

Previous research Background & Theory :

Circles of Support and Accountability, and community reintegration for those at risk of sexually reoffending

Abstract: This article outlines the role, scope and methodology of Circles of Support and Accountability, (CoSA) now well established in Canada, some regions of the USA, England, Wales and Scotland, and most recently in the Netherlands and Belgium. CoSA provides moderate to a high risk sex offender who is re-entering society but wishing not to reoffend (the 'core member') with a Circle of four to six local volunteers who support, monitor, but crucially also hold accountable to their offence-free intentions. The volunteers are assisted and supervised by a professional and experienced Circle Coordinator and by professionals who are involved with the sex offender's treatment and after care. Across the three European CoSA partners there are currently 80 Circles in operation; 65 in England and Wales, 14 in the Netherlands and one in Belgium. First recidivism studies in Canada, where the model was initiated show a 83% reduction in recidivism in CoSA participants compared to a matched control group. The theoretical model of change and conditions for effectiveness are described. Theoretical support for its effectiveness is outlined. Finally, the implications of further European dissemination are discussed.

Hanvey, S. and Höing, M. (2012) 'Circles of Support and Accountability, and community reintegration for those at risk of sexually reoffending', EuroVista, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 55-60

Link to article:

http://www.euro-vista.org/default.asp?page_id=100&shopgroeporderid=34&shopgroepid=53

A Community-Based Approach to the Reduction of Sexual Reoffending: Circles of Support and Accountability

Summary (from book cover): A Circle of Support and Accountability is a group of trained volunteers who meet on a regular basis with a high-risk sex offender living in their community. This innovative strategy, which helps the offender both to maintain accountability and to reintegrate into the community, is proven to be effective in combating child sexual abuse.

This book explains this pioneering approach to managing the behaviour of sex offenders in the community. It provides an overview of sexual abuse, sex offenders and their management, and the Circles approach. The authors set out the development of Circles since they were first started in Canada, the principles of Circles and how they work in practice, and the evidence and evaluation of their effectiveness. The use of Circles is brought to life by testimonies from four sex offenders and four volunteers who tell, often movingly, why they joined a Circle, their experiences, and the effects upon them.

This unique book, on a ground-breaking approach to managing sex offenders, will be of great interest to professionals across social care and the criminal justice system, including prison and probation services, the police, social workers, counsellors and all those working with sex offenders, including volunteers.

Hanvey, S., Philpot, T & Wilson, C. (2011). A Community-Based Approach to the Reduction of Sexual Reoffending: Circles of Support and Accountability. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 192pp. ISBN: 9781849051989

No link to the article available

Circles of Support and Accountability for Sex Offenders in England and Wales: Their origins and implementation between 1999 - 2005

Abstract: Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) are an innovative, volunteer-based means of supervising sex offenders, usually upon release from prison, which were 'transplanted' from Canada to England and Wales at the turn of the 21st century. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Lucy Faithful Foundation, were concerned with both the extreme demonisation of sex offenders in the press, and with the need to find better ways of safeguarding children from sexual abuse. The Home Office was simultaneously developing new mechanisms of public protection and funded three COSA pilot schemes between 2002 and 2005. The processes of development and implementation were essentially informal and improvised, crucially dependent on the choices, decisions, energy, status and reputations of particular individuals in particular places and networks. Circles flourished at the intersection of a nascent official concern with public protection, and the determination of faith-based professional activists (and others) to reaffirm the redeemability of sex offenders, but there was never a "structural logic" which made the emergence of COSA inevitable. Drawing on information from the key players, this paper details the processes by which they came into being.

Nellis, M. (2009) 'Circles of Support and Accountability for Sex Offenders in England and Wales: Their origins and implementation between 1999 - 2005', British Journal of Community Justice, Vol. 7, No. 1

Link to article: www.cjp.org.uk/bjcr/volume-7-issue-1/

Circles of Support and Accountability: An international partnership in reducing sexual offender recidivism

Abstract: Sexual offenders are unwelcome in virtually every community. The mere thought that such a person might possibly move to one's community inflames negative public sentiment beyond seemingly every other contemporary social issue. Until recently, some released sexual offenders in Florida were living under bridges. Now, they have been evicted from even those locations. In other jurisdictions, there is virtually no place within city limits that is not within 1,000 feet of a park, school, daycare, or community centre. As a society, we are slowly but surely banning sexual offenders from our midst. We are forcing sexual offenders into lives of secrecy. However, given that secrecy is a hallmark of sexual offending, are we, in our haste to rid ourselves of these people, potentially making the situation worse?

Wilson, R., McWhinnie, A. and Wilson, C. (2008) 'Circles of Support and Accountability: An international partnership in reducing sexual offender recidivism', Prison Service Journal, Issue 178, pp. 26-36

Link to article: www.cjcc.ca/CoSA_2010/The_Prison_Service_Journal.pdf

Circles of Support and Accountability: Engaging Community Volunteers in the Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders

Abstract: The release to the community of a sexual offender is frequently accompanied by intense coverage in the news media. Too often, the type of coverage these releases receive serves only to force many offenders into hiding or out of one community and into another. Forced to move to another community, the scapegoating process starts all over again. It is well known that secrecy and isolation are critical elements in sexual offending behaviour. Thus, forcing offenders into hiding does nothing to increase community safety or offender accountability and, arguably, increases the risk that new victims will be created. The most problematic releases

are those in which sexual offenders arrive in a community with few or no links, and with little access to appropriate treatment and supervisory services. This article outlines a restorative approach to the risk management of high-risk sexual offenders in Canada using professionally-facilitated volunteerism. The Circles of Support and Accountability model grew out of an ad hoc, faith-based response to a situation much like that described above in South-Central Ontario, Canada. The resultant pilot project has since reached its twelfth anniversary and the model has proliferated both nationally and internationally.

Wilson, R., Mcwhinnie, A., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M. and Cortoni, F. (2007) 'Circles of Support and Accountability: Engaging Community Volunteers in the Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders', The Howard Journal, Vol. 46, No 1, pp. 1-15

Link to article: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2007.00450.x/abstract>

Circles of Support and Accountability: A Community Justice Initiative for the Reintegration of High Risk Sex Offenders

Abstract: This article is an examination of the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) initiative in Canada as a community response to the release of high-risk, warrant-expired sex offenders. In this paper, we examine the socio-political context in which the COSA initiative emerged and provide a theoretical analysis of the underlying philosophy of the program. Conceptual links are drawn between the practice of COSA and Braithwaite and Mugford's 14 conditions of successful reintegration ceremonies and, drawing on our experiences as volunteers with a COSA initiative in a Canadian city, we suggest three best practice conditions for the creation of successful circles. We also show how COSA balances its twin, sometimes competing, objectives: 'No one is disposable' and 'No more victims.'

Hannem, S. and Petrunik, M. (2007)'Circles of Support and Accountability: A Community Justice Initiative for the Reintegration of High Risk Sex Offenders', Contemporary Justice Review, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp.153 - 171

Link to article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10282580701372046>