

Previous research Effectiveness and other quantitative studies:

Can Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) Work in the United States? Preliminary Results From a Randomized Experiment in Minnesota

Abstract: In 2008, the Minnesota Department of Corrections implemented Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability (MnCOSA), a sex offender reentry program based on the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) model developed in Canada during the 1990s. Using a randomized experimental design, this study evaluates the effectiveness of MnCOSA by conducting a cost-benefit analysis and comparing recidivism outcomes in the MnCOSA (N = 31) and control groups (N = 31). Despite the small total sample size (N = 62), the results from Cox regression models suggest that MnCOSA significantly reduced three of the five recidivism measures examined. By the end of 2011, none of the MnCOSA offenders had been rearrested for a new sex offense compared with one offender in the control group. Because of less recidivism observed among MnCOSA participants, the results from the cost-benefit analysis show the program has produced an estimated US\$363,211 in costs avoided to the state, resulting in a benefit of US\$11,716 per participant. For every dollar spent on MnCOSA, the program has generated an estimated benefit of US\$1.82 (an 82% return on investment).

Duwe, G. (2013) 'Can Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) Work in the United States? Preliminary Results From a Randomized Experiment in Minnesota', Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 143-165. (First published in August 2012)

Link to article: <http://sax.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/07/26/1079063212453942>

Circles South East: The First 10 Years 2002-2012

Abstract: This article describes the first 10 years of the implementation of Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) in the management of sexual offenders in South-East England by Circles South East (CSE). The Circles of 71 core members are reviewed in detail, with reference to demographic data, offense and sentencing histories, risk assessment data, and considerations regarding Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. A group of 71 comparison subjects who were referred to CSE and deemed suitable for but did not receive the service was identified. Follow-up behaviors of both groups are examined (including all forms of reconviction, breach of orders, and prison recall). Over a comparable follow-up period of 55 months, the incidence of violent and contact sexual reconviction in the comparison group was significantly higher than for the Circles cohort. Comparisons are made between expected and actual levels of sexual reconviction, with the Circles cohort showing lower than expected rate of sexual reconviction but not to a statistically significant degree.

Bates, A., Williams, D., Wilson, C. and Wilson, J. (2013) Circles South East: The first 10 years 2002-2012, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, published online 24th April 2013, DOI: 10.1177/0306624X13485362

Link to article: <http://ijo.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/04/22/0306624X13485362.full.pdf>

Ever-increasing circles: A descriptive study of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability 2002-2009

Abstract: This paper gives a history of Hampshire and Thames Valley (HTV) Circles, an organisation which recruits, trains and supports volunteer members of the public who are formed into small groups meeting weekly to provide support and monitoring of post-conviction sex offenders (Core Members) in the community. It describes the origins of Circles of Support and Accountability in Canada and gives an account of its implementation in the UK and a summary of the findings of the previous study of the first 16 HTV Circles Core Members in 2006 and some discussion about the challenges inherent in evaluating this kind of community-based and volunteer-led intervention. It describes demographic data on 60 Core Members followed-up for an average period of 36.2 months, including offence and sentence category, treatment history and statistically assessed risk of reconviction. It provides evidence of progress by these Core Members across a range of dynamic risk factors, as well as information on sexual reconviction, recall to prison and dropout from Circles. Three case studies provide details of Circles practice in community risk management of sex offenders. The paper discusses proposed areas of further research into Circles work, as well as the development of new techniques for measuring and managing dynamic risk factors displayed by Core Members in the community.

Bates, A., Macrae, R., Williams, D. and Webb, C. (2012) 'Ever-increasing circles: A descriptive study of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability 2002-09', Journal of Sexual Aggression, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 355-373. (First published in February 2011)

Link to article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2010.544415>

Circles of Support & Accountability: a Canadian national replication of outcome findings

Abstract: Circles of Support & Accountability (COSA) started 15 years ago in Ontario, Canada, as an alternate means of social support to high-risk sexual offenders released at the end of their sentences without any community supervision. The pilot project in South-Central Ontario has since assisted almost 200 offenders. Projects based on this model are now in place in the United Kingdom, several jurisdictions in the United States, and throughout Canada. Initial research into the efficacy of the COSA pilot project showed that participation reduced sexual recidivism by 70% or more in comparison with both matched controls and actuarial norms. The current study sought to replicate these findings using an independent Canadian national sample. A total of 44 high-risk sexual offenders, released at sentence completion and involved in COSA across Canada, were matched to a group of 44 similar offenders not involved in COSA. The average follow-up time was 35 months. Recidivism was defined as having a charge or conviction for a new offense. Results show that offenders in COSA had an 83% reduction in sexual recidivism, a 73% reduction in all types of violent recidivism, and an overall reduction of 71% in all types of recidivism in comparison to the matched offenders. These findings suggest that participation in COSA is not site-specific and provide further evidence for the position that trained and guided community volunteers can and do assist in markedly improving offenders' chances for successful reintegration.

Wilson R.J., Cortoni F., McWhinnie A.J. (2009) Circles of Support & Accountability: a Canadian national replication of outcome findings. Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research & Treatment. 21(4):412-30

Link to article: <http://sax.sagepub.com/content/21/4/412.abstract>

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professionally-Facilitated Volunteerism in the Community-Based Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders: Part One - Effects on Participants and Stakeholders

Abstract: This study presents evaluation data from the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) pilot project in South-Central Ontario, Canada - specifically regarding the effect that COSA has had on the community and those personally involved in the project. Results suggest that the COSA initiative has had a profound effect on all stakeholders: offenders, community volunteers, affiliated professionals, and the community-at-large. Being involved in a COSA appears to have greatly assisted many high-risk sexual offenders released to the community in remaining crime-free, with many reporting that they likely would have returned to offending without help from COSA. Community volunteers involved in the project reported a perceived increase in community safety as a result of COSA, as well as a belief that Core Members were motivated to succeed in the community. Professionals and agencies (for example, police officers, social services professionals, administrators, and other similar professionals) identified increased offender responsibility and accountability, as well as enhanced community safety. Survey results obtained from members of the community-at-large showed substantial increases in perceived community safety in knowing that high-risk sexual offenders in the community were involved in the project. The results of this study are discussed within a framework of empowering communities to participate in the effective risk management of released sexual offenders.

Wilson, R., Picheca, J. and Prinzo, M. (2007) 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professionally-Facilitated Volunteerism in the Community-Based Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders: Part One - Effects on Participants and Stakeholders', The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, Vol. 46, No 3; pp. 289-302

Link to article: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2007.00475.x/abstract>

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professionally-Facilitated Volunteerism in the Community-Based Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders: Part Two - A Comparison of Recidivism Rates

Abstract: This study represents an examination of recidivism rates associated with the pilot project of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) in South-Central Ontario, Canada. A group of 60 high-risk sexual offenders involved in COSA after having been released at the end of their sentence were matched to a group of 60 high-risk sexual offenders who had been released at the end of their sentence, but who did not become involved in COSA. Results show that the offenders who participated in the COSA pilot project had significantly lower rates of any type of reoffending than did the offenders who did not participate in COSA. Specifically, offenders who participated in COSA had a 70% reduction in sexual recidivism in contrast to the matched comparison group (5% vs. 16.7%), a 57% reduction in all types of violent recidivism (including sexual - 15% vs. 35%), and an overall reduction of 35% in all types of recidivism (including violent and sexual - 28.3% vs. 43.4%). Further, a considerable harm reduction function was noted in the COSA sample, in that sexual reoffences in this group were categorically less severe than prior offences by the same individual. This function was not observed in the matched comparison group.

Wilson, R., Picheca, J. and Prinzo, M. (2007) 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professionally-Facilitated Volunteerism in the Community-Based Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders: Part Two - A Comparison of Recidivism Rates', The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, Vol. 46, No.4; pp. 327-337

Link to article: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2007.00480.x/abstract>

Circles of Support & Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario

Abbreviated extract from the Executive Summary of the report: Ten years after the initiation of the first Circle, similar projects have been seeded in all Canadian provinces, several jurisdictions in the United States of America, each of the member countries of the United Kingdom, and interest has been indicated by such countries as the Netherlands, South Africa, and Bermuda. These projects have come about as a result of positive outcome data originating from the MCCO (Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario) pilot project. This report represents a formal review of this project.

To examine the impact of the MCCO project, two studies were conducted. The first study consisted of a survey that examined the experiences of the various members of COSA: Core Members (the offenders); Circle Volunteers, and Professionals and Agencies affiliated with the project. In addition, members of the community-at-large were surveyed to determine their views regarding COSA, and its existence in their community.

Study 2 consisted of an examination of the impact of COSA on recidivism. A group of 60 high risk sexual offenders involved in COSA after having been released at the end of their sentence were matched to a group of 60 high risk sexual offenders who had been released at the end of their sentence, but who did not become involved in COSA. Offenders were matched on risk; length of time in the community; and prior involvement in sexual offender specific treatment. The average follow-up time was 4.5 years.

Wilson, R., Picheca, J. and Prinzo, M. (2005), 'Circles of Support & Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario', Correctional Service of Canada

Link to report: <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/research/r168-eng.shtml>

Circles of Support: A restorative justice initiative

Abstract: This paper addresses the increasing difficulties faced in community-based management of sexual offenders in Canada. Those offenders at particularly high-risk to re-offend (e.g., sadistic rapists and serial child molesters) often receive indeterminate sentences, and are rarely released to the community prior to death or incapacitating illness. However, many other high-risk offenders are released from custody at the end of a determinate sentence, often without the benefit of adequate supervision or treatment. In a restorative justice initiative managed by the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario, 30 high-risk sexual offenders released at sentence completion were provided with community support in the form of Circles of Support and Accountability. A brief overview of the Canadian penal system and its handling of sexual offenders is given to provide the social and political framework in which many current restorative justice projects have been undertaken. It is argued that traditional punitive measures have done little to address risk to the community and that effective interventions in the community must not be limited to time under warrant. The Circles of Support initiative focuses on the need to engage the community in the offender reintegration process. Data are provided regarding recidivism rates in comparison to actuarial projections determined from STATIC-99 (Hanson&Thornton, 1999) survival curves. Recidivism across 30 high-risk offenders, with a mean follow-up time of 36 months, currently stands at less than 40% of that predicted by STATIC-99.

Wilson, R.J. & Prinzo, M. (2001). *Circles of Support: A restorative justice initiative*. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 13, 59-77

Link to article: www.robinjwilson.com/articles/WilsonCOSA2001.pdf