass to the Coordinators and the Coordinator has to decide how much he or she will pass to police or probation. This discretionary filtering could also be open to misinterpretation which at worst could

jeopardise the balance and functioning of the Project. Support and accountability in a Circle are always in a delicate balance and the perceived misuse of information on the accountability side could lead to an undermining of the support side of the equation.

There is also a balance between providing personal information and keeping the trust of the Core Member. Generally the Coordinators did very well in maintaining this balance in their gatekeeper role. However, at least three examples of instances were found where this balance was difficult to maintain and decisions were made under high levels of uncertainty. This further corroborates other findings that highlight the lack of clarity around the concept of accountability.

The Core Members: Key Findings

Core Members recounted the discomfort, uncertainty and fears that their ‘new’ status as sex offenders gave them. Many had lost family, social networks and the familiarity of a home town. In the wider context this isolation could be amplified by adverse press reporting and moving to towns or cities where they knew no-one. The result was often a self-imposed restriction to the home and a withdrawal from the community. The opportunity provided by CoSA, however, even with the initial uncertainties they had of its role, was seen as representing an opportunity to counter some of the barriers to reintegration. Misconceptions included fears of CoSA being an extension of the statutory agencies, especially the police and probation services or being judged by the volunteers. For those who were better informed the move to a Circle provoked less anxiety.

An unexpected finding was the extent of contact made by telephone outside of the formal meetings. Contact was equally initiated by volunteers and Core Members. The use of the telephone constituted an informal and valued supplement to the formal Circle, not least because contact could be made throughout the whole week if necessary. The existence of this ‘virtual’ network was another means of countering the isolation they experienced.

Initial meetings were ‘scary’ for many of the Core Members, especially about meeting a group of complete strangers and talking about their offending. As the routine of the

meetings developed, Core Members became more comfortable, settled and recognised the mostly non-judgemental attitudes of the volunteers. The meetings could be challenging for some Core Members and could induce stress for them but on the whole the context of the meetings provided a different type of meeting to that which Core Members had with the statutory sector and it was recognised and appreciated as such.

Core Members spoke highly of other activities that took them beyond the formal meetings with the volunteers. Those activities included visits to coffee bars, museums, art galleries, sporting events and walks. Meals were also a popular activity of the Circle to celebrate birthdays and seasonal events. These activities took the focus away from their offending and were seen by Core Members as activities which 'normal' people would do.

The opinions Core Members held of the volunteers were largely positive, with many Core Members being grateful for the time given up to help them, the acceptance of the Core Members as fellow-citizens, and for providing a safe environment for the discussion of sensitive topics. Core Members did question the number of volunteers who came with previous experience of working in criminal justice, particularly from the Probation Service. Opinions of Coordinators were also mostly positive and Core Members were grateful for their reassurance at difficult times and their ability to match their needs with suitable volunteers. Highly directive interactions with Coordinators were rejected by Core Members and seen as inappropriate.

Understandings of Support and Accountability contrasted. Support was well understood and Core Members were appreciative of the efforts of the volunteers in terms of general encouragement and with specific matters. Accountability on the other hand was a more difficult concept for them to understand. Most Core Members initially were confused by the very word accountability and its meaning, however, many of the Core Members were able to provide instances of where the volunteers had called them to account for their past offending or current 'risky behaviours'. Generally though the Core Members felt that responsibility to be accountable rested with them.

The vast majority of Core Members reported feeling more confident, gaining a wider social circle, being more appreciative of themselves and many said their working relationship with statutory agencies such as the police and probation had improved. Some felt they had gained new perspectives on their lives and more self-awareness as a result of their participation in CoSA. Many credited the Circle as having effected these changes, although others were more circumspect, saying CoSA were just one of a number of influences that had caused them to rethink their life. Overall CoSA, the volunteers and Project Coordinators were seen positively by the Core Members.

Review and Recommendations

The governments *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda implemented in 2014 will change the landscape of rehabilitation for people leaving prison. Circles of Support and Accountability and *Circles UK* as their coordinating central body has to find its best and most suitable position within the new panorama that is opening up.

The changes will mean the new National Probation Service will retain only 30% of its former work and the remaining 70% of traditional probation work will move to the private sector. The 30% of work left with the National Probation Service will include work focused on public protection, work directly managing those subject to MAPPA and those who pose the highest risk to the public; this will include work with sex offenders. High risk sex offenders will continue to be managed by the National Probation Service and if required Circles of Support and Accountability will continue to work in partnership with the NPS. Few changes are anticipated for the police and their Public Protection Units and their role of on-going risk assessment of offenders on the sex offender register. The voluntary sector will be encouraged to form partnerships with the probation service (public and private).

Circles UK and CoSA Projects are well placed for all these changes. The reasons are: they have volunteers with a strong commitment to their work with CoSA; *Circles UK* has established a number of good practices for training and guidance for volunteers.

This provides *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects with a pole-position in the future, more competitive environment.

Volunteers and Volunteering

There was a time when it was felt that only professionals could work with sex offenders and that this was not suitable work for volunteers. That position has clearly changed and Circles Projects are the manifestation of that change.

The Circles Coordinators find them either an easy group to manage being excellent in their role, enthusiastic and relating well to the Core Members. On the other hand they are a difficult group to manage. These difficulties arise because they are volunteers and not 'workers' and at worst they can just walk away from the Circle if they do not like it. Being part of a Circle is a big commitment.

Volunteers are lay people and as such this is both a strength and a weakness. A strength because they offer a fresh non-professional outlook that represents an acceptance of the Core Member but with the 'man (or woman)-in-the-street' view. They offer commitment and an immediate set of relationships for the Core Member. The weakness of the volunteer is that they might miss things that a professional would recognise. The very appearance of the Core Member was cited as a case in point. Volunteers thought that a dishevelled and scruffy looking Core Member was evidence of going 'downhill' where more offending might be about to start while a smartly dressed Core Member was showing signs of engagement with the world and evidence of probable desistance from offending. The professionals on the other hand, thought smart appearance could denote the opposite and could mean Core Members were already re-offending.

The volunteers were also unsure of whether 'accountability' meant accountability for the Core Members original offending or whether it should be applied to future possible offending. An emphasis was put on the initial disclosure of original offending by the Core Member at the start of the Circle but there was uncertainty as to whether this meant a need for constant revisiting of that event in later meetings.

Recommendations:

Recruitment of Volunteers

- Thought should be given to ways of widening the marketing of Circles for a greater cross-section of society to be brought in;
- More balance between 'ordinary' members of the public and people with backgrounds in criminal justice should be sought;
- More monitoring and exploration of absences and withdrawals by volunteers should be carried out.

Training for Volunteers

- Regular reviews of training provision and material are recommended;
- More sharing of best training practices at Coordinator forums and via Newsletters is encouraged;
- Evaluations of the initial training and further training should be sought from volunteers;
- Short refresher training for volunteers starting a new Circle is encouraged (some projects are already doing this)
- Training should include more content on the isolation and stigma attached to people with convictions for sexual offending;
- Training should be jargon-free for volunteers;
- Training should provide greater clarification and understanding of what is meant by 'support' and 'accountability';
- Training should provide clarification and understanding of 'personal information' 'privacy' and 'confidentiality';
- Training should help volunteers decide what to report and not report; at present there seems to be uncertainty;
- Training should help volunteers better distinguish between the roles of the Police (PPU) Officers, Probation Officers and volunteers;
- *Circles UK* and regional CoSA Projects should look into the possibilities to reduce the time gap between training ending and first Circle

Circles and Activities of Volunteers

- Training should cover appropriate other activities that could take place in a Circle;
- Guidance should be given to volunteers on what degree of planning should go into a Circle meeting and how much should be unplanned and spontaneous;
- Guidance should be given to volunteers on whether a Circle should focus on past offences or future behaviour;
- Guidance should be given on suitable venues for meetings (e.g. should probation offices be avoided to make the point that Circles is not a part of the statutory mechanisms);
- Guidance should be provided on ensuring meetings are in 'safe' places and not liable to interruption;

- Guidance should be provided on what is the minimum operational size of a Circle should individual volunteers not be available for a meeting; rules on one to one meetings should be clarified;
- Guidance should be provided on what constitutes ‘progress’ in a Circle and of a Core Member;

Communication and Collaboration

Collaboration and ‘working together’ is a well-established feature for agencies working in the criminal justice system. Working together can be pictured as a continuum from regular arms-length communication, through to various degrees of closer cooperation and coordination and on to elements of merger and ultimately incorporation. Such working together can take place at a high strategic level between organisations or at a lower service delivery level between practitioners on the ground. There is a recurring debate on the degree to which Circles of Support and Accountability should work closely together with the statutory public services and what levels of independence they should have. CoSA Projects that move too close to the probation service might risk incorporation as an extension of the formal supervisory systems provided by the police and probation service. This was something the original CoSA schemes in Canada managed to avoid. They have been said to be more ‘organic’ and independent than ‘systemic’ and embedded with the formal agencies. Circles Projects in the UK are therefore already seen as more ‘systemic’ and embedded in the formal arrangements where ‘the success of Circles in England and Wales was, in part, due to the strategic decision to place it within the existing structure of inter-agency cooperation’ (Hanvey et al 2011: 62). On the other hand Circles could introduce a countervailing approach to that of the ‘containment’ policies of the statutory arrangements.

This systemic position, close to the statutory agencies comes with a number of difficulties and problems. The probation service, police and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers were appreciative of the added value that Circles brought to their supervisory and management work. This was especially so in terms of the ‘personal information’ that a Circle could gather from a Core Member and pass on to the professionals. A recurring theme from the professionals interviewed was the idea that Circles gave them ‘extra eyes and ears’ with which to supervise offenders.

However this is a view contested from within CoSA. The idea that Circles are in existence solely for purposes of being ‘extra eyes and ears’ has been challenged openly and that particular phrase was rejected by the chair of one regional Circles Project (Chair of Yorkshire and Humberside COSA writing in their Newsletter *Ever Increasing Circles* No 8 Spring 2014). Volunteers also made this point. They queried whether Circles was becoming too close and tied into the statutory services and in turn becoming too ‘professional’.

The position of Coordinators seemed to affirm a very close relationship with the probation service. All the Coordinators we spoke to had strong links to the probation service being either seconded from the service or themselves being ex-probation officers. One Coordinator respondent told us it would be very difficult to be a Coordinator if one did not speak the language of probation. This is mirrored by the volunteer respondents. They felt that ‘professional language’ had to some extent infiltrated training efforts.

This systemic closeness is also obvious to some Core Members. It was perhaps interesting that it was the Core Members who noticed this more than other Circles participants and it was they who commented on the ‘overlap’ in language and attitudes. If the volunteers are meant to be representative of ordinary men and women in the street the use of professionals and ex-professionals from the criminal justice system might undermine this expectation and need to be further examined.

In the following section we provide some points for attention with a particular focus on the Coordinators who are ‘gatekeepers’ and focal points for the collaboration with professionals from Police and Probation.

Recommendations:

Coordinators

- Police and Probation Officers should be properly informed of the Project role and standing of the Coordinators and accept this;
- *Circles UK* might explore the possibilities to appoint volunteers as Coordinators so as to divide the roles between Project managers and volunteer Coordinators;

- The formal role/description of the Coordinator should be re-visited;
- The degree of local discretion accorded to Coordinators by *Circles UK* should be made more explicit;
- *Circles UK* should provide information to Coordinators on national strategy matters;
- Forums organised by *Circles UK* should be explicitly used to showcase best practices and for information exchange between Projects;
- *Circles UK* should review the amount of regular information they require from Coordinators;

Police, Probation and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers

- More general information about CoSA should be provided to all stakeholders on a regular basis; for those new to CoSA, an induction pack should be prepared;
- Guidance should be provided to clarify police contact with volunteers;
- *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects need to manage expectations from professionals regarding being an extra set of ‘eyes and ears’.

Support and Accountability

Support and Accountability are both key to the concept of CoSA. Support and Accountability are always stated as evenly balanced concepts with one as important as the other. Some commentators have described the two concepts as not opposed but with the support ‘hiding’ behind or being obscured by the accountability side and the latter even emphasised for public relations purposes (Hannem 2011). However, the research found evidence that for the majority of stakeholders and volunteers, accountability took priority over support. Some of the volunteers, for example, thought that their Circles training focused more on the accountability side of the equation than the support side. This was mirrored by views from the Police Officers.

Our research found that support from a Circle was well received by most of the Core Members interviewed. The Circle might not be able to help with major problems like accommodation or employment but it could provide acceptance, company and it could stop isolation; in those terms it could be very effective. Breaking the cycle of isolation seems to be a key achievement of the Circles and recognised by all.

Understanding and acting on accountability was problematic for all participants in Circles. All groups had never considered the term/concept before and when asked to

do so found it quite difficult. There was confusion amongst volunteers, for example, over whether accountability referred to ‘past’ crimes, or ‘future’ behaviour. Some Circle volunteers continually focused on the original offence that had led to conviction and sentence believing that accountability referred to that behaviour which had brought the Core Member before them. Others thought it was about future behaviour and possible future offending and meant looking for the risky behaviour patterns that might lead in that direction. This was the type of information on current behaviours that the volunteers sought and passed on to the professionals. Some volunteers thought that accountability referred to their accountability as a Circle in eliciting and channelling information from and on the Core Member. This could place an unexpected responsibility on their shoulders, and at worse could lead to a ‘fear’ that meant they were responsible for any future offending if they had not identified and passed on relevant information.

The most common tactic for the volunteers was to off-load their perceived accountability by passing information on to the Coordinator. Once they had reported to the Coordinator, they felt relieved of their responsibilities and left it to the Coordinator to determine how to proceed.

The imbalance between Support and Accountability, and the ensuing problems of communicating the concepts might be the result of the more ‘systemic nature’ of *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects and their stronger integration with statutory agencies. The researchers are not in a position to question this in principle, however, we wish to make recommendations that improve the present situation in particular regarding the flow of information. Training for volunteers might focus on these two concepts of support and accountability. The nature of support and accountability and the delicate balance between them should be as fully understood as possible before volunteers start their first Circle.

Recommendations:

‘Personal Information’ flows

- The nature of ‘personal information’ should be clarified in order to ensure agreed standards and provide certitude for action;

- The nature of ‘confidentiality’ with respect to Circles Projects should be clarified;
- The meaning of ‘accountability’ should be clarified and guidance produced for all participants involved in a Circle (Core Member, volunteer and professionals);
- The role of the original offence in the first and following meetings should be clarified; for Coordinators the level of discretion they have in their ‘gatekeeper’ role of filtering information flows should be clarified and guidance provided;
- The use and production of meeting minutes should be revisited: Are Core Members required to sign these? Policies regarding retention and access to minutes should be developed;
- Policies on informal exchanges of information and the use of that information should be established.

Communication with Core Members

- Core Members should be provided with more guidance in advance on what Circles are about in order to avoid misconceptions;
- Guidelines could be developed on the degree to which volunteers can challenge a Core Member in a meeting;
- Guidance should be produced on the nature of ‘virtual circles’ based on telephone contact and the extent of such contacts.

Conclusion: Circles as an Experience

This report has captured the experience of being part of a Circle Project whether as volunteer, stakeholder or Core Member. The report does not attempt any conclusions on whether the CoSA experience is effective in reducing re-offending. More robust research will be needed for that to be demonstrated. We can report that all participants feel their involvement in CoSA to be a worthwhile exercise and there were no criticisms in principle of CoSA. Core Members found it overwhelmingly useful and helpful. The report highlights a number of difficulties and problems that mainly result from the highly fraught environment in which CoSA operates and the conflicting demands that are imposed on its work. Notwithstanding these issues CoSA is well prepared for the changes in this landscape which lie ahead.

Chapter One - Introduction

Sexual offending is a serious and uniquely invasive form of offending. When the victims are children the violation is even more harmful. The subject of sexual offending and the appropriate response to such offending has moved steadily up political and public agendas over the last 15 -20 years. Successive Governments have introduced laws and policies to manage and contain the person living in the community who has been convicted for sexual offences and to enhance the levels of public protection to that community.

A complementary approach to managing people in the community has been that based on ideas of restorative justice and the GLM (Good Lives Model). Rather than identify 'deficits', risks and other 'negatives' that needed treatment, managing or 'exclusion', these approaches seek to work with the sex offender and to 'include' them back into society as better functioning members of that society. It particularly focused on a person's 'positives' and 'strengths' rather than his or her 'deficits'. Circles of Support and Accountability is a prime example of this approach.

This report is the result of a four year study. The original aim of the research was stated as 'to assess the extent to which CoSA Projects contribute towards the reintegration of adult sex offenders into the community'. The more specific objectives of the research were to:

- Examine the frontline practices of CoSA;
- Describe the cohort of Core Members who have completed or are currently in a Circle;
- Explore the experiences of Core Members;
- Identify the key components which are associated with re-integration in the community;
- Explore the background, motivation and experiences of volunteers;
- Investigate the links between the operation of CoSA and statutory provisions for sex offenders, such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), probation and the police;
- Assess the relative importance of factors and services in the process of reintegration for sex offenders;

- Contribute towards the development of good practice¹

The methodology to achieve these aims and objectives are outlined in detail in Chapter Five. Here we would just say that a series of complementary methods were originally intended to be used that included a Literature Review, collection of administrative data on Core Members, interviews with Core Members, interviews with volunteers and interviews with key stakeholders. As such this is not a report on impact of the work of Circles. It should be seen as a process-oriented and in-depth study of Circles and all who are involved.

The report is divided into four sections:

Part One - Circles of Support and Accountability - History, Development and Assessment

The report outlines a brief history of Circles of Support and Accountability from its origins in 1994 in Ontario, Canada and its transfer to the UK in 2000. In part they were a response to the increasing ‘demonisation’ of the child sex offender experienced in the UK at this time.

The embryonic Circles were based in the Thames Valley and Hampshire areas but later spread across the country; in 2007 a national coordinating body called *Circles UK* was established to set standards and produce a Code of Practice that regional Circles Projects were expected to comply with.

A Coordinator organises four to six volunteers into the Circle; the volunteers are recruited, trained and selected by the Coordinator. The volunteers meet regularly as a group (the Circle) with the person released from prison with convictions for sexual offences, who is referred to as the Core Member of the Circle. The role of the Circle

¹ One of the objectives of the original contract was transferred to a different provider in the course of the project. This was the analysis of the reconviction data and at the time of writing has not been finalised.

is to help support, monitor, and maintain the Core Member in the community. The Coordinator acts as a link between the volunteers, the Core Member and the statutory public services in the form of Police and Probation Officers.

Circles of Support and Accountability have received good reports from what existing evaluative studies there have been and have also received a good deal of press and media coverage. From their origins in Canada they have started to spread to other countries.

Part Two – Sex Offenders in the Community: The Context

The UK management of sex offenders in the community has been premised on a ‘containment’ model made up of post-custody probation supervision, sex offender registration, and various civil orders to prohibit potentially harmful behaviour. These services are provided by the police and probation service who are brought together along with other agencies in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

The Coalition government is currently implementing its *Transforming Rehabilitation* (TR) programme which will introduce the private sector and the voluntary sector far more into working with people recently released from prison. This will result in a smaller public probation service with an estimated 70% of its work going to the private and voluntary sectors. The reduced probation service will, however, continue to work with people who have committed sexual offences.

Alongside the ‘management’ and ‘containment’ of sex offenders have been attempts to effect ‘changes’ in the behaviour of sex offenders and their ‘treatment’ to try and help reduce re-offending. For present purposes the overarching theoretical frameworks to this work are divided into two – a ‘deficits based’ approach and a ‘strengths-based’ approach. The priority of the ‘strengths-based’ approach is to achieve a greater sense of agency, more self-esteem, increased social maturity and a

greater sense of competence from learning new skills. Such experiences should be associated with greater inclusion in society and successful resettlement.

Part Three – The Research

The essence of this report is based on 70 interviews with the key participants in Circles of Support and Accountability to create a picture of the frontline activities they are all engaged in. This includes interviews with the volunteers, the Coordinators, Police and Probation Officers and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers working at a senior level in the MAPPA. The final part of the research involved interviews with the Core Members.

With the focus on the experiences of a total of twenty Circles of Support and Accountability volunteers across the country were interviewed for their experiences on:

- Starting with Circles;
- Activities of a Circle;
- Relationships within Circles;
- Control and Accountability; and
- Recognising Success and Risk

For all the interviews the interview method of Appreciative Inquiry was used (see Chapter Five for details). Coordinators of Circles were interviewed for their views on their role and what it entailed, and how they experienced the volunteers and the task of organising the Circles. They were also asked about their view of the Core Members and what it was like working with the police and probation service and the coordinating body - *Circles UK*. For all groups the interview was designed with consideration to Appreciative Inquiry.

The other professionals were similarly asked for their views; these included the probation service and the Police as well as MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers involved with MAPPA and who had some commissioning roles with Circles.

A separate chapter in the report focusses on the exchange of information within the Circles structure; this included ‘personal information’ on the Core Members and more general information about the necessary arrangements for a Circle. Given the sensitive and confidential nature of the ‘personal information’ the research asked all the participants for their views on the formal exchanges and the form that they took as well as the informal arrangements.

This part of the report ends with the Core Members reflecting on life as a convicted sexual offender and the isolation they experienced, and their expectations of Circles and whether they had helped them in their resettlement. The Core Members gave their views on the volunteers, the content of the Circles, the nature of the support offered and the degree of accountability they felt they were under. They also gave their views on the professionals they had to work with.

Part Four – Review and Recommendations

In the final section the findings from the literature review chapters and from the results chapters on the different groups (volunteers, stakeholders and Core Members) are drawn together and discussed under the following headings:

- The changing landscape of rehabilitation;
- The nature of volunteering and the volunteers who provide Circles;
- The nature of communication and collaboration by all participants within CoSA Projects and across *Circles UK*; and
- The understanding of Support and Accountability within CoSA Projects and the various groups.

This is followed by recommendations that are based on the results of the research. It needs to be highlighted that the general tone of all groups was essentially positive nonetheless we need to caution that positive experiences are not necessarily the same as impact and efficiency. The recommendations focus in particular on communication, guidance and training.

**PART ONE: CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND
ACCOUNTABILITY - HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT
and ASSESSMENT**

Chapter Two – Circles of Support and Accountability – History, Development and Assessment

Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a way of working with sex offenders using volunteers. A group of volunteers (a ‘Circle’) meets with the former offender (the ‘Core Member’) on a regular basis over a given period of time to help them resettle in the community after a period of custody or to help them better adjust to society following a community sentence. The Circle offers the Core Member ‘support’ in various forms but also requires from the offender a degree of ‘accountability’ for their future behaviour.

The Circle of volunteers is linked by a ‘Coordinator’ to the statutory agencies in the form of the Probation and Police Service. Volunteers are carefully selected, given preliminary training and on-going support by the Coordinator. Reports of Circle meetings between volunteers and Core Members are provided to the Coordinators and relevant information fed back to the statutory agencies. *Circles UK* has become the national umbrella body for all local circles initiatives with its stated aim as ‘no more victims’.

For further general reading on Circles of Support and Accountability the reader is directed to the works by Silverman and Wilson 2002 (esp. pp167-79), the three articles by Wilson et al 2007 (a) (b) and (c) Kemshall 2008 (esp. pp 74-78), Nellis 2009, McAlinden 2010 (a), Bates et al 2012, Hanvey et al 2011, Hannem 2011, Hanvey and Höing 2013; further reading will be referenced throughout this report.

A Brief History of Circles

The origins of Circles of Support and Accountability have been well documented. They started in 1994 in Ontario, Canada in a community where there was considerable unrest caused by a high profile child sex offender being resettled to a community that did not want him. His cause was taken up by a local Mennonite church group who formed the first rudimentary Circle to support the offender and hold him to account:

The Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario (MCCO) agreed to sponsor a pilot project called the Community Reintegration Project, and the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) movement was born

(Wilson et al 2005)

The results were good in terms of re-offending and public safety and public authorities noted the relatively low costs of using volunteers; the idea was taken up by other Mennonite churches across Canada (Cesaroni 2001, Wilson et al 2002, Silverman and Wilson 2002: 167-179, Petrunik 2002, Hannem and Petrunik 2004, Kemshall 2008: 74-8, Hanvey et al 2011 Chapter One).

The idea of Circles later crossed the Atlantic to the UK where in the late 1990's we had seen the increasing 'demonisation' of the child sex offender and, as in Canada, vigilante unrest on the release from prison of some high profile sex offenders (PA News 1998). In August 2000 a media led campaign for American style public access to the sex offender register ('community notification') following the murder of eight year old Sarah Payne had led to street demonstrations that had in some areas turned violent (Perry 2000); the demand was for a 'Sarah's Law' comparable to 'Megan's Law' in the USA. An atmosphere of almost 'paedophile panic' was in the air (Silverman and Wilson 2002: 146-166).

The government had already introduced the sex offender register in the UK in 1997 and would follow that up with the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in 2001 (see Chapter Three). Full 'community notification' of the

whereabouts of registered sex offenders was resisted (Bennetto 2000) but lay members of the public were now permitted to sit on the Strategic Management Boards of MAPPA (Hebenton and Thomas 2004).

It was in this climate that talk of Circles of Support and Accountability started to be heard in the UK and again, just as in Canada, especially among religious groups. A Methodist church working party on sex offenders recorded its' interest in Circles of Support and Accountability:

The working party believes that the Church can play a significant role in developing these all important circles of support which will not only provide care for the individual offender but also help to reduce the number of future victims from abuse and contribute directly to public well-being

(Methodist Church 2000 section 3h; see also Bates 2000)

The Lucy Faithful Foundation charity working with child sex offenders from their offices in Berkshire sent a representative to Canada to see Circles for themselves. The Home Office started to take an interest in Circles and a workshop was convened in the UK in June 2000 and five Canadian representatives involved in Circles were able to attend (for a detailed account of developments at this time see Nellis 2009). The Lucy Faithful Foundation are credited with having started the first UK Circle of Support and Accountability in 2001 in Guildford (Hanvey et al 2011:13)

Another religious body - the Quakers – had also sent a representative to Canada to see Circles in operation and later they started a pilot project in the Thames Valley Police area in 2002; the TVP Chief Constable at this time, Charles Pollard, was particularly receptive to ideas based on restorative justice. The Home Office funded these initial projects over their first three years (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2003).

The importance of the Quaker involvement at this time has been emphasised:

[T]he Religious Society of Friends, or the Quakers, was crucial to the development and growth of Circles in the United Kingdom. The Quakers have a strong historical tradition of criminal justice reform. Their philosophy and faith have clear spiritual and theological

similarities to the Mennonites in Canada and the philosophy of Circles was integral to the Quaker tradition (Hanvey et al 2011: 21)

The Quakers themselves saw CoSA as a constructive way forward that avoided the worst pitfalls of ‘community notification’:

In our Interim Report published November 2003 we asked about ‘Sarah’s Law’ (the General Community Notification): ‘Are Circles of Support and Accountability a compromise on Sarah’s Law?’ This is now answered in the affirmative by the evidence from practice. (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005: 6)

Helen Drewery as Assistant General Secretary of the UK’s Quaker Peace and Social Witness was a driving force behind the movement. The Quakers started more CoSA projects in Hampshire during 2002-5; progress was slow, however, and later Hampshire merged with the Thames Valley projects to form the HTV area (Bates et al 2012)

The Home Office guidance to the emerging Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) published in March 2003 commended referral of former sex offenders to Circles of Support and Accountability as a risk management strategy ‘proven to be effective in achieving a reduction of re-offending behaviour or minimising the risk of serious harm’ (Home Office 2003: para.108). Subsequent revisions of this MAPPA guidance in 2007, 2009 and 2012 have all repeated the same brief commendation (see e.g. the most recent edition MoJ et al 2012: para12.58). Funding was targeted at CoSA pilot schemes by the National Probation Directorate as an example of ‘the type of community engagement with public protection which the MAPPA seeks to nurture’ (Bryan and Payne 2003).

The first national Circles conference took place 7 July 2004 at Friends House in London and Home Office junior minister Paul Goggins attended and affirmed the government’s commitment to Circles. Later the same day Goggins spoke about Circles in parliament. Jane Griffiths MP for Reading East had secured a short House of Commons debate at which she outlined the work of Circles of Support and Accountability. Paul Goggins confirmed that his Office were already providing

£173,000 to fund CoSA pilots with almost half of that money going to the Thames Valley project; evaluation was awaited but in the meantime he reported that:

I am pleased with the initial feedback that I have received from the earliest circles, which includes a range of evidence on such matters as offenders being supported in a way that enables them to live more independently, by getting a job, for example, or moving to their own accommodation, thereby helping them to overcome personal crises that are, perhaps, inevitable after a long period in prison (for the full 30 minute debate see Hansard HC Debates 7 July 2004 vol. 423 cc296-305WH)

Hanvey and colleagues report early differences at this time over how much CoSA should be an embedded part of the criminal justice mechanism and how independent it should be (Hanvey et al 2011: 23). The Quakers were clear that this was a result of replicating the more independent Canadian ‘organic’ model into the UK:

Our agenda was to adapt Circles to support the statutory agencies in the successful management of high-risk sex offenders living in the community. While the model for Canadian Circles is organic, the UK Circles model is systemic. (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005: 6)

In 2006 a separate Circles initiative was started in the north west of England as part of a project called IMPACT (Innovation Means Prisons and Communities Together). IMPACT was funded by the European Social Fund and was focussed primarily on enhancing the employability of ex-offenders of all kinds (Brown et al 2007). The lead agency was HM Prison Service in the north-west and some 40 development partners were involved from across all sectors:

The IMPACT model was set up based entirely on the best practice from the Thames Valley project. All criminal justice agencies were consulted to involve them in the process... IMPACT delivered a total of 6 successful Circles in the Lancashire and Cheshire probation regions during its research period. (IMPACT 2008 40-1; see also Haslewood-Pocsik et al 2008)

This spread of Circles initiatives was identified by Helen Drewery as something of a challenge:

Should we encourage the setting up of informal circles, even though they may lack the careful selection, training and support which we offer to our Circle members? Can – and should we – provide resources, such as manuals and training events to help faith groups ‘do circles’ as well as possible?
(Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005: 47)

In 2007 a national coordinating body called *Circles UK* was established; Stephen Hanvey was appointed as its first Chief Executive Officer in December 2007 (see below).

Within the UK but outside England and Wales a feasibility study was carried out to see if Circles of Support and Accountability would work in Scotland (Armstrong et al 2008). The Scottish government were initially not persuaded (Robertson 2008; see also Kirkwood and Richley 2008) but later a pilot scheme was organised by SACRO (Safeguarding Communities Reducing Offending) in the Fife area funded by government backing of £35,000 (Naysmith 2010).

In Northern Ireland Circles of Support and Accountability have reportedly been organised by the voluntary sector organisation Extern and works across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland providing a range of services to children, young people and adults:

A key restorative justice process employed by Extern involves the use of circles of support and accountability, taking a core person in need of assistance and attempting to wrap that person with a range supports such as volunteer buddying and a wider multi agency intervention (Payne et al 2010: 21)

Six circles were piloted before funding ran out (See below: *Circles in Other Countries*).

‘Circles UK’

All CoSA Projects have a degree of autonomy to practice as they wish, but to operate as CoSA Projects they are also required to be affiliated to *Circles UK*. *Circles UK* is a national charity based in Reading, Berkshire which acts as an umbrella organisation.

They define a Project as being the management and accountability structure recognised by *Circles UK* and statutory agencies for the delivery of Circles (*Circles UK* 2009: 6). CoSA Projects are guided with the aim of ensuring consistency, good practice and acceptable standards and governance across Projects. *Circles UK* is a charity although it has to-date received much of its funding from government departments (originally the Home Office and latterly the Ministry of Justice). Membership of *Circles UK* enables projects to use the ‘national brand’ and gives them access to a range of services (Hanvey et al, 2011: 29-30).

Circles UK protects the interests of Projects and supports and assists them with their work. It also runs national forums for the Coordinators to meet up, has published a number of strategy documents, produced a dynamic risk measurement tool (the Dynamic Risk Review or DRR) and facilitates and monitors research access through its Research and Evaluation Group. The work of *Circles UK* and Circles generally was presented at Westminster to the All-Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group 2 February 2010 (PRT 2010).

Circles UK publishes a Code of Practice which sets out standards with which all CoSA Projects are required to comply. The Code of Practice in use at the time of this research was published in 2009 (*Circles UK* 2009); it describes the purpose of Circles, includes fund raising and media protocols and sets out the requirements/standards relating to how Projects and Circles should operate. A revised and updated version of the Code was published in 2013 (*Circles UK* 2013). Compliance with the Code of Practice is monitored through auditing procedures which include visits to Projects by representatives of *Circles UK*; Yorkshire and Humberside CoSA, for example, reported:

We have received the feedback on our recent *Circles UK* compliance audit and they have awarded us a score of 98% (the necessary level to pass was 80%). We are all thrilled with the result. This is testimony to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved in YHCoSA and the commitment to the service we provide (Yorkshire and Humberside CoSA 2013 available at <https://sites.google.com/a/yhcosa.org.uk/test/news/circles-uk-audit> accessed 25 November 2013)

The Code of Practice requires data relating to the operation of Circles (how many Circles are active, number of volunteers and so on) to be provided by Projects to *Circles UK* on a quarterly basis and for 'common systems to be in place for the collection of data' (*Circles UK*, 2009: 10). The Code of Practice has the advantage of ensuring consistency and quality across CoSA Projects.

Circles in Practice

The CoSA arrangements may be pictured as a series of concentric circles at the centre of which is the person who has been convicted for a sexual offence - the Core Member. Around him or her are a circle of four to six volunteers and a professional Coordinator and outside them are a circle of professionals working with the same 'Core Member' - Probation Officers and/or Police Officers (Wilson et al 2007 (a)). As stated above the totality of the arrangements complete with management and accountability structures are referred to as Projects.

The volunteers create arguably the most important circle around the Core Member. Volunteers are carefully selected, and prepared for their role:

Once a volunteer has been successfully screened (interviews, references and enhanced criminal records check) and trained they will meet their fellow Circle volunteers and undertake a further month training before meeting the Core Member (Wilson et al 2010)

Volunteers meet on usually a weekly basis with the Core Member to build a working relationship. The Circle may consist of literally a Circle for purposes of discussion but may also include other activities in the community such as going to a restaurant, coffee bar etc. The underlying aims are to:

- Support,
- Monitor and
- Maintain

Support - is offered in the form of emotional or practical support on the basis that many Core Members are unduly isolated and do not have any support on first release from custody.

Monitoring - at the same time as 'support' is offered there is an agreement with the Core Member that anything untoward or 'suspicious' coming to light in a Circle that could possibly lead to risky behaviour will be reported by the Circle volunteers to the Coordinator and in turn to the police or probation service as the supervising authority; this being the 'monitoring' or 'accountability' side of the equation.

Maintaining – the Core Member is held accountable within a working relationship of trust with the volunteers and is guided toward maintaining any formal treatment objectives.

(see *Circles UK* 2009: 7)

Core Members are carefully selected by the Coordinators, the probation service, and police as being suitable for a Circle. Attendance at a CoSA arrangement is with the consent of the Core Member. Coordinators act as the link between the volunteers and the professionals and as a communications conduit for information exchanges (see Nellis 2009).

This coming together of statutory and voluntary workers has been described as a:

A fascinating hybrid of restorative and supportive functions and community protection practices that challenges assumptions and forces us to rethink theoretical boundaries (Hannem 2011)

Existing Evaluation Studies

On the whole, responses to CoSA have been favourable. In 2005, in one of the first evaluations of CoSA in England and Wales, the Thames Valley CoSA Project reported statistics from their first three years of operation. Using data collected from

20 Core Members who had participated in Circles in the Thames Valley CoSA Project, the results showed none of the Core Members had been reconvicted of any new sexual offence; one Core Member had been reconvicted for breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) and three Core Members had been recalled to prison on breach of parole licence. In four other cases recidivist behaviour in the Core Member was identified. The report states that in seven of the eight cases the CoSA volunteers identified the recidivist behaviour (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005; see also Bates et al 2004 and 2007). Recidivist behaviours were reported as consisting of a Core Member displaying traits exhibited when previous sexual offences occurred (i.e drinking) or pro-offending behaviours such as maintaining a record of past offending behaviour and updating this.

The most recent research on the Thames Valley CoSA Project, by this time renamed, *Circles South East*, was undertaken in 2012 and claimed a number of achievements for the Project (Circles South East, 2012; Bates et al, 2013). The research examined data held by the Circles South East Project on 71 Core Members since November 2002 and compared this with data on 71 sex offenders who had been referred to Circles South East but rejected and who did not receive a Circle. Reasons for rejection included the individual not yet being released from prison or an apparent lack of motivation from the individual being referred. A total of 29 Core Members who had received a Circle were excluded. Ten Core Members who had participated in CoSA for less than 90 days and 19 Core Members who had participated for less than six months².

The two groups were broadly matched using data received at the referral stage and from information on the Police National Computer. Those who did not receive a Circle had a slightly longer follow up period (55.04 months compared to 52.57 months for Core Members) and the average risk level was slightly higher among those who did not receive a Circle (2.21 v. 2.17). The risk levels for 25 members of the comparison group were missing compared to three from the Core Member group.

² 90 days was felt to be an insufficient period for Core Members to have benefitted from CoSA, and participation for less than six months was not considered a sufficient period to warrant a follow-up (Bates et al, 2013)

The results showed that no Core Members committed a new sexual or violent re-offence since participating in their Circle, but 10 individuals from the comparison group (those who did not participate in CoSA) had committed further sexual and violent offences. Bates et al (2013) should be commended for enhancing the rigour of the research on CoSA in England and Wales by undertaking this study although the authors admit there is a need for a matched comparison of subjects to provide more robust results.

Some of the most extensive Circles evaluations have been completed in Canada. In 2005, Wilson et al sought to compare recidivism data between 60 sex offenders who had received intervention from CoSA and 60 who had not, in order to attempt to better examine the influence of CoSA on recidivism. The study focused on one project in South Ontario, Canada. Wilson et al (2005) reported the sample was matched on their risk levels, the time and location of release, and the treatment interventions they had received. Recidivism was defined as being when a sex offender had been charged with, or convicted of a new sexual offence, or had breached an order of the court (Wilson et al, 2005). The results from the study showed that sex offenders who had received a circle had a 70% reduction in sexual recidivism with an average follow-up period of 4.5 years.

More recently, Wilson et al (2007b, 2007c, 2009) have conducted a national replication study of the 2005 recidivism evaluation and reported further positive results which suggest that CoSA interventions can significantly reduce reoffending amongst sex offenders. The study reported an 83% reduction in sexual recidivism and 71% reduction in all types of recidivism when compared a similarly matched sample (Wilson et al, 2009). The authors stated:

The results of this study provide strong evidence that adherence to principles of effective interventions, even when accomplished by community volunteers, can dramatically affect rates of re-offending (Wilson et al 2007c: 335)

In late 2012, the evidence base of CoSA was strengthened with data from the USA and the Minnesota CoSA project (Duwe, 2012). This research uses a randomised experimental design to evaluate whether Circles have decreased rates of recidivism

among a group of 62 Level 2 sex offenders³ who had volunteered to participate in a Circle. Half (N= 31) of the group were released from prison and randomly assigned to a Circle, while 31 offenders were randomly assigned to a control group. All 62 members of the study received the same treatment as they normally would, but the CoSA participants received additional contact with the Circle volunteers. The author also reports that aside from prior sexual convictions the two groups displayed no statistical differences.⁴

The results show that the reconviction rate for offenders who participated in a Circle was nearly half that of the control group (25%/45%). Duwe adds that CoSA reduced three of the five recidivism measures examined⁵, and the other two measures could be reassessed with a larger sample. The programme also reported an estimated \$11,700 reduction in costs per CoSA participant. From these results the author of the first randomised experimental design undertaken on CoSA stated:

The preliminary findings suggest that [CoSA] is an effective program for sex offenders (Duwe, 2012: 18)

In 2014, McCartan et al published the findings from a case file review of 32 Core Members from two CoSA pilot Projects between April 2008 and March 2010 (McCartan et al 2014 (a) and (b)). The two CoSA Projects were Hampshire and Thames Valley (HTV Circles) and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation CoSA. Despite the authors reporting a substantial amount of incomplete data the findings were favourably disposed toward Circles. The study found the two CoSA Projects to have supported risk management through proactive monitoring and to not have duplicated anything provided by the statutory agencies. Support had been provided to reduce the social isolation of Core Members and again to generally complement statutory support services (McCartan et al 2014 (a) and (b)). Up to now there has been no randomised control trial or meta-analysis of CoSA but there are larger reviews of sex offender treatment in general (see Lösel and Schmucker (2005) for an overview).

³ Level 2 offenders are those offenders assessed as posing a moderate risk to the public (Duwe, 2012)

⁴ The offenders who participated in the Circle were significantly more likely to have a greater number of prior convictions for sexual offences

⁵ The five recidivism measures are 're-arrest', 'reconviction', 're-incarceration for a new offence', 'revocation', and 'any re-incarceration – offence or revocation'.

Press and Broadcast Coverage

Media and press coverage has mostly been informative and favourably disposed toward Circles of Support and Accountability. Articles have been written in the national press by journalists including Butler 2002, Das Gupta 2006, Roberts 2006, Naysmith 2010, Coldwell 2012, and Dugan 2013. Some reports have been written by criminologists such as Professor David Wilson (Wilson 2004 and 2006).

At a regional and local level articles have included those by Duckles 2007 (Oxford), Casey 2012(a) and 2012(b) (Leeds), Gray 2013 (Rochdale) and Qureshi 2013 (Manchester). Other relevant local articles on CoSA with no by-line include 'Hampshire pilots paedophile project' (*Daily Echo* 21 September 2002), 'Sex pests need your help' (*Reading Evening Post* 7 July 2004), 'Can sex offenders be helped to change their ways' (*Yorkshire Post* 27 July 2007) and 'volunteers needed to monitor sex offenders in the community' (*Leamington Spa Courier* 9 May 2008) (for further examples see *Circles UK* web site at <http://www.circles-uk.org.uk/resources/newspaper-magazine-articles>)

David Wilson also made the television programme *No More Victims* broadcast by BBC 4 24 November 2004. Other BBC reports include Dilley 2002, Jha 2009 and Boakes 2013. BBC Radio 4 broadcast a feature called 'Rehabilitating Sex Offenders' in their series *All in the Mind* (14 July 2010) (available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxx9/broadcasts/2010/07> - accessed 29 November 2013) and a discussion on Circles was included in *Sunday Morning Live* BBC1 (7 July 2013).

There have been some critical press articles including the national tabloid headlines 'What a waste of our cash' (Kilroy-Silk 2002), 'Become pals with a pervert' (*Daily Express* 2002) and 'Parties for Perverts' (McLaughlin 2004). In Scotland CoSA was portrayed as 'Minders hold parties for kiddie pervs' (Hannem 2011)

Circles UK has a Media Protocol on communications with the media (see *Circles UK* 2009: Appendix B and 2013 Appendix E)

Circles in other Countries

Having arrived in the UK from Canada it is not surprising that CoSA arrangements have now started to spread around the world.

Scotland

The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research was commissioned by the Scottish Government to explore the feasibility of running pilot Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in Scotland. The resulting report was generally in favour of supporting CoSA (Armstrong et al 2008) but the Scottish Government decided against the idea (Robertson 2008; see also Kirkwood and Richley 2008 and Leask 2008).

Later a pilot Circle did take off organised by the NGO SACRO (Safeguarding Communities Reducing Offending) in the Fife area; the service delivered in Fife is a Pilot funded by Fife Council Criminal Justice Services, Fife Community Safety Partnership, and Fife and Forth Valley Community Justice Authority (Naysmith 2010).

Northern Ireland

“A pilot commenced operating in Northern Ireland by Extern. It ran six circles from 2003 to 2007. The shortest CoSA lasted for 14 months and longest was for just over four years.

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (who provided funding towards training and volunteers out of pocket expenses) and Extern (who provided the co-ordinator) funded the project. There was no funding from the probation service, although it supported the project. The pilot targeted high-risk offenders released on licence. Five of the circles were successful. In the sixth case, the circle ended because the offender was returned to prison for breach of conditions, as identified by the circle. Although the pilot had successful outcomes, it failed to secure core funding and did not move beyond the pilot phase” (Clarke, 2011: 19)

Europe

Belgium

CoSA has been established in Belgium through the Justitiehuis Antwerpen (Antwerp House of Justice, the local probation service) (Hanvey and Höing 2012; Höing et al 2010)

Republic of Ireland

The Irish Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform put forward the idea of CoSA in its 2009 discussion document *The Management of Sex Offenders* (DoJELR 2009: paras.4.4.10-11) and the Irish Probation Service followed this up by commissioning a feasibility study of circles working in the Irish context (Clarke 2011). The study found ‘widespread support for the establishment of CoSA in Ireland’ (ibid: para.5.2; see also Brennan 2011). At the time of writing CoSA ‘has not yet been introduced in Ireland’ (McGreevy 2013)

The Netherlands

Probation staff in the South of the Netherlands set up a Circle with the help of *Circles UK* and in conjunction with colleagues at Avans University of Applied Sciences (Vogelvang, 2012)

North America

Canada

Canada is considered the ‘home’ of Circles from which the practice has spread around the world (see Petrunik 2002, Hannem and Petrunik 2004)

The USA

A number of CoSA initiatives are now operating in the USA. Brief details and links of some of them are listed below.

Fresno, California - CoSA is housed in the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies of Fresno Pacific University (see <http://peace.fresno.edu/cosa/>; Gonzalez 2010)

Denver, Colorado (see <http://coloradocosa.org/>)

Minneapolis, Minnesota (see <http://www.doc.state.mn.us/volunteer/mncosa.htm>; Duwe 2012)

Nebraska (see <http://www.cosanebraska.org/>)

Durham, North Carolina (see <http://www.durhamcosa.org/index.html>; Upchurch 2013)

Cleveland, Ohio - The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has established the Citizen Circles to help ex-offenders (see <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/Citizen/citizencircle.htm>)

Portland, Oregon

(see

http://www.oregon.gov/DOC/OMR/pages/religious_services/home_for_good_in_oregon/hgo_home_page.aspx)

Barre, Vermont - The Vermont Department of Corrections was one of the first in the United States to embrace the CoSA approach, using a three-year \$2 million federal grant it received in 2003. Circles exist in Newport, St. Johnsbury, Barre, Montpelier, and Brattleboro

(see <http://www.doc.state.vt.us/about/policies/rpd/for-comment/circles-of-support-and-accountability-cosa-teams/view?searchterm=circles>; Russell 2007)

At the Federal level the U.S. Department of Justice, announced (27 April 2012) that it is seeking applications for funding under the 'Promoting Evidence Integration in Sex Offender Management: Circles of Support and Accountability Grant Program'. This

program supports projects that will generate evidence-based knowledge to enhance sex offender management practices (US Department of Justice, 2012)

Other Parts of the World

Bermuda

The Bermuda Coalition for the Protection of Children (CPC) has developed the CoSA framework for a programme to prevent ex-offenders from reoffending (Wilson 2013)

South Africa

(reference Kemshall 2008: 75)

China

See Master's Thesis (75 pp) Using circles of support and accountability in China: prospects and problems completed at School of Criminology Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, Canada (Zhong 2010)

Japan

(reference Circles South East 2012: 71)

Australia

The Federal Government Office for Women in Canberra, has commissioned a report on the feasibility of CoSA for Australia (Richards 2011 (a) and (b)). *Five8* is a Melbourne based voluntary group which builds pro-social communities around prisoners and ex-prisoners using the CoSA model. A group of six volunteers from Footscray Church of Christ (Melbourne) committed to visit an isolated prisoner, receive phone calls, write letters provide practical support such as assistance with his education, and continued to help him after his release (see <http://www.five8australia.com.au/about-the-program/introduction/>)

New Zealand

New Zealand has noted the existence of Circles of Support and Accountability (see Newsletter of *Rethinking Crime and Punishment* (RECAP) no. 78: 8-9, and no. 88: 3 available at www.rethinking.org.nz. accessed 29 November 2013)

Volunteer CoSA training has also been provided by the Te Piriti Special Treatment Unit for sex offenders at Auckland Prison. After some early set-backs when three Circles in the planning stage had to be ‘prematurely terminated because of inappropriate behaviour on the part of the Core Members’ and Circles have been generally welcomed by the New Zealand Department of Corrections and Parole Board (van Rensburg 2012).

A pan-European initiative:

In Europe *Circles UK* has been involved with Belgium and the Netherlands in a project called ‘Circles Europe – Together for Safety’ funded by the European Commission Daphne III Programme. The project aimed to support the implementation of Circles in other European Countries (see Höing 2011).

This was followed up by a second project also funded by the Daphne III programme called CIRCLES4EU which had three themes:

- (1) Unifying Circles, where the aim is to develop the European Circles network for the training, guidance and support of new European services, defining and setting the Circles principles and values.
- (2) Research which will oversee the objective of supporting and evaluating all work-streams and expanding the knowledge base to ensure maximum effectiveness and impact of Circles across a widely varied set of national and geographical locations.
- (3) Supporting the establishment of the three new Circles services in Catalonia, Latvia and Bulgaria.

(Hanvey 2013: 6; see also http://www.circles4.eu/default.asp?page_id=133)

Summary

Circles of Support and Accountability originated in Canada and started in the UK in 2001. The practice of organising volunteers in this way to help rehabilitate people with convictions for sexual offences back into the community after custodial sentences has gradually spread across the country from its beginnings in the Thames Valley and Hampshire. A centralised coordinating body – *Circles UK* – now sets standards for Circles and accredits new Projects and monitors existing ones. Evaluation studies to date have demonstrated the achievements of Circles, but no evaluation studies which can generate sufficiently robust results on CoSA in England and Wales currently exists. Public awareness has been relatively low-key although there has been a degree of press and broadcast coverage. Other countries have taken an interest in Circles and the movement looks set to continue spreading.

**PART TWO: SEX OFFENDERS IN THE
COMMUNITY: THE CONTEXT**

Chapter Three - Sex Offenders in the Community

Introduction

Statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest that there are about 473,000 adult victims of sex crimes in England and Wales every year. Some 404,000 of these victims are women. The Police Services of England and Wales recorded 53,665 sexual offences in 2011-12; 41% of these were for sexual assault, and 30% for rape (Ministry of Justice et al 2013). The NSPCC (2014) reported 18,915 sexual crimes against children under 16 in England and Wales in 2012/2013.

On 30 June 2011 there were 10,935 prisoners classified as sex offenders; 10,832 of these were men and 103 were women; 9850 of this total had been sentenced. Six years earlier on 30 June 2005 the prisons in England and Wales held 6,951 people remanded or sentenced for sexual offences. In this same time period (2005-11) the overall prison population had risen but the proportion of sex offenders had risen at a faster rate and now comprised 14% of the overall prison population compared to 9% in 2005 (Ministry of Justice et al 2013).

Chapter Three looks at the policy and legislation response to sexual offending as it has developed especially over the last twenty years. It is in this environment that Circles of Support and Accountability have grown.

Managing Sex Offenders in the Community

The 'management' of people in the community who have committed sexual offences has been a continuing political preoccupation over the last two decades; the management arrangements put in place have been to improve 'public protection'. The assessment of risk has become central to all 'management' and 'public protection' work with sex offenders to identify the 'dangerous' from the 'less dangerous'. These

developments have been initiated within the public statutory sector with new roles for the police, probation and other agencies.

An alternative terminology to ‘managing’ sex offenders in the community has been that of ‘containing’ the sex offender. This is terminology that has come from the USA, most notably in the influential guidance *Managing Adult Sex Offenders: a containment approach*. This containment model had five basic components:

- Public protection was paramount;
- Agencies had to coordinate and work together;
- Sex offenders were to be held accountable;
- Policies were to be developed and implemented to support consistent practices; and
- Quality control mechanisms ensured policies and procedures were delivered as planned (English et al 1996; 2.5-6).

The Association of Chief Probation Officers produced a briefing for Members of Parliament on working with sex offenders called *Containing Public Enemy Number One* (ACOP 1997). In California legislators passed a Sex Offender Containment Act 1999, although it never actually became law; others in America have referred to this time period as being the ‘containment era’ (Leon 2011 Chapter 5). Few voices were heard against containment or in favour of going ‘beyond containment’ (but see PRT 1992).

More recently there has been a revival of interest in the ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘resettlement’ of ex-prisoners back into the community. Of particular concern has been the perceived need to reduce the high re-offending rates of many people (not just sexual offenders) coming out of prison. The last two UK governments have been anxious to involve the private sector and the voluntary sector to help tackle this re-offending. As already mentioned, there were 10,935 prisoners in custody for sexual offences in 2012/2013 and this population represents one of the fastest growing groups in prison now comprising 14 per cent of the overall prison population. The average period in custody for sexual offenders was reported as being 32 months (including time on remand). The number of prisoners serving sentences for offences against children was reportedly stable between 2008 and 2011. The number of offenders under post-release supervision for sexual offences by the probation service is reportedly stable ranging between 2,750 and 3,024 (Ministry of Justice et al 2013).

The Statutory Sector

The police, the probation service and the prison service are the three main statutory agencies required to manage the person living in the community with convictions or a caution for sexual offences. At a local level these three agencies work together in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (or MAPPA) where they are defined as the ‘responsible authorities’; other statutory agencies (e.g. health and housing) have a ‘duty to cooperate’ with them.

The Police Service

In 1997, the police became custodians of the UK ‘sex offender register’ and acquired a more direct oversight role of sex offenders. People cautioned or convicted for a designated sexual offence were made subject to the register and automatically required to notify the police when their details changed; this requirement lasted for a specified period of time dependent on the length of sentence imposed and for some the requirement lasted for life; failure to comply with ‘notification requirements’ became an offence in itself (Sex Offenders Act 1997; now in the Sexual Offences Act 2003ss. 80-95; Thomas 2011).

In 2001 new Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were created. MAPPA required the police to liaise with the probation service and the two agencies were known as the ‘responsible authorities’ (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 ss.66-68). The Criminal Justice Act 2003 ss. 325-7 later added the prison service as a third MAPPA ‘responsible authority’ and placed a duty on the police to ‘assess the risk’ posed by all sex offenders on the register; for the higher risk offenders this was to involve home visits by the police at regular intervals. If a registered sex offender refused to admit a Police Officer to their home new laws were passed allowing for a possible forced entry (Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 s58 amending Sexual Offences Act 2003 with a new s96B; Home Office 2007)

The police also implement the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSOD) whereby there is a ‘presumption to disclose’ information on identified adults to parents or guardians whose children may have close contact with their children

(Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 ss. 140 amending Criminal Justice Act 2003 with a new s327A). These arrangements complement the earlier ‘discretionary’ powers to disclose information to certain people using the common law if it would prevent crime (Cann 2007).

The new duty to hear appeals against lifetime sex offender registration has also fallen on the police (Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Remedial) Order 2012 SI 1883 amending the Sexual Offences Act 2003 with new sections 91A-F; Home Office 2012).

Prisons

HM Prison Service was active in providing the first Sex Offender Treatment Programmes in 1991 (Guy 1992). The government’s plans to extend the length of custodial sentences for persistent sex offenders had been announced in 1990 ‘if this is necessary to protect the public from serious harm’ (Home Office 1990: para.3.13) and put into effect by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 s44.

Child sex offenders leaving prison for accommodation that might give them direct access to children were the subject of arrangements to assess that accommodation and any child protection issues that might arise from the offender living there (HM Prison Service 1994; these arrangements had originally been introduced in 1978).

Recent new legislation has introduced the Extended Determinate Sentence (EDS) for those convicted of serious sexual and violent crimes (replacing the earlier discredited Imprisonment for the Public Protection); these sentences will have ‘extended licence periods’ attached to them for monitoring people in the community. The courts have the power to give up to an extra eight years of licence for sexual offenders on top of their prison sentence. EDS came into effect 3 December 2012 (Criminal Justice Act 2003 s226A as amended by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 s124).

Mandatory life sentences for second serious sexual crimes have also been legislated for (Criminal Justice Act 2003 s224A as amended by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 s1224).

Early release for sex offenders wearing a tag under the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) arrangements had been discontinued in 2001 (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 s65 amending the Criminal Justice Act 1991 s34A). On 4 October 2013 the Ministry of Justice announced that automatic early release for serious child sex offenders was to be discontinued (MoJ 2013 (a))

Probation Trusts

The probation service has traditionally been the lead agency for managing offenders in the community. Probation supervision was offered in place of a sentence; people were ‘on probation’ with the Probation Officer offering to ‘advise, assist and befriend’. The Probation Service was expected to:

prepare the way for the offenders return to the community, and to give him that guidance, moral support and practical help which will assist him to get through the difficult initial period, and to face the longer term problems of resettlement in normal working and social life (Home Office 1964: para.39)

The Service formally became the ‘Probation and After Care Service’ in 1966 (but the addition was later dropped).

The late eighties and early 1990’s saw attempts to toughen probation (see e.g. Goodwin 1988) and to prioritise ‘public protection’. The Home Office suggested that the aims of probation supervision should be:

- Protection of the public;
- Prevention of re-offending; and
- Successful re-integration of the offender in the community

and that of these three aims ‘the protection of the public must be the first thought in the supervising officer’s mind’ (Home Office 1990: paras7.3-4).

Within a few years reports suggested that ‘probation services were successfully developing their assessment and supervision of sex offenders in response to [public and media] expectations’ (HMIP 1998: para.1.3). On the other hand, work on the resettlement of offenders was not being given a high enough priority and suffered from a lack of coordination between the prison and probation services:

Unless something is done to tackle the causes of offending behaviour, and the social and economic exclusion from which it commonly springs, and to which it contributes, prisons will continue to have revolving doors and the public will not in the long term be protected (HMIP&P 2001: 4).

The National Probation Service was now formed as a unified service for England and Wales, and Probation Boards introduced (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 Part One). The idea that the probation service would benefit from integration with the private sector and the voluntary sector started to be heard (Carter Report 2003) and Probation Trusts introduced to replace Probation Boards as part of the move toward opening up the probation services market; Probation Trusts were created by the Offender Management Act 2007.

In 2012 the Governments thinking on the future of probation was outlined in the document *Punishment and Reform: effective Probation Services*; the high reoffending levels were central to the new thinking:

‘to free up a traditional, old fashioned system and introduce new ways of operating and delivering that will help drive a reduction in reoffending...the prize is a more dynamic and effective Probation Service – one that keeps the best of the public sector, but that also benefits from the innovative thinking and flexibility of business and charities’ (MoJ 2012: 3)

The Crime and Courts Act 2013 s44 and Schedule 16 implemented one proposal of *Punishment and Reform: effective Probation Services* which sought to ensure a clear punitive element in every community order made by a court.

The number of people with convictions for sexual offences being supervised by the probation service has been falling:

The number of people being supervised under post release supervision for sexual offenders has remained relatively constant over the last seven years ranging from between 2,750 and 3,024. As a proportion of all offenders subject to post release supervision the number has fallen from 11% in 2005 to 7% in 2011 (MoJ et al 2013: 52).

Local Authorities

Local authorities have a duty (along with the health services) to provide after-care to any-one who has been detained in a hospital for mental health reasons; the Act allows that this may be done in co-operation with relevant voluntary agencies, and other after-care services and sometimes under a degree of formal supervision (Mental Health Act 1983 s 117).

National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

In the wake of the reports on high levels of re-offending after prison (see above), the Home Office (and later the Ministry of Justice) started a fundamental review of its aftercare services for people returning to society following a custodial sentence. The Carter Report (2003) concluded that a new approach was needed with:

- ‘end to end management of offenders’ through a new National Offender Management Service (NOMS) replacing the Prison and Probation Services; and
- greater use of competition from private and voluntary providers

NOMS would involve a purchaser/provider split, with Regional Offender Managers contracting rather than managing services on an equal basis from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

NOMS was established from 1 June 2004 as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice. It directly manages 117 public prisons and the contracts of 14 private prisons with a prisoner population of 86,000. It commissioned and funded services from Probation Trusts which oversee approximately 165,000 offenders serving community sentences; when Trusts are wound up in 2014 NOMS will directly manage the new smaller National Probation Service.

‘Working Together’ in the Public Sector

The importance of agencies ‘working together’, exchanging information, cooperating and collaborating had been established in the 1980’s for matters of child protection

and offender supervision. In 1992 the probation service had been advised that the ‘special needs of sex offenders and their potential risk to the public’ emphasised the need for probation to work with other criminal justice and child protection agencies (Home Office 1992: paras.32-3).

‘Working Together’ today is carried on daily by practitioners and in locally agreed arrangements; at a national level there are three main forms of organisation:

- (a) **Multi-Agency Public Protection Agencies (MAPPA)** - As noted above the Probation Service and the Police Service were given a legal duty in 2001 to cooperate and work together in Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 ss. 67-8). MAPPA is not an agency in itself but a set of administrative arrangements to assist the participating agencies; each MAPPA has its own coordinator. This legal duty to cooperate was later extended to HM Prison Service and together the three agencies (police, prison and probation) worked closely with agencies under a ‘duty to cooperate’ including youth offending teams, local authorities, local housing authorities, health authorities and others (see Criminal Justice Act 2003 s325 (6) for the complete list).

The cooperative work was to be focussed on three categories of offender:

- (1) Offenders on the Sex Offender Register
- (2) Violent and other Sexual Offenders
- (3) Other Dangerous Offenders

The Ministry of Justice has made available detailed guidance on how the MAPPA should work (MoJ et al 2012; see also CJI 2011 for an inspection report of MAPPA arrangements).

- (b) **Integrated Offender Management** - Integrated Offender Management (IOM) is an overarching framework that allows local and partner agencies to come together to ensure that the offenders whose crimes cause most damage and

harm locally are managed in a co-ordinated way. Local IOM approaches differ from area to area, reflecting local priorities, but there are common key principles. These include delivering a local response to local problems with all relevant local partners involved in strategic planning, decision-making and funding choices and all partners tackling offenders together encouraging the development of a multi-agency problem-solving approach focussing on offenders, not offences. IOM also involves making better use of existing programmes and governance. Changes implicit in the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme (see Chapter Four) are intended to preserve and build on local IOM arrangements.

- (c) **Police and Crime Commissioners** - Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were elected across England and Wales and took office on the 22nd November 2012; they are responsible for a combined police force area budget of £8 billion. PCCs aim to cut crime and deliver an effective and efficient police service within their force area. They ensure community needs are met as effectively as possible, and are improving local relationships through building confidence and restoring trust. PCCs work in partnership across a range of agencies at local and national level to ensure there is a unified approach to preventing and reducing crime.

Under the terms of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, PCCs must (amongst other things) secure an efficient and effective police for their area; set the police and crime objectives for their area through a police and crime plan; set the force budget and determine the precept; and bring together community safety and criminal justice partners, to make sure local priorities are joined up.

Transforming Rehabilitation

From 2000 onwards growing concern was being expressed about the re-offending rates of so many people coming out of prison; rehabilitation as we had known it was

not working. The Coalition government policy on the rehabilitation of offenders from prison back to the community was announced within a few days of coming to power in May 2010:

We will introduce a ‘rehabilitation revolution’ that will pay independent providers to reduce reoffending, paid for by the savings this new approach will generate within the criminal justice system (HM Government 2010b: 23)

Central to the strategy was the opening up of the probation services market to new providers from the private and voluntary sectors. The seeds for this ‘mixed economy’ of services had been laid by the Labour Government (Carter Report 2003) and was now followed up by the Coalition government with a series of supporting statements (see e.g. MoJ 2010, 2011, and 2012). ‘Payment by results’ would be described as the ‘cornerstone’ of the changes to rehabilitation (Hansard HC Debates 9 May 2013 col 152).

If the private sector was to be offered ‘payment by results’, the voluntary sector was seen as important in offering innovation and creative thinking. Minister of Justice Jeremy Wright said of the voluntary sector in particular:

[it] has a wealth of expertise and experience and a reputation for innovation – it is crucial we unlock this, bringing it to bear on the problem of our stubbornly high offending rates (MoJ 2013 c).

Here we consider the two sectors – private and voluntary - before looking at the changes currently being implemented in the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme.

The Private Sector

The private sector has a growing part to play in the criminal justice system. The private security industry itself has grown over the last two decades and various parts of the public sector services to offenders have been contracted out to the private sector (Johnston 1992).

The first privately run prison was opened in 1992. Fourteen UK Prisons are now run by private companies, managed by private companies such as G4S Justice Services,

Serco Custodial Services and Sodexo Justice Services. All four Secure Training Centres (for offenders aged 12 to 15) are run by the private companies G4S (3) and SERCO (1).

Prisoner Escort and Inter Prison Transfer services are run by the private companies SERCO Wincanton (for London and the East) and GEO Amey PECS Ltd (for the rest of the country). All the electronic monitoring or ‘tagging’ of offenders in the community has been undertaken by private companies; contracts are currently being renegotiated (MoJ 2014).

The Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector is also referred to by a number of other names. Voluntary organisations may be known as charities, non-governmental organisations, or non-profit making organisations and the voluntary sector as a whole referred to as the ‘third sector’ (after the public and private sectors), the VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) Sector or as VCO’s (Voluntary and Community Organisations). For purposes of this report the terms voluntary organisations and voluntary sector will be used.

Volunteering in the criminal justice system has a long history and many voluntary organisation activities pre-date state public sector engagement with offenders; the original Victorian ‘Probation Officers’ were volunteers acting as ‘missionaries to the courts’ working with offenders and offering a welfare service. The tradition has continued with probation volunteers, and elsewhere with ‘special constables’ for the police, prison visitors, Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the 6000 or so volunteers who have joined ‘Victim Support’. In the mid-1960s the Home Office outlined the conventional wisdom in this area:

...as a private individual a volunteer may be able to establish a good relationship with an offender who shuns all contact with officials...simple acts of practical friendship and help may do much towards breaking down an offender’s sense of isolation and rejection (Home Office 1966 para.120)

Probation volunteers did such work as prison visiting, individual befriending outside prison, literacy schemes, organising prisoner's wives groups, intermediate treatment programmes, day-centre work, transport, accommodation and fund raising (Gill and Mawby 1990:35).

It is perhaps worth noting here two international statements made in the early 1990's commending the involvement of the community in matters of criminal justice. Firstly the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures* ('*The Tokyo Rules*') recommends:

1.2 The Rules are intended to promote greater community involvement in the management of criminal justice, specifically in the treatment of offenders, as well as to promote among offenders a sense of responsibility towards society.

and that:

17.1 Public participation should be encouraged as it is a major resource and one of the most important factors in improving ties between offenders undergoing non-custodial measures and the family and community. It should complement the efforts of the criminal justice administration.

17.2 Public participation should be regarded as an opportunity for members of the community to contribute to the protection of their society (UN 1990)

Secondly the Council of Europe's *European Community Rules on Sanctions and Measures* emphasises that:

Community participation shall be used to assist offenders to develop meaningful ties in the community, become aware of the community's interest in them and broaden their possibilities for contact and support (Council of Europe 1992: Rule 46)

In the mid-1990s the Deakin Report on the future of voluntary organisations looked at the voluntary sector across the board estimating there were some 170,000 general charities and 350,000 community groups in existence; the report proposed a working 'compact' between the state and the voluntary sector (Deakin Commission 1996).

The 1997-2010 Labour government furthered the arguments in favour of engaging communities in the ‘fight against crime’ (Cabinet Office 2008) with the voluntary sector playing a specific part in the criminal justice system:

The sector’s creativity, its independence from government, and its involvement of thousands of volunteers (including offenders and ex-offenders as volunteers and mentors in prisons and the community) can also help break down barriers, change attitudes and build the motivation necessary to bring about positive and lasting change (MoJ/NOMS 2008: Foreword)

A new ‘Reducing Re-offending Third Sector Advisory Group’ (RRTSAG) was created in 2008; the Group meets quarterly to advise Ministers on the role of the voluntary sector (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/reducing-reoffending-third-sector-advisory-group>)

Critics pointed to the possibility that volunteers could be being asked to complement and compensate for the reductions in professional staff caused by reduced funding in the public sector and the fiscal problems the country was experiencing. This in turn could lead to difficulties in working alongside each other (see e.g. Neuberger Report 2009: 17).

The promotion of the use of volunteers was continued post-2010 into the era of the Coalition government; violence towards women and children was specifically cited as an example of where volunteers might make a difference:

The coalition government’s ambition is to ensure that tackling violence against women and girls is treated as a priority at every level. Greater decentralisation and our vision for Big Society will give local people a stronger voice in setting local priorities, and give local areas the means through which to understand what those priorities are (HM Government 2010a: 7)

What concerned some observers was that ‘behind the Big Society public sector reforms lurks the Big Market’ (Morgan 2012).

Transforming Rehabilitation: the 2013-14 Policy Agenda

The government did not regard the market as ‘lurking’ anywhere, but saw ‘marketisation’ as being central to its plans for *Transforming Rehabilitation*. The strategy that emerged had five parts to it:

- Extending rehabilitation support to short-term prisoners;
- Introducing designated ‘resettlement prisons’;
- Opening up the probation services market;
- Introducing ‘payment by results’; and
- Forming a new National Probation Service

A number of measures had already been put in place to bring about this transformation. The Offender Management Act 2007 (based on the Carter Report) had already centralised powers to commission probation arrangements and opened up the voluntary and private sector to commissioners. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 had introduced Police and Crime Commissioners with powers to award grants to any local organisation or body they consider will support community safety projects. How this trajectory might be maintained was put forward in a Consultation Paper in January 2013 (MoJ 2013 (c)) and followed up with a strategy document published May 2013.

The Strategy Document *Transforming Rehabilitation: a strategy for reform* confirmed the changes:

- Extending rehabilitation to offenders released from short custodial sentences; at present those sentenced to 12 months or less get no post-custody supervision;
- Competing delivery of rehabilitation services for the majority of offenders; providers to come from the private and voluntary sectors.
- Paying providers of these services according to their results in reducing re-offending; ‘payment by results’ had already been introduced in other government departments and most notably in the Work Programme of the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Putting in place a public sector probation service which is focussed on protecting the public and managing offenders who pose the highest risk of serious harm; this would amount to about 30% of the previous work carried out by probation.
- Ensuring the new system is responsive to local needs and integrates effectively with the other local partnerships and structures relevant to offenders.

(MoJ 2013 (d)).

To bring about the first of these changes (post custody supervision for short term prisoners) the Offender Rehabilitation Bill was presented to the House of Lords on 9 May 2013. The Bill included measures to introduce:

- arrangements for release under licence for offenders serving fixed-term custodial sentences of less than 12 months;
- new supervision arrangements for offenders released from fixed - term custodial sentences of less than two years so that all offenders are supervised in the community for at least 12 months;
- new sanctions for breach of supervision requirements for offenders serving fixed - term custodial sentences of less than two years;
- a requirement that offenders sentenced to an Extended Determinate Sentence must have an extension period of supervision of at least one year.

The Bill was estimated to extend statutory supervision to around 50,000 offenders sentenced to less than 12 months custody.

The strategy was to have these short-term prisoners serve their sentences in newly designated ‘resettlement prisons’ in, or close to, the area in which they live. The ‘resettlement prisons’ would number 70 adult male local, training and open prisons; the women’s estate was to be the subject of a separate review. Long-term prisoners would move to ‘resettlement prisons’ before their discharge (MoJ 2013 (e)).

The *Transforming Rehabilitation* strategy proposed the complete restructuring of the probation service which was to lose 70% of its work to the private and voluntary sector. The remaining 30% would be work with serious and high risk offenders, those subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and direct services to the courts such as preparing Pre-Sentence Reports; the majority of Probation Officers would be re-allocated from the public probation service to the new private sector providers with protected conditions of employment through the Transfer of Undertakings - Protection of Employment (TUPE) process. For some it was not an attractive prospect:

bleak visions of a rump [probation] service, shorn of its most positive activities whose main functions will be to maintain surveillance and control of offenders, carry the risks they pose, and take the blame when things go wrong (Maguire 2012)

The *Transforming Rehabilitation* consultation paper had outlined the vision of changes (MoJ 2013 (c)); the response - *Transforming Rehabilitation: A strategy for reform* - had outlined the strategy (MoJ 2013 (d)); the Target Operating Model now showed how that vision and strategy might be implemented (MoJ 2013 (e)).

Probation Trusts were to be wound up and a new public National Probation Service (NPS) introduced as a part of NOMS; Trusts were able to bid for new contracts in competition with other providers in the national competition for rehabilitation services; successful bids would enable them to 'spin-out' of the Trust arrangements and become 'mutual organisations'. A Mutuals Support Programme was established by the government to assist those Trusts wishing to do this (Cabinet Office 2013).

England and Wales was to be divided into 21 designated Contract Package Areas (CPA) each with its own set of 'resettlement prisons'. Probation services would be delivered through Local Delivery Units (LDU) and alongside them would be the new Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) in the private sector.

More details emerged on how CRCs would initially be formed by the Ministry of Justice who would 'own' them or 'hold' them as NewCo's until contracts were awarded. The two bodies (NPS and CRCs) would work in partnership providing rehabilitation services. Further details on how 'payments by results' might work were published (MoJ 2013 (g)) and bidding for contracts started on 19 September 2013 (MoJ 2013(h)); by December some 30 organisations were assessed as having successfully passed a 'qualifying' stage in order to bid and this included 11 'mutuals' (MoJ 2013(i))

NPS officers were to continue using the existing Probation Qualification Framework (PQF); CRC could choose to use the PQF or not. A new Institute of Probation was to be formed to promote professionalism and share good practice.

The scheduled date for the existing contractual arrangements with Probation Trusts to end was April 2014. A number of commentators noted that that was a very short space of time for such large changes (see e.g. Maguire 2012). Senior officials in the

Ministry of Justice were quoted as calling the transformation project a ‘complex large scale change programme to be completed *within an aggressive timetable*’ (Travis 2013 emphasis added). In January 2014 the Secretary of State for Justice announced that the April date for terminating the government’s contracts with Probation Trusts would be put back to 1st June 2014 (Hansard HC Debates Ministerial Statement 20 Jan 2014: Column 2-3WS)

Summary

The current ‘management’ of sex offenders in the community by the public statutory agencies include primarily the police, probation service and the prisons linked together in the local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Within these arrangements the emphasis in the past has been on ‘containing’ the released offender. More recently that emphasis has been revisited in the light of concepts of rehabilitation and resettlement. At a national level policies of rehabilitation have been the subject of intense debate as the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda of 2013-2014 seeks to implement major changes to our ways of assisting people released from custody. The private sector and the voluntary sector are envisaged as playing an important part in this changing landscape of rehabilitation. Organisations like *Circles UK* and individual Circles Projects will be seeking their own footing in this new world. The National Probation Service will be the obvious partner for *Circles UK* and Circles Projects because the National Probation Service are responsible for supervising sex offenders in the community under the new regime. Given all the uncertainty surrounding *Transforming Rehabilitation* however, there is a possibility that some of the lowest risk sex offenders could be managed by the private sector and this presents another opportunity for partnerships for CoSA.

Chapter Four – Frameworks of Change

Introduction

Alongside the ‘management’ and ‘containment’ of sex offenders there have been attempts to effect ‘changes’ in the behaviour of sex offenders and their ‘treatment’ to try and help reduce re-offending. For present purposes the overarching theoretical frameworks to this work are divided into two – a ‘deficits based’ approach and a ‘strengths-based’ approach. In broad terms the ‘deficits based’ approach looks at the attributes which cause offending and seeks to eliminate or compensate for these attributes, whilst the ‘strengths-based’ approach tries to build on the positive attributes in order to take people forward and away from further offending behaviour. The key question for CoSA is whether these two approaches can be seen as complementary to each other’, as has been stated.

Deficits Based Approaches

The deficits-based approach looks at the ‘risk’ offenders pose and the ‘needs’ they may have; finally it considers how the professionals should engage and respond to those risks and needs. The approach is summarised as the Risk, Needs, Responsivity approach – or RNR. The aim is to reduce the risk by meeting the needs (Bonta and Andrews, 2007).

The RNR model emerged in the early 1980s, following the publication of Robert Martinson's analysis of criminal justice programmes, which reported ‘nothing works’. Martinson reviewed existing research evidence as to the effectiveness of treatment programmes with offenders and reported that very few had a significant impact on reducing their likelihood of reoffending (Martinson, 1974).

The RNR model developed alongside the ‘what works’ movement, and the quest to identify and develop the most effective treatment programmes for offenders (Bonta and Andrews, 2007). The model was formalised in 1990 and since then has become ‘widely regarded as the premier model for guiding offender assessment and treatment’ (Andrews et al, 2011: 735). Although various modifications have taken place in the model, to strengthen risk assessment accuracy and incorporate more offender populations (Ward et al, 2007), the three core principles of the RNR model remain the same. These are the principles of Risk, Needs and Responsivity (Andrews et al, 2011).

Bonta and Andrews (2007) describe how these three principles seek to address offender rehabilitation:

The principle of ‘Risk’ asserts that criminal behaviours can be accurately predicted using the correct assessment tools (Hanson et al, 2009) and resources should be targeted towards the highest risk offenders (Bonta and Andrews, 2007; Andrews and Bonta 2006). While proponents of the RNR approach note that human beings are too complex for 100% accuracy in the measurement tools, actuarial methods are significantly more effective than relying on clinicians professional judgment (Andrews et al, 2011).

The principle of ‘Needs’, asserts the necessity of interventions to target criminogenic needs or factors specifically related to the offenders risk of reoffending, in the design, delivery and treatment of offenders (Bonta and Andrews, 2007). Criminogenic needs include sexual deviancy; pro-criminal attitudes; and anti-social personality patterns, to name but a few (Mann et al, 2010; Andrews and Bonta: 2006). The RNR approach argues that in tackling criminogenic needs, offenders pro-criminal attitudes can be adjusted so that they develop pro-social attitudes, which in turn is claimed will reduce criminal behaviours and increase pro-social behaviours (Bonta and Andrews (2007).

The final principle of the RNR approach is 'Responsivity'. Andrews and Bonta (2006) argue that treatment programmes must match the design and delivery of an intervention to the offenders' mode of learning and abilities. In tailoring the programme to the offender's abilities, motivation for engagement is said to increase as well as the effectiveness of the intervention being delivered.

In line with the findings from the 'what works' movement, Bonta and Andrews (2007) claim that for treatment programmes to be most effective they must follow six key principles. These principles are that programmes should be:

- cognitive-behavioural in foundation;
- structured to achieve the aims of the session;
- delivered by trained and qualified staff who are themselves supervised;
- able to maintain programme integrity by following the content of the programme;
- be manual-based; and
- be undertaken in institutions amenable to change (Andrews et al, 2011; McGuire, 1995).

The benefits of adopting a more RNR focused approach has been acknowledged in the literature and as Robinson (2011) states, this has guided practitioners to target resources and interventions to better manage risk, as well as develop more defensible practice. Over the last decade there has been a growing dissent to the focus of the RNR model and implications for offender management.

Ward and colleagues (2002; 2004; 2007) have provided some of the most vocal opposition to the RNR model and the risk management approach to offender rehabilitation; they posit an alternative approach called the Good Lives Model (GLM) – see below. They have argued that the RNR model's adherence to structured, manual-based programme delivery amounts to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to rehabilitation, which can also result in a lower motivation by the staff delivering the programme and from offenders participating in interventions (Ward and Maruna, 2007). One of the few successes of the GLM acknowledged by Andrews et al (2011) is the GLMs success in providing a greater level of motivation among practitioners.

Another criticism levied at the RNR model is that the focus on criminogenic needs at the expense of other factors associated with offending results in further stigma and loneliness for offenders (Ward et al, 2007). However, Bonta and Andrews (2007) argue that the GLM in addressing non-criminogenic needs such as low self-esteem, at the expense of criminogenic needs such as pro-criminal behaviours, could result in treatment programmes producing ‘confident criminals’. Indeed, Andrews et al (2011) have suggested this to be a glaring omission of the GLM and one which has only recently been fixed.

Other criticisms of the RNR model include it paying insufficient attention to the role of human agency and neglecting human nature (Ward et al 2007); it is said to fail to account for the role of motivated offenders in successful rehabilitation and its theoretical foundations are unclear (Ward and Maruna 2007). Advocates of the RNR model however, have suggested that many of the criticisms levied at the model are already covered, if not as explicitly as the GLM critics describe (Andrews et al 2011). Andrews et al (2011) add that the calls by Ward and colleagues for a less actuarial, structured form of risk assessment amounts to a system which is not an advancement in service delivery but a step-back in time to less effective measures of risk assessment based on ‘professional judgement’.

Strengths-Based Approaches

The significance of such developments is that in recent years Circles of Support and Accountability have increasingly been aligned with the strengths-based approaches, and in particular the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Bates et al 2012, Wilson et al 2010). Strengths-based approaches developed in response to the growing dissatisfaction of the dominant deficits approaches, and the emergence of positive psychology (Laws 2000). Strengths-based approaches attempts to move the focus away from risk factors and ‘negatives’ and seeks to build on an offenders ‘strengths’. In essence, strengths-based approaches see themselves as more positive because they do not focus solely on repairing or correcting an offenders deficits. One of the most

widely used strengths-based approaches is the Good Lives Model. The GLM was advocated particularly in the writings of Tony Ward in New Zealand (Maruna 2001, Ward and Marshall 2004, Ward and Gannon 2006, Ward and Maruna 2007, Willis and Ward 2011, Purvis et al 2011)

The rationale behind the GLM is to promote more social behaviour through involvement with activities that utilise the offender's strengths and promote individual dignity:

The aim of treatment according to the GLM is the promotion of primary goods or human needs that, once met, enhance psychological well-being...a basic premise of the GLM is that offenders, like all human beings, hold a set of primary goods. The weightings or priorities given to specific primary goods reflect an offender's life values and personal identity (Willis and Ward 2011: 291)

The priority is to achieve a greater sense of agency, more self-esteem, increased social maturity and a greater sense of competence from learning new skills (see Toch, 2000). Such experiences should be associated with greater inclusion in society and successful resettlement.

The literature provides some empirical support for this claim. Sampson and Laub (1993), for example, found that gaining employment and financially providing for families was strongly associated with desistance from offending. Maruna's (2001) work provides evidence that reformed offenders were significantly more care-oriented, other-centred and keen to promote the next generation. Those who were able to 'go straight' frequently based their personal narrative on identities as 'wounded healers'; that is, they were able to find meaning in their shameful pasts through engagement in 'generative activities' such as voluntary work or becoming drugs counsellors so that they could help others.

Strengths-based interventions are also designed to be as inclusive as possible in order to counteract the 'othering' experienced by sex offenders (White and Graham, 2010; Maruna and LeBel, 2002). A focus purely on building pro-social capital, however, is not sufficient to earn redemption from the community. Burnett and Maruna (2006) point out that for reintegration to be successful, strengths-based interventions must

also encourage offenders to ‘spend’ social capital⁶. For it is the expenditure of social capital which is believed to be essential to assist in the reintegration of offenders and necessary for offenders to earn redemption from the community (Barry, 2006; Burnett and Maruna, 2006).

The Good Lives Model claims to build on the foundations of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model (Ward and Maruna, 2007; Andrews et al, 2011). Rather than placing an emphasis on treating or correcting risk factors, the GLM holds the belief that recidivism can be reduced by equipping offenders with ‘the tools to live more fulfilling lives’ (Ward and Brown, 2004: 244). The core presumption of the GLM is that all human beings, including offenders, have aspirations to seek out and consume what Ward (2002) calls ‘primary human goods’. Ward and Maruna (2007) define primary human goods as being the activities which individuals seek which are beneficial to their welfare. The eight primary human goods being:

- Creativity;
- Excellence in Work and Play;
- Inner Peace;
- Spirituality;
- Healthy Living;
- Self-Management;
- Love, Friendship and Intimacy; and
- Knowledge (Ward, 2002).

Where offenders lack the necessary skills or capabilities to acquire these primary human goods then according to the GLM, criminality may result from the inability to achieve the necessary skills or human goods leads offenders to resort to illegitimate avenues to gain success (Ward 2002). For the GLM, the failure to achieve primary human goods through legitimate avenues results in further unhappiness for offenders, and is likely to result in offenders seeking to gain more primary human goods quicker than they would had they achieved them legitimately (Yates and Ward, 2008).

This inability to satisfy primary human goods also prevents offenders from participating in behaviour which would provide more pro-social or better lives (Ward

⁶ While the term is debated the use of Social Capital is used to refer to social networks, social connections and how individuals engage, trust and use or gain resources in society from their socialisation (Farrall, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

and Stewart, 2003; Ward and Gannon, 2006). Thus the GLM seeks to increase the skills offenders have which will provide them with the opportunities and resources to enable them to lead a 'socially acceptable and personally meaningful life' (Ward et al, 2012: 95).

In order to better examine the application of the GLM to CoSA it is necessary to firstly identify and explore some of the barriers identified within the literature relating to offender resettlement, and the resettlement of serious or high-risk offenders in particular.

Most offenders will experience problems resettling in the community after a custodial sentence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Lewis et al. 2003; Crow 2006; Hucklesby and Hagley-Dickinson, 2007). In an attempt to address some of the problems experienced by short-term prisoners, the Home Office (2004) published the 'Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan'. The Action Plan required a wider range of statutory bodies to take responsibility to address the routes of resettlement for prisoners, but also identified nine distinct resettlement pathways. These pathways were:

- (1) Accommodation;
- (2) Education, Training and Employment;
- (3) Mental and Physical health;
- (4) Drugs and Alcohol;
- (5) Finance, Benefit and Debt;
- (6) Children and Families of Offenders;
- (7) Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour;
- (8) Public Protection; and
- (9) Prolific Offenders (Maguire, 2007).

The practice of progressing along these pathways is described as 'presenting a daunting challenge' for sex offenders (Maguire and Nolan, 2007). The low self-esteem among many sex offenders, together with the community hostility and community protection restrictions imposed following their release from custody, means they will experience different resettlement experiences to most short-term prisoners (Brown et al, 2007).

The perceived continuing risk of harm posed by some sex offenders on release, means they are one of the few offender populations who have release from prison planned in

detail (Maguire and Nolan, 2007; Appleton, 2010). As such, while gaining accommodation immediately after conviction or release from custody will be planned for most sex offenders, the transition from 'approved premises' to 'independent' accommodation can be particularly problematic (Brown et al, 2007). Not only are many housing providers reluctant to house sex offenders or high-risk offenders, but a lack of supervision following this transition may raise concerns for probation staff (Mills and Grimshaw, 2012).

The community response to finding that a sex offender has been located in their community can cause additional fears for some sex offenders, but can also increase difficulties in their supervision, should the community take action to 'out' the sex offender (Brogden and Harkin, 2000; Russell et al, 2011; Burchfield and Mingus, 2008). The move to independent accommodation is further complicated by concerns from the Police Public Protection Units (PPU) about the location of sex offenders; the general lack of available rented accommodation; and the loss of pro-social networks which could result in accommodation being unfurnished and remaining so due to financial problems (McAlinden, 2006; Mills and Grimshaw, 2012).

The heterogeneity of sex offenders which CoSA works with also complicates its ability to effectively reintegrate sex offenders (Brown et al, 2007). While some sex offenders participating in CoSA will be young and able-bodied, others will be reaching, or have exceeded the age of retirement and may be suffering various health complaints. Some of the participants on CoSA will have contact with family or friends, but may still be subject to license conditions restricting time with them; while others will face complete isolation following rejection by their families (Brogden and Harkin, 2000).

Other sex offenders have experienced significant fears that their sexual offending identity will be exposed as they returned to the community (Hudson 2005). This fear of exposure not only affects their behaviour and attitudes, but also impacts on their interactions with others (Brown et al, 2007; Brogden and Harkin, 2000). Other research has noted how the fears sex offenders anticipated on release often resulted in them finding prison a less daunting prospect (Mills and Grimshaw 2012). Thus, sex

offenders participating in CoSA will probably have experienced a range of emotions, fears and social isolation prior to even being considered for a Circle (Appleton, 2010; Russell et al, 2011; Mills and Grimshaw, 2012).

As with many initiatives previously, CoSA does not adopt one pure theoretical model to ground its work, but draws on a wide range of approaches. Hannem and Petrunik state that CoSA requires a careful consideration of the influence of reintegration and risk management concerns. If the Circle places too much emphasis on reintegrating sex offenders, risky behaviours or changes in attitudes may be overlooked by the Circle volunteers. Equally, too much attention on relapse prevention and other 'accountability' functions is suggested to create increased pressures on the Core Member and may also increase the risk of reoffending (Hannem and Petrunik, 2004). The contention is that the Canadian Circles provide a convergence point for the deficits approach (RNR) and the strengths-based approach with clear overlaps (Petrunik 2007, Wilson et al 2008 and Hannem 2011)

Circles of Support and Accountability, RNR and the GLM

The extent to which Circles of Support and Accountability in England and Wales successfully balance these two paradigms of RNR and GLM is not altogether clear. As already mentioned CoSA in this country has adopted a much closer relationship to criminal justice agencies than in Canada (*Circles UK*, 2009; Hanvey et al, 2011). This is evident not only through their development alongside the emerging MAPPAs; but also through the increasing use of current Probation Officers who are seconded to co-ordinate regional Circle Projects by Probation Trusts.

The implementation of risk assessment measures such as the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR) and the encouragement of greater cooperation with criminal justice agencies and the general trend of what Petrunik (2007) describes as 'routinisation' and 'rationalisation', illustrates how CoSA, is affected by the New Penology framework (Feeley and Simon, 1992). The implication of this for Circles is that the guiding principles of the Circle of Support and Accountability may be re-worked to be one of

Accountability and Support (Hannem, 2011). In one respect, this is only a rhetorical issue, however, in terms of the service provided and the training received the implications of this closer alliance is that Circles theoretical model becomes framed in the risk management approach to offender rehabilitation that the probation service and the rest of the criminal justice system have adopted (McAlinden, 2010b). Hannem (2011) suggests that such a divergence from the classical Circles model could have ramifications for the transferability of any CoSA research results.

The extent to which CoSA actually lies within a model of actuarial risk assessment techniques and the management of offenders is still questionable. Not only do CoSA not use trained and qualified staff to risk assess and deliver interventions, but interventions by the Circle volunteers in meetings appears to be fluid to the changing needs of the Core Members (Hannem 2011). Interventions by the Circle also appear to be flexible so that the concerns of volunteers, about public protection or emotional loneliness can also be discussed (Haslewood-Pócsik et al, 2008).

CoSA appears, therefore, to adopt both risk management and strengths-based approaches to offender rehabilitation in a more informal way and with greater and lesser priorities depending on volunteer perceptions of their role and the risks posed. One possible explanation for this is the backdrop of criminal justice support that each Core Member receives alongside various other interventions they receive (i.e. hostel; benefits; treatment programmes).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice emerged in the early 1990's in England and Wales (Umbreit and Roberts, 1996) as a countermovement or counterbalance to what was perceived at the time as an overly punitive criminal justice system based on retribution and with prison at its centre piece (Zehr, 1990). People who offended were seen as being not amenable to reform or rehabilitation and the criminal justice system was effectively becoming a punishment system rather than a justice system. The resulting harsh incapacitative policies with an ever rising prison population was challenged as being

ineffective (if not counterproductive), failing to prevent crime, failing to involve the victims of crime and failing to achieve greater public protection.

Restorative justice offered a more positive way forward re-framing 'crime' as 'harmful action' that required a restoring of relationships that had been broken with individuals or the community. The perpetrator of the crime was invited to face and understand the harm done to the victim and not just displace his or her feelings of resentment on to the punishment imposed. Restorative justice measures included forms of alternative dispute settlement, mediation, negotiation, and conferences (Johnstone 2002, Crawford and Newburn 2002, Johnstone and van Ness 2007).

From the outset, the 'classical' model of Circles (Petrunik, 2007) was informed by the principles of mutual responsibility and equal importance, with both concepts being key to the restorative justice initiative (Hanvey et al, 2011). As such, the CoSA concept is said to have followed in the traditions of previous Canadian responses by developing new approaches to criminal justice which seek to balance rights and risks of offenders (Hudson, 2007) and became strongly associated with the restorative justice concept (Nellis, 2009; Hannem, 2011).

Restorative justice deals with offenders through the participation of all affected parties (Zehr, 2002). As such, restorative justice often involves both offenders and victims; together with criminal justice professionals and communities coming together in an attempt to repair the harm done and facilitate reintegration (Sawin and Zehr, 2007; Schiff, 2007). While the offending act may be condemned, restorative justice advocates claim the priority should be to meet the victims and community's needs; and ensure the offender is fully aware of their actions on others (Johnstone and van Ness, 2007). In applying such a framework, advocates argue restorative justice to be more demanding than traditional punishment, but also that the forgiveness offenders receive through participation in restorative justice helps to facilitate their reintegration (Johnstone, 2002). Unlike 'traditional' or 'pure' restorative justice attempts, Circles seeks mediation between the offender and the wider community rather than the direct victim (Gavrielides, 2007; Hannem, 2011). From a restorative justice perspective, CoSA allow sex offenders who would previously be left with no

or limited contact on return to the community, to instead be befriended and offered support and assistance.

While an exact definition of restorative justice may have remained elusive its principles had developed and become well known. Their relationship with mainstream forms of justice continue to be problematic (McAlinden 2011). Questions have also been raised about which sort of ‘social harms’ (crimes) restorative justice was best suited to deal with and arguments for using restorative justice in cases of sexual offending started to be made (Daly 2002, Hudson 2002).

In Canada it was held that restorative justice principles could be implemented at any stage of the justice process. At the ‘front-end’ Sentencing Circles could be used for sex offenders and at a later stage working with sex offenders leaving prison in Circles of Support and Accountability also fell under the auspices of restorative justice (Wilson et al 2002; Hartill 2001).

Restorative justice initiatives in England and Wales had primarily concentrated on the ‘front-end’ of the criminal justice system rather than the later or ‘end-stages’. As the late Barbara Hudson put it:

With restorative justice, the community is involved in expressing disapproval, and in providing and guaranteeing protection and redress for victims, but it is also involved in supporting the perpetrator in *his efforts to change, and in maintaining him as a member of the community* (Hudson 1998 emphasis added)

This neglect of restorative justice for the re-entry context of the criminal justice system has continued but a growing body of evidence supports this re-focussing of restorative practices on to the reintegration process (Bazemore and Maruna 2009).

Summary

The welfare approaches to working with offenders to help them back into society was somewhat restricted by the mid-1970s doubts about ‘what worked’. The resulting

move was toward ‘just deserts’ sentencing and a ‘negative’ focus on an individual’s ‘deficits’ or ‘criminogenic needs’. This movement was referred to as the Risk, Needs, Responsivity (RNR) approach. In the late 1990s and early 2000s this ‘deficits’ approach was challenged by what was seen as a more ‘positive’ and ‘strengths-based’ approach. This means that offenders have the same basic human needs as everyone and strive for basic ‘primary human goods’ in order to live a reasonable life in society. This movement was referred to as the Good Lives Model (GLM). In turn the GLM also fitted with the growing restorative justice approaches emerging at the same time.

With its approach on ‘Support’ and ‘Accountability’ CoSA aims at integrating these different approaches. However, operating on a mix of risk-based and so called strengths-based approaches might explain some of the difficulties experienced in the work of CoSA by different groups, as will be detailed later in the following chapters.

PART THREE: THE RESEARCH

Chapter Five – Methodology⁷

Introduction

This chapter describes the strategy used throughout this research to explore the attitudes and experiences of Core Members, volunteers and stakeholders who have participated or are still involved with CoSA. The chapter discusses the research design, the aims and objectives and the overall approach of the study. All interviews were conducted using the Appreciative Inquiry approach which is described in detail in the section on the Core Members below. Interview Schedules are provided in the Appendix 1.

The interviews were conducted sequentially starting with the Core Members, then the volunteers and finally the stakeholders; the presentation in this report puts the Core Members last. A description of the Core Member and volunteers samples are described in detail at the start of each of the results chapters. The stakeholders sample is not described in detail. Ethical approval for the research was gained from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee and NOMS National Research Committee.

Core Members

Sampling

A total of 30 Core Members were interviewed by the research team for this study. Participants were drawn from nine CoSA Projects across England and Wales. The nine Projects are:

Circles East

Circles North East

Circles South West

⁷ Authored by David Thompson

Cumbria Circles
Greater Manchester Circles
Leicestershire and Rutland Circles
Lucy Faithfull Foundation Circles
North Wales Circles
Yorkshire and Humberside Circles of Support and Accountability

To be considered for inclusion in the research, Core Members were required to have participated in a Circle for a period of approximately 6 months or over; be aged over 18 years; and have a good understanding of English. The decision to only include those Core Members over 18 years old and who had participated for approximately 6 months was to allow a broader range of experiences for the Core Members to comment on and provide a more complete perspective of the full Circle process.

The recruitment of Core Members was also governed by an ethical and professional awareness of the harms of over-researching potential participants. These concerns exempted Circles South East from participating in this study, though the remaining nine active CoSA Projects were contacted. To that end, approximately 40 Core Members or half of the Core Member population participating in CoSA at the time of this research were deemed eligible for inclusion in the research.

Access

From its original inception this research project has had the support of the Chief Executive of *Circles UK* and its Board of Trustees. This support allowed for an access point through which potential participants were identified to the research team. Details of regional CoSA Projects were provided by *Circles UK*. These prior introductions and contacts with the Projects facilitated smoother access to Core Members by the research team as Project Coordinators were made aware of the inclusion criteria for Core Members to be invited.

Core Members were accessed via regional Project Coordinators. Regional Coordinators received a copy of the information sheet and were briefed on the aims of the research and the importance of Core Members not being encouraged or coerced

into participating in the research. Core Members were also to be provided with an information sheet at this stage. This approach was adopted due to the geographical-spread of interviewees and the limited finances preventing travel to these interviewees on two separate occasions. This approach benefits the Core Members and the research as it provides some familiarity for the Core Members in the shape of the regional Project Coordinator.

Four Core Members were contacted directly by the research team after approval from the Core Members. The research team contacted each Core Member initially by telephone to introduce the research and invite the Core Member to participate. All Core Members were given at least a one week cooling off period between invitation and being interviewed to ensure that they had adequate time to decide on whether to participate or not. Those Core Members who agreed to participate in the research then chose a preferred date for the interview. Core Members also received a mobile telephone number for the research team should they wish to contact the research team directly to ask any questions about the research following recruitment and prior to the interview. Co-ordinators provided an invaluable support in arranging interview dates and venues with Core Members

Approached and Realised

A total of 42 Core Members were identified and approached to be interviewed by regional Project Coordinators. Seven Core Members declined to participate in the research outright; two Core Members were identified but not invited as they had been recalled to prison or it was anticipated that they would be convicted for a new offence; and three Core Members were unable to attend the interview due to illness, two of which were related to their pre-existing stress and anxiety. This gives a 71% successful completion rate on interviews and an 83% successful response rate (which includes the five Core Members who had initially agreed but who were not interviewed).

Data Collection: Interviews, Questionnaires and Administrative Data

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of collecting data for this research, supplemented by a short questionnaire conducted at the end of the interview

and administrative data produced on each of the 30 Core Members produced by the regional Projects.

Interview Schedule and Appreciative Inquiry

As the main aim of this research was to assess the extent to which CoSA contribute towards the reintegration of released sex offenders in the community in England and Wales it was important to explore the experiences and perspectives of Core Members to their participation in CoSA and other interventions, as well as their reintegration and their future lives. The use of semi-structured interviews was selected as the most suitable tool to achieve the aims and objectives of the research because the interviewer is able to ensure that the responses are relevant to the research questions, while enabling follow-up questions to be asked and complex phenomena better explored (Crow & Semmens, 2008; King and Wincup, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

In terms of eliciting experiences, the interview schedule has been designed with consideration to the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry encourages individuals to reflect on their best or most positive experiences rather than seeking to confirm or defend against pre-supposed criticisms or weaknesses as problem-oriented research often does (Liebling et al, 1999; Ludema, 2002). Appreciative Inquiry also asks participants to reflect on 'what might be' (Cooperrider, 1990). Through this process of examining what might be or what is missing, and what interviewees want more of, Appreciative Inquiry provides a valuable source of exploring experiences and generates the potential for change. 'Pure' AI consists of four cyclical stages called '4-D' (Discovery; Dreaming; Design; Destiny). This research prioritised the first two stages of Discovery and Dreaming with some attention to Design and Destiny.

The adoption of positive questions was an attractive alternative given the social isolation and negative-attitudes associated with sex offenders in the previous research (Blagden and Pemberton, 2011). The successful use in other criminal justice research (see Cowburn and Lavis, 2013; Liebling et al, 1999; Robinson et al, 2013) encouraged the researcher to adopt this approach in this setting.

Interview topics included exploring Core Members initial expectations of CoSA and their experiences of CoSA meetings and activities done with the Circle. The interview also explored the concepts of Support and Accountability with Core Members, their experiences of other interventions, their experiences of reintegration and their plans for the future.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered at the end of each interview and was devised to collect important data about each participating Core Member's basic demographics; details about their CoSA experiences; and past interventions. This is a standard research instrument which contained approximately 20 questions and was designed to last no more than 10 minutes.

Administrative Data

Administrative data contained important data on past offences; more detailed information on past interventions and other records. Accessing data in this way optimised the duration of the interview which could be spent examining attitudes and experiences of the CoSA initiative and also minimised potential discomfort to Core Members by talking about their past offences. These files were only accessed with the express consent of Core Members (even though they had already given consent for *Circles UK* to use or share this data for research purposes).

The Interviewing Process

The day before the interview, those Core Members contacted by the research team directly, were contacted via SMS message to confirm they were still willing to participate in the research and positive messages were received by all. On the day of the interview, most Core Members arrived at the venue with the Project Coordinator or a volunteer, those Core Members who were contacted directly by the research team arrived on their own.

Interviews took place at a variety of locations including charity organisation buildings, the meeting room of a hotel, probation offices, and Quaker meeting houses. All venues were suggested by the regional Project Coordinator.

Before the interview commenced, the Information Sheet was presented to Core Members and it was offered to be read out by the interviewer. Core Members were also asked for permission to record the interviews. Core Members received £20 in high street vouchers to cover travel costs. It is normal practice to use such payments in criminal justice research in order to cover travel expenses, to acknowledge the impact of research on participants' time and to increase the likelihood of participation by offenders within research projects. Vouchers were given to Core Members prior to the interviews.

Interviews took place between February 2013 and June 2013 with the majority of the interviews having been completed over a seven week period from the beginning of February 2013. The first four interviews were planned as pilot interviews to ensure that the interview schedule was fit for purpose for use with Core Members. The final two interviews to be completed did take longer than anticipated but were undertaken in May 2013 and June 2013. Training was given by Professor Birgit Völlm who is an expert in interviewing with this group.

Interviews were initially expected to last approximately 1hour – 1hour 30 minutes, though most lasted far longer with the average length being 2hours 24 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 1hour 25 minutes and the longest interview lasted 3hours 40 minutes (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Interview Length for Core Members

Interview Length	
1hour – 1hour 30 minutes	0
1hour 30 – 2 hours	8
2hours – 2 hours 30 minutes	8
2 hours 30 minutes – 3 hours	9
3 hours – 3 hours 30 minutes	3
Over 3 hours 30 minutes	2

None of the Core Members who participated in the interviews requested that their data be withdrawn and many Core Members thanked the research team for allowing them to have a voice and received an overall positive response.

Analysis

The recordings of all 30 interviews with Core Members were transcribed by the research team. During transcription all recordings were stripped of any identifiers and held securely within the University of Leeds premises. Anonymised transcripts were then loaded into the NVivo software tool to assist in analysis. Some preliminary themes were identified during the interviews and new themes emerged as the interviews were analysed. Questionnaire data was also stripped of identifiers while the administrative data was anonymised by each CoSA Project prior to being passed to the research team.

Ethics

Given the nature of this research a number of ethical issues were identified and discussed by the research team. The main issues of concern were: informed consent; the use of data; the right to privacy and the reduction of harm. A number of steps were followed to ensure that these issues were fully addressed before commencing this research. Firstly, research adheres to the Code of Ethics of the British Society of Criminology.

Secondly, the research team sought to ensure informed consent was gained by stressing to all regional Project Coordinators that participation by Core Members was voluntary and that Core Members should feel no pressure to participate. At the interview, Core Members were told that their involvement was voluntary and all agreed. The research team also informed Core Members of the purpose of the research their role in the research and the reason for their selection. Core Members were also informed how their data may be used and that administrative data from the Project will be accessed with their permission. Core Members were also informed of their right to withdraw at any time prior to analysis being undertaken and their right to refuse to answer any questions, and were given the opportunity to ask any questions of the researcher prior to commencing the interview.

This study did not offer ‘absolute confidentiality’, but instead, offered ‘limited confidentiality’ to Core Members (King and Liebling, 2008; Cowburn, 2002). This meant Core Members were told prior to the interview that any information Core Members gave during interviews would be kept confidential, except where disclosures of serious risk of harm were made about themselves or others. The decision to offer limited confidentiality is based on Scully’s argument that the ‘protection of the endangered person takes precedence over the rights of the informant’ (Scully 1990: 23).

Volunteers

Sampling

A total of 20 volunteers from six CoSA Projects across England and Wales were interviewed for this study. The six Projects are:

Circles East

Circles North East

Cumbria Circles

Greater Manchester Circles

North Wales Circles

Yorkshire and Humberside Circles of Support and Accountability

Recent estimates from *Circles UK* stated there to be approximately 600 active CoSA volunteers across England and Wales (McCartan et al, 2014 (a)). To be considered for inclusion in this research volunteers were required to have some experience of participating in an active CoSA. Given the available population of volunteers this study sought to draw on the experiences of volunteers who were participating in their first Circle as well as those who had participated in more than one Circle and sought to gain the experiences of volunteers from Projects throughout England and Wales. The study also sought to achieve a range of ages of volunteers to minimise the skewing of the results to only being ‘students’ or ‘retired’ people. Volunteers were also required to have a good understanding of English.

Access

As with Core Members, the support from *Circles UK* and the Coordinators assisted greatly in allowing access to potential participants. The research team used the contacts developed with regional Project Coordinators to identify volunteers who would be willing to participate in the research and who fitted the inclusion criteria.

Regional Coordinators received a copy of the Information Sheet and were briefed on the aims of the research and the importance of volunteers not being encouraged or coerced into participating in the research. Coordinators approached 11 volunteers, and all received a copy of the Information Sheet informing them of the purpose of the research, their role in the research, and the reason they had been selected. The Information Sheet also contained details of how their data may be used, their right to withdraw at any time and to refuse to answer any questions. Contact details for all members of the research team were also provided to allow volunteers to ask any questions prior to the interview. The support of the Coordinators was again invaluable in assisting in the identification of volunteers and in arranging interview venues.

All volunteers were very busy people and therefore the research team received the contact details of nine volunteers from the coordinator and a mutually acceptable date was arranged with the research team. All volunteers were given at least a one week cooling off period between invitation and being interviewed to ensure that they had adequate time to decide on whether to participate or not.

Approached and Realised

Coordinators from each of the nine Projects involved in the study were contacted. One of the Coordinators requested not to contact the Project due to high workloads at the time interviews were anticipated, and one of the Coordinators left their post shortly after the research team made contact with the Project to interview volunteers and so that Project was not approached to allow the new Coordinator time to settle in to the role. One of the Projects was contacted but no responses were received.

A total of 26 volunteers were identified and approached to be interviewed and a total of 20 interviews were conducted with volunteers across six regional Projects. This gives a response rate of 77%. Three of the volunteers identified by the Coordinators were contacted directly by the research team. Two did not respond to the request and one declined due to work commitments. The remaining three volunteers were contacted by the Coordinator but no further progress was made and so alternative arrangements were made.

Data Collection: Interviews and Questionnaires

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of collecting data for this research with volunteers and a short questionnaire supplemented the interview.

Interview Schedule and Appreciative Inquiry

The main aim of these interviews was to gain the experiences and perspectives of volunteers to their work and role with CoSA and how it contributes towards the reintegration of released sex offenders in the community in England and Wales. As with the Core Member interviews the use of semi-structured interviews was selected as the most suitable tool to achieve the aims and objectives. The interview schedule for volunteers was also designed with consideration to the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (see description in Core Member section).

Interview topics included exploring volunteers' initial motivations for working with CoSA and sex offenders, their relationship with Core Members and other volunteers and their experiences of CoSA meetings and activities done with the Circle. The interview also explored volunteers understanding of the concepts of support and accountability, the limits of their role and whether they would continue working with CoSA.

Questionnaire

A short questionnaire was also administered at the end of each interview with the volunteers and was devised to collect important data about the basic demographics of volunteers as well as details about their experience with CoSA and past experience working in criminal justice. This contained approximately 20 questions and was

designed to last no more than ten minutes. For more detail on the socio-demographics of volunteers see Chapter Six.

The Interviewing Process

The majority of the interviews with volunteers were conducted face to face (N= 16). The remaining four interviews took place over the telephone. This was due to the personal preference of the volunteers and the research team. Where interviews with volunteers were face-to-face, volunteers arrived at the venue independently. Interviews took place at a variety of locations including charity organisation buildings, the meeting room of a hotel, the lobby of a hotel, probation offices, and Quaker meeting houses. All venues were suggested by the regional Project Coordinators or volunteers. Before the interview commenced, the Information Sheet was presented to volunteers and was offered to be read out by the interviewer.

Interviews with volunteers took place between October 2013 and February 2014 with half the interviews completed between in October 2013. The first four interviews were planned as pilot interviews to ensure that the interview schedule was fit for purpose for use with volunteers.

Interviews with volunteers were initially expected to last approximately 1hour – 1hour 30 minutes including time for the questionnaire. The average length of time taken to complete these interviews and questionnaire was 1hour 23 minutes. The shortest interview was 50 minutes while the longest interview lasted 2hours 14 minutes. None of the volunteers requested that their data be withdrawn and a positive response was received.

Analysis

All recordings from the interviews with volunteers were transcribed by the research team. During transcription all identifiers were stripped from the recordings. Anonymised transcripts were then loaded into the NVivo software tool to assist in analysis. Some preliminary themes were identified during the interviews and new themes emerged as the interviews were analysed. Questionnaire data was also stripped of identifiers.

Interviewing the Stakeholders

For the purposes of this research the term stakeholders has been used to encompass a number of different groups of professionals who are involved in the management of sex offenders or Core Members. The following groups are incorporated in the stakeholder group: regional Project Coordinators; Police Public Protection Officers and Probation Officers; and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers involved in MAPPA.

Sampling

Because of the different roles of the stakeholder group a number of specific criteria were developed for each group. All Probation Officers who were selected are or have previously been involved in supervising a Core Member who has been part of a Circle and the Probation Officer may have supervised several Core Members. MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers were required to have an awareness of sex offenders who have participated in CoSA, though did not need to have been actively involved in the Circle.

The knowledge gained on the CoSA Projects as a result of our involvement in this research identified a number of variations between regional Projects to ensure that views from all stakeholders provided a diverse and nationwide perspective of CoSA in England and Wales. Key factors identified across the CoSA Projects included the geography of the Project (rural/urban and county/multi-county); the age of the Project and the number of active Core Members in the Project. The research team also sought to include probation-led, probation assisted and independent/charitable Projects.

Twenty participants made up the stakeholder group and they were drawn from five CoSA Projects throughout England and Wales. Because of the small numbers these will remain anonymous. A more precise breakdown of the stakeholder interviews can be seen in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviews
Coordinators	6
Probation Officers	6
Police Officers	5
MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers	3
Total	20

Access

Access to probation staff was sought via NOMS National Research Committee and from the Chief Probation Officer for the respective Probation Trusts and was approved very quickly. Once approval was gained, the research team contacted regional Project Coordinators to identify potential participants who met the selection criteria for Police and Probation Officers and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers. Coordinators once again assisted greatly with identifying stakeholders and in some cases facilitated arranging dates and venues for the interviews. Other Coordinators passed on the contact details of stakeholders and the research team made contact with these individuals.

The research team already had the details of the regional Project Coordinators and received contact details for nine of the remaining 14 stakeholders. Mutually acceptable dates were arranged with the research team or via the regional Project coordinator. All stakeholders were given at least a one week cooling off period between invitation and being interviewed to ensure that they had adequate time to decide on whether to participate or not.

All stakeholders who were approached, received a copy of the Information Sheet informing them of the purpose of the research, their role in the research, and the reason they have been selected. The Information Sheet also contained details of how their data may be used, their right to withdraw at any time and to refuse to answer any questions. Contact details for all members of the research team were also provided to

allow questions prior to the research. Those regional Project Coordinators identified by the research team were contacted directly.

Approached and Realised

A total of 25 stakeholders were identified and approached to participate in this research and a total of 20 interviews were conducted across five regional Projects. This gives a response rate of 80%. Reasons for rejections were related to work commitments. For instance, on the day of an interview, one stakeholder had to cancel due to an unexpected incident involving one of their cases. Two stakeholders did not respond directly but passed messages through the regional Project Coordinators such were their workload commitments. Rejections were received from two MAPPA Coordinators/Senior Managers, 2 Police Public Protection Officers and one Probation Officer.

Data Collection: Interviews and Questionnaires

Semi-structured interviews were the sole method of collecting data for this research with stakeholders due to their work commitments. Because of the different roles which are demanded of these stakeholders it was agreed that three distinct interview schedules should be produced to ensure maximum data is collected from each of these interviews to be used in the final report.

As with other interviews, stakeholder interview schedules were designed with consideration to the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and encouraging individuals to reflect on their best or most positive experiences and ‘what might be’ (Cooperrider, 1990).

Interviews explored stakeholder’s initial understandings of the role of CoSA and its work with sex offenders; perceptions of the use of volunteers to work with Core Members; their involvement in the referral process and Circle meetings. The interview also explored stakeholders understandings of the concepts of ‘Support’ and ‘Accountability’, the limits of CoSA work and their reflections on the work of CoSA. Additionally interviews with Police and Probation Officers explored their perspective of CoSA; what they feel are the best and worst things about CoSA; how they

communicate with Coordinators; and any areas where the CoSA model could or should be improved. Co-ordinator interviews further explored their role in training volunteers and managing the Project and their experiences of working with volunteers.

The Interviewing Process

The majority of interviews with stakeholders (N= 14) were undertaken face-to-face. The remaining six interviews were done by telephone at the request of the participants and due to workload commitments. The majority of the face-to-face interviews with stakeholders took place in either police or probation offices. One interview took place in a Quaker Meeting House and one in a university meeting room. Venues were suggested by the individual stakeholders. Before each interview commenced the Information Sheet was presented to each stakeholder and permission was sought to record the interview. All stakeholders agreed.

Interviews with stakeholders took place between December 2013 and February 2014 with the majority of the interviews completed in December 2013 (N= 12). As with the interviews with Core Members and volunteers, the interview schedules for stakeholders were piloted and assessed by the research team to ensure there were no gaps in the schedules and that the style of interviewing was appropriate for the respective participants groups. This was done internally by the research team for the first interviews with each set of participants.

Because of the pivotal role Coordinators play in CoSA and the experience from interviewing Core Members, interviews with Coordinators were initially expected to last approximately 1hour 30 minutes – 2 hours. The average length of time taken to complete these interviews was 1hour 48 minutes. The shortest interview was 1hour 23 minutes while the longest interview lasted 2hours 28 minutes.

Interviews with Police and Probation Officers were designed to be much shorter due to the high workload and varying experiences of CoSA and were designed to last approximately one hour. The average length of time taken to complete these

interviews was 1 hour. The shortest interview was 41 minutes while the longest interview lasted 1 hour 32 minutes.

Interviews with MAPPA Managers and Commissioners were designed to last up to 45 minutes. The average length of time taken to complete these interviews was 35 minutes. The shortest interview was 25 minutes while the longest interview lasted 35 minutes.

In total 20 interviews with stakeholders were completed and the average time was 1 hour 11 minutes, the shortest interview was 25 minutes and the longest interview was 2 hours 28 minutes. No stakeholders requested that their data be withdrawn and appeared eager to participate in the research.

Analysis

All interviews with each of the three stakeholder groups were recorded and transcribed by the research team. During transcription all identifiers were stripped from the recordings. Anonymised transcripts were then loaded into the NVivo software tool to assist in analysis. Some preliminary themes were identified during the interviews and new themes emerged as the interviews were analysed.

Chapter Six – The Volunteers

Introduction

A total of twenty Circles of Support and Accountability volunteers across the country were interviewed for this report about their experiences working with people convicted of sexual offences living in the community; their identities have been disguised. The responses are grouped here into five broad sections:

- Getting Started;
- Activities;
- Relationships;
- Support and Accountability; and
- Recognising Success and Risk

In 2012 some 600 people were reportedly acting as volunteers in Circles of Support and Accountability across England and Wales; 74% were female and 26% male (McCartan et al 2014 (a): 3); for an account of volunteers experiences of Circles in a narrative form see also Hanvey et al 2011: 116-149.

Sample Description

To assist in describing the sample of volunteers, data collected from the questionnaire is presented below. As with a lot of voluntary work most of the volunteers interviewed were female (N= 16) (McCartan et al, 2014 (a)), four male volunteers were also interviewed. The age range of volunteers was varied though most were aged 30-39 and 60-69. The age of volunteers is something which is examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Table 6.1: Age of Volunteers

	Frequency (N)
20-29	15% (3)
30-39	25% (5)
40-49	10% (2)
50-59	10% (2)
60-69	30% (6)
70-79	10% (2)

Also of note throughout the chapter, and so worth noting here is that most of the volunteers were either students (N= 7) or were retired (N= 5). The remaining seven had various other occupations. Most volunteers had some previous experiences of working in criminal justice (N= 14), either through previous paid employment or volunteer roles and 17 of the 20 volunteers had previous voluntary experiences. Two volunteers had participated in six Circles (of varying lengths) though most had participated in two or three Circles (N= 6). The result is that the CoSA volunteers are experienced people and this sample represents a group of volunteers who have previous voluntary experience and some experience of working with offenders or victims previously in the criminal justice system. The majority of the volunteers (N= 15) interviewed were also experienced at working in Circles with three-quarters of the sample participating in more than one Circle (see table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Number of Circles volunteers participated in

Participated in	Frequency (N)
1	25% (5)
2	30% (6)
3	30% (6)
4	5% (1)
5	0
6	10% (2)

Getting Started

As a preface to looking at the activities of a Circle we asked the volunteers about the source of their interest and motivations for joining a Circle and their views on training.

Hearing about Circles

Volunteers heard about Circles in a variety of ways including radio programmes, the internet or press reports. Two of the volunteers said they had heard about Circles through their membership of the Quakers organisation:

I am a Quaker and a member of Quaker Peace and Social Welfare and I used to go to meetings down there and Helen Drewery appeared one day ...and I was really fired up by it and I thought it was tremendous (V9)

Most heard about Circles through the recruiting role played by CoSA Co-ordinators (N= 13):

A Coordinator came to the place I was studying and they gave a presentation...the talk inspired me (V3)

It was the Coordinators that came in to do a talk at the university. I wasn't actually there that day but everyone was talking about it and I looked into it a bit myself and then I thought I'd give it a go really (V5)

The Coordinator was fantastic and they sold it to me and it sounded like it was doing some good, getting some positive results, their reoffending rate was low compared to the norm, and so I thought why not give it a go so that's how I got involved (V13)

Motivation for Joining Circles

The reasons for joining a Circle as a volunteer can be divided into those reasons that are about the volunteer and those that are more about an altruistic view of contributing to society; Bellamy and Watson call this a degree of 'inward motivation' (experience gaining, CV building etc.) and 'outward motivation' (altruistic, protecting the community, giving something back to the community) (Bellamy and Watson 2013; see also Circles South East 2012: 63-64 for more on volunteer motivations). In our sample we found less than half (8; 40%) of volunteers initially had an openly inward motivation. The majority (12; 60%) were more outward oriented at the start.

Those volunteers with an 'inward motivation' were quite open about their reasons for joining:

I think now it's about the experience of doing it as well cos as I do my degree I am looking for a job in the criminal justice system (V5)

I was doing a foundation degree and we had to do some volunteering work to get experience and because I would be interested in working in probation in the future so I'd signed up (V8)

doing a psychology degree I was thinking about what I wanted to do when I finished [and this] was diverse, different and something to get your teeth into (V14)

I was doing a degree in criminology because I want a career change from working in an office...It was part of our degree to do voluntary work as well and they'd mentioned Circles in that way as something they thought was worthwhile (V17)

Other research has found a high degree of students involved in Circles (see e.g. Circles South East 2012: 59) and the earlier study on Circles in the north west found the most commonly cited reason to volunteer was 'career progression' (Haslewood-Pocsik et al 2008: para.4.3).

Volunteers who had become involved for 'inward motivations' like career progression might later change their view, as they saw the intrinsic value of Circles regardless of their own individual needs:

I thought it would look good on my CV as much as anything and I suppose now I've finished my degree and I've continued it. I think I still do it because I think it works and you can see the changes in a Core Member (V17)

I am in university as well so it was a good opportunity to get a bit of experience in as well as doing my course...I suppose at the start it was to support a future career but now I suppose it is that I would like to carry on regardless really (V4)

In fairness it was selfishness, cos I thought wow this is gonna give me experience in an area that will help my career after I've left university. Then when I started reading into it and looking at it I found out how worthwhile it is and just how much it does and how it can help certain offenders. So although it was for me at first, then it was because it seemed to do good (V19)

Those with a more 'outward motivation' from the start were often the older volunteers with a work background that motivated them:

I am a social worker – it just instantly appealed to me (V2)

I've volunteered all my life (V11)

I've worked in IT for 35 years and we've got no people care, no people management, because we are robots, you know we code, we programme we talk techy and that's it. So our H.R. are Human Remains, you know they are no good. You go to the voluntary sector and they are completely the opposite (V18)

These older 'altruistic' volunteers were able to separate themselves off from the younger 'inwardly' motivated:

I didn't trust her ...she was a student as well but she wasn't driven to do it, I felt it was just to go on her CV as opposed to believing it (V3)

Its 70% young students on a psychology or criminology degree who are doing it for a career option. That is fine I have no issue with that whatsoever but they are young people. Maybe because they are being educated in these topics at university it isn't a big issue and there aren't many 'lay' younger people, the 'lay' people tend to be older people but who have more life experience (V18)

Another view expressed was neither 'inward' nor 'outward' looking but based just on the fascination of meeting 'real' sex offenders in a safe setting:

I mean putting it really bluntly there is a degree of it is voyeurism in doing it. It is just so fascinating. With the poor guy I have just worked with, I just think my goodness how do you cope with the life you have come from and that is part of the reason that I have an increased commitment to it (V6)

Training

All volunteers are expected to undergo a period of training before selection for a Circle and before joining their first Circle. The *Circles UK* Code of Practice confirms the requirement for training *prior* to selection (*Circles UK* 2009: 12) inevitably making the training part of the selection. A standard programme of training might include:

- Attitudes and beliefs to sexual offending and related issues;
- A presentation on circles;
- Roles and responsibilities of circle volunteers;
- Personal boundaries and self-care;
- Sex offender treatment; and
- Community relapse prevention/better lives.

(cited in *Circles South East* 2012: 24)

Some additional specialist training has been offered for example to volunteers working with Core Members with learning disabilities or with younger people who have been convicted of sexual offences (ibid: 26).

The present study found most (N= 15) volunteers positively disposed toward their training:

I think it added to my knowledge (V3)

Like if you are meeting with someone every week it could become easy to forget what they've done and just think 'aww they're lovely'. But the training reminds you about that and also it reminds you about how manipulative they can be (V5)

The training is actually pretty good... it does make a difference. Definitely (V7)

Very good.... we all got some material in a folder and then we talked through it...we also did some practical exercises (V10)

It was really good. It was two solid days. It brought a lot of different people together and see what other people you would be likely to be working with because it is definitely a team effort. It was interesting to hear from other experiences who have been volunteers before (V12)

Even if sometimes the language was a bit jargon bound:

Yes it was very good, the people who were doing it were very informative and knew what they were doing. It was a little technical, you know so the programmes details, and MAPPA and the technical terms weren't explained well enough but it's around the structure of professionals in probation and police. So there is an element of professionalism in this (V18)

The majority of volunteers (N= 13) also thought training seemed to be more slanted towards 'accountability' than it was toward support:

[we were told the priorities] were to reintegrate them into society, occupy their time so that they don't have the time on their hands to start thinking horrible thoughts and to support them into building a new life...you are helping probation as well (V3)

They brought in past volunteers ... [and]...they said that whichever Core Member you work with, will try and avoid talking about accountability or will try to pass it on to somebody else – and that has happened quite a few times.

So we were told how we could turn that around and make them more accountable for what they've done (V11)

A lot of the training was talking about sex offender behaviour patterns and recognising risky behaviours (V13)

It definitely made the accountability role more obvious. It didn't come through in the interview. I think I did four or five days training and it came through in that (V17)

A substantive number of respondents (N= 8) believed that a lot of the training was also about the safety and well-being of the volunteers as much as it was about understanding the people who commit sexual offences and the criminal justice system:

It was your own safety, you know never meet with the Core Member alone and be alone with them and listening out for things that might be risky like they are going somewhere they should be. You know being vigilant of things that they say. Also manipulation was key cos they were telling us about that cos with a sex offender that is a big part of who they are and how they get to do what they do (V4)

There was a big emphasis on self-preservation as well...I would say that 60% of the [training] day was for me and making sure that I was safe in that environment and the other 40% was how a Circle works and the process of it. But there was a strong emphasis on keeping us sane and that's important because of the nature of the role (V8)

In terms of selection the Circles South East Project have reported that out of 320 volunteers trained they had had to 'de-select' only six volunteers in a ten year period (Circles South East 2012: 6).

A small number of volunteers (N= 3) commented on the perceived time 'gap' between training and the first Circle:

It was nearly two years ago because there was quite a long gap between the initial training and so I am trying to remember but it began with the no more victims and went into more and more detail (V6)

Gap between training and first circle can be too long (V7)

The study by Haslewood-Pocsik and colleagues had found an average six month wait between training and first Circle but volunteers reported it to be a wait that could be

put to good use; 'this way they could digest all the information and think about the circle' (Haslewood-Pocsik et al 2009:26).

In contrast some volunteers had experienced no time gap at all

I was pretty much straight into a Circle after training (V8)

In one case, a volunteer with previous experience working with offenders received no formal training but had an intensive meeting with the Coordinator. The volunteer stated:

I didn't actually do the training. I was pretty much thrown in at the deep end...two volunteers had dropped out cos of their jobs. But I met with the coordinator and we went through everything ... [was offered more training but] I am ex-army and I am best just thrown in (V11)

The other theme coming through from volunteers was that, however good the training was it could never really prepare you for the first time you met with the Core Member in the Circle. Five volunteers explicitly commented on this:

faced with a Core Member...really we know nothing! (laughs)...you learn on the job really ... first time you go to see the CM it's terrifying! I didn't expect it to be so frightening (V9)

You are given amazing training really...what it doesn't set you up for is meeting the Core Member for the first time and you have all of these thoughts going through your mind like 'this is going to be a sex offender, oh my god what are they gonna be like' (V14)

Activities

Group Meetings - Discussions

Within the group, activities were considered in terms of topics of discussion and actual activities that went beyond the immediate Circle meeting as a Circle. Topics of conversation included:

We talk about what he is doing at the moment ...what's moved forward. We kind of share news ...our holidays and bits about families...the positive things

in his life...the things that might go wrong, are there any risks in what he is doing (V2)

Friendship, family and sexual relationships. We do discuss sex...social activities...work or training or educational opportunities. How they manage their whole lives really, self-care (V7)

Victim empathy. His life style – family life his relationship with his parents and siblings also his girlfriend (V10)

O God! It's everything. Cross-stitch, hobbies, cooking, how to use an electric cooker, what their thoughts and views are on the day, you know what's on the news. It really could be anything (V19)

Some meetings were pre-planned – some were not planned and were ‘mostly ad lib when we get there’ (V11). An example of pre-planning was:

One of the other volunteers had a big issue with him because she said he never engaged with her. Whenever she said things he'd hardly look at her but as soon as she'd say something he would say something completely different about another topic and she picked up on it ... so there had been a number of sessions where we planned that only she would talk to him so he was forced to talk to her and show her respect (V19)

Sometimes the Core Member was allowed to lead the discussion and not least because they often had no one to listen to them elsewhere and because they ‘liked talking about themselves’:

I just try to listen because they feel like their voice isn't being heard and they do like to talk about themselves (V3)

He loved to exaggerate and he talked a lot about violence and all the various fights he had been in...he needed to entertain us and impress us. I think it gradually wore off (V7)

Attitudes relevant to sexual offending would be taken on and challenged when necessary. The aim was to do this in a ‘safe’ environment for the Core Member.

As Hannem writing about Canadian Circles has said:

Although volunteers may at times be forced to challenge or even reprimand their Core Member, the underlying sentiment is one of ‘tough love’ and the Core Member continues to be supported and respected as a valuable human being, even in these difficult moments (Hannem 2011)

In the present study volunteers reported:

One time we'd talked about a story-line on Emmerdale when a woman got raped. He was on the side of the rapist and so we would challenge him about that to see if we could work out where he was coming from on that and then try to tell him why the character got caught. The soaps were useful cos he was a real soap-addict (V3)

It's not all nicey-nicey touchy-feely stuff [smiles] and it is challenging their thought-processes or when they say something and trying to make them think in a different way than they have (V17).

I challenged W that the fact that it was the police's fault and the judge's fault and he couldn't possibly have done these things and then he started saying he was a computer expert and they got it wrong....I challenged him about that and at the end of the meeting he said he could sort of see what I was saying and that was good ... [but] he went away in a right huff and really moaned, but it was good (V14)

Discussion of the original offence did take place but was not constantly brought up because it became repetitive:

You have to be really aware that meetings can become routine and you just meet up, and go home without anything actually changing. And that is useless, that is not gonna save anyone. To be honest with you a Circle is quite expensive to set up and run and if no one is getting anything out of it, including the volunteers then it is a waste of time (V19)

Characteristics of Good Meetings

In general terms a good meeting was felt to be one where everyone was there and the conversation/interaction was free-flowing:

Where everybody managed to turn up...we would meet even if we can't all meet (V2)

When everyone takes part...when it flows around the Circle (V9)

Everybody being there and taking part, including the Core Member. Last week we had a good meeting, we went to the library and had a coffee. It was a good social meeting (V19)

If the interaction is not working then humour could be used as the 'oil' to make the wheels go round:

You want it to be relaxed and you know me and the volunteers will give a little bit about our personal lives – nothing too personal but we can have a bit of banter and a bit of a joke (V4)

Often we have meetings where he sits passively and says ‘alright’ all the time (laughs) ... we just tell him! We just say ‘alright’ is not an option (laughs) ...we don’t do it in an intimidating or rude manner. We just try and say it in a jokey way just to get him to open up and it works with him...we aren’t horrible to him (V10)

We always try and make him laugh and giggle but he also has some very dark days because he has no one to talk to apart from his Probation Officer and two volunteers. If he goes in a shop he isn’t very comfortable speaking in there (V16)

The emergence of ‘new’ information or a disclosure of some sort was also seen as being part of a ‘good’ meeting:

A good meeting is working through something or when you find out some new information and you feel like you are really starting to make progress here (V10)

There had been weeks and weeks where we thought we were getting nowhere, he’d be telling us he was looking into things but then all of a sudden he started telling us he’d joined this group and met these people...I think it was the review really that probably gave him the kick to get up and do it for him (V17)

Characteristics of Bad Meetings

In contrast to a perceived ‘good’ meeting is the meeting that has little interaction:

Lack of communication an absolute brick wall that can be difficult (V1)

Any meeting where we aren’t getting anything out of him...like when he’s not engaging or really saying anything or it’s just general chit chat (V10)

Where you feel you are not making any progress really, they are not coming up with ideas about where the Circle may help them or be of value to them and we have run out of ideas ourselves. It’s sort of stagnation. It doesn’t last long but I think it’s happened in both Circles I’ve been in (V12)

I find it a little frustrating because I was seeing the same after 4 or 5 months [that it wasn’t going anywhere] but you can’t really stop it. Well you can but ... I actually went ape at the first review session, I was shouting at him saying ‘We’ve been here for four months and you’ve delivered nothing, what are you here for? We are here to support you but you’re giving us nothing back’ (V18)

Unhelpful can be where the meetings start looping – like they keep going over the same stuff – particularly offences. But in reality its' pointless going back to the offence, you realise sometimes that their opinion isn't going to change and so you just have to move on cos we can't change it just by going over it again and again (V19)

The Core Member may also be able to use the dynamics of the group (the Circle) to their own advantage:

Core Member's are very good on the whole at manipulating volunteers and dealing with a person who won't ask them difficult questions and avoiding the person who will - they are very good at mixing it up which is why reflection is very important (V1)

He was pitching us against the Coordinator and everyone against everyone else. That was the worst one. ...and we challenged him about it. That was very uncomfortable...he couldn't cope with it really, that he'd been caught out...I think he was probably upset as well (V9)

Specific incidents may arise to disrupt a Circle such as a Core Member being drunk:

The worst meeting was when he [Core Member] was drunk (V2)

Another incident involved a fellow volunteer being drunk:

[the latest] was horrendous really, one of the volunteers partners is going through chemotherapy and so she was out of sorts and had had a couple of drinks before-hand I think...it was horrendous, absolutely horrendous ... I wanted to step in and say perhaps you should go home... but we had one of the Coordinators there and I could see their face and saw them thinking 'Oh what's the best way to handle this?' (V11)

One of the main assets of a Circle was its ability to offer a 'safe' environment of a private area where the Core Member (and the volunteers) could feel safe to say anything they wanted to. If this 'safe' space was the violated for any reason that could cause problems:

I do think when they come in this room they feel they are safe and they can say something to us. That was why it was so shocking yesterday when somebody walked in yesterday because we have always made it clear that this has got to be completely safe (V9)

[His mother] did turn up at one of the meetings actually, possibly to see what we were like and what we were doing with him. That was interesting. She didn't stay, it was just a 'Hello' kind of thing, but I think it was for her curiosity (V8)

Group Meetings – Other Activities

As well as meetings within a formal setting all Circle volunteers would engage in various activities away from the meeting room. These included:

Bowling, shopping, lunch, coffee, restaurant in the evening (V1)

We visited him in hospital when he was ill (V2)

Library... coffee shops...meals...the only rule is we don't drink alcohol (V7)

We've done some role plays with him (V10)

We went to bingo – cos that was free on one night. It was good fun (V18)

The value of activities that went beyond the immediate Circle was explained as taking the focus off the Core Member and thereby allowing the conversation to flow more easily; the activity became the focus rather than the Core Member:

If you try different activities in different places I think you get a wider variety of social interaction. You can also learn more about the Core Member, how he responds and behaviour in different types of situations. This meeting room is a bit artificial really...putting him in a goldfish bowl and studying him (V7)

[it's] not quite so intimidating you can be part of the wallpaper a bit more, you can mix in...one of my Core Members who rarely uses more than three words at a time in the Circle almost told me his life history just over coffee...I think that is great (V1)

Although inevitably non-Circle activities may sometimes go wrong:

Taking Andy out for a meal that was quite disastrous, quite disastrous. It was the only social event we did with him, and we wanted it to be a normal social event for him and so we were all interacting with each other and talking normally and he really couldn't cope with that and it had to be about him and so he had some kind of attack in the middle. We aren't sure what it was but one of the volunteers who was an ex-nurse dealt with his acting very well but yes it was a total disaster (V13)

Relationships

Group dynamics and relationships within the Circle were described as being much like any other group. Informal 'leaders' would come forward, and some members of

the group would be more out-going than others who might adopt more of a ‘listening role’; other research confirms this:

“There is no formal leadership structure within Circles, but respondents did allude to informal leadership roles emerging due to the personalities of some group members” (Bellamy and Watson 2013: 28)

Whilst the philosophy suggested that everyone was equal in the Circle and everyone had an equal voice, volunteers were always aware that, that was not really the case because there was always more of a focus on the Core Member. The Circle members had no ‘power’ over the Core Member comparable to any power the police or probation service might have but it was only the Core Member who was going to have his activities reported to the Coordinator if there were concerns - not the volunteers. As Bellamy and Watson put it:

“The Core Member is potentially isolated as the only group member there to address issues of their own around behaviour, risk and their future” (Bellamy and Watson 2013: 26)

Friendships with the Core Member?

The volunteers were divided on the question of whether they were ‘friends’ or not with the Core Member. All had mixed feelings about this issue. After further questioning, only a minority of three volunteers of the twenty were in favour of friendships, and six volunteers stated they were against friendship. The general feeling was that they were ‘friendly but not friends’ (V19), which perhaps best expresses the mixed feelings of all volunteers:

He is almost a friend but not quite and I think that is how he sees me as well (V2)

Hmmm it sort of is, but it's not a real friendship. When we are all there and together we sit around and talk like a friendship group, but you are there for a reason and that reason isn't to be best buds and that is hard. Because when you are altogether it is like a friendship and you do care like a friend, but it's not real. And once it comes to an end then that will be it... it's like friendship with a time limit on it - so it's strange (V5)

Although the volunteers thought that perception did not stop the Core Member from thinking that they - the volunteers - were his or her friends:

we are not their friends, we are there to support them and be friendly, but not their friends...I think they sometimes see us as their friends and so I just say well I will let the Coordinators know just to gently remind them (V3)

He sees us as friends. That's obviously not where Circles is...he knows very little about me...he doesn't even know my surname (V14)

The *Circles UK* Code of Practice states that it is 'good practice for Circles volunteers to be known within the Circle by first name only' (*Circles UK* 2009: 16).

If not a friendship did the Circle constitute something more 'professional'? Was the relationship even a counselling relationship? Again there were divisions of opinion:

We are not a counselling service (V2)

It's almost a bit like a counselling session (V3)

Yes we are counselling...counselling is about listening. And one thing we do with Core Members is we listen to them (V7)

The answer here was seemingly dependent on what prior experiences the volunteer had of counselling. If they had such experiences they seem to have been happy to import those experiences into the Circle.

Trust and the Core Member

The question of 'trust' in the relationship between volunteers and Core Members was explored. Opinions were again divided; some (N= 8) thought there was a degree of 'trust':

[yes] pretty much I would say ...I think there are things that he doesn't tell us and I think that we respect that...we completely respect his right to privacy in that we don't think we need to know all his deep dark secrets we just watch for and talk about signs of risk for him (V2)

One of the core ingredients of a Circle really (V7)

Hmm I trust that they want to not reoffend, I trust that their intentions are good. I'm not sure they are always as honest with us as they could be but I trust that their intention to not reoffend is there (V17)

Others (N= 12) were more questioning:

He was a bit wary because I was a social worker (V2)

No – well the first two they proved me right they re-offended... I have a picture of my daughter on my key ring so I would make sure my keys were in my pocket (V3)

I wouldn't trust them 100% cos obviously they've done it once so they are capable of doing it again so you've always gotta remember that (V4)

Trust was something that could be worked on by the volunteers. 'Definitely the trust wasn't there at the start, but I think as they get to know you more and they understand why we are doing it then I do think they do trust us' (V5). One way of doing this was to engage in some self-revelations on the part of the volunteer:

We reveal little things about ourselves so that it becomes a kind of dialogue (V2)

Give a little bit of yourself without giving too much cos obviously I don't want them turning up at my door (V3)

I guess because as a volunteer you are guarded about what you disclose, there isn't that openness that you would have with a friend and you would just talk about what you did at the weekend as you are more careful about what you talk about (V17)

Trust was also seen in terms of volunteers' relationships with the police and probation service:

If he feels that every little thing is going to be reported back then that's not particularly helpful ... [it means] he is only going to trust us to a certain degree (V7)

On the other hand 'trust' – or an appearance of 'trust' - could also be used in an instrumental way by the volunteers to elicit useful information from the Core Member:

Trust means that you get more from them and so they can be helped more and it gets more information from them about the things they are doing but which they maybe shouldn't be doing as well. So the more information we get the more we can pass to the Coordinator. Then it's their discretion as to whether it's passed on further (V5)

I don't think you can enter into it without having a personal attachment. That would be pretty heartless and I'm not that way (V8)

We did have a bit of a wobble on our trust path when he did divulge something to us which we felt really increased his risk and we had to pass that on to probation and the PPU (Public Protection Unit). And then action was taken by them...but he knew that was part of the Circle so it's tough I'm afraid! (laughs) (V10)

They probably trust us to a point, not completely just because they know they are accountable and if there was something concerning then we would report it (V17)

Relationships between the Volunteers

Most volunteers got on well with each other during the period of the Circle even if that sometimes took a while to achieve:

You get a very interesting mix, you may get lifelong friendships, you may get people who have nothing else in common apart from the Circles, but yet they get on very well for the duration of the Circle (V1)

We all get on really well and it's great. We all have our own little role and so one was more assertive and put them in their place; one was much more of a listener and takes notice of what's going on (V5)

That is a real icing on the cake. I get on with them very well and have enjoyed getting to know them, which is surprising but also quite nice as well because if the Circle leaves one feeling that we weren't able to change the world, then there isn't that feeling that it is all on my own shoulders (V6)

Yah great – we all really get on. All the girls are doing the same course as me but at different stages in it (V10)

Brilliant ...we've all gelled really well and all offer something different (V11)

A few volunteers (N= 4) did not achieve such a degree of closeness:

we were all quite a close group to begin with and then people have kind of drifted away...[two of the group] talk to each other more than the others...more as friends than work colleagues (V2)

I didn't trust her ...she was a student as well but she wasn't driven to do it, I felt it was just to go on her CV as opposed to believing it (V3)

I don't have a lot of contact with the people from my previous Circles...it doesn't seem to happen that relationships carry on after the end of a Circle, certainly not for me anyway (V7)

In the first Circle one of the volunteers walked out and we never saw him again. I don't know if he took offence to something we said but he was there one meeting and then he wasn't at the next meeting (V13)

Working with the Core Member

Initial meetings with Core Members were usually seen as significant events beset with expectations and even traumatic:

we were all worrying about what it would be like going into this room and that there would be this monster coming into the room and he would be scary but they are just normal people and in a sense that is more scary isn't it because then you just don't know do you (V4)

It was quite overwhelming to have someone sit and explain what they've done and at his age, I got quite choked about it and it was a massive impact on me. After I said that he should be proud that he can sit in front of four strangers and tell us what he'd done and I said I was sorry for getting so emotional (V8)

The level of questioning could be intense:

we do question in great detail, and I do mean in great detail, the reasons behind the offending and why they feel it is ok to do what they've done (V10)

When he didn't want to answer we had to probe further while also remembering that he doesn't have to answer anything he doesn't want to. So you have to do it in a way that doesn't alienate the Core Member and that keeps it clear to them that you are trying to help them and that is a difficult balance (V10)

Although there was some uncertainty reported about the division of labour with the probation and police service role:

about his offence, we weren't really sure whether that was our job because probation will be doing that and we didn't want him to be dreading coming to see us and us questioning him about the offence... We said we wouldn't quiz him about his offence or quiz him about his whereabouts and everything else because well that's police and probation's job and as a group we wanted to be completely separate from that (V8)

I don't know whether there are ambivalent feelings in probation because of course we are volunteers and they are professionals and one or two people might think we are treading on their toes and perhaps meddling in things that we shouldn't be (V7)

And it was always easier to divert to other subjects:

it was his aunt's birthday and I asked him what he'd got for her...and he said he'd got her nothing. So we told him what a tight-arse he was and told him he could at least get her some flowers and then he said 'Oh I think I will' and he did. So it's just having that ability to speak in that way (V3)

Support and Accountability

Support and Accountability were intrinsic to the idea of Circles. Volunteers are often motivated by the idea of helping and supporting people. The researchers sought their views on aspects of support and accountability.

How did Volunteers see Support?

The researchers asked the Circles volunteers what the idea of 'support' meant to them:

It's helping them to put the mechanisms into place for them to have an offence free life...the ultimate goal is for them to be independent and offence-free (V3)

It means over the course of the typical Circle, offering the Core Member enough flexibility for them to express what they need so that we can then see how much we can help rather than us assuming what it is they need. So it is about providing as wide a boundary as possible (V6)

We are modelling something that they don't normally encounter and he wasn't used to being listened to and I think that was something quite refreshing for him (V7)

It's difficult but I think it means helping somebody in all aspects of their life to become a better person and reach an aim and achieve the ultimate happy lifestyle that they can (V10)

To me it's being there for somebody. To help them to do something if they want to do it. Be a listening ear, somebody they know will be there and can contact if they need too (V19)

The timing and regularity of the weekly meetings was emphasised as being an important component of support and putting a structure into Core Members lives which might otherwise lack any consistent structure:

You are there every week and they are there every week ... if you treat the Circle casually as a volunteer then you can expect no more from the Core Member (V1)

I think being there each week for them. Being reliable (V4)

Support is being there, meeting them every week, listening to the good and the bad. If they have a problem trying to give options rather than telling them what to do. Just things like that really (V5)

I think it's really important that we meet on a regular basis, we are volunteers and we are choosing to be there ...So I suppose the most important support is us meeting regularly and listening to what he's got to say and offering our opinion and helping him (V17)

How did Volunteers see Accountability?

If 'support' is the restorative arm of Circles of Support and Accountability, 'accountability' might be seen as the 'justice' arm.

In political terms some commentators see the two as not opposed but with the support 'hiding' behind or being obscured by the accountability side and the latter even emphasised for public relations purposes. Writing of Canada, Hannem's view is that:

Given the current socio-political climate this public emphasis on accountability may be viewed, not as counterproductive to the restorative roots of the program but as an adaptive strategy that allows the [CoSA] initiative to survive (Hannem 2011)

The volunteers interviewed for this research showed a lot of confusion in their understanding of 'accountability' being not sure if it applied to the Core Members' past activities or current and future activities or indeed whether it applied to themselves as a Circle of volunteers and their responsibility to report, or solely to the Core Members themselves. Some volunteers (N= 6) thought it applied to the past:

To accept that what they have done is wrong and to know that they mustn't put themselves in a position where it could happen again and just acceptance of what they have done and have the drive not to do it again. You know - want to change (V4)

Them facing up to what they've done and being open and honest about it. Not trying to ship the blame elsewhere really (V5)

We also hold them to account for what they have done in the past (V7)

That they recognise that what they did was wrong and that they recognise and understand why it was wrong and why people get upset by what they did. They need to accept it as well though (V19)

Others (N= 8) saw it more in terms of a Core Members present and future activities:

[We] remind them they are not off the leash altogether (V9)

It means them accounting for their behaviour. I mean the perfect thing would be for them to be able to evaluate their behaviour and not behave in a way which they have done in the past and to be able to build up good relationships. So being able to hold them to account, not in a hugely hostile way, but questioning about other relationships and activities and behaviours that they are using (V12)

The remaining six volunteers saw accountability as being past, present and future orientated.

The volunteers reported their uncertainty that accountability might lie with them rather than the Core Member in that they were now responsible for reporting 'risky' behaviour:

O that accountability, my accountability, we had all of our organisational accountability. Sorry I was thinking about his accountability to us, but we had all of our accountability to the whole Criminal Justice System which is if he had said anything that was worrying then we would have to say something. We had a load of reviews where we all sat round and talked about whether we had ever heard anything about any inappropriate sexual thoughts and what we thought about his vulnerability, isolation and other things. So yeah we are accountable (V6)

I think it's unfair to say its accountability because that's putting what they do on our plates and that's not the case and never would be. If they go out and do something then that is only their decision. Never ours (V14)

The accountability part. I mean I've never really understand what is supposed to be meant by community accountability as opposed to criminal justice accountability. I suppose that is something that needs working on because you can't go following him on his bike, but that does exist. So it's when we feel comfortable having this person in our own patch really (V15)

and, in effect, accountability being their decision to report to the Coordinators and through them to probation or the police:

He has always known that we would report him (V2)

If you are suspicious of something happening then we would tell the Coordinator straightaway (V9)

And reporting if necessary which I must say we have done very little of, but it has happened (V13)

The Circle would deliberate and make its own decision on what to report:

You do have to watch everything and I take notes on lots of things and you have to keep deciding if it's something to worry about or not (V5)

Each week there were questions as to whether there were any issues that were worrying us. And sometimes we would say that there were but we would like to give it more time so please don't go in with hob-nail boots (V6).

There are loads of things that they say to us, and we will tell the Coordinator and the Coordinator will say that they haven't told us anything about that (V5)

Even if the volunteers were not exactly sure what it was they were reporting:

Yea we did report some concerns about B when he was up and down. We couldn't put our finger on what was up but we knew something was wrong so we passed that back (V5)

I mean the minutes for him, we literally just used to write down verbatim because it was almost the safest way. I mean he was very sexually explicit in his language, particularly with men, but also with us (V13)

I can't remember what the topic was but I do remember there was a point when we were not in agreement with something and so we took it to the Coordinator... we were all in agreement about that because the ramifications of getting it wrong are just not worth thinking about. And it ended up as a Circle of three because somebody had to leave and none of us wanted to take responsibility if something went wrong (V6)

Some volunteers saw reporting to the Coordinator as a way of off-loading 'their accountability' in the sense that once they had reported something that was that – an end of their responsibilities and now someone' else's decision:

I have got no problems with passing things along if it is even a mild suspicion ... I don't have to make a decision, my Coordinator does, so if I give them the information they can make the decision, if I don't give it to them then they can't (V1)

If I have something or concern that is on my mind I report it. Then even if it comes to nothing then it is off my mind then. Rather that, than something major happening and me thinking I should have said something (V3)

With A. we just used to send everything in and let the Coordinator decide if it was risky or not (V13)

We also do minutes after every meeting to summarise everything we've discussed and they are passed on to the Coordinator to deal with (V17)

Anonymised Extracts of Minutes and Reports sent to Coordinators are reproduced in Circles South East 2012: 64-5

Recognising Success – the Volunteers View

The researchers asked the volunteers whether they themselves felt able to recognise the signs of 'success' in their work with Core Members. To begin with they were asked if it was possible to change behaviour.

Can you change behaviour?

All the volunteers were asked if they felt they could change the Core Members offending behaviour – the answer was unanimously 'no'. Instead the volunteers felt the Core Member had to want to change and if they did not want to then the volunteers were limited in what they could do:

No they need to change it themselves all you can do is stand where you stand and show them there are other ways to do things (V1)

Some behaviour that you can't change if he doesn't want to change them (V2)

It only works with people who want to change which is good because I don't think it would work with those who don't want to change! [laughs] (V4)

And the interest [in young boys] doesn't go! ...you won't ever make that feeling that they have got go away. That will always be there...they can't get rid of that interest (V11)

No. No. I think they control their own behaviour and we support that but I'm not sure we can control their behaviour (V17)

Despite feeling they could not exert much change on the Core Members offending, the volunteers continued to promote a pro-social, non-offending message and encouraged Core Members to think of how a non-offending lifestyle could be better for them:

You can't change it cos it's only them that can do that, but I do think you can show them ways in which they can change, or ways in which they can change for the better but I think it's definitely something they have to do, that its self-led (V8)

It's more about encouraging change rather than forcing him to change (V11)

What they could change was mannerisms and appearance; a number (N= 16) of volunteers remarked on changes in physical appearance as a sign of success – or failure:

Changes are appearance; happier people tend to be a bit smarter...shaving habits, in hair care, clothing, posture, general health and that kind of thing...yeah appearance is usually the first thing (V1)

He looks more confident as a person and is more happy and settled ... it does look like a weight has been lifted off his chest (V10)

He just looked happier and lighter...new haircut, new clothes and a smile on his face and he just looked great and he said he felt it too ... when he first turned up his clothes were too big, he was scruffy as hell, head down, never gave eye contact...and now you see him in his new clothes he comes strutting in, his personality has come out so much, he has a bit of a joke and banter with you. He's a different person (V11)

A few days before he reoffended we saw him and he was looking a bit unkempt and dishevelled and like he wasn't looking after himself very well and I felt in hindsight that was the warning sign. What we should have done, but didn't do, was offer him another meeting in a day or two's time, but a couple of days later he reoffended (V7)

I'd voiced these concerns that his mannerism had changed and it was a gut feeling I had. He'd done nothing but I couldn't have lived with myself if I didn't report it. If it came to nothing then that is great for everybody but I wanted to make people aware and I had a duty to do that (V3)

In later interviews with Probation Officers and Police Officers we were told that signs of a 'happier' Core Member were not always good signs because they could just as easily indicate a return to offending (see Chapter Eight).

Did the Volunteers think that Circles was worthwhile?

Negative opinions were only held by a minority of four volunteers. Seven had a balanced assessment of success. The remaining nine volunteers reported that Circles was generally a success both in terms of individuals and wider social benefits:

Having been part of a professional organisation I think there is a huge role for volunteers, volunteers can do something completely different than statutory services (V2)

The Circle gives them something different, it shows them that in society there are people who know nothing about the process of sex offending and the recovery process or what sentencing terms are, who don't judge you and will take you on face value and use that elsewhere when people do judge you to remind yourself that there are some people who sat with you every week that didn't judge you (V16)

even though sometimes it might be difficult to know how much the Circles input had made the difference:

I always thought and hoped that Circles would prevent somebody from reoffending and going back to prison but it's not really. I don't think we are as wonderful as that really (V9)

Whether it would have made a difference us being there or not I don't know. That he hasn't reoffended is a success – that we know of obviously! [smiles] But then we don't know that he would have anyway (V5)

Other individuals might not have been completely changed but inroads had been made and the aim of 'no more victims' had at least been contributed to:

Confidence, definitely. When he first started he was in a room with his cap on, covering his mouth and because of the speech issues that he has it meant it was so difficult to understand him. But it got to the stage where the hat was off, hand was away from the mouth and he could maintain eye contact. Body language also moved away from typical teenager lolling around to being more positive and attentive (V8)

The biggest issues we had at the beginning was his lack of victim empathy cos it was virtually none existent, but now he accepts what he did was illegal and he is starting to recognise that what he did will affect her forever, no matter

how much counselling she has and how much money is thrown at her. But that took a lot of reiteration from us cos his argument was 'She's got support'. And I was like 'I beg your pardon!?' and he was saying 'Well she's got her family, she's got...' and I said 'You have no idea what that girl has'. He'd just assumed everything was back to how it was, so I think now he does have some empathy for his victim which is a major thing (V19)

Others suggested success was not necessarily just about turning individuals away from offending and that it could equally be about Circles playing an active role in putting people back into prison:

Putting people back into prison is also a success though, cos that could have gone so horribly wrong with two more little victims, innocent little victims. So yea I count success as either moving on with their lives or being back inside' (V3)

One volunteer had noted the way Circles had drifted closer to the 'professional model' of doing things:

One thing I have noticed since I joined Circles is that now they are almost trying too hard to be professional in that everything has become very, very rule orientated. And ...the thing they are forgetting is that the people are volunteers. So I feel they are trying to run it as a wing of the probation service (V7)

An example of this shift was:

They have said that we can't work with Core Member's on a one-to-one basis. But I would challenge that...you know let's have a realistic appraisal of the risk, because let's say I as a man, working with a Core Member who has a history of offences against little girls, what risk is there of me having coffee with him in a public place? But they are not looking at the risks, they are just saying 'No' as a blanket rule (V7)

Other volunteers had noted and questioned this rule change:

Well first, nobody would meet the Core Member individually, there always has to be a minimum of two of you there. That's health and safety pure and simple. Really we are at no risk really whatsoever, but we have to meet with a minimum of two (V19)

When asked who 'they' were who had introduced this rule the first volunteer answered:

Circles UK as far as I know. I don't think it originally existed because I have noticed this move toward professionalism all the way through...in the past I have met on a one-to-one basis (V7)

The positioning of Circles Projects in relation to the statutory services and to *Circles UK* is returned to in Chapter 10.

Summary

The use of volunteers to work alongside the professionals working with people convicted of sexual offences is the unique feature of Circles. In this chapter we have tried to give a voice to those volunteers to see how they got started in this field, what motivated them, how they experienced recruitment and training and what they thought of the actual Circles meeting both good and bad. We also asked them for their views on their working relationship with the Core Member and with their fellow volunteers. The volunteers were also asked about their general views of Circles and how they perceived concepts like 'support' and 'accountability' and how they might recognise signs of success and risk in the contact with the Core Members.

The results, in summary, were that the volunteers were well motivated. Most had initially stated that they volunteered to aid their own career prospects or even a voyeuristic desire to work with sex offenders, however, many changed their views having completed a Circle. Those who volunteered for outward, more altruistic reasons, had their expectations confirmed and have continued in their role with Circles. Training was thought highly of with most saying it added to their knowledge or provided a strong base for them to start working with Core Members. The relationship volunteers had with the Coordinator was also identified as important and provided a link to the Project as a whole. In some cases it was the 'sales-pitch' or enthusiasm of the Coordinator which encouraged the volunteers to join CoSA. The volunteers stressed that they felt the Coordinator was an ever-present support for them should they need it and was a respected source of knowledge.

Volunteers reported that the discussion topics within meetings were often unplanned and ranged over a whole array of topics. What constituted a good meeting varied between the Circles and the individual needs of Core Members, though free-flowing and humorous meetings were seen as important. Outside of the formal meetings, volunteers met with Core Members at libraries, art galleries, café's and other venues according to the Core Members wishes or needs. These meetings outside of the formal settings were seen as pivotal in developing the Core Members' social skills and relationships, but also in helping them recognise the progress they were making. As with topics of discussion, the volunteers felt Core Members enjoyed activities which were 'fun' though benefitted more from activities such as library visits or assisting at the job centre.

Volunteers had a realistic assessment of what they could achieve with Core Members. They felt they could not completely change their behaviour but they could nudge them in the right direction through pro-social modelling, and acceptance of the Core Member as a fellow-citizen rather than a stigmatised 'outsider'. Providing a sense of structure and reliability in the Core Members life by attending the weekly meetings was also felt to be important by volunteers. Despite being unable to control behaviours or directly change the behaviour of Core Members, the volunteers did imply that via the Circle they could affect some changes (e.g. mannerisms and appearance) and provide an environment which offers something different to that which professionals give in supervision meetings or treatment programmes. To achieve this however, volunteers felt it important and also their responsibility to create the right working relationship in which they could communicate with the Core Member and invite them to meet the volunteers half way. Success in developing the appropriate environment to engage meaningfully is also dependent on participation from the Core Member.

A further theme identified from all the volunteer interviews was the capacity of the volunteers to be supportive of the Core Member. They could offer personal relationships and a social interaction and make the distinction between the person and the previous behaviours which had resulted in offending. There are some links here to wider criminological theory, in particular, John Braithwaite's model of Reintegrative

Shaming which focuses on the negatives of behaviour rather than on the individual as an ‘irredeemably bad person’. In doing so, Circles in line with Reintegrative Shaming principles, expresses societies disapproval for the act while accepting the guilty party back into the community and in doing so help prevent future offending through a process of active reintegration.

An important discovery from the volunteer interviews, was the apparent confusion regarding the meaning and limits of the word ‘accountability’. For instance, some volunteers saw accountability to be about the past and the Core Members’ original offence, whilst others saw it as being about the present and future behaviour. Confusion about accountability also emerged in terms of who it was that was actually accountable. Some volunteers felt that they as volunteers were ultimately accountable for any risky behaviours not being identified. Others felt that accountability could only be the responsibility of the Core Member and the role of the volunteers was limited to passing any instances of risky behaviours or disclosures of harm to the Coordinator. Even doubts about what they should actually be reporting was identified by some volunteers. Some took precise minutes of meetings in an attempt to provide accountability. Others could only report on ‘gut-feelings’ or individual intuitions. Despite this lack of clarity it is arguable that the volunteers are in fact holding Core Members to account and are able to effect some changes in their behaviour. The lack of a precise and shared understanding of the word ‘accountability’ remains significant. Accountability is a central concept of the Circles model and perhaps needs to be more clearly defined for volunteers at an organisational and individual Project level.

Chapter Seven – The Stakeholders

Introduction

The idea of the stakeholders refers to the professionals who actively make up a Circles of Support and Accountability alongside the volunteers. They consist of the Police Officers, Probation Officers and the Circles' Coordinators who form an outer Circle around the volunteers as the inner Circle and with the Core Member at the heart of the arrangements.

In this part of the report we look at the views of all these stakeholders and also at the views of a number of MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers within the MAPPA structure to get their perspective on Circles of Support and Accountability. The Coordinators are referred to as C1 etc., the representatives of MAPPA as M1 etc., and the police and probation collectively identified as stakeholders (S1etc.). For more information on the sample see the methodology chapter (Chapter Five).

The Coordinators

The Coordinators act as a central link between the Core Members, the volunteers and the professionals of the criminal justice agencies described in this section of the research.

Profile and Role

A total of six Coordinators were interviewed and all of them were serving Probation Officers who were seconded to the work or former Probation Officers. The consensus was that this was a good background for work as a Coordinator and with their local contacts the Coordinators' job was made that much easier:

It helps that I am known. I think had I not been in probation and had come from outside of the area then it would have been a very difficult job for

somebody to pick up... I know how to speak to them and they speak to me as a Probation Officer (C2)

Being based in a Probation Office and having access to email and being managed by a Senior Probation Officer is great. It makes it 1000 times easier than if I was an independent charity but that also means that if the government wants to impose some bullshit legislation then Circles is pulled into that too (C4)

The Coordinators expressed a degree of disenchantment about contemporary probation work which was then cited as a reason to move to Circles work:

Truthfully, I found it dispiriting sitting in front of a computer 80% of the day filling in OASys assessments which took me three hours to fill in and informed me that the offender was high risk [laughs]. I'm not being flippant but its' nonsense, you know I think the managerialism of probation got a little crazy and pushed me out (C1)

I probably thought I was ready for a break from Offender Management by that time and I'd had that frustration of knowing full well that the half-hour that you've spent with someone each week or fortnight isn't going to do it when they go back to their peer group or old ways of thinking. (C4)

All of the Coordinators were very clear about their formal roles:

To select, recruit and train volunteers, to then care for volunteers – that's high up on my list. I then have to select and recruit, to some degree Core Members, assess their risk as closely as I can to the reality. I then have to supervise them altogether and I have to ensure that good quality of work goes on within those individual Circle meetings. My role is then to supervise the progress of that in terms of safety, effectiveness, the quality of information that then is communicated outwards and I see myself as a bit of a bridge in that process, in that volunteers might have some direct access to some of the professionals around the Circle but I have a duty to make sure that that communication is smoothly delivered. (C2)

Basically it's managing and supporting Circles in functioning and that involves managing and supporting volunteers and assessing appropriate Core Members and the communications and the working relationship between the Circle and professionals involved. Attending MAPPA meetings where necessary, promoting the work of Circles in the area, keeping referrals coming in and now I don't have to advertise and recruit the volunteers because we get help with that but I am still responsible for the assessment of suitable volunteers. Also the training as well (C3)

In addition there were always the unexpected incident to troubleshoot and the need to promote Circles to a wider audience as part of development work:

All the ringing the volunteers, 'can you meet at 5 instead of 6' type stuff... I do get involved when things go pear shaped like with a guy that has had a bit of a breakdown recently (C1)

So it was a couple of volunteers and a Probation Officer that came to loggerheads. And this is the thing, people don't think about these things happening in Circles. It's not a day-to-day thing but when it happens it is me having to negotiate and mediate and that's not in my job description [laughs] (C3)

I promote the Project both within statutory agencies and outside of that to show the project is working and why we are doing what we are doing. I am also involved in the development of the Project, both strategically and in terms of getting fund raising. So that's probably all the roles (C6)

Many cited other work that they were expected to carry out or had voluntarily taken on:

I tend to organise the counsellors as well, we've got two counsellors who see people. I also tend to organise a little letter writing service going on (three or four people doing it), which is volunteers who write to guys who are serving IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) sentences (C1)

Other additional roles for the Coordinators included supporting the wives and partners of men who are either in the community now or in custody, delivering presentations and generally enthusing people about what is special about CoSA; this latter role might have to be done 'gently':

I also have a duty I think, to inform the public as much as I can – I'll do that in all sorts of different ways, but I have so far in the life I've had as a Co-ordinator, done it very, very gently, because we haven't had the resources or the stability or the strength to counter any negative stuff that ever bounces back (C2)

Others took a more robust approach to the same job:

I am also quite tenacious and ram the Project down everyone's throats as well [laughs]. Like recently I got an award about getting press publicity for it as well. (C6)

The general feeling was that although the essence of the Coordinators' role was recognised and suitably defined the amount of additional 'extra' work that could be involved was not always recognised:

We are the manager and the tea boy at the same time you know [laughs] (C4)

I have a dual role of manager and Coordinator because who else picks up all the managerial stuff, who does all the data sheets, all of that kind of stuff, as well as a clean, clear Co-ordinators role (C2)

I mean I'd like to know what other Projects do about those in Phase Three,⁸ I'd mentioned it at a Coordinators forum and they just howled and they asked how I managed to fit it all in, and of course, I don't fit it into my job and I work more than I should. They all think I'm daft for doing that but I can't just let go of them (C2)

Other factors reported by the Coordinators that could add to the stress of the role included:

The geography. I'm sure this is a common theme given some of the geographies of the other Projects and it's no different here, it is a very spread out place ... we've put a Circle in place assuming that they will be living in Place 1 and they end up miles away in Place 2 or 3 (C1)

To get the referrals through and they just don't come, and I still have to go and scratch around and say 'Has anybody got anybody on their caseload?' I email managers and say 'Still waiting for a referral' – not one, they've waited ages (C2)

I have recently received a referral for our first female Core Member which is a priority because of her needs and so that will take me to my max (C3)

Perspectives on Core Members

Sex offenders are invariably stigmatised by their activities that have led them to court and punishment. Respondents amongst the Coordinators were asked how much they felt they trusted individual Core Members that they had to work with:

I trust some very, very little, I trust some to a greater extent and there are some who I don't have a crystal ball but with hand on heart there are a number who have turned a corner in their thinking (C1)

Too much, I always see good in people and the other failing I have is that I am over-empathic so I have to be aware of that and I have to be grounded in that. That's a good thing about working in a group and I have always co-worked where I could at work because I know I am (C2)

⁸ The process of a Circle is traditionally made up of two phases. Phase One is usually used to indicate the formal period of the Circle; Phase Two is used to describe the informal continuation of the Circle between the Core Member and volunteers. Here Phase Three was coined to include the role that the Coordinator took when the Circle ended.

I start on the basis of you've got my trust but if you do anything to make me question that, that's when we are going to run into problems. There have been Core Members where I wouldn't say I could trust them. That's not necessarily a bad thing [laughs] and been proven right, but I couldn't do this job if I didn't believe in people and their ability to change (C3)

Perspectives on the Volunteers

The Coordinators looked upon the volunteers with a mix of wonder and disappointment. On the one hand they were inspiring and passionate about their work:

Some of them do really great work and don't need much input, and others do great work but want to ring every day and you have to manage that ... I find it humbling to be honest (C1)

There was a former Core Member that called from the edge of a bridge that had called the volunteers, saying he wanted to finish it. Bless her the volunteer talked him off the bridge (C2)

I like the fact that they [volunteers] provide the passion and the last thing I want is a group of 'yes men' because CoSA isn't about that. The nature of the work we do we will attract strong characters with strong views and it's about accepting, managing and arguably harnessing it but also developing and encouraging it (C3)

They were also in a position to offer something the professionals could not:

Quite often the volunteers go 'You what!' and they give very real reactions to that. But if they did that to police and probation you get a very deadpan professional response of 'O right ok, well you know what we need to do now' (C3)

That was really important he [Core Member] got that response because a Probation Officer in a supervision wouldn't have been able to respond in that way. You know that the volunteer turned around and said 'That's just fucking rude, don't talk to me like that!' is just a brilliant taste of what the world is like and why he won't say it again! (C4)

On the other hand one of the Coordinators told us 'nine times out of ten if a problem occurs in a Circle it's down to the volunteers not the Core Member' (C3). The researchers heard of two Coordinators discussing a drunk volunteer:

One of the volunteers was drunk. So, I said 'No, I've never had that'. So bless her, she said 'What do I do?', so I said 'What did you do?' So she made the best of it. I had two volunteers fall out in a Circle, and it was a big falling out, and that really impacted on everything else (C2)

Other sorts of problems with volunteers reported to the researchers were:

We are careful about telling them what they shouldn't be doing and that is to do with counselling. One or two of the volunteers have thought it's going to be more like that and we've said that isn't our role, there are other people to do that (C1)

I had a volunteer who just disappeared and the Core Member thought it was because of them. And that's gonna have an impact on the Core Member (C6)

A volunteer just 'disappearing' was the extreme end of the problem for Coordinators caused by the waning enthusiasm of volunteers and absenteeism:

Very committed at the beginning, desperate to do it, and then they get used to the work or they don't like the Core Member and you can see the weeks sort of starting to get missed, but then I have supervision with them and I say 'Oh are you having some difficulties etc.', and they say 'Oh no, no I'm really committed to this'. That one is a tough one (C2)

Another women who is about 31 at the moment but gone back to be a full time student, has something like four kids, doesn't even live in [city], she's one of the best ones, but she will turn up and then not turn up for the next two weeks or one of the kids is ill, etc., and it really does throw the burden back (C2)

I do really like my volunteers now, I had a few at the start that I just didn't get on with and they didn't with me and I found it really hard. They decided to leave (C6)

Sometimes a problem lay with the Coordinator unused to working with volunteers:

You have to be very careful in the use of language with volunteers and also remembering that they are not professionals, they are very keen amateurs so it's different language (C5)

I'm used to managing offenders, I can't tell my volunteers to 'Shut up' basically [laughs] and so I have to be diplomatic and they tell me when they are not happy with something I've done or not done, or with the Project and I try and be as nice and open as possible and I realise that sometimes I have to be firm and say that 'I can't always be on the phone and available all the time because I can't work 24 hours a day' (C6)

Coordinators were also wary about students and their motivations for volunteering; often it seemed they were just doing it to advance their own careers or because the University had suggested it:

You get students coming here because there is the university nearby, and they come all bright eyed and desperate to get working, very keen, very energised, got lots of bits of theory that they can bring in, but absolutely no life experience really...I think I am getting better at spotting who wants to do the work and who wants to tick a box somewhere ... [and] you're going to have to have a bit more than 'My tutor said I had to' (C2)

You know it's inevitable that in getting some very good students to come and work in this field that they will move on but it's made clear that they do try and last a year, but this particular person just stopped all contact and it left us in a bit of a pickle and it also affected the Core Member (C5)

Relationships with the Wider Framework

Circles Projects do not exist in a vacuum and the researchers sought the views of Coordinators on their relationship with *Circles UK*, the police and the probation service. All Circles Projects are accredited by *Circles UK* the national coordinating body for Projects; they were there to offer help and support. The Coordinators appreciated their work:

Circles UK, I think their assistance is very helpful in many ways, especially when people start ... they are there to support existing projects, to ensure that we have up-to-date Codes of Practice and policies and procedures. I think they are there to maintain standards and now to take a leading role in all the media stuff, cos that is a bit of an issue, especially when there were only a few Projects, we would be getting asked to speak to all sorts. So I think for Circles UK to take that education, media role was good (C1)

I like working with Circles UK and they are all great and they are supportive of the Project (C6)

The Coordinators forums⁹ in particular were noted as being very useful:

Overall, nothing but good things to say about Circles UK... I see them as almost like they are an energy source because there is nothing like going to a Coordinators forum and picking up that energy again, and reminding me what it's all about and why I'm in it, because they are the loveliest people in terms of individuals, you couldn't put a lovelier bunch of people together. They genuinely seem to adhere to the ethic of Circles and that's just like a touchstone (C2)

It's tricky because the Coordinator forums are great and fantastic, but for me that is an ideal opportunity for me to discuss these national agendas but instead we spend time asking about how many Circles we have, what's

⁹ The coordinator forums are quarterly events where the Coordinators would meet to discuss points of interest, National Standards and also receive updates from *Circles UK*.

happening in your area. Yea it's nice to hear that but we could talk about that during breaks and as we are waiting for it to start. So it sometimes feels like it is a bit of a wasted opportunity (C3)

What is good though are the Coordinator meetings, they are incredible, especially when I was working on my own and felt completely isolated and was pulling my hair out. Going to those showed me the Coordinators understood too (C4)

The Coordinators did have some critical points to make:

I mean no one looks forward to inspection but they do have to come round and check ... I understand that Circles UK needs to justify its existence, and sometimes the amount of stuff that they want from the Projects can be quite overwhelming – the requests for stats and attending meetings and do this and phone whoever, but it's fitting it in with everything else. ...you know I understand their need to have up to date information about the Projects but we are just trying to do the work and if there is too much monitoring then it becomes ...do you know what I mean? (C1)

and one Coordinator would have liked more of a lead from *Circles UK* on national matters as they arose; the discretion for the statutory sector to start using polygraphs ('lie-detectors') with sex offenders was cited as a case in point:

They are strategic but they are not really helping us with strategy when the big things are coming up ... the introduction of polygraph testing, we've had no guidance from them [Circles UK] on that and that's the sort of thing that I think is missing, the national agendas and how we work with that. That is what we are not getting (C3)

I don't really use them [Circles UK] now. I go to the training events because it's a requirement of membership and we have to be members otherwise we can't be a Circles Project (C4)

Sometimes I think they [Circles UK] favour Projects who are more established and I get annoyed when I see that they have helped a big Project to bid for something and I think well we have nothing surely you should be prioritising us because we have no money. (C6)

The researchers also speculated that some Project developments meant large Projects were becoming so strong in their own right that they were almost forming a countervailing power to *Circles UK*:

I wonder if there is confusion about what Circles UK is for anymore. I don't know if now there are a lot of Projects and big Projects that are moving

forward with a number of developments related to Circles, maybe they are confused about their purpose (C3)

and requests for information needed by *Circles UK* was not always taken seriously:

You see going back to the pointless referral questions that Circles UK ask, ...and I am never going to record how many phone calls I have with colleagues over a three months period so I just make up a number, [laughs] 5, 46, 2500, there prove it's not true! [laughs] (C4)

Coordinators views on the Probation Service

Coordinators differed in their views on the probation service. These concerned the quality of the collaboration. Critical views were not only expressed by those who previously held a Probation Officer role:

The reality is that we have some Probation Officers who we work really well with and others who we don't and because we have enough referrals I don't chase them up. I mean they must know we are around because we've been here long enough, but maybe they just don't think about it or other things (C1)

The professional identity of Probation Officers – and indeed other professionals - could sometimes lead to a degree of ‘distance’ from other professionals and the general public. Their training, qualifications and daily experiences gave them a world view that non-probation personnel might not appreciate. This professional and occupational culture could sometimes be an obstacle to working together with other practitioners; one of the Coordinators was very critical of this culture and described Probation Officers as living in an encapsulated world of their own:

At that first meeting it was very much we'll do the professional work, you just meet them for a cup of tea and I think that attitude still exists about charitable organisations (C2)

I say this as a Probation Officer who has loved the service for many, many years - there has always been an arrogance around 'The Probation Service/The Professional Service' – they weren't very good at communicating with Social Services because 'Why do they need to know, we are managing this offender?' yet there is a family over here that you should be communicating about, there was always that arrogance, you know better paid, better holidays, all of that sort of sat with probation, you know the professional organisation ... you know that sort of patronising feel... and I have witnessed that as a Coordinator from a Probation Officer with one of the Circle volunteers and they were furious because they were a very experienced bunch of folk and were very mature people (C2)

The promotion of CoSA is a continuous thing whenever I am in probation buildings and MAPPA meetings just talking to people about the work we do because there are still people who don't have a clue (C3)

So the CoSA is a safe space where they can have a rant about their copper or Probation Officer as well, you know we might have a bitch about our colleagues and we should be able to do that without it getting out because it means you can turn up next week and carry on (C4)

Coordinators views on working with the Police

Coordinators and Police Officers generally worked well together but at times individual officers or the police culture could be experienced as not being that helpful:

I mean this Police Officer, who is very involved with us, but hell they are so relaxed they are horizontal! They are quite like that with the Core Members as well, mostly in a good way because they trust them and will always call if there is a problem and that's great, but sometimes they will think 'O its only Nigel, it'll be fine' (C2)

The police have a very difficult culture, it's about catching people doing things wrong and Circles isn't there for that... police aren't that interested in the support side (C4)

With the police I only get them involved in things I think they are going to be useful at, so it is risk stuff. It's not going to be the Circles stuff, we're not gonna have a copper turn up at the Circle meetings it just wouldn't work (C4)

The police had varying knowledge of Circles and could also have misunderstandings about their role and even confusing it with that of the statutory services:

Where we work, they [the police] are quite good, but outside of that you see them looking at you like, 'what are you on about?' So it depends on their experiences of it and also it's a new project still (C6)

Another one, the police said that the Core Member wasn't doing much with his time and they asked me to do a diary with him and I flat out said 'No' cos that is flat out recording his life so you know what he is doing. So I just said that's not the place for it, so you just have to defend your Circles sometimes. They could ask him, or probation could ask him but not the Circle (C6)

The Police Officers

The Police and Probation Officers working with sex offenders and with contact with Circles were interviewed for views on various aspects of their work. The interviews start here with the police whose role toward sex offenders arguably changed dramatically after the introduction of the sex offender register in 1997. Before that date the police had investigated and arrested the perpetrators of sexual crimes, but now they became the ‘custodians’ of the register and its associated role of continually assessing the risk of registered sex offenders in the community (see Chapter Three).

Police Work with Sex Offenders

The police were asked about their attitudes to working with sex offenders. The 1997 changes brought on by the Sex Offender Act 1997 and the instigation of the sex offender register were referred to in particular by one Police Officer (S2):

So in 1997 the register came in and the police had no idea what to do with it and they didn't do anything with it. People who had to sign up to it did so and were probably never visited again. It was a complete and utter shambles. No records were kept, it was awful, not just here, it was the same everywhere ... I was the only one at that point doing all the visits to sex offenders in [city] and all the nitty-gritty. They very quickly worked out there was an awful lot of work and we now have a sergeant and 6 or 7 I think. (S2)

The policing role became a new role; where policing had once been about public order, crime prevention, investigating crimes and detecting offenders, it now had the new role of supervising certain offenders – the sex offenders – which was a role more akin to the probation role and which required the police to act in ways they had never had to do before:

We've got to work with the people not against them. Sometimes that is hard but I see that. It was only me - nobody told me what to do so I just did it. Then as people have come in they've accepted that way of working and it's built on the back of myself and other people's attitudes (S2)

Well I can give you thousands and thousands of examples of things we've done that we would never have done before. Recently I took a guy to see a solicitor because his mum had died and he wanted some help trying to sort out funeral arrangements and the will. I then went with him to his mum's funeral and I would never have thought about doing that before but he's got no one else. I

was that guys support. Now if I want to maintain a relationship with that guy I need to give him something to build on as well (S2)

The reality of 'registration' created a form of people 'management' that was new to the police:

Yes they are on the register, depending on what risk they are, depends how often we see them. If there is specific intelligence they will be seen a lot more frequently and closely depending on what the intelligence is ... so you know ... the unannounced visits, the management, it's the way you've gotta do it (S3)

Well we don't go in flashing badges, we drive normal cars, don't wear police uniform, we just deal with that one aspect of the sex offender. And we sell ourselves to them and expect them to reciprocate to us ... you know the times that we have to arrest somebody you could count on one hand over 10 years you know it's not that type of role (S2)

Guidance on police levels of management of registered sex offenders is to be found in the MAPPA guidance (MoJ et al 2012: Section 7).

Sex offenders as a group were identified by some police respondents as being a specific form of offender who brought their own attributes' into contact with the police:

I've been bitten a few times by thinking 'Oh no he'll never do it again' but it comes back to bite you ... the majority that I've come across over the years, they are quite scheming, cunning and lying, deceitful so... (S3)

You know they present well at home visits and meetings, but they had this child modelling agency going on where they were taking pictures. So we can get done over too. But we work in pairs, and that's all I can say (S8)

Police views of Circles of Support and Accountability

The police were asked for their perspective on Circles. There was a consensus that Circles were useful:

I think it's a good idea if it works properly. I can't see that there are any negatives to it. You know it's another tool to help the Core Member get back on his feet and in the right direction (S2)

We all think it's a positive thing. Anything that can reduce the chance of reoffending is a good thing. (S3)

My understanding of the model is that it is simplistic and sometimes simplistic works! There is the individual, these are the problems and issues. Get some support in and around them, deal with them, share information. It's as simple as that really (S7)

In theory I think CoSA is excellent, it is an extra support (S8)

It just looked like common sense to me really. And the more tools I have to monitor my client base in the community the better (S10)

One officer was able to elaborate further on their views:

I work with CoSA in order to reduce the risk of reoffending by Registered Sex Offenders by giving them things to do rather than having them sitting in their flats staring at four walls all of the time and thinking I might as well be back in prison so I may as well pop out and do some more offending. That's it in a nutshell really (S10)

and

I am quite satisfied with the feedback I get and the amount of input I have with them. I am content with the job they are doing, I am happy, and you've got to remember they are volunteers as well (S10)

The Police views of Volunteers

The police were well able to state their opinions and feelings toward working with volunteers. The enthusiasm of the volunteers in particular was noted:

There is one guy that has volunteered, every time he is involved in a Circle it works. And if I could clone him it would be fine. He is very personable but also doesn't miss a trick. He is perfect for him at the minute, but he's only one person (S2)

I think what I do notice is that they seem quite committed and clear-cut about what their role is as a volunteer and very enthusiastic about wanting it to work (S3)

Volunteers could also see things differently by just being themselves and offering a degree of 'common sense' unencumbered by professional training:

I think there are benefits to them just being lay people from the street in that if you are trained up as we are ... I would like to think that CoSA volunteers are normal people and as such in dealing with them would present what normal

life would be, should be, could be. Present normal social values, behavioural traits all those (S7)

That they are volunteers helps. The [Core Members] are able to relate differently to how they relate to us and the Core Member will feel the enthusiasm from the volunteers as well. Well I think so anyway. You know ten pressed men aren't gonna give the same vibe off or be as interested in the offender (S3)

The picture was not completely without criticism and sometimes enthusiasm could go too far:

One female volunteer – no names – who had clearly watched too many Ms. Marple programmes and thought it was their job to interrogate the Core Member to the extent where the Core Member was saying to me: 'I can't take this, I don't want to go down there for two hours to be grilled, it's like being interviewed by the police for two hours every week. I don't need that. I don't mind them asking me questions every now and then but there is no end to it'. In the end we called a meeting, me the Coordinator and the volunteers and we told the volunteers they have to rein back, you can't keep doing this to him (S2)

Questions around the extent to which volunteers are able to find that line - to not cross it and make things worse than they are and not open that wound and trigger reoffending... some of them just go out for a brew, so whether there is an element of accountability in them just going out and doing their shopping and having a brew I am not entirely sure (S7)

The volunteers think they are just doing our job for us (S8)

This did make some Police Officers question why people wanted to volunteer to work with sex offenders:

I often think, 'Why do they want to do it?' why do people actually want to do it? I would be interested in doing it when I eventually do retire but I come from that background. But given the wide variety of backgrounds I do wonder, it's marvellous but you know I do think getting the right mix is crucial (S2)

I do gather that it is difficult getting volunteers for the Circles and in people staying the course because peoples own personal circumstances change, and maybe not enough men in it (S3)

I did ask myself why they were doing it and what confidentiality there was to it and what training they had received (S8)

The Police Role with Circles

The police were well aware of the official standing of Circles in relation to themselves:

The main thrust of my work with CoSA involves the registered sex offenders. In the main the RSOs who have no family or who are quite socially isolated, basically 'loners', and it's to introduce them into the community and give them some support. Usually when they've been recently released from prison really (S3)

The degree of direct involvement with Circles could be variable:

We haven't been doing it that long and it's taken time for the police to grow into it and not everywhere is the same even within our force area (S2)

I will go to every review meeting as well. And I say in front of everyone that if the Core Member ever wants me to come to a meeting just ask and I will come, and likewise I say it to the Core Members ... and that has happened, I have been asked to go back. But I also say that it's theirs to run with (S2)

You know the Coordinator in charge of ours is very committed, very passionate about it and obviously I attend every review session. I don't attend every meeting, it's only the reviews (S3)

I have very little contact with the volunteers (S10)

The police role with Circles appeared to be dependent on their adaptation to the new more supervisory role they now had and their understanding of the public protection agenda. This coupled with an officers own pre-disposition to the new role controlled how closely they aligned themselves with CoSA.

A Protective Arm from the Police

Whatever the motives for volunteering one theme that emerged from the interviews was the stated police belief that they should seek to safeguard the volunteers and look out for their welfare:

It was also for us to work with them to support them. That's important, they need to know they have always got our support (S2)

I think it's quite important and relevant that they know everything about the RSO [Registered Sex Offender] in order to manage his risk while they are with him in the community and also for the protection of themselves (S3)

I am trusting in the very experienced Coordinator and the support network of probation that they manage that. I have asked those questions and have been assured that these people [the volunteers] are switched-on, savvy and supervised (S7)

Well first of all they are volunteers so we have a significant duty to them to not put them at risk and give the Coordinator sufficient information to safeguard their volunteers. That is paramount (S10)

The Probation Officers

Probation Officers have always worked with people with convictions for sexual offences in a supervisory role.

Probation views of Circles of Support and Accountability

Probation Officers were well informed about the work of Circles and what Circles Projects were trying to do:

It was for Registered Sex Offenders who are particularly isolated and maybe have little social support then trained volunteers are another source of support who can meet with them on a regular basis to assist them a little bit to work out some things, some practical ideas and talking through things or meeting for a coffee (S1).

I've actually, quite naturally felt that this was a really isolated group and as soon as it was mentioned, I had a very positive response to it and thought this was really good, we need something like this, and I've been trying to refer cases ever since (S4)

From my experience I think they are doing a really good job and playing a really valuable role so I think that there isn't much more they could be doing and it's really helpful to us (S6)

But yea I think a Circle can be invaluable in providing additional support to those going through a programme (S9)

They were also appreciative that Circles could do things that they as Probation Officers could not do:

I've heard it before from Core Members it's the fact that they say I can't believe that someone is talking to me like a normal person ... it made absolute

sense to me because it was about removing the stigma, forensically removing them from shame to guilt. Accepting the person not the offence (S1)

It's something the old Probation Officers used to do. You know 'advise, assist, befriend'. I hear stories of people having met up in cafes and going out into the community where you want change to happen and help. You know it is so tempting to go over to people's houses sometimes and help them tidy up [smiles] and have a cup of coffee but you are just not allowed to do that (S4)

Probation Views of Volunteers

As with the police the Probation Officers interviewed noted the enthusiasm of volunteers:

I think I was spoilt really because we kept having volunteers who were coming back for more Circles and I mean the dedication of the volunteers was amazing. I don't mean to sound patronising but it was part of my job [to work with offenders] but they were giving up all their hours and doing all sorts of things to meet with these people. It was really nice ... when you tell people about it they scratch their heads 'What you let members of the public around these sex offenders?' - 'Yea! and why not?' (S1)

They are very committed to it and they are doing it for no money and because they want to. You know I go to the meetings and while I never do get the time back [smiles] in theory I could, but they are doing it because they are interested and I think they are very valuable and dedicated to what they are doing (S11)

Volunteers working as a group were identified as being more helpful than some individual volunteers working in the criminal justice system:

The trouble with volunteers working on their own though is that in my experience, where I have had a few experiences where the relationship has broken down and that can be damaging. The good thing about CoSA is that where one of the volunteers has to leave it doesn't affect the whole thing (S4)

Probation Officers identified the benefits of volunteers being able to do things they could not do and as with the police they saw them offering a 'common sense' view unencumbered by professional training:

The Quakers are fab! I haven't met a duff one yet! They were talking about their life experiences and how it affected them and it was just really fascinating to see this level of openness. Because there was a view around that you should be very guarded and you [as a Probation Officer] should never make any disclosures about yourself in case it gets corrupted or tainted and

here there were these people telling the Core Member and it was having a real big impact on the Core Member (S1)

Whether it is easier for me to just dive straight in and start talking about their offending triggers I don't know. Maybe it is easier for the volunteers to do that though, or maybe they [Core Members] find it easier with the volunteers? ... it might be easier to say it to a non-statutory person. 'They are there for me, they know me, they perhaps won't judge me as much' (S5)

If the volunteers were trained up more so from us to be like us there would be no division between the purposes (S7)

Circles have the advantage of maybe not seeing the volunteers as authority so maybe it helps them feel more accepted and can be more natural ... you know I am probably an authority figure to them as a Probation Officer, whereas they probably don't see a volunteer in the same way and it's more like everyday life really cos you can easily put a mask on for half an hour while you come in to a probation meeting. But with CoSA it's out there, its real life isn't it? Being able to engage with the Core Member as a peer rather than as someone from a law enforcement agency (S9)

One Probation Officer noted that volunteers tended to defer to them when there was possibly no need to:

the volunteers appear to feel they have to take a bit of a back seat when the probation or PPU officers are there. You know because they feel it's our area of expertise, it would be a real shame if they thought that because one of the volunteers in the meeting said something that impacted and it was like 'wow' (S11)

The Probation Role with Circles

There was a closer affinity between probation and Circles than perhaps there was with the Police Officers interviewed. Many Project Coordinators were still Probation Officers or were former Probation Officers. The formal position of Circles was clearly understood:

CoSA is for support and its accountability so it's getting that balance right. You know so they can support them as people but also being able to spot the risky behaviours, a bit like probation really but in a different context and it's just getting that balance right (S6)

I would hope that the Core Member would do work with me on the clinic stuff and it would be balanced by them going to watch a football match two days later with one of the volunteers (S1)

I see it [Circle] as for them really and I don't want them to think that I am chasing them up because that might make them close off or disengage them from the Circle...If they want to discuss it with me they can but I don't press it with them (S5)

The more formal probation role was still recognised:

They are capable of reporting that back - they weren't actually managing that risk they only reported that information. As a Probation Officer though we are actually managing the risks (S6)

A Protective Arm from the Probation Service

Probation Officers also shared the police view that volunteers needed to be watched out for:

We've actually stopped three Circles because the Core Members behaviour was of concern and there was no way, the phrase I would use is 'Get the Circle back'. My concern was that if it carried on it would taint the functioning of the Circle so we stopped it. My view was that there was problematic behaviour here which needs to be addressed in the supervisory meetings with the probation service or in the hostel. These are volunteers giving up their time and I don't want them to be used, abused or psychologically affected. So on three occasions we stopped it (S1)

At the end of the day they [volunteers] are giving up their spare time and they shouldn't be put in harm's way (S4)

No I would still take the view they need to be protected because they are giving up their time and I don't want them to be negatively affected or feeling like they have been mistreated... people can get hurt and that's why you should look after your volunteers (S1)

The MAPPA Managers and Commissioners

For this report three MAPPA Coordinators or Senior Managers within the MAPPA framework were interviewed for their views of Circles. As noted in Chapter Three the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) came into being in 2001. MAPPA is not itself an Agency but a framework for 'working together' consisting of the police, probation and prison service (the 'responsible bodies') and other agencies who have a 'duty to cooperate' (health service, Children's Services, education etc.).

Perspectives on Volunteers working with sex offenders

The 2009 Neuberger Report looking at volunteering across the criminal justice system in general found some hostility from the professionals to the idea of volunteers:

It is also embarrassingly clear that there are [in the criminal justice system] deep cultural and attitudinal barriers to working with volunteers, and these will need to be overcome if the public services are really to get the best out of volunteers. There is a deep seated suspicion that volunteering is really about job substitution, with the related presumption that volunteers are a free economic resource (Neuberger Report 2009).

We started by asking the MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers about their views on working with volunteers who in turn were working with sex offenders; some doubts were expressed but in general the benefits out-weighed the doubts and had quickly been brought home to them:

[Circles] really is the extreme of volunteering, you know it's not just helping a little it's a heck of a lot. What is surprising in most cases is that there are people that want to do that ... actually, if you cast [Circles] alongside some of the others things we do with volunteers and volunteering structures for offender mentoring then I think yea, its bloody good value! (M1)

I always had the impression, and don't take this the wrong way [laughs] but I always had the impression that [Circles] was a very happy, happy-clappy, everything's going to be ok sort of thing. Whereas I don't think it should be that soft-touch, I think it should have a purpose ... as long as you quality assure the process and you make sure the volunteers have been vetted appropriately and that they received proper training, support and supervision then I think it can work (M2)

Circles of Support and Accountability could do things that the professionals could not do or did not have time to do in their formal supervision sessions; the volunteers had more time and they were again not encumbered with professional requirements and as a result could offer a more 'normal' environment:

And actually with the best will in the world you can't do that as a professional, you can't force that person back into the community and make the community take the person back. But the CoSA model is about engaging with those people in the local community in terms of tying that person back in as well as just giving that normal kind of support (M1)

Most of them [Core Members] – and quite a broad stereotyping now – but a lot of them are quite inadequate – socially inadequate and everything like that which is why they offend against children. So if they have other outlets where

they can learn to feel a bit more adequate and have relationships with their peer group and appropriate relationships then that can only be a benefit really and I think the Circles facilitate that (M2)

This freedom from professional roles is reflected in the current *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme and its' rationale to move toward the private and voluntary sector for innovation and creativity; there will be no stated professional qualifications requirements for people working in these two sectors (see Chapter Three).

Perspectives on Circles UK

We asked the managers their views on the role of *Circles UK*. One of them was unsure of it:

Circles UK? I just assumed it was a rebranding to be honest (M2)

But another (M1) was well aware of the central coordinating role of *Circles UK* and in face to face dealings with them it sometimes felt to him that the efforts made locally were not always appreciated:

If I am honest I think that sometimes Circles UK want their cake and eat it. And I don't mean that in a nasty way but I think it's like they will lead and set the standards kind of thing, but it's all your responsibility to manage all the resources and if anything goes wrong it's you know ... I've had meetings and it's been really helpful but sometimes it's a bit like they are ticking you off because your financial structure is going down the toilet and you feel like 'well it's not as if we are not trying to do our best to sort this out!' (M1)

The same manager wanted to see a more pro-active role from *Circles UK* and wanted to see them become more of a campaigning voice aimed at the Ministry of Justice and not least to ensure adequate funding:

Circles UK, they could have a much more vociferous campaign with the Ministry of Justice and other interested parties ACPO etc. in terms of finding a financial structure that could keep CoSA going at some level. Because in a sense what you really want is a minimal level of delivery everywhere and if you want to buy more you could do locally (M1)

One way of doing this, it was argued, *Circles UK* needed to bring in a high-profile spokesperson who knew his or her way around government departments and was experienced in dealing with the media:

They need to find an MP or Esther Rantzen¹⁰ type of person that can become synonymous with Circles UK and speak out about it. You know 'This is distasteful and we don't want to give sex offenders nice things but actually its miles better than not doing it and this is why' and get that on the TV, even more than it has been. And to be fair Circles UK have done some great work on that but it really needs a champion and get a minimal financial structure across the country for this work (M1)

As managers they were inevitably concerned about funding Circles. Local Circles are funded 'by local Probation Trusts, charitable organisations and occasionally by the local police force' (McCartan et al, 2014 (a): 9). Recent research puts the average cost of a Circle – excluding volunteer costs – at £9,800 when managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and £7,900 when managed by the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles (ibid).

The funding model we set up here is that it was a probation-led model so it was us as a probation trust that funded the Circle. I think if we were going to do it again we would look to do it differently but you tend to end up with what you grow organically in some respects... what you realise is that no one else is saying 'O you've had that a couple of years now we'll take it on cos we know what a pain it is, don't worry you've done your bit - we'll do some now' nobody ever says that and that is understandable (M1)

But actually a bit more central leadership and push from you to ministers as Circles UK might actually ... cos it's not actually masses and masses of money in the end. So we have a very disparate funding structure across the UK now, some through National Lottery, some through other funding, and in [Project] they fund it through ETE (Education Training Employment) money, you know which is just dishonest apart from anything else! (M1)

I think that would be my line manager who is the public protection director who has influence over that and I believe they would give the 'ok' for whatever amount of money is required for a Circle. I think pay a retainer of £5000 and then £8000 per Circle or maybe it's the other way around I'm not sure (M2)

Summary

¹⁰ Esther Rantzen is a journalist and television presenter who has taken an interest in child protection matters and was a co-founder of Childline

The researchers interviewed the stakeholders who worked with Circles to varying degrees; collectively these were seen as the ‘stakeholders’ and included the Project Coordinators, Police Officers, Probation Officers and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers. Project Coordinators were seen as having pivotal roles in Circle Project arrangements pulling everyone together and ensuring the service was delivered. The Police Officers had a slightly more distant role from the actual Circles but had clear views on the work they did. Probation Officers felt closer to the volunteers and were well informed on the work carried out. Both Police and Probation Officers felt part of their role was to ensure the welfare of the volunteers. The MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers interviewed had a more direct role with funding and connections to *Circles UK*.

Throughout all of the stakeholder interviews the CoSA model was considered a good model by all and added an extra dimension to the work that stakeholders could do with sex offenders, but also offered something which was different to the professional’s contribution. The interviews also revealed a broad agreement that the use of volunteers is very good and that volunteers were regarded positively by all respondents. Many of the stakeholders noted the levels of commitment displayed by the volunteers and the common-sense views which volunteers could bring to the role, which is unencumbered by professional training.

Most stakeholders did raise some concerns as to the need to protect volunteers from the Core Member or from the consequences of the actions of Core Members. Both Police and Probation officers made this point about protection for the volunteers, albeit in slightly different ways. The Police Officers saw protection in terms of making sure the volunteers had sufficient information about the potential Core Members, whilst Probation Officers were concerned to directly intervene if they saw any risk to the volunteers; if necessary even stopping a Circle. These risks included volunteers being in harms-way of a Core Members behaviour (e.g. offending or grooming etc); volunteers feeling mistreated by Core Members or under-valued by the Criminal Justice System. This need to protect came from the Police Officers and Probation Officers rather than it being mentioned or requested by the volunteers. Indeed, in our material we did not find any such remarks from volunteers.

Half of the Police Officers interviewed questioned the volunteer's commitment and enthusiasm, as well as their motivations for working with Core Members. They also acknowledged however, that their knowledge of recruitment and training of volunteers was by their own admission, limited. These perceptions were obviously and admittedly not based on proper information.

All Project Coordinators had previous links to Probation and expressed something positive in CoSA and its operation which attracted them to work directly for CoSA and with volunteers. The Coordinators displayed the best understanding of CoSA and there was a consensus amongst the Coordinators as to how CoSA should operate. Some Coordinators took on additional duties 'at the edges' of the formal role which had been unexpected but which are deemed to be important to maintaining the functioning of the Project. These additional duties could lead to stress among Coordinators.

There were differences of opinion amongst the stakeholders about the information flowing from a Circle. The Probation Officers interviewed felt the flows of information to be quite strong and regular whereas the Police Officers, who placed a high value on any information they received had mixed experiences. Some were just grateful for any information received from the Circle, but others found the degree of information not as forthcoming as they had expected. This discussion will continue in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight – Communication, Collaboration and Information Exchange

Introduction

At various points in previous chapters we have identified problems of information flows. This chapter is about communications and the circulation of information from the (inner) Circle of volunteers, to the Coordinator to the (outer) Circle of the professionals (and *vice versa*); this movement of information was seen as a critical feature of Circles Projects. It was, therefore, felt appropriate to write this separate chapter to treat information exchange as a discrete subject and to take the views expressed from the different participants within Projects.

Personal Information and Other Information

The information in question was ‘personal information’ as differentiated from other aggregate information or non-personal information. ‘Personal information’ relates to an identifiable person and has been defined as:

...those facts, communications, or opinions which relate to the individual and which it would be reasonable to expect him to regard as intimate or sensitive and therefore want to withhold or at least to restrict their collection, use, or circulation (Wacks 1989: 26)

The Data Protection Act 1998 defines ‘personal data’ as data which relates to a living individual who can be identified from that data, or from that data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data ‘controller’; it includes any expression of opinion about the individual and any indication of the intentions of the data controller or any other person in respect of the individual (Data Protection Act 1998 s1).

The Data Protection Act goes on to define some forms of personal information as particularly ‘sensitive’ information and that includes information pertinent to Circles Projects:

- his or her physical or mental health or condition;
- his or her sexual life;
- the commission or alleged commission by him or her of any offence;
- any proceedings for any offence committed or alleged to have been committed by him or her, the disposal of such proceedings or the sentence of any court in such proceedings (Data Protection Act 1998 s2 (e) to (h)).

Personal information on the Core Member would invariably include his or her family background and past criminal record, as well as their current thoughts, presentation and behaviour so far as they were known or observed within a Circles Project.

The Coordinators held a central and pivotal role in ensuring this personal information movement went smoothly in the interests of the safety of the volunteers and ensuring the ‘accountability’ side of the Circles of Support and Accountability equation.

The circulation of personal information on the Core Member was not a one-way flow from the inner Circle to the outer Circle but could equally involve information going the other way from the professionals to the volunteers. This movement of information would include the initial information briefing that the volunteers needed to launch their Circles discussions and activities and any later information to keep them up to date with what they needed to know about the Core Member. This information was also seen as contributing toward the continued safety and well-being of the volunteers.

One Coordinator summed it up for us:

So I think that it's the accountability that gives us the credence, the kudos with other agencies that we won't just sit on the information and therefore they share information with us because the more they tell us the more we will tell the volunteers and in turn we are better able to judge what information we filter back to keep everyone safe, so it's a virtuous circle almost (C1)

It was implicit that relevant personal information on a Core Member would be shared appropriately throughout the various parts of a Circles Project.

Confidentiality within the Circle Project as a whole was agreed in the Circle Agreement signed by all participants (see *Circles UK* 2009: Standard 5.5 ii) and within the Project it could be said that it was every one's job to make sure the right information got to the right person at the right time (and that equally the wrong information did not get to the wrong person at the wrong time).

'Other information' that was not 'personal information' would include anything that could not be linked to an identifiable person. Whereas 'personal information' might be claimed as 'private' or 'confidential' because it was about a given person 'other information' had no such claims to 'privacy' or 'confidentiality'. 'Other information' could include information about *Circles UK*, the criminal justice system, aggregate information, the law, organisational systems etc. As such, 'other information' was openly available and could be freely passed between people without any concerns being raised about 'privacy' or 'confidentiality'.

Information from the Professionals to the Circle

Each Circle Project is based on getting full information profiles on the Core Member. This enables an assessment of 'suitability' to be made, an appropriate Circle to be put together and the volunteers to be briefed before the Circle starts:

I guess it's my role as the case manager to make sure that the volunteers are informed of risk factors, and that they are informed basically about kind of basic facts about the offence. At the start of the Circle, they have a meeting with myself, the case manager, and the Coordinator and they manage disclosure if you like, in order for the volunteer to understand the context and that they are engaging with the case (S4)

That information was shared with me from the police and we pass that on to the Circle and make sure the Coordinator is kept updated on any developments (S5)

This information movement from the outer Circle (the professionals) to the inner Circle (the volunteers) is also seen as a form of protection for the safety of the volunteers:

I think it's quite important and relevant that [the volunteers] know everything about the RSO (Registered Sex Offender) in order to manage his risk while they are with him in the community and also for the protection of themselves. (S3)

Problems can also occur when the volunteers think they should have been given more information from the Coordinator or the other professionals working with the Core Member; one volunteer respondent told us:

[there] should be complete honesty from day one. That is difficult – very, very difficult – partly because Probation doesn't always tell us what we need to know and I know in theory they should, we get a bit of paper with a form on which is a kind of rough break down of what they have done, it is not always accurate or complete (V1)

This particular volunteer (V1) had seen the results of a lack of information going to the Circle because one of the volunteers had been 'stalked' by the Core Member and when this was reported to the Probation Officer via the Coordinator who said:

[PO:] 'Ah he's stalking again is he?'
[V1:] 'What do you mean 'again'?''
[PO:] 'What didn't you know he has got a life-time order?'
[V1:] 'No' - this turned out to be a civil order prohibiting him to go near a named person – because it was a civil order not linked to his sexual offending the information had been deemed confidential (V1)

If necessary the Coordinators could be proactive in looking for this information:

If the Circle has moved on to more social contacts I will be checking with police and probation that that is ok and they are safe to attend because they might have knowledge and intelligence that I don't (C3)

Information from the Circle to the Professionals

The movement of information about the Core Member going outwards from the Circle through the Coordinator to the professionals was recognised as a valuable source of information and a means of keeping the Core Member accountable. All the respondents throughout this report expressed the importance of this personal information flow. One Coordinator put it that:

The sharing of information is vital. CoSA is an excellent resource for helping people's reintegration and therefore perhaps reduced their risk of reoffending but it is also equally fantastic for us to gather further information or intelligence about what an individual is doing in their private lives (C5)

The phrase extra 'eyes and ears' was used by more than one respondent. The Police Officers wanted this information because:

As far as I was concerned it was just another group of people as eyes and ears. The more people that I can speak to who are finding things out – not because I don't trust the Core Member, but the more information I have the better I can make that judgement ... any help we can get can't be a bad thing (S2)

We are looking to utilise CoSA as another set of eyes and ears really (S7)

All three of the MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers that we interviewed used the same expression; the first person speaking about probation said:

A by-product of that is not just that support and reintegration but the extra eyes and ears and you can't buy that. You know there are costs but you just can't buy that. Police colleagues would say that if they wanted to use that kind of surveillance it would cost thousands and thousands... [Circle's] information can be critical in terms of somebody's liberty or somebody's protection, so yes its absolute value for money (M1)

Subtle eyes and ears to be honest and reporting back and say 'You know what - I was there the other day and he's saying ...' or 'he kept wanting to walk past the fairground'. That's what I'd want to hear (M2)

The professionals valued the information they got from the Circles volunteers because it could be different from what they themselves were picking up:

Some of the disclosures he's made to his volunteers have been different to what he's said to me and so it's been helpful in having that extra information to help keep assessing his risk on an ongoing basis (S5)

It is an intelligence gathering operation, and we use that intelligence to either curtail what the nominal might want or intend to do, or positively develop an area they have an interest in...we have established from CoSA information that a nominal is friends with - or has established a friendship with - a nominal from outside the area. So that is good information that we hadn't known about (S7)

We might not have found that out any other way than through the Circle because they might speak more freely than they would with police and probation (M2)

The professionals then saw it as their role to make the interventions and to act appropriately on the information received because it would be something the volunteers could not do:

I've had to arrest a Core Member because of stuff that he's said in a meeting so I've been down that route as well but nobody fell out over it (S2)

They are capable of reporting that back - they weren't actually managing that risk they only reported that information. As a Probation Officer though we are actually managing the risks (S6)

I think it's limited what they [volunteers] can do with the Core Member and that's why it's imperative that they come back with everything. You know it needs to be reported back (S8)

Sometimes we've had information passed on from a volunteer which indicated a change in someone's risk status in terms of how they were communicating and behaving towards female group members. So that has then been used as a source of information in the risk assessment proces. (S9)

The circulation of 'personal information' within a Circles Project can be represented in the following diagram (Figure One) and the movement of 'other information' in Figure Two:

Figure One: Circles of Support and Accountability – Movement of Personal Information

		RECIPIENT				
	<i>Circles UK</i>	Volunteers	Coordinators	Police Probation Officers/ MAPPA	Core Members	
SENDER	<i>Circles UK</i>					
	Volunteers		Before and after meetings; Telephone	Minutes of the meeting; Dynamic Risk Reviews; Supervision Meetings; Telephone; Core Member Review meetings.	Only in exceptional circumstances or at the review meetings where the Core Member is attending.	Weekly meetings; Telephone; Core Member review meetings.
	Coordinators	For example, a high profile arrest	Preparation and Offence; Disclosure meetings; Information on the Core Member from Statutory agencies; Supervision Meetings	Where a Project has a shared coordinator role	Pre formal referral stage; at referral stage; Information from the Circle minutes; Concerns raised by the volunteers; Core Member Review meetings	At referral and assessment for suitability; Core Member Review meetings
	Police Probation Officers/ MAPPA		Preparation meetings; Core Member Review meetings; In exceptional circumstances	Pre-referral discussions; Referral; Throughout the circle meetings; Intervention updates; Changes in risk; Changes in formal supervisory requirements	Routine but as part of their statutory/MAPPA requirements to work together.	Pre-referral; Formal supervisory meetings; Registration requirements; Information received from the Project
	Core Members		Information about anything they want to discuss Telephone	Pre-referral; Questions about the circle and volunteers; Intermittently during the Circle; Some use the Coordinator as a pseudo-circle after the Circle ends	At formal meetings as part of their statutory requirements; Access to police via telephone	Only if Core Members take the initiative

Red filled squares signify the boundaries of information flow. Black filled squares indicate no flow of information. The Orange filled square indicates an infrequent flow of information.

Figure Two: Circles of Support and Accountability – Movement of Other Information

		RECIPIENT			
	<i>Circles UK</i>	Volunteers	Coordinators	Police Officers/ Probation MAPPA	Core Members
<i>Circles UK</i>		Annual Conference	Information on Standards, Code of Practice etc; Project Accreditation; Coordinator Forums; Funding; Expansion; Strategic Development; Administrative Information about the Circle	Information on Standards, Code of Practice etc; Project Accreditation;	
SENDER	Volunteers	Applications to join	Social events; Good and bad experiences of Circles are shared	Additional Training; Policy and Procedure Inquiries; Any Personal matters that might impact upon the Circle	Some contact post-circle
	Coordinators	Administrative Information about the Circle; Funding; Expansion; Strategic Development	Applications to join; Policies and Procedures	Coordinator Forums; Project expansion; Funding;	Information about the Circle; Maintain contact post-circle ('Phase 3')
	Police Probation Officers/ MAPPA		Requests for more information about CoSA Projects	Routine but as part of their statutory/MAPPA requirements to work together.	
	Core Members	Informal applications to join CoSA (Drewery, 2014)	Post-Circle contacts	Maintain contact post-Circle; 'Phase 3'	Discuss their experiences of CoSA – e.g. in Approved Premises and Prison.

Red filled squares signify the boundaries of information flow. Black filled squares indicate no flow of information.

The Coordinators pivotal Role

The Coordinators' position between the Circle of volunteers and the outer Circle of the professionals made them focal points in the formal flow of information within a Project; in effect the Coordinators had a 'gatekeeping' role over the movement of information. This was recognised by the stakeholders:

Now [the Coordinator] is focussed and does a far better job really. They make it much easier and will tell me if there is a problem and what I need to do which also helps! (S1)

The Coordinator will act as a conduit for the information... I don't think the Coordinators would bother us with trivialities though (S10)

Information could be passed by email, text or telephone; often it could be face to face:

If the Circle had something to report the Coordinator would come to speak to us and I'd get it direct from the Coordinator (S3)

I am a face to face person really. So at the MAPPA 3 case today I met with the Coordinator and we spoke about a few things including this case. We also text and talk on the phone frequently. We have sufficient contact really (S5)

We have monthly/bi-monthly catch up meetings where we and CoSA will meet and share information and it is just a free passage of information (S7)

At the end of each Circle meeting minutes/notes were taken and passed to the Coordinator. Core Members could be shown the minutes and asked to agree with them; as one of them told us:

Before the Core Member leaves they sign it if they agree with it or adjustments are made, and then it's passed to the [Coordinator]. So it's open in that sense, so no-one is writing messages behind your back (Ronnie)

The Types of Information

Personal information within a Circles Project could exist in a number of forms from digital to hand-written to spoken word. Here we consider these different forms and the 'gatekeeping' role exercised by the Coordinators in the form of 'filtering' to ensure

that only relevant information was the subject of movement and that that information was moved urgently if required.

The Minutes

On receipt of the meetings minutes the Coordinator will assess and filter them in order to pass relevant information on to the police and/or probation:

I am clear about my role I guess and that is to filter the information that comes through ...so really it's anything I think they [police] need to know, whether it's that he's got a new car to asking them if they knew his brother or sister visits... I think we have such a personal relationship with the PPU officers that I would rather report the most trivial things to them, or whether it's to do with their risk, licence conditions, SOPOs, even the smallest thing and I just ask them if they know it and most of the time they do. I just don't think you can risk it really (C1)

Not every bit of information that is identified by a volunteer and passed back to us is necessarily as of such significance that it really needs to be mentioned to the Probation Officer so it's a filtering role (C5)

The Coordinators role (and skill) was also to look for things that had *not* been said as much as things that were said:

We say that anything they [volunteers] hear might be passed back and also where the Core Member is refusing to talk about the various issues is a sign that the Core Member is not taking responsibility and that's what the volunteers should be looking for and they understand that from the training (C2)

Sometimes I've read the minutes and wondered if there is attempted grooming or manipulation going on so I just ask those questions and if they [volunteers] don't think so I will keep my eye on it but I will accept their judgement as well (C3)

Some professionals expressed concern that the volunteers – and hence the Coordinator - might miss important signs; a cheerful demeanour from a Core Member might be over-looked but could equally mean they were re-offending:

you've got to be just as mindful about the positivity, because as well, ego plays into it because when someone is really happy, you think oh I'm doing my job really well, look I've got a sexual offender who's really happy, engaged, and so you've got to watch out for that because you've got to be as critical of the situation when they're happy as when they're sad (S4)

Even deliberate deception by Core Members was seen as potentially taking place:

The question we had was whether they would be pulling the volunteers strings so that what we eventually get back is actually disinformation which does nothing more than cloud any decision making processes that we make (S7)

Minutes were supposed to be signed by the Core Member and passed to Coordinators after each meeting (*Circles UK 2009: Standard 5.5 vi*). This did not always happen:

We don't always get the minutes after each meeting, sometime we will get a batch of three sets of minutes at once...the minutes are handwritten at the moment and I think we are already getting our pound of flesh from our volunteers so to be arsey about their handwriting would probably lead me to getting a slap around the face to be honest! (C5)

... the minutes, which they don't have to sign anymore. Cos what used to be happening was that I would leave a stamped address envelope at the place of the meeting but the Core Member would say something on the way out or the volunteers would remember something in the debrief and the Core Member had gone so couldn't sign it. So we stopped the Core Member having to sign it but one of the volunteers needs to. Then if any emails come afterwards I just attach it to the minutes so that's my record of what's happening (C6)

The minutes themselves were not passed on to the police or probation:

But what we don't do is pass the minutes on to them. The reason I don't is that there is a lot of inconsequential information there that people could let slip. Say it's about them having a visit from their brother and its nothing to do with risk or offending and their Probation Officer asks about the visit, the Core Member is then thinking but I've not told them about that the only people I told is the volunteers (C1)

The Code of Practice confirmed that only information 'relevant to risk, progress and safety' was passed on to 'relevant agencies' (*Circles UK 2009: Standard 5.4 vi*).

Some of the professionals expressed concern when a Coordinator would not pass the Circle's weekly minutes to them and again thought that only getting selective 'raised concerns' meant they were not getting the full picture:

We've never had a full copy. We would sometimes get a summary - sometimes we don't. Some will just say they've met this week. I am assuming that had there been any issues then it would be passed back (S5)

You know we were seeing him every three months but they were seeing him every week so having minutes where he was telling them he was going blah

blah would have been useful to us. They covered themselves about the minutes by saying any raised concerns would be flagged up to us (S8)

The Police Officer interviewed here added they were not happy with ‘leaving it down to what one person thinks’ (S8) because a different Coordinator might think differently. The officer even speculated that ‘may be the volunteers [had] a loyalty to the Core Member and so won’t repeat stuff’ (S8).

The alternative view from another officer was that:

In many ways we are just grateful to see what we get and don’t push it too much (S7)

The appropriate movement of ‘personal information’ was formally guided by the *Circles UK* Code of Practice and divergence from the Code was not anticipated and nor were any other obstacles to the flow of information. We asked stakeholders if they had experienced any other obstacles:

None whatsoever. It would be an issue if they knew something and they didn’t pass it on but it hasn’t happened [laughs] (S3)

Not really. I think it’s always worked quite well for me (S6)

I think they have always been ok at sharing the information, although there were a few incidents in the very early days when stuff wouldn’t be shared and I felt that the Circle was on the offender’s side and forgetting about the victims (M2)

Straight on the Phone

The Coordinators were well aware that certain information had to be passed on immediately and could not wait for the minutes to be produced and filtered:

one guy was meeting me to have an initial chat about CoSA ... he wanted to meet in a big supermarket cafe and I had read about him offending against children and he wasn’t allowed to see his own children and when I got there we had our chat and as I left I turned around and he’d met his partner there and all their children were there. So I was stunned and he’s not supposed to have any contact with them and so I rang the police Public Protection Unit straight away. In the end I think he went on the run with the children and so that’s a pretty straight-forward one but I would just ring and tell them (C1)

The first thing he said was about this little girl and his face lit up and he said that she'd given him a present over the hedge and I was thinking this isn't right and so as soon as he'd left the room I rang PPU and his Probation Officer and the next morning I saw him with his Probation Officer and I was invited in and we discussed what he'd told me and he was recalled later that day (C1)

He hadn't quite committed an offence but he wasn't far off and he told his Circle so I was straight on the phone and the volunteers will always be in touch with me, they won't just let things pass they always check things out (C2)

Other formal reports on the Core Member that needed completion by the Coordinator are the Monthly Progress Reports, summaries for MAPPAs and End of Circle Reports (Circles UK 2009: Standards 5.4 iv and v). But once again the feeling was that urgent information would be passed on straightaway:

I get the report at the review and summaries of the meetings ... but if there is any information to be passed by the Coordinator from the volunteers it's passed on regardless of any review (S3)

Informal Information Exchanges

Although all the formal mechanisms are in place for information exchange and are outlined in the *Circles UK* Code of Practice the practitioners concerned could also simply talk to each other outside of any formally stated 'rules' especially when Coordinators were also Probation Officers or former Probation Officers and shared the same offices:

So I say [to the Core Member] are you so desperate to not commit another offence that you would rather have another five pairs of eyes figure out what you are doing? I tell them we will talk and that I am a Probation Officer and I sit in a probation office, I am friends with their Probation Officer and I ask them why they would want this in their life (C4)

There are rules about how communication is had, to be honest with you, there's quite an informal chat around the situation, which I think is really important, it kind of leads to a more organic sort of relationship with Circles. (S4)

[Interviewer] Where do you think communication with CoSA works at its best? The ability to just ring up and speak to them or drop them an email (S5)

ViSOR - the Data-base for Information on Sex Offenders

Much of this information on Core Members from Circles eventually finds its way onto the national data-base known as ViSOR. ViSOR is a national confidential database that supports MAPPA. It facilitates the effective sharing of information and intelligence on violent and sexual offenders between the three MAPPA 'responsible authority' agencies (police, probation and prisons), as well as the recording of joint risk assessments and risk management plans. ViSOR was initially an acronym for the Violent and Sexual Offender Register, but was expanded by the police to record information on some non-convicted subjects (known as potentially dangerous persons) and terrorist offenders. ViSOR is no longer an acronym but is the formal name of the database. ViSOR is to be used by MAPPA responsible authorities in discharging their statutory responsibilities to assess and manage the risks presented by known sexual and violent offenders.

Well ViSOR is police led, so everything that goes on with ViSOR is you know kind of added by the police, so it's their intelligence that goes on there (S4)

This Probation Officer respondent was actually incorrect because designated Probation Officers with security clearance could input information on to ViSOR:

I mean we have ViSOR and as far as we are concerned this is the hub of everything. Every piece of information we get in is placed on ViSOR – the confidential system that only a select few have access too. Probation can also have access to it so they can also put any information they have on to it as well. But the theory being is that should someone disappear off the face of the earth we should have every bit of information available to trawl through (S8)

For full details on probation use of ViSOR see Probation Instruction 03/2013

Core Members and the Movement of Information

Core Members were made aware of the extent and nature of the information movement because following the Code of Practice all Core Members were required to sign an Authorisation and Consent Form prior to commencing a Circle (*Circles UK* 2009 and 2013: Standard 5.2 iv).

This knowledge that personal information would be passed on from the Circle to the Coordinator and beyond was certainly understood by the professionals. Two coordinators said:

I think that every single Core Member who comes in and declares some sort of risky behaviour is fully aware that it is more than likely that the information will be shared with others. (C5)

Information will be passed on...this was particularly important in terms of holding the Core Members to account. (C6)

Meanwhile, two Police Officers and a Probation Officer reported the same:

The Core Member knows that any information they disclose is shared (S3)

It's imperative that the Core Member knows that anything will be passed on - but I am not sure what the protocols are on that (S8)

If the offender really trusted the Circle and was saying they were having inappropriate thoughts or were going online when they shouldn't have been, it would be ridiculous to think that wouldn't be shared in my opinion (S9)

A Core Member also recognised this flow, as Stephen states:

Well because everything that happens in CoSA is put back to Probation ... so every conversation that we've had in Circles, probation and [Coordinator] know about. So there are no secrets (Stephen)

Even with this clear understanding and signing of the Authorisation and Consent Form one Coordinator (C1) speculated that the Core Member could still be wary of where the information was going:

I'm still sure they are suspicious that we are just providing information for the police (C1)

The Core Members themselves said that problems might still occur if the reported information was misconstrued:

When things have gone back [to probation from the Circle] and they've been said the wrong way or understood the wrong way and got muddled up (Ryan)

Another Core Member felt aggrieved that the formal channels were not followed:

The thing that really sticks in my throat is that, Sandra [Volunteer] never said a thing, she went straight to Probation Officer saying I've done this without asking me anything about it and whether I am putting myself at risk or anything. No she went straight to Probation and they got PPU involved and we had this extraordinary meeting about it (Phil)

The Core Members' only control over the flow of information about them was to ensure it was not disclosed in the Circle in the first place:

I gotta have some private life... you know what I mean. If I tell CoSA everything they tell PPU everything and I've got no private life (Norman)

or the working relationship with the volunteers was strong enough for them to not disclose it:

Well when [Probation Officer] met the CoSA they didn't tell them everything I've done but said he's lead a very colourful life! But they don't know how colourful you know [laughs] (Matthew).

Attempts by the Core Member to prevent information on them circulating could have unforeseen consequences:

And I said 'Don't tell PPU' [laughs]. And PPU came round and they said 'You can't say that, you can't come between PPU and CoSA'. So I got a bollocking again ... if I hadn't said 'Don't tell PPU' I probably wouldn't have got such a bollocking (Norman)

Equally it could be the subject of a separate report to the Circle:

The Police Officer was the guy who went to the Core Member's home and checked things out there, and that was useful because it told us things which we weren't being told by the Core Member (V6)

Despite these attempts at honesty and openness with the Core Members about the flow of information a number of respondents referred to incidents whereby information was passed to a Police Officer or a Probation Officer with the stated (or unstated) proviso that they did not tell the Core Member where it came from:

*I am very clear about [the police] role and any information that comes to light, and because I trust them all that **they won't say it's come from us**, especially the trivial things you know that they need to know to put on ViSOR,*

then I haven't had any problems and in fact I think they try to almost protect the volunteers because they see the benefit of it. Obviously if the professionals did disclose to the Core Member that could end the Circle and the Core Member could not trust them anymore (C1; emphasis added)

*A Core Member had a relationship that he was meant to declare but had not. I think that was shared with the Circle unintentionally where he made some sort of sexual innuendo or with a love bite on his neck, I can't remember but it was passed to his Probation Officer and then the Probation Officer challenged him about it and had asked if he was in a relationship because someone had seen him in town with somebody and **it was done that way** (C5 emphasis added)*

*Yea just hearing that someone is increasing their intake of cannabis. Well cannabis might be their dis-inhibitor. Or they are drinking more or their stash of porn has increased. I would expect that the volunteers discuss the potentials of that with the nominal and in turn feed that back to us and we would run with that. But **we would do it in such a way that it would try not to come back as being from the CoSA** (S7; emphasis added)*

This passing of information without telling the Core Member that it came from the Circle could be construed in two ways. On the one hand this may be an acceptable way of working in order to not damage the Circles relationship with the Core Member and for the greater good of the Project in its continuing work with that Core Member. On the other hand the professionals could be interpreted as being deceitful to the Core Member - and if the Core Member later asked the volunteers or the Coordinator if they had said anything to the professionals, they too would have to be deceitful to the Core Member in order to maintain the 'story'.

One respondent told us about another category of information which was referred to as 'leakage'. This was information about the Police or Probation Officers themselves that included the Core Members attitude toward them:

We've also got what we call 'leakage' from the circle – i.e. in a meeting with the Circle he was telling them how he was angry with me because I'd told him to go to the police with some material he had, and again that is quite helpful because when I saw him next I had an idea where he was in his head and could then develop that working relationship with him again. Also concerns about his own well-being as well, and what he's said at meetings and in telephone calls. So yea very helpful really (S5)

That gave me just enough information, but I didn't share that with him, but I was able to ask him what's going on at Circles at the moment and how are

you finding it, and then I would sort of tease out from him his view of what happened (S4)

Summary

The value placed on information exchange within Circle Projects had been clearly expressed to the researchers and for that reason this chapter was exclusively on that subject. The distinction was made between ‘personal information’ and other forms of information. ‘Personal information’ about the Core Member went from the professionals to the Circle volunteers and alternatively went from the volunteers to the professionals. The Coordinators held a pivotal role in the centre of proceedings acting as a ‘gatekeeper’ and ensuring the movement of relevant ‘personal information’. The different types of information exchange were looked at, from written minutes, reviews, summaries through to the informal spoken word.

Personal information was the category of information that was of most concern. This was information that related to an identifiable person and could lay claim to being ‘private’ and needing a degree of ‘confidentiality’ surrounding it. The personal information about the Core Member coming into the Circle was generally very strong and positively received – albeit with one exception (see above re Core Member with a history of stalking that was not passed on). Good communication channels existed and this incoming personal information was seen as part of the professionals’ duty to ‘protect’ volunteers. This appeared to be an example of collaboration working at its best.

Personal information moving outward from the Circle to the professionals could be more problematic. Quite a number of professionals saw Circles as an extra set of ‘eyes and ears’ for the criminal justice system. Most of the time it worked well and was valued by the professionals, but sometimes there was a lack of clarity over the relevance of outward information. Some professionals wanted to see ‘any’ information coming from the Circle because it was all considered to be useful and supplementary to their own interventions and intelligence and contact with the Core Member. The Coordinators, however, saw it as their role to filter information and be

the gatekeeper of the Circle and sometimes they kept the gate closed! One Police Officer was unhappy with the role of the Coordinator as gate-keeper although in most instances this filtering was carried out in a responsible way with Coordinators making considered and defensible decisions on what information was being passed on. The *Circles UKs* Code of Practice states that information should be '*relevant to risk, progress and safety*'. These are arguably quite ambiguous and subjective terms and open to interpretation. Coordinators who are putting 'everything' through, could be deviating from the Code and using a 'precautionary logic' that implied it's 'better to be safe than sorry'.

The levels to which filtering is open to interpretation could create difficulties to all parties. At the centre the Core Member could be limiting their input of information to the Circle based on how much they think will be moved forward by the volunteers. The volunteers consider how much they should pass to the Coordinators and the Coordinator has to decide how much he or she will pass to the police or probation. This discretionary filtering could always be open to interpretation or misinterpretation which at worst could jeopardise the balance and functioning of the Project. Support and accountability in a Circle are always in a delicate balance and the perceived misuse of information on the accountability side could lead to an undermining of the support side of the equation.

There is a delicate balance between providing personal information and keeping the trust of the Core Member. Generally the researchers found that the Coordinators did very well in maintaining this balance in their gate keeper role. However, they found at least three examples of instances where this balance was difficult to maintain and decisions were made under high levels of uncertainty. This further contributes to other findings that highlight the lack of clarity around accountability.

Chapter Nine – The Core Members

Introduction

The people convicted of sexual offences who partake in the Circles experience are referred to as the Core Members (CMs) putting them at the centre of the concentric circles of volunteers and professionals. For this report 30 Core Members were interviewed from across the country and this chapter gives their voice to this report; they have all been given pseudonyms as have any volunteers or professionals they refer to. Core Members were the first group to be interviewed and those interviews significantly varied in length. Whilst some interviewees just answered the questions put to them, others wandered off and took the opportunity to talk about benefits, their family circumstances, family breakdowns, and other associated matters. Here we have focused on their responses from the interview schedule and in particular distilled their experiences with Circles and resettlement.

Description of Sample

In order to provide some context to the distribution of Core Members interviewed, questionnaire data and administrative data has been used to describe the sample. All Core Members interviewed in this research were male.¹¹ The ages of Core Members ranged from 18 years to 65 years, with the average age of Core Members being 43.3 years. This is similar to results recently found by McCartan et al (2014 (a)) who found that most Core Members in their sample were 40-49. Table 9.1 provides a more detailed breakdown of the age of Core Members who were interviewed in this study.

¹¹ There was one Circle for a female Core Member planned in one of the Projects but this was only in the early preparation stages and would not have met the criteria for inclusion for at least 7 months.

Table 9.1: Age of Core Members (Five year intervals)

Age	Frequency (N)
18-23	13.3% (4)
24-29	3.3% (1)
30-35	6.6% (2)
36-41	26.6% (8)
42-47	6.6% (2)
48-53	20% (6)
54-59	6.6% (2)
60-65	16.6% (5)

At the time of the interviews over one-third of those interviewed had participated in a Circle for over 12 months (see Table 9.2).

Table 9.2: Length of time in CoSA

Length of Time	Number
0-5 months	4
6-8 months	6
9-12 months	5
12+ months	11
Ended	4

At the time that the interviews were conducted, three Core Members had not participated in CoSA for over six months and three Core Members had finished with CoSA, but all six were still interviewed. The decision to include these six Core Members was carefully considered. Of the three Core Members who had participated in CoSA for less than six months at the time of interview, all three had been involved for over 5 months and therefore were close enough to the ‘approximately six month’ inclusion criteria. This figure is also well in excess of the minimum three-month involvement recommended by other researchers in this field who have undertaken a significant amount of the existing research on CoSA (Bates et al, 2013). The three Core Members who were interviewed after their Circle had formally ended were also included as two of the Core Members had finished within a month of the interview and the third remained in contact with the co-ordinator so all had clear recollections of their time in their Circle.

Half of the sample (N= 15) Core Members had two or more index offences listed in the administrative data. The most frequent index offence was Sexual Assault Child Female for which 14 Core Members had been convicted. Two Core Members had

been convicted of Rape of an Adult Female and three Core Members had committed Rape of a Child Female. Nine Core Members had received a Community Order, while 18 received a custodial sentence. Of those who served a custodial sentence, most received a sentence of 4-5 years.

As McCartan et al (2014 (a)) found in their case file review, some administrative data held by the CoSA Projects was incomplete. In our study, gaining a complete picture on past interventions was difficult to assess due to recording methods in the administrative data. The research team established that 16 Core Members had completed Community Sex Offender Treatment Programmes and five were currently participating in Programmes. Three Core Members reportedly failed to complete a Programme. 16 of the 18 Core Members who received a custodial sentence were recorded as having completed the Prison Sex Offender Treatment Programme.

The recording of past interventions and risk levels was more difficult to determine due to a lack of data attributed to Core Members and inputted within the administrative data. Risk levels were taken from OASys and from RM2000. As Table 4 shows, RM2000 assessments found most Core Members were assessed as being either High-Risk (N= 9) or Medium-Risk (N= 8). Risk levels were unknown for seven Core Members (see Table 9.3).

Table 9.3: Risk Assessment Scores on Risk Matrix 2000

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	6.66% (2)
High	30% (9)
Medium	26.6% (8)
Low	13.3% (4)
Unknown	23.3% (7)

OASys assessments varied depending on the focus. For instance, when risk of harm to children was assessed, 14 Core Members were assessed as being Very High-Risk (N= 2) or High-Risk (N= 12), and five were Medium-Risk. The risk was unknown for nine Core Members (see Table 9.4). The risk of harm Core Members posed to the General Public was assessed as being lower with only three Core Members deemed as being of High-Risk of harm and one of Medium-Risk. 16 Core Members were assessed as Low-Risk while the risk was unknown for 10 Core Members (See Table 9.5).

Table 9.4: OASys Risk of Harm – Children

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	6.66% (2)
High	40% (12)
Medium	16.66% (5)
Low	6.66% (2)
Unknown	30% (9)

Table 9.5: OASys Risk of Harm – General Public

Risk Level	Frequency (N)
Very High	0
High	10% (3)
Medium	3.3% (1)
Low	53.3% (16)
Unknown	33.3% (10)

Also of note from administrative data was that over two-thirds of referrals came from Probation (N= 23); 17 Core Members were subjected to SOPOs and 13 were subject to licence conditions at the point of referral to CoSA.

The Starting Point for CoSA: Life as a convicted Sex Offender

Research on the particular problems experienced by people with convictions for sexual offences have been less well reported on although studies do exist from the USA. We start this chapter by collating some of the perspectives made by Core Members on their needs in attempting to live their lives as a convicted sexual offender.

One of the claims made for Circles of Support and Accountability is that they provide support to sexual offenders that helps them to resettle into the community however as research from America has identified, and as the discussion in Chapter Four illustrated, many found life post-conviction very different and difficult. Many of the Core Members interviewed also expressed these difficulties. Isolation and a lack of

friends was considered as one of the pervasive features of life as a convicted sex offender. Immediate family might withdraw contact with the Core Member depending on the circumstances of the offence. Our respondents were able to confirm this picture:

Well I didn't have any family to have any relationships with. Cos my family actually dumped me and told me to have no contact with them again. Even though a lot of the guys I was in prison for had done far worse and still were having their family in on visits and in touch, my family didn't want anything (Christopher)

Since he found out I was in jail and what it was for, he [son] called my brother and in so many words told my brother 'I never want to speak to him [Core Member] again' and er ... I've never been in touch with anyone since. I've wrote to him three times but he doesn't want to know ... I'm good at talking to people but writing letters they can just screw 'em up you know it just doesn't work ... but [Probation Officer] says it takes time you know (Matthew)

Social networks beyond the immediate family could also be adversely affected resulting in a withdrawal from the community where the person has lived all their lives and where they were well known; their conviction giving them a negative label to be seen by all:

Cos I felt like I had this sign above my head. There is a certain five letter N word that they used especially in prison for guys like me – nonce. And I felt like anyone who looked at me would see this sign and think ... (Troy)

A lot of the friends I had before I went into prison don't want to know me now (Joe)

I was just walking through town and somebody on the other side of the road was pointing at me and asking if it was me and one of them actually came over but they didn't do anything but I was ready if they wanted to (Kyle)

I was in a second-hand shop looking at video games and I was just merrily looking at DVDs and games and I hear somebody say quite clearly 'I am sure that's him' (Pete)

The response was to literally keep your head down:

It's like walking from one house to another it would be straight there, you know don't look around, just look at the pavement and ignore anything that might be happening (Bill)

Apart from being personally known in a small community the offence or offences had often been reported by the local newspapers and broadcast media; sometimes the national media:

And everyone knows cos when I got sentenced it was in the paper, on the radio and everywhere, yes there wasn't any hiding it! (Bill)

This particular offence was in the newspaper and ... I was known by one name you see, ... and I knew that if I was known by that name then, not just for my family's protection but everybody in work would have known it was me you see, so erm ... I changed it (Bob)

After you've done your offence you do go through that stage where you think that everyone is going to recognise you from the paper and ... make judgements about you (Gordon)

Apart from just being made to feel uncomfortable in their local communities the Core Members could also become fearful for their own personal safety:

Afraid of walking down the street and someone having a go, verbally, physically - you know if Joe Public knew about me would they ... you know you always have that fear of a vigilante lynch-mob wanting to put you on the nearest lamppost as a decoration for Christmas ... that was a big part of the paranoia that I had after release. (Bill)

I've got me own safety as well. My brother says my place is like Fort Knox, and I said yea too right! Like me back gate, it must have six bolts and locks and what not, and where the door is, I've heightened it so they can't climb over it, and I've got a steel door at the back of the door, plus the door, plus security deadlocks, plus I have got CCTV, plus I have this [shows home-help cord] which is for inside the home and it goes 24 hours a day and it calls if I need help, the ambulance, doctor, police ... and with me having that around me neck I am safe (Brian)

If people did find out about me I would probably be burnt out and treated like a witch or something from the 1600s you know. But that's because people have been scared by the papers. But the stats haven't changed since the 1960s with child abductions and things like that (Eddie)

One option to manage this hostile reaction was to move town to a place where the Core Member was not known:

I moved cos I was afraid that if it got in the paper then the town is so small that any hint of it would make me public enemy number one and bring out the lynch mob for the dirty bastard! (Phil)

I keep saying I wanna go back to [home-town] where I used to live, but some of me wants to, and some of me doesn't, cos while I am here nobody knows me so I am not getting the hassle, whereas in [town] where I lived everybody there knew me ... and I don't know if I could do with all the pointing, name calling and you know ... like a couple of me brothers neighbours have stopped talking to him because of me ... you know ... a family friend that we had known since we were four has stopped talking to him ... because of me (Joe)

I come from a small town and everybody knows me but I come up here and people barely know me (Norman)

Core Members mostly spoke in terms of making their own decisions to move to a new town but occasionally they implied that they had been 'compelled' to move by the probation service or other authorities. It was not possible to verify the truth of this 'compulsion' but it was clearly felt that way by the Core Members:

Its cos my offence happened in [region] and so I am under their probation, so they made me move here where I knew no-one, into a hostel with a load of ex-cons and I'd just come from an environment where you have to be brutal to survive or you become a victim yourself! (Troy)

Cos of my offence my family had to move. It was quite bad to be honest. So I'm not allowed to be in [City] cos of my offence and because of my victims and also my safety. So it was pretty much life-or-death. They were either gonna get me or my family so we've all had to move. But me and my parents were quite well known there and so they were gonna be targets that's why we had to move (Anthony)

Whether the Core Member lived at home or in a new town there was a common experience reported of withdrawal from the community and increasing personal isolation. The Core Members confirmed this:

Nah I don't really have much friends, the only friends I've got are on this course I've just started on (Jack)

I mean at the start I'd just got my own place but I was literally spending pretty much seven days a week inside my flat staring at the TV or playing on my X-Box. You know I didn't have the confidence to meet other people or to go out and go into a situation where I hadn't been to before but they [Circles] have helped me (James)

And then it got to the point that I couldn't be arsed to do anything and I literally blank everyone and locked myself in my flat for two weeks. Only going out to get my dole money, sign on, get my shopping and blank every call even from my mum...On a night time I am bored shitless watching T.V or playing [computer] games all the time (Richard)

Literally I was getting up at 7.30am, going to bed at 11.30pm and I was doing nothing all day. I might come into the fringes of town if I could force myself for half an hour ... but the rest of the time I was sat in my room or sat in the common room [of the hostel] watching TV and that was my life. It was doing nothing! (Troy)

This lack of involvement and engagement in the community was driven by a number of other wider factors such as employment and accommodation. Together these factors highlight the difficulties Core Members, CoSA and the Circle volunteers face in attempting to reintegrate Core Members into the community.

Core Members and Circles: the experience

In this section we consider the expectations held by Core Members on what Circles might be like and how they experienced the actual meetings of the Circle.

Expectations of Circles

When the idea of Circles was first brought to the attention of Core Members their reactions were mostly based on their ignorance of what Circles actually were:

We didn't have a clue what it was about cos I was one of the first in the area and all I was told was they [organisation] were setting up a new thing and it's called Circles. It's volunteers who meet with you and they will chat with you and after a few months they will meet you in the town and go for a coffee with you. And I thought ok that sounds ok (Christopher)

I didn't know what to expect to be honest. I thought to myself that if they start being too judgemental or stuck up to me then I would walk out. But having done the group work you don't really know what to expect anyway so I just went in with an open mind. So I had no real expectation but if I had had any negatives then I wouldn't have done it (Eddie)

It sounded like an extension of probation, and it wasn't until I asked for more details about what CoSA was all about, and then that was explained, but even then I was still very sceptical... (Gordon)

At worst the Core Members expressed a number of misconceptions about Circles:

I thought like the police, like PCSOs, they'd be escorting me around everywhere watching me as I pick up a Mars bar and all that sort of thing.

And I thought, to meself, am I gonna be handcuffed while I am with these people? Cos me head had gone cos I'd been in this cell for a time (Alan)

I thought it was more like probation, I thought it was all part of erm [pause] things you have to do, you HAVE to be there, I don't have to be there I can walk out at any time I want. Erm is it important? It is to me. (Bruce)

Before I first joined Circles I thought it would be a mentor system that would point you in the right direction and would stop you from doing things wrong. I thought it would be like another avenue of probation you know, but it's a lot more flexible, friendly and a lot more supportive and they go that extra mile to make you feel as though you [want to be there] (Gordon)

The levels of 'not knowing' what Circles were or of having distorted conceptions of what they were was supplemented by Core Members having spoken to other people in the same position as them including some who had already experienced life in a Circle and having seen things in the media:

I kind of had an idea cos I knew two other guys who were on Circles and this is what we'd discussed. And I think that helped a lot cos it sort of helped me relax at this first meeting cos I knew what to expect and it would have made me far more nervous going in to that first meeting (James)

My Probation Officer came forward and said I'd been put forward to do it and would I be interested. Fortunately I'd seen it about a year before on the news, on the Inside/Out programme about this guy who had one and what it was all about so I'd had a bit of insight from that (Max)

First Circle Meetings

Whatever the levels of understanding in advance of the first meeting as a Circle the degree of wariness of the first meeting was commented on by the majority of Core Members. For instance, Anthony stated the first meeting was:

Scary, I was a bit nervous cos I thought that it would be a bit spooky but then once I got sat in here after a couple of weeks I realised that it was gonna be alright (Anthony)

Others had similar views:

Me very first one was in this room. And I was shiteing myself to put it bluntly. I was petrified ... because it was four new people that I had never met in my life and it was like what are they gonna think of me. You know, are they gonna hate me, are they gonna like me, my blood pressure was through the roof and my heart was racing (Joe)

Ya at first they were, the first couple of meetings were terrible, we weren't hardly saying anything ... I can remember our second meeting we had and it was just Ken and Kath, the other two had commitments and I walked in and the look they had on their faces then was that they didn't wanna be there, seriously it looked like they didn't want to be there, I'm being honest. They must have had a hard day (Jack).

I went home, that night I decided that I wasn't going back to CoSA anymore cos I found it so intimidating but then [the Coordinator] rang me up the next day and I'm quite positive that if [the Coordinator] hadn't rang me back up the next day I wouldn't have gone back to CoSA (Jack)

You're in the hot seat and that's what it felt like [with CoSA] that I was in the hot seat you know what I mean, that I was getting a psychological evaluation at times but in the end it was ok. After three or four visits it started getting easier and then as the weeks went by it got even easier so ... (Eddie)

The 'high' numbers of volunteers involved in Circles and the fact that these volunteers would be 'strangers' was also commented on by a number of people:

Cos they mentioned that I would be talking about my offending and my problems in front of complete strangers (Ashley)

The first time when I met the group members. There were four group members there, there was the Probation Officer there and there were two Police Officers there from PPU, so there were like 9-10 people there and it was really intimidating (Jack)

I was walking in to a room full of strangers to tell 'em ... the darkest, most terrible part of my life basically! You know, and however much they volunteered to be there and hear that, from this side of this table it's still scary (Troy)

Despite the anxiety levels, Core Members reported that their fears and apprehensions declined after the first meetings and all Core Members continued to attend the meetings with the Circle.

The Circle Meetings

Core Members were then asked what they thought of the meetings once their initial misgivings had been overcome. Core Members were particularly grateful for the flexibility and the openness offered by the Circles meetings which allowed the meetings to be free from prescriptive agendas:

Circles is quite flexible I suppose cos there is no set formula for each Circle, yea obviously there is the Core Member, Coordinator and volunteers and you have certain parameters like they are volunteers not friends, and all the rest of it. But then how each Circle runs and what it does is up to each Circle and you draw up your own rules and guidelines and that's it. As an example, the two guys that I know that are in the Circles at the minute, their Circles are totally different to mine, but it works for them. (Troy)

Having the Circle there, it lets you explore how you feel and lets you talk about it ... you know I could talk to my sister about it but ... you know it's ... again its ... not as comfortable as with the CoSA ... I mean that is something quite personal to talk to somebody about really .. I suppose that is one of the good things that came out of CoSA really that I felt comfortable enough to talk about something as personal as that (Bill)

It's a relationship that grows, even though it's not a permanent one, it's only a short term one, its [pause] erm, [pause] part of society isn't it. It's how we all work at the end of the day (Bruce)

Others reported how they particularly appreciated how this atmosphere also allowed them to switch the tone to more purposeful matters when necessary:

They are all so different and so it's quite different to identify similarities. So I would come in and just say 'how are you?', 'how have you been?' and just chat for a while and then we'll kind of move off into a discussion or I will say I want to talk about this or something ... and then it just kind of flows wherever it wants to go (Carl)

Core Members also commented on the meetings providing a release from everything 'going on' in their life at that stage even if this was only temporary:

I am not under any obligation to discuss anything, but at the same time I can ramble on without fear of, for instance, someone who is personally connected to me getting upset or ... so they have been that happy medium if you like and let me sort of ramble on for hours on end! [laughs/smiles] (Bob)

Even rules on attendance could be flexible:

... me wife offended as well, but because I took the deal she didn't get charged ... so her charges were dropped but she still felt guilty so she joined the Circles, not officially, but she'd come once a month and they'd took to her and I allowed that and [the Coordinator] did too (Stephen)

Not all Core Members experienced a smooth time in the meetings and both Dennis and Norman felt there were times when the purpose and direction of the Circle had been lost:

it was brought up at one of the meetings that [the volunteers] are confused about what it's all about and what they should be doing, er because there is no set rules laid down about how CoSA should run ... but it's the blind leading the blind because what is the purpose of it that sounds bad on my behalf.... (Dennis)

Because from what the comments I've heard, some [volunteers] weren't sure about what it was all about even ... or what they were going to do so it is difficult (Norman)

Topics for Discussion

As with the volunteers, Core Members reported that the topics of discussion in the meetings were extremely varied from the frivolous to serious. Some meetings provided an opportunity to discuss the practicalities of life:

Any difficulties I had had you know things like that, and talking about general things that were happening, you know things in the news, anything really [laughs] (Bill)

Its everyday life, I mean it's always pretty much the same. I think it helps you to relax more when you are in surroundings like that to be honest, but I know them well enough now that we can just basically chat about everyday things, then if I need to chuck in anything that has been bothering me, or things that have been happening that I would like a second opinion on (Bob)

And then May and Henry, Samuel and Minnie would turn up with biscuits and cakes at different weeks so it wasn't just that we'd be sitting there like this [all huddled up around a table] but we'd have a laugh you know and towards the end they were talking about their lives more than I was talking about mine (Christopher)

Other meetings would revolve around the past week and what the Core Members had done:

Usually it starts with how's your week been and that leads on to the good points and the bad points will come if there are any and it just snowballs from there really and that is so much better than sitting down with a clip board of things that we have to discuss (James)

This could be evidence of an informal accountability role being undertaken by the Circle. Equally some meetings had a more overt accountability focus and involved discussing their past offending and concerning behaviours. Sometimes this could be just stressful questioning:

I've taken a grilling in the past and sometimes you've been sitting there and been questioned like the Spanish Inquisition now, and [Probation Officer] said 'Ah well that's all finished now, you're getting onto the social thing so there'll not be any more like that now you know', so I said 'Thank God for that' (Matthew)

Sometimes they're so in-depth and heavy I used to lose, not lose the plot, but just get a bit stressed about it and I couldn't concentrate properly. If they had just kept it lighter and not so in-depth then yes it might have been more helpful instead of probing into me mother's circumstances, my past life and stuff. I don't want to go into my past life and stuff, I want to go forward. That was too stressful for me (Norman)

I wasn't used to being challenged. They would say 'Ok well we'll talk about it for a little bit and then we'll talk about the weather ... by the end of the meeting I would be fine. They would always say to me at the end of the meeting 'How are you feeling? Any problems?' Which I thought was nice cos I could have gone home and topped meself if I'd had a bad session you know! (Joe)

There are times when I feel like they are trying to use what I say against me and I don't like it when people do that (Richard)

In such instances, the Core Members felt the specific comments of a volunteer could make the meeting even more unpleasant:

I was early for a meeting once ... they were all late and it was supposed to start at 2pm and it didn't start until quarter past. I came to enter the room and Adam was in there and he told me to 'Get lost!' Straight out words 'Get out!' All the attitude, all the voice, all the emotion was there and it got me really, really angry and I stormed off and I went to sit down ... and it took Audrey 20 more minutes to calm me down and get me to go in the room. And me and Adam haven't got on since, he won't apologise. He is one of these people that says 'I'm right, you're wrong; I'm big, you're small' and Adam is the only member of the group that we didn't get on with cos he wouldn't apologise. He knew he did wrong by telling me to get lost, but it's how he said it, he actually got up and got in me face and he actually said 'Get lost' and it got me so angry (Stephen)

In one meeting Brian had said he 'hated gays' and this had led to problems with one of the volunteers who was also a Probation Officer:

Because she said 'O like you're childish', it pushed a button inside my head and I left and went home, I couldn't stay there anymore ... It was near the end of the Circle! Everything had been fine until I said that word and the way they reacted.... I thought being a professional person she should have explained it to me a bit better, not putting her work in. That's what I said in the meeting when all the rest of them was there. I said, just because she is a Probation Officer, I felt... strongly, that she is overpowering me (Brian)

The reactions of some volunteers could have far more serious implications for all parties:

I said if it goes too far I'd probably commit another offence. And a [volunteer] said 'Ooo no you're not committing another offence, well if you do were walking out on ya' and it was worse than that when I did go back, cos they were saying 'Oo we were wasting our time'. Brian and Jenny couldn't look at me. Wow that did me a lot of damage (Alan)

I got a bit paranoid afterwards, cos when I walked downstairs to leave the building I heard laughing in the background and you know, I suffer from a little bit of paranoia but when I asked [the Coordinator] she said that one of the volunteers went to open the blind and got stuck so they were laughing at that, and I assumed they were laughing at me (Jack)

Activities

As well as formal meetings, all Core Members also spoke highly and with fondness to some of the activities they had done with the volunteers during the Circle. Activities were many and varied. Sometimes this would be holding a meeting in a more public venue to break-up the routine of being in a meeting room:

The normal meetings we have at Costa or Starbucks or wherever. Actually we've also been ... for breakfast at Frankie and Benny's together (Bob)

Went to McDonalds; we've been to grab some coffee in the cafeteria (Ashley)

Rather than sitting in here like in a classroom sort of thing – even though we just sit like we are now and talk. Sometimes we feel we want to get out of here and so we'll meet at Starbucks and have a coffee or if its something special like a birthday or something like that then we might go for a meal or a quick snack you know (Ronnie)

Such activities were also used to assist Core Members

I was talking about what I am nervous about fairly early on, and it was the fact that being somewhere public made me nervous, erm ... so you know as a CoSA what we would tend to do is go somewhere out to have a coffee, you know to Asda or Sainsbury's cafe and things like that to actually face some of the things I was less sure off (Bill)

I was struggling cos the divorce was going through and ... I needed to open an account to get money sent from the solicitor, and when your passport has been destroyed by the passport office cos the police sent it there when I went to prison and you don't actually have any I.D. then it's extremely hard to open up a bank account so Adele came with me to help me get through that (Max)

Other times, the Core Members reported going to specific venues or attractions:

There was the college [to talk about my] offending (Ashley)

It became more informal when we went out places, and we've been to a cafe, the museum, an art gallery. The first attempt at the art gallery wasn't good ... then we did go back to the art gallery and actually surprised them because I actually ... I really enjoyed it and the museums (Pete)

The match was good as well (Richard)

walks with the volunteers (Matthew)

Two baking sessions, we always had a good laugh with them .. We went to the pictures (Joe)

Erm we've just gone to the [gay bars] (Simon)

Or to celebrate certain events like birthdays or Christmas:

Cos for my birthday the year before we went to Nando's – they paid obviously ... I'd never been before and cos I like my spicy food I had the hot sauce on it and they all said that my face went red, and it was! But I've always been like that (Richard)

Well we have had a birthday party and we've been out at Christmas. We had a meeting on the Thursday and then went for the meal on Friday (Jack)

Many spoke of such outings as being some of the best parts of CoSA:

Probably the one where we went to a restaurant for one of the volunteers birthdays or when we went out somewhere together (Richard)

While most Core Members felt the volunteers had supported them in doing activities, some did mention activities they wanted to do but were not able to for various reasons:

We had mentioned about going to the cinema, but it never came off cos Brian's father was ill in hospital. He actually met mum on me birthday last year, after having a meal in one of the restaurants in town (Alan)

There was one where they said we could go out and we were gonna go to a club in town but I didn't have the money to get up to town and I was gutted and all that. Apparently it was a good night out as well (Richard)

Generally we've gone out and had coffee, we've been out and played pool. We were supposed to have a Christmas dinner and I got in trouble and so we didn't go (Ryan)

They once suggested that we go do some indoor wall climbing, but I had to say no cos it will be so expensive and I don't think COSA budget is going to afford that so no (Jack)

Telephone Contacts

During the interviews it became apparent that telephone and messaging contact between Circle members before and after a formal meeting was more important to Core Members than the researchers had previously realised. In effect this form of communication created a sort of 'virtual circle' that continued throughout the week if an appropriate relationship had been developed between the volunteers and Core Member:

They have a phone and I contact them. Some are more helpful than others. Anne is very good, so is Lucy. The other two aren't so good with the phone, they don't turn it on much. I don't know about you but mine is never off [laughs] (Norman)

During the early stages of the Circle most Core Members who used the 'virtual circle' were contacted by one or all of the volunteers to check how they are 'getting on':

You know they text me numerous times during the week and I text them back when they text me and it works really, really well but now you know I have that support network there ... normally on a Sunday Gail will text me asking how the weekend's been (Max)

Where contact was made by the Core Member the reasons might vary. Some would only initiate contact with volunteers to discuss a specific issue in order not to infringe on the volunteers personal lives:

I am very much aware that the volunteers have their own lives to lead and I don't think that they would like me ringing up every few days saying I really need to talk (Bob)

And as I say they were only a phone call away and that's 24/7 and so if you had a problem you could give them a ring. And they used to call me too, so we'd meet on a Tuesday and then once a week usually over the weekend I'd get a phone call asking how I was getting on, what I'd been doing, what I'd had for me dinner, that sort of thing (Eddie).

Though others felt more able to freely contact the volunteers:

Philip has said if there is anything give us a ring and we've exchanged various text messages you know (Matthew)

They are always there for me ... I text them or phone them practically every day – Peter, Claudia and Lauren – and sometimes they might say they'll ring me back but then I tell them I will cos I've got more money than them and it's just our joke (Maurice)

Equally phone contact could be initiated by a Circle volunteer if they believed something was not quite right:

The group members noticed that I was talking about some of me offences they could see my confidence and demeanour lowering ... and after the group I went home and felt really, really miserable and couldn't sleep and then they rang me the next day to check I was ok, that was nice (Jack)

Cos what [the Coordinator] did was find out which network I am on and then bought phones on the same network as me. So each one of them has a phone – they are only cheap and tacky ones but it serves its purpose really well (James).

When a Circle ends

At the end of a Circle contact with Coordinators and/or volunteers did not necessarily end, and again the telephone was important in allowing some informal continuity to continue. This was something that was valued by Core Members:

I got a text off one of them a couple of days ago on the CoSA phone, just to ask how I'd been and what was happening in me life, which I didn't expect cos I

thought when the last meeting was over I thought that would be it, it would be finished with. I didn't really expect a text message so it was nice (Joe).

August last year that I last saw CoSA. But I do see a fella from CoSA that I am seeing later today that I see every fortnight, well I saw him last Thursday and I am seeing him again today and we go for a meal and a chit-chat. I have made a friend out of it so... (Eddie)

Other Core Members who were still involved in the Circle also valued the potential of continuing some contact even if this was just by telephone:

We might keep in touch in a low key, unofficial, sort of way. They have my number, I have theirs, the idea has been floated a couple of times and I am happy to go along with that (Henry).

When I finish with CoSA I shall keep contact and they have already said that if I need to the support is here for as long as I want it. So to me that is an added support network that I had prior to my offence (Gordon)

Core Members views of the Volunteers

The Core Members were asked for their views on the volunteers. Mostly they were very positive about the volunteers and the role they played and often made references to the fact that they were volunteers and were actually giving up their own time to be with them. While some acknowledged the social benefits of meeting the volunteers and what 'nice' people the volunteers were:

I get on really well with them all actually, yea (Bill)

Others went further and tried to stress the volunteers filled a gap in their lives. For instance, Gordon stated:

I've never had any problems with them. They've always been very supportive and they've always been very open and I couldn't have wished to have a better Circle - I know they are here to help me and everything but they are almost like friends type of thing. They are people that if ever I needed to talk to them about anything I wouldn't hesitate to say you know I need a word you know (Gordon)

Bruce confirmed this by saying:

I can't ask for more, if their willing to erm, and I feel that, I'd like to keep in touch with 'em as friends - I've sent 'em a Christmas card, bit late like cos we missed 'em over Christmas like, which just says like 'Thank you for the support' and they [pause] mean a lot to me [slightly choked] not only as a Circle of Support but also as individuals (Bruce)

In most cases the Core Members valued the opportunity they were given by participating in the Circle because it was either an outlet to discuss things related to their past with people who they felt safe with:

I think they were sort of shocked, you know, it was a lot for them to take in ... which is understandable ... [stutters] ... and I think maybe they felt a little uncomfortable at first but after the initial shock ... then it felt better that it was out in the open and they were aware (Dennis)

Cos if I had have felt uncomfortable or that they were judging me I would have stopped it straight away you know what I mean ... (Eddie)

The one's I got were psychology students. So like, I often thought, am I one of their guinea pigs sort of thing, am I a case study, [smiles] but I knew they weren't it's just how I was thinking (Joe)

Or, as other Core Members commented, the interaction within the Circle was said to have more profound and life changing outcomes as the Core Members saw the volunteers as 'normal' people who were able to see past their offence:

It's been four remarkable women that give a damn (Troy)

It totally obliterated my myth that I had in my head that it would be the younger people that would be judgemental about me, and ... er the way that they were to me, they were actually quite welcoming (Bill)

Although there could be exceptions:

When I leave I always shake hands with people...but when I offered to shake her hand she said 'I'm not gonna shake hands with you!' And I looked at Peter and he shook his head [as if to say he understands] and so I shook hands with Claudia and Lauren and other one and said 'It's over' to snotty one...then she did come in next time and all she wanted to know was what I was in prison for and I said 'You know', and I told her that she already knew and she needed to back down and Peter put his hand on me and I said 'No' and I got up and left and walked home (Maurice).

Instances such as this one were isolated and only Maurice revealed such an encounter occurring throughout the interviews.

Core Members perceptions of the social and professional backgrounds of the Volunteers

The Core Members were aware that volunteers came from all walks of life and brought with them a variety of backgrounds and experience. It was not their business to pry into that background but, at the same time, they inevitably got to know about some of the volunteers and what they had been doing:

I made it a point of not asking because at the end of the day I have a conviction for a sexual offence and I don't think it would be right to ask too much about their backgrounds (Bill)

It doesn't matter who those people are it's just that those people give their time to help you and erm [pause] if I thought I could give my time I'd like to be in that position as well (Bruce).

The Core Members did have problems with the backgrounds of some volunteers. They detected a number of volunteers, for example, who already worked, or had previously worked, in the criminal justice system as Probation Officers, social workers, and Police Officers:

Graham is a prison officer so it's all down to his shifts as to when he can get time off, and Geoff who is a Probation Officer and he's got stuff going on as well. Then Sandra, she's a prison chaplain... I thought that these volunteers were people at random from the community, but they aren't really cos they are all people who are working with offenders (Phil)

Shaun was quite a lot older. He was 40-50'ish. I think he was a support worker or a social worker for a long time. He was very goal driven and like 'We must do this'. He didn't really fit in with the rest of the Circle cos he was quite a lot older (Carl)

He doesn't go on like Debbie. I think it's got something to do with her child protection work (Dennis).

One of the circle was a Probation Officer (Ruben)

In turn this could, they thought, result in a degree of role confusion which caused concern; (see also Brian's homophobic comments reported above in this Chapter under Topics for Discussion):

Only one thingy, I've got about the CoSA is how they put things across to you. Do the CoSA business, not bring their job into it. Cos I think that spoils what it's all about... Cos when she [volunteer] is in CoSA she's in the CoSA not in probation ...cos she was saying 'No be quiet let me finish', but I wouldn't let her [laughs] ... because to me it was you know 'I say this so I expect you to do it attitude' [Core Member imitating volunteer] but I don't work that way. I feel like if I am talking to a person it has to be fair like we are understanding each other, the way they come from and the way I think as well (Brian)

I found out that one of the volunteers, May was a Probation Officer and I thought 'no' not after everything I've been through with Probation Officers and I told her that ... it took a couple of weeks but I told her that. I said that 'I am not keen on opening up with you as a Probation Officer sat there', and she said that 'You've got to look at me as a Probation Officer and when I finish work and come here I shut the door on my probation work and I am here just like the rest of them as a volunteer'. She said, 'Yes if you are talking about things which are out-of-line then I will step into my uniform and just put you right on it without bringing probation into it' (Christopher)

The questions she was asking me I'd already sussed out what her job was anyway, which was, she'd worked for Social Services, so ... she knew what to ask and how to ask, you know, so I'd already sussed that one. (Ronnie)

The age of the volunteers was something that further intrigued the Core Members and especially the presence of so many young people who were often students:

I was expecting them to be late-middle-aged, retired people, you know the retired judge that you know knew exactly what should be done with an offender [laughs] ... (Bill)

I actually thought it would be a load of old people at first. You know in their 60s. Like you get these volunteers in hospital shops and them who go round the ward's visiting people. That's what I thought it would be like at first, you know 50's, 60's people. You know it was really strange. (Joe)

They are all females ... but erm the two younger ones, at first I was a bit iffy but now ... I got alright then. I tried to put it out of my mind, their age, n' tried to imagine that they were all the same age. But the trouble is Diane looks very young and that's a bit off-putting. There was meant to be a man there, but for some reason he didn't take the job on (Norman)

The Core Members views of volunteers were somewhat stereotyped and the reality was surprising for them especially in terms of age.

The Core Members views of the Coordinators

Core Members had formal relationships with the probation service and the Police Officers in the Public Protection Units responsible for the sex offender register as well as the Coordinators directly responsible for the Circle. We did not seek to discuss this in significant detail though invariably these relationships came out during the interview.

The Coordinators are in a pivotal position between the worlds of the volunteers, the professionals and the Core Members and play a ‘boundary spanning’ role between all these parties and their separate worlds. The Core Members mostly appreciated the value of the Coordinators who they saw in a positive light:

And [the Coordinator’s] judgement on who I would fit in with, cos it was her choice to use them, cos she thought I would work well with somebody younger which quite surprised me how quickly she had analysed me as a person and erm put me into a category that suited me (Bruce)

Well I couldn’t sleep that night, yea it was just, really intimidating and I thought I’d made a fool of myself and they were laughing at me ... and they thought I was some kind of monster ... and so I didn’t wanna go through those emotions again and the next morning I was just about to send a text to [the Coordinator] saying I wasn’t gonna do it anymore, and [the Coordinator] rang and we went for a coffee to relax me. It was [the Coordinators] reassurance that what I was feeling was absolutely normal and then they said that what I’d done was an absolutely amazing thing to do, to tell people, even though they knew my background, to actually vocalise what I’d done to strangers is quite a big step for anybody to do ... you know. .. so yea I felt quite pleased that I did that (Jack)

I knew that I could count on the support of the professionals and also that [the Coordinator] would do a very good of picking the volunteers (James)

That was not to say that there were not varying degrees of criticisms of Coordinators from minor points:

One of the greatest problems is, again with CoSA is the booking of the room. It wasn’t always booked, [the Coordinator] should have booked it but it wasn’t always booked (Dennis)

The only negative things I will say, there have been occasions whereby I have left a message or sent a text message and I've not heard anything for days. You know I can appreciate that they [Coordinators] have a wide area to look after ... for instance, there could be one meeting where they'll say 'Right I'll get in touch with you by the end of this week or start of next week about the next meeting' and I don't hear anything for 7-10 days ... erm so that's been the only frustrating thing really (Bob)

to more serious criticisms:

The less I say about [the Coordinator] the better! - a useless bugger anyway, I'm not being funny [she] pushes people and I don't like being pushed. Like I asked if I could stay in touch once its ended and I asked Peter and he said I could whenever I wanted too, and then I asked Claudia and Lauren and Lauren said yes ... and [the Coordinator] said 'You are not!' And I said 'Hang on a minute if the Circle is over she can do what she wants and I told [the Coordinator] that she was getting too big for her boots and Peter pulled me back and told [them] it was cos I was getting bored but really I was getting angry with [the Coordinator] again for telling me what to do (Maurice)

I went to see [the Coordinator] once and she said 'Nothing's sunk in has it, it's been a waste of time hasn't it?' But the CoSA team said I'd done very well, but [the Coordinator] isn't there, but the CoSA team are, and they wouldn't say it if they didn't mean it, and they said I've done very well (Norman)

Core Members views on Professionals

As might be expected the Core Members had a lot to say about the Police and probation services ranging from 'very good' to 'very bad'. Here we have distilled their comments on both services as they impact upon their CoSA experiences.

Comparing Probation with CoSA

Throughout this report we have assumed the different roles of the police, probation and Circles Projects to be self-evident but we asked the respondents if they were clear on the distinction:

Probation and Circles are basically completely different. Like at probation you go down and do the work and that, and like if I have an appointment at 4pm then I could still be waiting at 4.30 or 4.45 and it just does my head in all the waiting. Whereas with Circles you see them bang on that time, sometimes even early and if I'm early then we just sit and have a chat and that. But at probation they are always running flapping around in a rush trying to get stuff sorted and they are never on time (Anthony)

While I was on Probation I could have told them anything, but they were just more official if you know what I mean. Like if I say this am I going to get myself into trouble or... even though I didn't do anything wrong. But I was saying to meself well if I say this to a Probation Officer ... do you know what I mean ... but if I say this to a CoSA, ... it weren't the same, the atmosphere weren't the same as well (Brian)

No it's like completely opposite ends of the spectrum Probation and CoSA. You know there would be some times when I turned up at Probation and I'd think well I'm here just to say that I am in the area. You know you'd get 'How are you?' but you never really got the impression that they were listening to what you were actually saying so it became 'Fine', 'Yea great', 'See you next week'. And that you know ... having been a service user I'd think 'Is that effective?' but yea as a tax payer I'd be thinking you know 'Are they actually doing a proper job?' (Bill)

I could open up more to CoSA than I feel as if I could with Probation Officer cos the PO has my life in their hands, you know. If they want to send me back to prison for the next three and a half years they could (Joe)

Comparing the Police with CoSA

When discussing the relationship they had with the police compared with the relationship with Circles, some expected responses emerged:

You know PPU know who you are, you know they know where you live ..., and having a phone call from them saying 'Merry Christmas' isn't quite the same thing [laughs] (Bill)

Anyway I'd mentioned about this visit and the [PPU] officer then went off on one and used this guy's full name in the meeting which we don't do in Circles, so that was a lack of professionalism but from discussing it afterwards [the Police Officer] had had a very long day and an even harder week cos they had to recall two people and it was past their home time (James)

In one case however, the Core Member appeared to start to give a sales-pitch to the Police Officer about CoSA:

The PPU officer said he's heard a lot of complaints about CoSA and he sez they are boring, and I'd said they can be boring, but I said you just have a general chat and you just tell them what's happened and it's up to you to go places and make things more interesting (Matthew)

Core Members perspectives on Support and Accountability

Given the two key concepts at the heart of CoSA – Support and Accountability – Core Members were also encouraged to discuss their understandings of these terms and where they have experienced these two elements in their Circle.

Core Members views on Support

All of the Core Members were able to give a definition of support. Most definitions involved reference to the volunteers acting as a figure of guidance or someone to talk to about ideas, thoughts or events in their life:

It's like them helping me out. And they are perfect for the job. They give up their spare time to come round and help people out. They are unbelievable (Anthony)

I would define support as holding something. So in the context of CoSA they are like holding me up (Carl)

To me it means having people there who are non-judgemental and are aware of the situation and are there and ready to help me when I have a problem (James)

For others it was support with specific issues:

It's not physical support, it's knowing that you are not being judged, that there are people willing to help by giving ideas, suggestions for whatever problem. That you get a wider idea of choice, and knowing that if I have got a problem I have someone that I can speak to, even if it's only once a week, I know that I can come and I can lay it out on the table how I am feeling and what my problem is and how I thought about coping with it and then they can throw their ideas on or give you the support that you are going in the right direction and encouragement to carry on going in that direction (Ronnie)

They are there if I need them; someone to talk too; someone that I think I wanna do this but I don't really know how to do it; or if I do this what do you think of it or what will happen (Kyle)

... Erm ... just being able to be there for me. And if I've got any problems they might give me some advice ... they've been a big bone of support for me you know (Matthew)

Others saw support as always being accessible but not intrusive

It's having someone there to help you if you need help. Who is there to give you advice if you are asking for or need advice. Basically its help that's there if you need it (Eddie)

it depends on the level of support the person needs doesn't it. I'm sure if I needed more support ... you know I could call on the group and they would happily do that. You know they wouldn't drop everything but it could be arranged (Max)

[It means] communication, contact and just words of advice. If I needed to sit down and talk to somebody at the other end of the phone about something specific that was bothering me I'd like to be able to do it (Bob)

Given the difficulties of reintegration and the lack of family contact or employment opportunities Core Members were asked to give examples of where the Circle had provided support to them. A lot of the Core Members felt the volunteers had provided them with the necessary encouragement to begin to rebuild their lives:

Boosting my confidence, helping me to give me the erm ... support to put in place the building blocks for what I wanted to change really.... you know making sure that I talked to people, that I dealt with some of the issues I've got with confidence ... (Bill)

For others, it was encouragement to actually restart their life:

Cos when I first went on probation and I got my flat from the council, I used to draw all the curtains and stay in at home and lock me-self in and lock me self away from the world ... and CoSA helped me go out in the world and do different things (Brian)

I think they have helped build up my morale, self-esteem, my confidence and competence – the personal things inside me. Cos of depression, you don't think you suffer from depression but you do, and ... just knowing that there is somebody there to help... at the end of the phone – when it's not switched off! (Dennis)

So yea without that extra support, and push if you like, from the CoSA, knowing all the time that whatever happens that they will be there to support me and get me through it whether it went bad or not. And fortunately it didn't so yea I am grateful to 'em for that (Ronnie)

Core Members felt support was offered by greater socialisation opportunities:

It's that they've encouraged me to go out and meet people and look out for myself and stuff like that (Anthony)

Like when I came out I didn't know anybody, I still don't know an amazing amount of people but I know a lot more people than I did before. And I think that if it wasn't for the encouragement of the Circle I would probably still be at home seven days a week staring at the wall, watching T.V. and playing games (James)

I suppose it's getting to know some new people who aren't necessarily probation people but are part of the community and they can understand what's happened and why I am in the situation that I am in rather than me being worried that I am gonna get beat up or something that I haven't done cos that's the way I used to think (Ryan)

Core Members views on Accountability

There was a good deal of confusion amongst the Core Members as to what was meant by 'accountability' in the terminology Circles of Support and Accountability. The actual word 'accountability' in itself when just presented as a word caused a good deal of confusion:

Accountability? I aint got a clue [laughs] I don't know (Brian).

I don't even know what it means [laughs] (Anthony)

That bit? ... clueless on that...(Ashley)

I struggle with that because I struggle to define accountability, I think I don't really know what it means so I don't know really know how it works. (Carl)

Good question ... are you talking about ... I can't think what the term accountability is in the context of Circles (Dennis)

I have no idea really, I've never really thought about that to be honest. (Matthew)

Well it's very hard if you don't know what the word means! (Stephen)

Accountability is sort of a big word, (Troy)

Nothing less than a dictionary was going to be needed:

I saw that coming and I was trying to think about it but I don't know ... holding you to account, accountability ... can I have a dictionary? (Carl)

*Blimey I would have to get a dictionary out I think to figure it out ...
(Christopher)*

In practice and moving beyond the actual word, the ideas of accountability were realised and understood and the Core Members did try to expand. Most felt that accountability rested with them as the Core Member:

The accountability side of things I've never really got my head around myself. I am presuming that erm ... I am trying to understand what the accountability side means, whether it's that I am accountable for what I tell my volunteers; or if I disclose something which shouldn't have been disclosed; am I accountable; who is accountable, do they have to pass the message on... (Bob)

I don't really understand much about it really but I have to account for my behaviour ... erm ... in confidence with them, how I feel about the offending, how I feel about moving on, future, job, social ... activities ... keeping busy to deter my mind from thinking offending 'forts' (Alan)

Umm... I know this... accountability ... account for your actions and what you do, and be able to explain why you did it ... does that make sense? Account for yourself ... [Core Member sighs] I know what I mean but I can't explain it (Norman)

Taking responsibility basically I think (Pete)

Carl echoed these views but added how the volunteers may also have a role in upholding accountability as well:

I'm not sure exactly what happens but I do know they make minutes of the meeting. They do get written but I haven't read them for quite a while. I have seen them previously but I haven't seen them for quite a while. I don't know whether it happens in the bit I am not there or if they do it afterwards, but I don't know if they've actually been written. ... It was literally what we'd talked about and what had been said.... It goes to the Coordinator (Carl)

For Ryan, however, accountability was only referred to as being for the volunteers:

I don't really know really. I think accountability is that they have to let the professionals know if there is a problem. I think that is basically what it means (Ryan)

While Ryan indicated that he was also responsible for his actions at an earlier stage of the interview, there was a lack of a clear awareness of how this role was achieved by

some Core Members. As the name is Circles of Support and Accountability, this could have quite significant implications which should be addressed.

Core Members Perceptions of Success

The researchers asked Core Members to think and reflect on their time in CoSA and identify any changes they have recognised in themselves since starting in CoSA. Core Members felt they had become more confident to be able to move forward with their lives:

I just kind of feel like I am moving forwards, and I don't know, like from the environment I was in when I was offending, I've moved forwards a long way and everything is getting better and better and better and I just feel like life is improving a lot, mainly because I feel like I am progressing towards university and towards a career and I just feel more confident and at ease with myself than I have done for quite a long time (Carl)

Erm ... I am much more relaxed I am I suppose more outgoing in a way. More socialable. I am relaxed in myself in accepting that I can't change the past, but realising that you can always change the future and having the Circle and family and wider social networks ... for me give more confidence, and I suppose I am now a bit more outspoken that I used to be [laughs] (Ronnie)

For others, the Circle provided some stability to their lives which they felt they did not have previously:

To be honest I think it's the best support I've ever had... Because I've never had anything like this available before. Obviously if I hadn't screwed up then it wouldn't be available to me now, but you know (James)

Well I've got people there! Before I had no-one. It's just getting used to being with people, being out with people, erm ... having a little banter with people cos that's what we all do as people innit. Cos even you have banter with your friends don't ya (Kyle)

Others felt they had gained a new perspective or way of thinking since the Circle:

Now that I am managing to get my life back on track and they are helping to make sure that I don't reoffend, which I know for a fact that I won't ... but it's just helping me move forward and get on with the rest of my life and choose the right path (Anthony)

But I also learnt to try and see it more from the other persons view and see where they are coming from. It doesn't justify what he was saying and all the rest of it but I did try to learn to not go for the jugular as often and in everyday life as well (Henry)

I'd say I am more appreciative of myself and what I've got and also taking responsibility for my lifestyle and my future ... erm looking at things in perspective is what's mainly changed in me (Ashley)

I think my thought patterns have changed, the way I think about things. So my view of offending, my self-safeguarding and the impact of not engaging with people of a certain age and you know kind of keep myself safe. And you know that is done, and this sounds very selfish but I need to look after me, I need to keep myself safe. But PPU said that is good because if I am looking after me, then I am looking after others and it's that awareness of my actions. So I am more aware of ... for an example... if ... if I am say with a young lady sitting next to me, a young girl sitting next to me then I move because that is appropriate. And now I don't engage in young people (Ruben)

Core Members also remarked on the physical changes they or the volunteers had noticed:

Well I feel a lot healthier now cos I've actually lost a bit of weight., cos when I went inside at 15 I was about 15 stone – I was a right little blubber (Richard)

Things 'ave gone really really brilliantly. Cos you know I found it really hard to interact with people ... but they've noticed a vast change in me, ... you know I can give people eye-contact, whereas before I wouldn't really look people in the eye and now I do (Jack)

Was it worthwhile?

Core Members were also encouraged to reflect on whether during their time in Circles they had noticed changes in themselves. All Core Members reported that at least some aspect of their life had improved. The spark for change varied however. Some credited the Circle for this:

I don't think I would have widened my social circle so much. It would have been more family-orientated and maybe I wouldn't have been quite so confident or comfortable with myself to be able to speak to people, or express myself (Ronnie)

Well I think they are brilliant! Cos I've seen all the positive stuff I think it's really good. I've enjoyed coming meeting the people, going out with them (Ryan)

Less drinking, I'm more happy, more able to cope with problems because before I was very depressed and down and ... no motivation at all. But now I am getting more motivated and looking for things and looking for more jobs ... I suppose getting out more as well, being better – until tomorrow (Simon)

Jeezz! My confidence is a hell of a lot higher, I am going out now. I mean at the start I'd just got my own place but I was literally spending pretty much 7 days a week inside my flat staring at the TV or playing on my Xbox. You know I didn't have the confidence to meet other people or to go out and go into a situation where I hadn't been to before but they have helped me (James)

Meanwhile Eddie felt his Circle gave support when he needed it, but when the Circle ended, still provided him with a volunteer who he continues to meet with:

For me ... I am glad I had CoSA at the time, cos as I said earlier I only been out of prison about 3-4 months erm soo ... I'm glad I had them but erm ... so that's a good positive out of it . And I am happy within meself anyway and I am happy that I did it, and like I say I made a friend out of it so I got a bonus out of it [smile] you know what I mean and because Peter knows all about my offences, if I do have any negative thoughts or any problem I've got his phone number so I could phone him up you see, as well as PO. So yea it's been good all round you know what I mean (Eddie)

Other Core Members felt that credit for their changes was broader than just the Circle and it was a multi-level approach, which helped them:

Circles, probation, family, just everyone has been helpful. Like in my family it's been my sister and brother in law; probation it's been up and down and I admit I've been a bit out of hand swearing and been aggressive and that when I've had to explain my offence, which is understandable but not acceptable; and then my Circle, they've just helped me out so much, they are so relaxed and I can talk to them without swearing or anything like that (Anthony)

Well I've gone through the Thames Valley Sex Offender Programme course and realised my faults and things, that's ended now, it finished a few weeks ago ... Getting used to the volunteers, getting more used to them really, we chat about all sorts of things really, my offending, what sort of things I should be doing (Simon)

While all Core Members were able to identify positive changes, some Core Members were still not satisfied with their life:

Er, its different [laughs] it's er, you know, I'm not living at home with my wife and kids so its ... I don't think it can be better. I haven't got a job but I am able to be myself a bit more, (Bill)

[At first] I don't think there was much change cos I don't think I was ready for change (Ruben)

I've changed cos I can open up and talk about my offence now but if I hit a point that I don't wanna talk about it then I will just go stum and just blank everyone. There was even one point when I brought my offence up and then when they tried to get me to extend on it I tried to and then it got too much and then for ages I was ignoring every call I was getting from them – that was [Probation] that was. And then it got to the point that I couldn't be arsed to do anything and I literally blank everyone and locked myself in my flat for two weeks. Only going out to get my dole money, sign on, get my shopping and blank every call even from my mum (Richard)

Even when Core Members spoke highly of Circles and the CoSA volunteers, as said at the beginning of this report, this does not necessarily relate to a success or indicator of effectiveness. Alan was a Core Member who spoke very highly of the Circle but disclosed during the interview that he had previously been recalled to prison during his first participation in Circles:

there are several ways, their kindness, their support, the generosity, the ... concern, they wanted to know where I was going for the next 7-10 days and so if they were taking time off ... It's given me a purpose to move forward, and live an offence free life in the community, and I am immensely grateful and I will be for the rest of my life. Cos without them I would be stuck in the hostel and that is only very similar to prison cells and ... its ... it's a nothing an nobodies life. I mean ... don't get me wrong. ... I didn't go on an outing for the first 5 months I was there. I barricaded meself in my room, I wasn't having meals, I was eating me own bought food. And they practically gave up on me (Alan)

Summary

The Core Members interviewed were able to tell us about life as a person with convictions for sexual offences and the isolation and stigma that they experienced. They expressed their views of CoSA including their early misconceptions; they appreciated the positive side of working with volunteers either directly within the Circle or all through the week by telephone contact and attempted to interpret what was meant by 'support' and 'accountability'. They gave their views of meetings and also of the professionals that they had to work with.

Core Members recounted the discomfort, uncertainty and fears that their 'new' status as sex offenders gave them. Many had lost family, social networks and the familiarity of a home town. In the wider context this isolation could be amplified by adverse press reporting and moving to towns or cities where they knew no-one. The result was often a self-imposed restriction to the home and a withdrawal from the community. The opportunity provided by CoSA, however, even with the initial uncertainties they had of its role, was seen as representing an opportunity to counter some of the barriers to reintegration. Misconceptions included fears of CoSA being an extension of the statutory agencies, especially the police and probation services or being judged by the volunteers. Other Core Members reported being better informed and for them the move to a Circle provoked less anxiety.

Initial meetings were 'scary' for many of the Core Members, especially about meeting a group of complete strangers and talking about their offending. As the routine of the meetings developed, Core Members became more comfortable, settled and recognised the mostly non-judgemental attitudes of the volunteers. Conversations in meetings varied widely with Core Members appreciating the more relaxed and informal discussions over conversations focused on accountability and past offending. The meetings could be challenging for some Core Members and could induce stress for them but on the whole the context of the meetings provided a different type of meeting to that which Core Members had with the statutory sector and it was recognised and appreciated as such.

An unexpected finding was the extent of contact made by telephone outside of the formal meetings. Contact was equally initiated by volunteers and Core Members. The use of the telephone constituted an informal and valued supplement to the formal Circle, not least because contact could be made throughout the whole week if necessary. The existence of this 'virtual' network was another means of countering the isolation they experienced.

Core Members spoke highly of other activities that took them beyond the formal meetings with the volunteers. Those activities included visits to coffee bars, museums, art galleries, sporting events and walks. Meals were also a popular activity of the

Circle to celebrate birthdays and seasonal events. These activities took the focus away from their offending and were seen by Core Members as activities which ‘normal’ people would do.

The opinions Core Members held of the volunteers were largely positive, with many Core Members being grateful for the time given up to help them, the acceptance of the Core Members as fellow-citizens, and for providing a safe environment for the discussion of sensitive topics. Core Members did question the number of volunteers who came with previous experience of working in criminal justice, particularly from the probation service. Some Core Members felt volunteers with a professional background could have difficulties transferring from ‘a Probation Officer’ to ‘a volunteer’.

Opinions of Coordinators were also mostly positive and Core Members were grateful for their reassurance at difficult times and their ability to match their needs with suitable volunteers. Although there were inevitably minor criticisms, commonly about logistical matters, such as room bookings not made, and difficulties in replying to messages. Highly directive interactions with Coordinators were rejected by Core Members and seen as inappropriate.

Understandings of Support and Accountability contrasted. Support was well understood and Core Members were appreciative of the efforts of the volunteers in terms of general encouragement and with specific matters. Accountability on the other hand was a more difficult concept for them to understand. Most Core Members initially were confused by the very word accountability and its meaning, however, many of the Core Members were able to provide instances of where the volunteers had called them to account for their past offending or current ‘risky behaviours’. Generally though the Core Members felt that responsibility to be accountable rested with them.

Asked to reflect on their time in CoSA, the vast majority of Core Members reported feeling more confident, had gained a wider social circle, were becoming more appreciative of themselves and many said their working relationship with statutory

agencies such as the police and probation had improved. Some felt they had gained new perspectives on their lives and more self-awareness as a result of their participation in CoSA. Many credited the Circle as having effected these changes, although others were more circumspect, saying CoSA were just one of a number of influences that had caused them to rethink their life. Overall CoSA, the volunteers and Project Coordinators were seen positively by the Core Members.

**PART FOUR: REVIEW AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter Ten – Review and Recommendations

Introduction

The researchers working on this report received full cooperation from all the participants who make up a Circles Project and *Circles UK*; we would again like to put on record our thanks to everyone who spoke to us. We should also record the high levels of commitment and industry we have observed across the country that goes into providing Circles of Support and Accountability. In the final chapter the researchers have collated the results which have emerged and raise points, which *Circles UK* and regional CoSA projects may wish to give attention to.

The themes we have identified from this study can be categorised under the following headings:

- The changing landscape of rehabilitation that has coincided with this work;
- The nature of volunteering and the volunteers who provide Circles;
- The nature of collaboration by all participants within a CoSA Project; and
- The nature of Support and Accountability with a CoSA Project

The Changing Landscape of Rehabilitation

The ‘management’ and ‘supervision’ of sex offenders in the community following imprisonment has traditionally been by the public statutory agencies. These include primarily the police, probation service and the prisons linked together in the local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA); other agencies cooperate with them. Within these arrangements the approach has arguably been focused on ‘containing’ the released offender. This ‘containment’ approach has been challenged in recent years by the re-emergence of a more welfare styled approach.

Welfare approaches to working with offenders to help them back in to society was somewhat restricted by the mid-1970s doubts about 'what worked'. The resulting move was toward 'just deserts' sentencing and a 'negative' focus on an individual's 'deficits' or criminogenic needs. This movement has been referred to as the Risk, Needs, Responsivity (RNR) approach. By the early 2000s, this 'deficits' approach was challenged by what was seen as a more 'positive' and 'strengths-based' approach; everyone was seen to want to have basic 'primary human goods' in order to live a reasonable life in society. This movement was referred to as the Good Lives Model (GLM). In turn the GLM also fitted with the growing restorative justice approaches emerging at the same time.

Circles of Support and Accountability originated in Canada and started in the UK in 2001. This practice of organising volunteers to help rehabilitate people with convictions for sexual offences back into the community after custodial sentences has gradually spread across the country from its beginnings in the Thames Valley and Hampshire area. Circles of Support and Accountability fitted well with the Good Lives Model.

The governments *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda implemented in 2014 will change the landscape of rehabilitation for people leaving prison. Circles of Support and Accountability and *Circles UK* as their coordinating central body has to find its best and most suitable position within the new panorama that is opening up.

The changes will mean the new National Probation Service will retain only 30% of its former work and the remaining 70% of traditional probation work will move to the private sector. In effect there will be two probation services (public and private) in each given locality running side by side but delivering similar services. Mandatory post-custody supervision will be introduced for those serving sentences of under 12 months and new 'payment by results' regimes will be introduced as incentives to the private sector. The vision is one of more efficient and effective rehabilitative services based on a degree of competition.

The 30% of work left with the National Probation Service will include work focused on public protection, work directly managing those subject to MAPPA and those who pose the highest risk to the public; this will include work with sex offenders. Jeremy Wright the under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice has said:

Responsibility for the initial assessment of offenders, and management of those who are assessed as high risk, will rest with the National Probation Service (NPS). Once the NPS has assumed responsibility for an offender's case, they will continue to retain responsibility even if the offender's risk of serious harm decreases during their sentence. If an offender's risk of harm escalates to high, responsibility for the management of the case will transfer from the Community Rehabilitation Company to the NPS. The number of cases transferred will depend on the outcomes of risk assessments on offenders, and case transfers will happen in a way that ensures public protection, which remains our primary concern (Hansard HC Debates 24 Mar 2014: Column 104W)

An initial assessment would suggest that Circles Projects will not experience the major changes that other parts of the rehabilitative services might experience. High risk sex offenders will continue to be managed by the National Probation Service and if required Circles of Support and Accountability will continue to work in partnership with the NPS. Few changes are anticipated for the police and their Public Protection Units and their role of on-going risk assessment of offenders on the sex offender register.

The voluntary sector will be encouraged to form partnerships with the probation service (public and private). *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects are well placed for this change because the volunteers are committed to what they do with CoSA. *Circles UK* also has established a number of good practices for training and guidance for volunteers. In this way, *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects actually have an advantage over other providers. If the private sector do get involved with the management of sexual offenders, some volunteers might not be attracted to working with the private sector as easily as they have been attracted to working with the public sector. CoSA Projects have an advantage in attracting volunteers to work with offenders because they are mostly charitable organisations working not for profit. Thus they have a greater appeal for the outwardly motivated volunteers, who will arguably prefer working for charities rather than for the private sector.

Volunteers and Volunteering

There was a time when it was felt that only professionals could work with sex offenders and that this was not suitable work for volunteers. That position has clearly changed and Circles Projects are the manifestation of that change.

The Circles Coordinators find the volunteers either an easy group to manage being excellent in their role, enthusiastic and relating well to the Core Members, or they are a potentially difficult group to manage. These difficulties arise because they are volunteers and not 'workers' and at worst they can just walk away from the Circle if they do not like it. Being part of a Circle is a big commitment.

Volunteers are also lay people and as such this is both a strength and a weakness. A strength because they offer a fresh non-professional outlook that represents an acceptance of the Core Member but with the 'man (or woman)-in-the-street's' view. They offer commitment and an immediate set of relationships for the Core Member.

The weakness of the volunteer is that they might miss things that a professional would recognise. The very appearance of the Core Member was cited as a case in point. Volunteers thought that a dishevelled and scruffy looking Core Member was evidence of going 'downhill' where more offending might be about to start, while a smartly dressed Core Member was showing signs of engagement with the world and evidence of probable desistance from offending. The professionals on the other hand, thought smart appearance could denote the opposite and could mean Core Members were already re-offending. Of course, such different interpretations may, just indicate that it is impossible for anyone to identify a sex offender from appearance alone.

The volunteers were also unsure of whether 'accountability' meant accountability for the Core Members original offending or whether it should be applied to future possible offending. An emphasis was put on the initial disclosure of original offending by the Core Member at the start of the Circle but there was uncertainty as to whether this meant a need for constant revisiting of that event in later meetings.

Recommendations:

Recruitment of Volunteers

- Thought should be given to ways of widening the marketing of Circles for a greater cross-section of society to be brought in;
- More balance between ‘ordinary’ members of the public and people with backgrounds in criminal justice should be sought;
- More monitoring and exploration of absences and withdrawals by volunteers should be carried out.

Training for Volunteers

- Regular reviews of training provision and material are recommended;
- More sharing of best training practices at Coordinator forums and via Newsletters is encouraged;
- Short refresher training for volunteers starting a new Circle is encouraged (some projects are already doing this)
- Training should include more content on the isolation and stigma attached to people with convictions for sexual offending;
- Training should be jargon-free for volunteers;
- Training should provide greater clarification and understanding of what is meant by ‘support’ and ‘accountability’;
- Training should provide clarification and understanding of ‘personal information’ ‘privacy’ and ‘confidentiality’;
- Training should help volunteers decide what to report and not report; at present there seems to be uncertainty which could mean systems are silted up with information that is not useful;
- Training should help volunteers better distinguish between the roles of the Police (PPU) Officers, Probation Officers and volunteers;
- *Circles UK* and regional CoSA projects should look into the possibilities to reduce the time gap between training ending and first Circle

Circles and Activities of Volunteers

- Training should cover appropriate other activities that could take place in a Circle;
- Guidance should be given to volunteers on what degree of planning should go into a Circle meeting and how much should be unplanned and spontaneous;
- Guidance should be given to volunteers on whether a Circle should focus on past offences or future behaviour;
- Guidance should be given on suitable venues for meetings (e.g. should probation offices be avoided to make the point that Circles is not a part of the statutory mechanisms);
- Guidance should be provided on ensuring meetings are in ‘safe’ places and not liable to interruption;
- Guidance should be provided on what is the minimum operational size of a Circle should individual volunteers not be available for a meeting; rules on one to one meetings should be clarified;
- Guidance should be provided on what constitutes ‘progress’ in a Circle and of a Core Member;

Communication and Collaboration

Collaboration and ‘working together’ is now a well-established feature for agencies working in the criminal justice system. Working together can be pictured as a continuum from regular arms-length communication, through to various degrees of closer cooperation and coordination and on to elements of merger and ultimately incorporation. Such working together can take place at a high strategic level between organisations or at a lower service delivery level between practitioners on the ground.

There is a recurring debate on the degree to which Circles of Support and Accountability should work closely together with the statutory public services and what levels of independence they should have. Circles Projects that move too close to the probation service might risk incorporation as an extension of the formal supervisory systems provided by the police and probation service. This was something the original CoSA schemes in Canada managed to avoid. They have been said to be more ‘organic’ and independent than ‘systemic’ and embedded with the formal agencies. The difference between Canadian and UK approaches has been noted:

In this country [UK] Circles was replicated as a series of pilot projects funded by the Home Office. Our agenda was to adapt Circles to support the statutory agencies in the successful management of high-risk sex offenders living in the community. While the model for Canadian Circles is organic, the UK Circles model is systemic (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005:6)

The Department of Justice in the USA, sees CoSA schemes as being part of the formal supervisory arrangements:

The Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) model *is a supervision strategy* involving the use of community volunteers to provide support to an individual sex offender. CoSA assists offenders with garnering community resources, while holding them accountable to their self-monitoring plan, typically following completion of legal supervision. (Promoting Evidence Integration in Sex Offender Management: Circles of Support and Accountability for Project Sites (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012 – emphasis added)

Circles Projects in the UK are therefore already seen as more ‘systemic’ and embedded in the formal arrangements where ‘the success of Circles in England and

Wales was, in part, due to the strategic decision to place it within the existing structure of inter-agency cooperation' (Hanvey et al 2011: 62). On the other hand Circles could introduce a countervailing approach to that of the 'containment' policies of the statutory arrangements:

Circles afford this process the ability to manage a specific population of offenders through positive risk management rather than relying totally on restrictive methods of control (ibid: 62).

This systemic position, close to the statutory agencies comes with a number of difficulties and problems. The researchers heard views from the probation service, Police and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers that were appreciative of the added value that Circles brought to their supervisory and management work. This was especially so in terms of the 'personal information' that a Circle could gather from a Core Member and pass on to the professionals. A recurring theme from the professionals interviewed was the idea that Circles gave them 'extra eyes and ears' with which to supervise offenders (see Chapter Eight).

However this is a view contested from within CoSA. The idea that Circles are in existence solely for purposes of being 'extra eyes and ears' has been challenged and that particular phrase was rejected by the chair of one regional Circles Project who was adamant that:

What we are not is a free extension of the statutory services, we are not here to supervise offenders, *we are not the eyes and ears of the police*, and that is very important. If we lose our unique purpose and identity, our values and the reason we exist, then we also lose our ability to intervene positively and to make a difference (Chair of Yorkshire and Humberside COSA writing in their Newsletter *Ever Increasing Circles* No 8 Spring 2014)

Our research found four volunteers who also made this point. They queried whether Circles was becoming too close and tied into the statutory services and in turn becoming too 'professional'.

The position of Coordinators seemed to affirm a very close relationship with the probation service. All the Coordinators we spoke to had strong links to the probation service being either seconded from the service or themselves being ex-probation

officers. One Coordinator respondent told us it would be very difficult to be a Coordinator if you were an ‘outsider’ and did not speak the language of probation:

It helps that I am known. I think had I not been in probation and had come from outside of the area then it would have been a very difficult job for somebody to pick up... I know how to speak to them and they speak to me as a Probation Officer (C2)

This is mirrored by the volunteer respondents. They felt that ‘professional language’ had to some extent infiltrated training efforts. The volunteers found the training ‘very good’, but:

‘it was a little technical, you know so the programmes details, and MAPPA and the technical terms weren’t explained well enough but it’s around the structure of professionals in probation and police. So there is an element of professionalism in this’ (V18)

This systemic closeness is also obvious to some Core Members:

Graham is a prison officer so it’s all down to his shifts as to when he can get time off, and Geoff who is a Probation Officer and he’s got stuff going on as well. Then Sandra, she’s a prison chaplain... I thought that these volunteers were people at random from the community, but they aren’t really cos they are all people who are working with offenders (Phil)

It was perhaps interesting that it was the Core Members who noticed this more than other Circles participants and it was they who commented on the ‘overlap’ in language and attitudes. If the volunteers are meant to be representative of ordinary men and women in the street the use of professionals and ex-professionals from the criminal justice system might undermine this expectation and need to be further examined.

In the following section we provide some points for attention with a particular focus on the Coordinators who are ‘gatekeepers’ and focal points for the collaboration with professionals from Police and Probation.

Recommendations

For Coordinators

- Police and Probation Officers should be properly informed of the Project role and standing of the Coordinators and accept this;

- *Circles UK* might explore the possibilities to appoint volunteers as Coordinators so as to divide the roles between Project managers and volunteer Coordinators;
- The formal role/description of the Coordinator should be re-visited;
- The degree of local discretion accorded to Coordinators by *Circles UK* should be made more explicit;
- *Circles UK* should provide information to Coordinators on national strategy matters;
- Forums organised by *Circles UK* should be explicitly used to showcase best practices and for information exchange between Projects;
- *Circles UK* should review the amount of regular information they require from Coordinators;

Police Officers, Probation Officers and MAPPA Coordinators and Senior Managers

- More general information about CoSA should be provided to all stakeholders on a regular basis; for those new to CoSA, an induction pack should be prepared;
- Guidance should be provided to clarify police contact with volunteers;
- *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects need to manage expectations from professionals regards being an extra set of “eyes and ears”.

Support and Accountability

Support and Accountability are both key to the concept of Circles of Support and Accountability. Support and Accountability are always stated as evenly balanced concepts with one as important as the other. However, the research found evidence that for the majority of stakeholders and volunteers, accountability took priority over support. Some of the volunteers, for example, thought that their Circles training focused more on the accountability side of the equation than the support side:

It definitely made the accountability role more obvious. It didn't come through in the interview. I think I did four or five days training and it came through in that (V17)

A Police Officer who also saw it this way stated:

The more tools I have to monitor my client base in the community the better (S10)

Some commentators have described the two concepts as not opposed but with the support ‘hiding’ behind or being obscured by the accountability side and the latter

even emphasised for public relations purposes. Writing of Canada, Hannem's view is that:

Given the current socio-political climate this public emphasis on accountability may be viewed, not as counterproductive to the restorative roots of the program but as an adaptive strategy that allows the [CoSA] initiative to survive (Hannem 2011)

Our research found that support from a Circle was well received by most of the Core Members interviewed. The Circle might not be able to help with major problems like accommodation or employment but it could provide acceptance, company and it could stop isolation; in those terms it could be very effective. Breaking the cycle of isolation seems to be a key achievement of the Circles and recognised by all.

Understanding and acting on accountability was problematic for participants in Circles. All groups had never considered the term/concept before and when asked to do so found it quite difficult. There was (as stated in Chapter Six) confusion amongst volunteers, for example, over whether accountability referred to 'past' crimes, or 'future' behaviour. Some Circle volunteers continually focused on the original offence that had led to conviction and sentence believing that accountability referred to that behaviour which had brought the Core Member before them. Others thought it was about future behaviour and possible future offending and meant looking for the risky behaviour patterns that might lead in that direction. This was the type of information on current behaviours that the volunteers sought and passed on to the professionals. Some volunteers thought that accountability referred to their accountability as a Circle in eliciting and channelling information from and on the Core Member. This could place an unexpected responsibility on their shoulders, and at worse could lead to a 'fear' that meant they were responsible for any future offending if they had not identified and passed on relevant information.

Volunteers employed ways of getting around this feeling of responsibility by putting it back to the Core Member who could be seen as solely responsible for their own actions:

It only works with people who want to change which is good because I don't think it would work with those who don't want to change! (V4)

The most common tactic for the volunteers was to off-load their perceived accountability by passing information on to the Coordinator. Once they had reported to the Coordinator, they felt relieved of their responsibilities and left it to the Coordinator to determine how to proceed:

*I have got no problems with passing things along if it is even a mild suspicion ... **I don't have to make a decision, my Coordinator does**, so if I give them the information they can make the decision, if I don't give it to them then they can't (V1)*

*If I have something or concern that is on my mind I report it. Then even if it comes to nothing then **it is off my mind then**. Rather that, than something major happening and me thinking I should have said something (V3)*

*With A. we just used to send everything in and **let the Coordinator decide** if it was risky or not (V13) (emphasis added)*

The imbalance between Support and Accountability, and the ensuing problems of communicating the concepts might be the result of the more 'systemic nature' of *Circles UK* and CoSA Projects and their stronger integration with statutory agencies. The researchers are not in a position to question this in principle; however, we wish to make recommendations that improve the present situation in particular with regards to the flow of information. Training for volunteers might focus on these two concepts of support and accountability. The nature of support and accountability and the delicate balance between them should be as fully understood as possible before volunteers start their first Circle.

Recommendations

'Personal Information' flows

- The nature of 'personal information' should be clarified in order to ensure agreed standards and provide certitude for action;
- The nature of 'confidentiality' with respect to Circles Projects should be clarified;
- The meaning of 'accountability' should be clarified and guidance produced for all participants involved in a Circle (Core Member, volunteer and professionals);
- The role of the original offence in the first and following meetings should be clarified; For Coordinators the level of discretion they have in their 'gatekeeper' role of filtering information flows should be clarified and guidance provided;
- The use and production of meeting minutes should be revisited: Are Core Members required to sign these? Policies regarding retention and access to minutes should be developed;

- Policies on informal exchanges of information and the use of that information should be established.

Communication with Core Members

- Core Members should be provided with more guidance in advance on what Circles are about in order to avoid misconceptions;
- Guidelines could be developed on the degree to which volunteers can challenge a Core Member in a meeting;
- Guidance should be produced on the nature of ‘virtual circles’ based on telephone contact and the extent of such contacts.

Conclusion: Circles as an Experience

This report has captured the experience of being part of a Circle Project whether as volunteer, stakeholder or Core Member. The report does not attempt any conclusions on whether the CoSA experience is effective in reducing re-offending. More robust research will be needed for that to be demonstrated. We can report that all participants feel their involvement in CoSA to be a worthwhile exercise and there were no criticisms in principle of CoSA. Core Members found it overwhelmingly useful and helpful. The report highlights a number of difficulties and problems that mainly result from the highly fraught environment in which CoSA operates and the conflicting demands that are imposed on its work. Notwithstanding these issues CoSA is well prepared for the changes in this landscape which lie ahead.

Appendix 1: Interview Schedules

Appendix 1.1. Core Member Interview Schedule

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Circle Meetings

I'd like to start by asking you to think about your last circle meeting. Can you describe it to me?

- Many people there
- Who was there?
- What did you do? (any activities)
- Topics discussed?
- Was it a typical meeting – what happened that was different?

Now looking all the way back to your first meeting with your circle, can you tell me what you remember about your first meeting?

- What was the most memorable thing that happened in that meeting?
- Did you make a disclosure to your circle volunteers?
- What was the response from your volunteers?

How do you think you have changed since your first circle?

- What about the volunteers, do you think they have changed?

Thinking about all of the time you've been involved in CoSA now, can you tell me about your best circle meeting?

- What happened in this circle?
- Why was this your best meeting = What was special about it?
- Are there any other especially memorable meetings?

Also, can you tell me about your worst circle meeting?

- What happened in this circle?
- Why was this your worst meeting = What was bad about it?

- Are there any other meetings that you have not enjoyed or that you felt were unhelpful?

Moving back to your circle again, can you tell me who is in your circle?

- Can you describe the people in your circle to me?
- Who would you describe your relationships with your volunteers?
- Have there been any changes in the volunteers?
- As your circle has progressed, do you think that your volunteers have changed at all?
 - o Has this affected you?

Moving on to the things you do with your circle volunteers now. Can you start by telling me about the activities you do with your circle?

- What kind of activities are you doing in your circle meetings?
- What kind of activities do you do with your volunteers but outside of meetings?
- What kind of activities are they offering you?
- Are there any activities or hobbies that you would like to do but your volunteers have been reluctant to do or have not done with you?
- Advice/practical skills?
- What do the volunteers do with you?
- Improved relationships (family, friends etc...)
- Do the volunteers pass on any other advice?
- What was the most un/helpful?

The final question I'd like to ask about circle meetings is on the specific things you talk about in your meetings?

- Can you tell me what things you discuss?
- Who decides this?
- Your involvement?
- What are the topics you like to discuss?
- Are there any things you don't like talking about with your volunteers?

- Are there any things you would like your volunteers to talk about with you but they don't?
- Do you talk to your circle about your thoughts and ideas?
- Do your volunteers ask you about your thoughts and ideas?
 - o When was the last time you spoke about this?
- Do you ever discuss your offence(s) in meetings?
 - o How are these discussed with your meetings

Based on your experiences of CoSA meetings, if you could pass on any message to your volunteers or *Circles UK*, what would it be?

Support and Accountability

Now I understand a little more about what happens in circle meetings, can you tell me what you have found to be the most helpful thing about your circle?

An important element of CoSA are the terms *support* and *accountability*, can you tell me what **Support** means to you?

- What kind of support do you get it?
- Examples of this happening?
- Are you asking for it?
- Do you think you get enough support?
- Do you feel Individual volunteers do this with you more than others?

What did you think the support would have been when you first heard about circles?

- What do you think has been the biggest support you have got from being in CoSA?

How do you think your circle has helped you with the following:

Contacts

Employment

CV

Housing

Have you discussed these with your circle volunteers?

Moving to **Accountability** now, can I start by asking what you thought this meant to you when you first heard about CoSA?

- And could you describe what you think it means to you and CoSA now that you have been in a circle for # months?
- Do you think your circle give you this?
- Can you give me some examples of the ways you feel that your circle has best held you to account?
 - o *'techniques to stay out of trouble'*
- Would you say any of the volunteers do this with you more than others?

Does accountability involve you discussing your offence/past life with your circle?

Do you think differently now that you have been in CoSA?

- Probe where changed occurred

Have you ever felt stressed (before, during or after) a circle meeting?

- Why
- What happened?

Expectations

Going back down the circles road to when you first heard about CoSA, can you recall how you first heard about CoSA?

- What were your initial thoughts about CoSA?
- What did you expect when you first heard about CoSA?

- What were your motivations for joining CoSA?

And what do you think about CoSA now?

- How happy are you to have been in a circle?
- How well do you think CoSA has met your expectations?
- If you could tell your CoSA project or your volunteers any things you were disappointed with, or have found unhelpful, what would they be?

Reintegration

Thinking more broadly about your life now, can you tell me what is good or better about your life now?

- Why is this good?
- Has it changed since CoSA?
- What do you think is the cause of this change?

Thinking about your life now, what are you missing?

Thinking about your life now, what are you fearful of?

- Do you think CoSA can help?

In which ways do you think life has changed since CoSA?

- Do you feel these have been Positive/negative changes
- How do you think CoSA has helped?

Other programmes

Can you describe your experience of other programmes?

- What are these?
- Did you find these helpful?
 - o What did you find helpful/unhelpful
 - o Why?

How would you compare CoSA to these programmes?

- Is it something new?

What are your plans and thoughts for the future?

- What would be your ideal vision? (*how long will it take to get there?*)
- Where do you see yourself in 1 year from now?
- What about 5-10 years from now
- Where do you see CoSA or your volunteers in that vision?

Appendix 1.2. Volunteer Interview Schedule

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Hear about CoSA & Motivations

This is a rare type of work that you are doing. Not many people want to engage with sex offenders, can you tell me why you wanted to do it?

Has it changed?

What are **YOUR** special talents in dealing with them and assisting them?

What do **YOU** want to achieve in working with these people?

Has this changed over time?

Who do you have in mind when you are working with the Core Member?

Now moving on to your initial thoughts about CoSA now... How did you first hear about CoSA?

What did you understand the role of CoSA to be?

What did you understand your role as a CoSA volunteer to be?

What did the training do?

Do you think it has changed how you work with Core Members?

What were you told about the priorities of CoSA at the training?

Do you think you have achieved this with any of the Core Members you have worked with?

Do you tell anyone about the work you do?

Would you introduce your family to the CM or the CM to your family?

Thinking about your relationship with the Core Member now ...

How many Circles have you been involved in?

Would you say you are able to trust your Core Members?

Do you think trust is something which develops over the course of a circle?

What are the signs that make you think you can trust them?

Do you think Core Members can trust you?

What do you do to make them trust you?

How important do you think you are in the Core Members life?

Can you describe your relationship with the Core Members who you have been in Circles with?

Can you describe your relationships with the other volunteers in each Circle?

CoSA meetings

If we can start with your **most recent** meetings. Can you describe this meeting to me?

Prompts: What did you do?; What Topics did you discuss?; Did you do any activities in the group?

Best meetings – across all Circles you have participated in

What is a good meeting?

Why was it your best?

Can you remember a time when you did something good and thought you could make an impact or achieve something with a Core Member?

And experiences that have been positive?

Any other best moments?

Worst meetings – across all Circles you have participated in

Have you had any bad meetings?

What was bad about these meetings?

Any other unpleasant/unhelpful moments?

Did you ever feel regret about anything you did?

Thinking more generally about what happens in COSA meetings now.

What are the topics which you discuss?

Who decides this?

Are there topics Core Members like and don't like talking about?

How you manage this?

How often do you discuss offences and sexual thoughts or ideas with Core Members?

How is this done?

When was this last done?

What activities have you done with Core Members?

What kind of activities do you think assist the Core Member?

Are there any additional things you have done with Core Members?

i.e. advice/practical skills; improved Core Members relationships

Is there such a thing as a typical meeting?

Is there a danger of routinising meetings? *Focus: avoids talking about offence related factors for instance*

And now if we may move forward and discuss some of the seminal concepts of key underpinnings of your work in CoSA.

Assessing Support

What does support mean to you?

i.e. how do you give support to Core Members?

What do you think about the support you give?

Some people say there is too much support for sex offenders, do you think the circle can give Core Members too much support?

What do you think is the most important level of support the Core Member has received?

Was this something CoSA did or someone else?

The other part of CoSA is Accountability

What does accountability mean to you?

What are the activities you have done with the Core Member which you would say provided accountability?

What are the most frequent kind of 'problems' for Core Members to bring up or discuss with you and the other volunteers?

And the most unusual?

Have you any of these topics made you feel awkward or uncomfortable?

Do you think CoSA should be proactive in looking for issues with Core Members or reactive and wait for issues to emerge?

What do you think you can do to change the Core Members behaviour?

Are you doing things that can control their behaviour?

How are you doing that?

Do you think this provides enough control?

Does your relationship with them enable you to help them control their behaviour?

Have you ever reported a Core Member's behaviour to the circle coordinator?

Did you agree with the report/ not reporting?

Why?

Where there any cases you know which were not reported but maybe should have been?

Reflections and Effectiveness

Can you tell me any changes that you have noticed in the Core Members you have worked with?

Positives

Negatives

What do you think have been the causes of these changes?

Do you think the Core Member will experience a 'loss' when the Circle ends?

What makes you think that a circle has succeeded?

What are the indicators and signs of success or that a Core Member has changed?

The Future

Will you continue to volunteer for CoSA in future?

Why?

Would you join another circle straightaway?

Questionnaire for Volunteers

Could you tell me your age?

How would you describe your gender?

If I may ask a bit about your personal circumstances now:

How would you describe your marital status?

.....

Do you have a family?

.....

Do you have any children?

.....

Could you describe your current living arrangements?

.....

What is your occupation?

.....

Have you had any previous experience working in criminal justice or with offenders?

.....

Have you done any voluntary work before you joined CoSA?

.....

Training and Support

Apart from the initial training you received when you started with CoSA, have you received any additional training?

.....
.....

How long was the period between finishing training and starting with a circle?

.....

Do you think you receive sufficient support from the co-ordinator?

.....

Do you think the support you receive is good enough?

.....

Before CoSA

What details/Information were you given about the CM?

.....
.....

How did you feel having received this information about the CM?

.....

Did your opinions change in any way once you met the CM?

.....

CoSA meetings

How frequently do you meet with the CM you are currently working with?

.....

Was a plan made/devised for the 12 months of the Circle?

.....

Was there any input from Probation or Police in this?

.....

Do you think Police or Probation should be involved?

.....

Have you ever met without the CM being present?

.....

Why?

.....

Ending the Circle

Will the Circle you are currently in continue after 12 months?

.....

Will you stay in contact with the CM after the Circle ends?

.....

Any benefit?

.....

Do you remain in contact with any CMs from previous circles?

.....

Do you think CoSA should run for a determined length?

.....

What should this be? / Why?

.....

Do you think a CoSA can go on for too long?

.....

Improvements to CoSA

Are there any improvements that you could recommend to the operation of CoSA?

.....
.....

Appendix 1.3. Coordinator Interview Schedule

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Can you start by giving me a brief description of your role as a circle co-ordinator?

What does this role involve?

What is the main part of your work?

What is your previous background/experience of working in criminal justice?

How many Core Members are you currently working with?

Is there a maximum number of Core Member can you work with?

There are many different styles of CoSA projects, could you please describe the organisation and structure of this project?

Perspectives on CoSA

How do you first hear about CoSA?

What were your initial impressions?

How did you get involved in CoSA?

What did you understand the role of CoSA to be?

And has this changed?

What did you understand your role as a co-ordinator to be in this organisation?

And has this changed?

What were the skills you felt **you** would bring to the organisation?

What were your thoughts about working with volunteers in this area?

Do you think CoSA is a good example of voluntary sector involvement in criminal justice?

What do you understand the role of *Circles UK* to be?

What are the most rewarding things about being a co-ordinator?

What is the most stressful part of being a co-ordinator?

What is the most time consuming part of your job?

Training

What is your involvement in training volunteers?

Can you briefly describe what you do with volunteers in their initial training?

What is the purpose of this?

Do you feel anything is missing from the *Circles UK* training guidelines?

What are the priorities you pass on to volunteers in their training?

What is the message you try to convey in the training?

Do your partner agencies have any involvement in training the volunteers?

If no: would you like this?

Do you think the volunteers can receive too much training?

Is volunteer training necessary for good relationships with Police/Probation?

Do you provide any follow-up/refresher training?

Logistics

Do you agree that working with sex offenders requires inter-agency work?

Where do you feel CoSA fits in broader working of criminal justice?

How much contact do you have with other agencies?

How would you describe your relationships with these other agencies?

How often do you discuss Core Members with volunteers; Police and Probation?

Where do you think communication with CoSA works at its best?

What do you think are the obstacles in communication between CoSA and other agencies?

What is your role through the length of the circle?

What is your involvement in circles meetings?

What is your involvement in the ending of the circle?

On a day-to-day basis what is your involvement with the volunteers?

How often do you communicate with the volunteers?

i.e. do they come to you or do you chase them?

Overall how would you describe your relationship with the volunteers?

Referral Process

Where do your referrals come from?

Can you briefly talk me through the referral process?

What are the factors you consider when choosing to refer a CM?

How do you assess suitability for CoSA?

Who do you think is not suitable?

Could you describe a suitable and not suitable Core Member?

Are reasons recorded for the referral or non-referral of a sex offender?

Are reasons recorded why a CM is accepted or rejected?

What is done with this information?

Are you in a position to refuse Core Members?

Do you feel under any organisational pressure to accept CMs/some CMs?

How would you describe your relationship with individual Core Members?

Support

How do you think CoSA is able to best support Core Members?

In what ways can they practically do this?

What sort of things do you tell volunteers about supporting Core Members?

In what ways have you supported the Core Member?

In what ways do you think the COSA have helped in ways others can't?

Can you provide examples of where the CoSA has given the CM support?

Do you think volunteers can give too much support?

In what ways do you support the volunteers?

How do you explain the support function of COSA to other agencies?

General Accountability in CoSA

How do you feel the circle is able to hold Core Members to account?

Can you provide examples of where this has happened?

Does accountability, in the context of CoSA, involve discussing the offence and sexual thoughts with the Core Member?

Do you think CoSA should be proactive in looking for issues with the Core Member or reactive and wait for issues to emerge?

Accountability for Core Members?

How do you explain accountability to Core Members?

How do you instil trust in Core Members?

Moving to Volunteers now:

How do you describe the accountability role to volunteers?

Do you provide advice and examples of how the volunteers can hold Core Members to account?

Such as?

Do you feel the volunteers are capable of doing this?

Are there any things volunteers cannot or should not do with Core Members related to accountability or control or the Core Members behaviour?

Accountability to other agencies:

How do you explain the role of CoSA to other agencies?

Have you had any difficulties with this concept from Police/Probation?

What do you do if you get complaints from Police/Probation?

What is your response in such instances?

*Part of the role of CoSA as I understand it involves **disclosing information** from circle meetings to partner agencies.*

What does this entail?

What happens with the information you pass on?

With hindsight, have there been any occasions when you could have reported things but did not?

Have there been any times when you reported something and no action followed but you felt it should have been?

In terms of reporting behaviours, how do you explain this to Core Members?

What is their reaction/response to this?

Have you ever had to report a Core Members behaviour?

Trust

How do you instil trust in the Core Member?

How much do you trust individual Core Members?

How much do you trust the volunteers?

How do you promote trust in CoSA by partner agencies?

Your Assessment

Overall, have you seen changes in those who have participated in CoSA?

- positive and negative?
- What is the cause of this change?

How do you define/measure a 'successful' circle?

What do you think CoSA do well?

Are there any areas you feel CoSA needs to improve?

Where do you feel CoSA can produce change where other agencies can not?

Why is this?

Are there any ways in which CoSA could be better supported by partner agencies?

What do you see the future being for CoSA?

Do you think CoSA is a viable scheme?

In what ways?

If you had a magic wand and could change anything what would it be?

Appendix 1.4. Police-Probation Officer Interview Schedule

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What is your role – a job description?

In what capacity do you work with CoSA?

How is your agency / organisation involved - what kind of contract do you have with CoSA?

What are your roles and responsibilities in relation to your work with CoSA?

Perspectives on CoSA

How did you get involved with CoSA?

What do you understand the role of CoSA to initially be?

And now?

What were your thoughts about working with volunteers in this area?

Why did you work with CoSA?

Have you heard about *Circles UK*?

What do you understand the role of *Circles UK* to be?

Training

Should the volunteers receive training?

What should training involve?

Do you know what training the volunteers get?

How much do you think they should get?

Do you think the training is effective?

What type of training should they get?

Have you ever been to a CoSA training event?

Logistics/ Current Activities

Do you agree that working with sex offenders requires inter-agency work?

How much contact do you have with other agencies about the work of CoSA?

What are their views of CoSA?

And what about your colleagues?

How often do you discuss CMs with the co-ordinator or volunteers?

What do you discuss?

Is the CM present?

Where do you think communication with CoSA works at its best?

What do you think are the obstacles in communication between agencies?

Do you think CoSA is a good example of voluntary sector involvement in criminal justice?

Do you have any influence or involvement in what the circle does?

It is my understanding that part of what COSA does, means you receive a summary of each meeting.

What do you do with information passed to you by the co-ordinator/volunteers?

Have you ever received information about a Core Member from a circle that has led to you being concerned about their behaviour?

Referral

Are you involved in, or have previously referred a Core Member?

What are the factors you consider when choosing to refer a CM?

How do you assess suitability for CoSA?

Who do you think is not suitable?

Could you describe a suitable and non-suitable Core Member?

How does the referral process work formally?

Are reasons recorded for the referral or non-referral of a sex offender?

Are reasons recorded why a CM is accepted or rejected?

What is done with this information?

Do you feel under any organisational pressure to refer CMs/some CMs?

Assessing Support

Support

Circles are supposed to give support to Core Members, what do you think this means?

What should it be?

What do you think has been the biggest support the CM has received from CoSA?

In what ways do you think the CoSA have helped the CM where you may not have been able to help?

Accountability

Do you think CoSA can provide Accountability?

Are volunteers capable of doing this?

What do you think they should do?

What can they do?

What can they **NOT** or should not do?

Does accountability, in the context of CoSA, involve discussing the offence and sexual thoughts with the CM?

Do you think CoSA should be proactive in looking for issues with the CM or reactive and wait for issues to emerge?

Control

Do you think CoSA can control a Core Member?

Have they done it?

Is it enough?

What is lacking?

Is it fulfilling your needs?

Are there any things you would have liked the CoSA to have done with CMs but they didn't?

Are the CoSA given specific tasks to do with a particular Core Member?

Has a CM's behaviour ever been reported to you by the circle coordinator or volunteers?

Did you agree with the report/ not reporting? Why?

Do you think there were cases when things should have been reported but were not?

Do you think there were cases when things should have not been reported but were?

Your Assessment

Do you think that CMs have changed since been in CoSA?

What do you think have been the causes for this change?

What do you think CoSA do well?

Where do you think that CoSA fail and don't do well?

Do you think they achieve things that nobody else could?

In what ways do you think CoSA is better than your agency/ organisation?

Why do you think they do it well?

What improvements do you think could be made to CoSA?

What things do you think your agency/ organisation do better to help CoSA?

Why do you think this?

What things do you think CoSA could be doing to help your work?

Do you have any other comments or question related to this interview?

Appendix 1.5. MAPPA Coordinator-Senior Manager Interview Schedule

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Can you briefly describe what your role is to me?

What are your responsibilities in this role?

In what capacity do you work with CoSA or its clients?

How is your agency/ organisation involved with CoSA?

i.e. What kind of contract and so on

What are your roles and responsibilities in relation to your work with CoSA?

Perspectives on CoSA

How did you get involved with CoSA?

What did you understand the role of CoSA to be initially?

And what is your understanding of CoSA now?

What were your thoughts about working with volunteers in this area?

Why did you work with CoSA?

Should the volunteers receive training?

In your opinion what should this training involve?

Do you know what training the volunteers get currently?

Do you think this is sufficient for the work they do?

Have you heard about *Circles UK*?

What do you understand the role of *Circles UK* to be?

Logistics/Current Activities

Do you agree that working with sex offenders requires inter-agency work?

How much contact do you have with the CoSA co-ordinator?

Where do you think communication with CoSA works at its best?

Where do you the obstacles to good communication are?
Has CoSA facilitated better working relationships with other agencies?
What is your view of the voluntary sector working in criminal justice?
How closely involved are you with CoSA activities?

It is my understanding that part of what COSA does, means a summary of each meeting is produce for partner agencies.

Have you ever received such summaries?
What do you do with information passed to you by the co-ordinator/volunteers?
Have you ever received information about a Core Member from a circle that has led to you being concerned about their behaviour?
- *either the Core Member or the volunteers*

Referral

Do you have any involvement in the referral of sex offenders to CoSA?
How do you assess suitability for CoSA?
Who do you think is not suitable?
Could you describe a suitable and not suitable Core Member?

Assessing Support

Circles are supposed to give support to Core Members, what do you think this means?
What should it be?
What do you think CoSA does well?
In what ways do you think the CoSA have helped the CM where you may not have been able to help?

Accountability

Do you think CoSA can provide Accountability?
Are volunteers capable of doing this?
What can they do?

What can't they do?

Do you think CoSA should be proactive in looking for issues with the CM or reactive and wait for issues to emerge?

Control

Do you think CoSA volunteers can control Core Members?

Are you aware of any instances where they have controlled or changed the behaviour of a Core Member?

What is lacking in the way CoSA operate in this aspect?

Is it fulfilling your needs?

Your Assessment of CoSA

In your overall experience have you seen change in Core Members who have participated in CoSA?

What do you think has been the cause of this change?

What do you think are the best things about CoSA?

Where do you think CoSA needs to be improved?

Do you think CoSA offers additional value that police and probation cannot normally offer Core Members?

Would you like to see more or less CoSA?

Expansion, decrease

Do you think CoSA offers value for money?

How do you measure success of CoSA?

Do you have any other comments or question related to this interview?

Appendix 2: Statistics

Appendix 2.1. Core Member Sample Details

Core Member	Age Range	Gender	Length of Interview
Alan	48-53	M	2hrs 36
Anthony	18-23	M	2hrs 43
Ashley	18-23	M	1hr 35
Bill	36-41	M	2hrs 48
Bob	36-41	M	1hr 52
Brian	42-47	M	2hrs 18
Carl	48-53	M	2hrs 10
Christopher	18-23	M	1hr 50
Dennis	60-65	M	2hrs 33
Eddie	48-53	M	2hrs
Gerard	48-53	M	2hrs 03
Gordon	54-59	M	2hrs 33
Henry	60-65	M	3hrs 11
Jack	36-41	M	2hrs 09
James	36-41	M	2hrs 11
Joe	36-41	M	2hrs 52
Kyle	36-41	M	1hr 55
Matthews	60-65	M	3hrs 27
Maurice	60-65	M	1hr 49
Max	30-35	M	1hr 23
Norman	54-59	M	2hrs 48
Pete	48-53	M	2hrs 45
Phil	42-47	M	3hrs 38
Richard	18-23	M	1hr 47
Ronnie	60-65	M	2hrs 30
Ruben	36-41	M	3hrs 31
Ryan	24-29	M	2hrs 02
Simon	48-53	M	1hr 48
Stephen	30-35	M	2hrs 18
Troy	36-41	M	3hrs 17

Appendix 2.2. Volunteer Sample Details

Volunteer	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Occupation	Criminal Justice Experience	Voluntary Experience	Circles Participation
1	62	M	Married	Other	Yes	Yes	3
2	62	F	Married	Student	Yes	No	1
3	33	F	Single	Other	Yes	Yes	3
4	35	F	Separated	Student	No	Yes	2
5	23	F	Single	Student	No	No	2
6	61	F	Married	Student	Yes	Yes	1
7	55	M	Civil Partnership	Other	No	Yes	3
8	39	F	Married	Student	Yes	Yes	1
9	73	F	Married	Retired	No	Yes	6
10	24	F	Married	Student	Yes	Yes	1
11	30's	F	Single	Other	Yes	Yes	1
12	61	F	Married	Retired	No	Yes	2
13	64	F	Divorced	Retired	Yes	Yes	6
14	42	F	Separated	Other	No	No	3
15	70	M	Married	Retired	Yes	Yes	2
16	27	F	Single	Other	Yes	Yes	3
17	41	F	Single	Other	Yes	Yes	4
18	52	M	Married	Other	Yes	Yes	3
19	37	F	Married	Student	Yes	Yes	2
20	64	F	Widow	Retired	Yes	Yes	2

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