



## **Circles of Support and Accountability**

No More Victims

No One is Disposable

*Circles of Support and Accountability* (CoSA) is a community-oriented, restorative-justice based reintegration program that assists people in their effort to re-enter society after a period of incarceration for a sexual offense. These people, referred to as *Core Members*, participate in the program voluntarily and are not mandated by the judicial system.

A “Circle” involves a group of three to five screened, trained volunteers who commit themselves to support and hold accountable the Core Member who is more often than not labelled high risk to re-offend. Because he has been held to the end of his sentence, he is returning to the community with little or no support available to him and often with much media attention.

The Circle meets together regularly and is guided by a written and signed agreement called a *Covenant*. Volunteers also meet individually with the Core Member to provide assistance with re-entry challenges (housing, employment, medical attention, etc). The Core Member commits to open communication with the group regarding his identified risk factors, problematic behaviour, attitudes, etc., all in an effort to end his pattern of sexual offences and increase public safety.

Volunteer members come from all walks of life, ranging in age from 19 and up. They are professionally supported and work in conjunction with community agencies, treatment providers like psychologists, parole or probation officers, the police, and the courts.

---

### **For More Information/ Pour obtenir plus d'information, contactez-nous :**

#### **CoSA Halifax**

Shirley Dixon, Coordinator/Coordonatrice, sdixon-cosa@bellaliant.com, 902.492.0569

#### **CoSA Moncton**

Christina Farnsworth, Coordinator/Coordonatrice, christina@monctonchaplaincy.com, 506.851.6384

---

## **Cercles de Soutien et de Responsabilité**

Plus jamais de victimes

Personne n'est jetable

Les *Cercles de soutien et de responsabilité* (CSR) font partie d'un programme de réintégration axé sur la justice réparatrice et la collectivité qui aide les personnes à réintégrer la société après une période d'incarcération pour infraction sexuelle. Les personnes, que l'on désigne comme les *membres principaux*, participent au programme de leur propre gré et ne sont pas mandatées par le système judiciaire.

Un « cercle » est un groupe de trois à cinq bénévoles choisis et formés qui s'engagent à appuyer et tenir responsable le membre principal qui, plus que moins souvent, est étiqueté comme une personne à risque élevé de récidive. Étant donné qu'il a été détenu jusqu'à la fin de sa sentence, il retourne dans la collectivité avec peu d'aide ou aucune aide et il est souvent la cible de beaucoup d'attention médiatique.

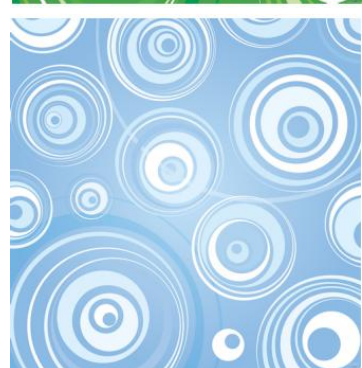
Le cercle, qui se réunit régulièrement, est guidé par une entente écrite et signée appelée *covenant*. Les bénévoles rencontrent également le membre principal individuellement afin de l'aider à relever les défis de sa réintégration (logement, emploi, attention médicale, etc.). Le membre principal s'engage à communiquer ouvertement avec le groupe concernant ses facteurs de risque identifiés, son comportement posant problème, ses attitudes, etc., dans un effort pour mettre fin à ses habitudes d'infractions sexuelles et pour améliorer la sécurité publique.

Les membres bénévoles proviennent de tous les horizons et ils ont au moins 19 ans. Ils sont appuyés de manière professionnelle et travaillent de concert avec les organismes communautaires, des fournisseurs de traitement comme des psychologues, des agents de libération conditionnelle ou des agents de probation, la police et les tribunaux.

# Circles of Support and Accountability

Restorative Practices and the  
Reintegration of High Risk Sex  
Offenders

Shirley Dixon and Christina Farnsworth



# History

- In the early 1990s Canadian legislation was changed to allow violent and/or sexual offenders considered high risk to reoffend, to be held to the end of their sentence.
- 1994, Hamilton, Ontario – Rev. Harry Nigh and a group of experienced volunteers formed the first CoSA
- A second Circle soon followed in Toronto, Ontario



# History

In light of the success of these first 2 Circles, Correctional Services Canada (CSC) and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) funded other pilot projects in Canada.

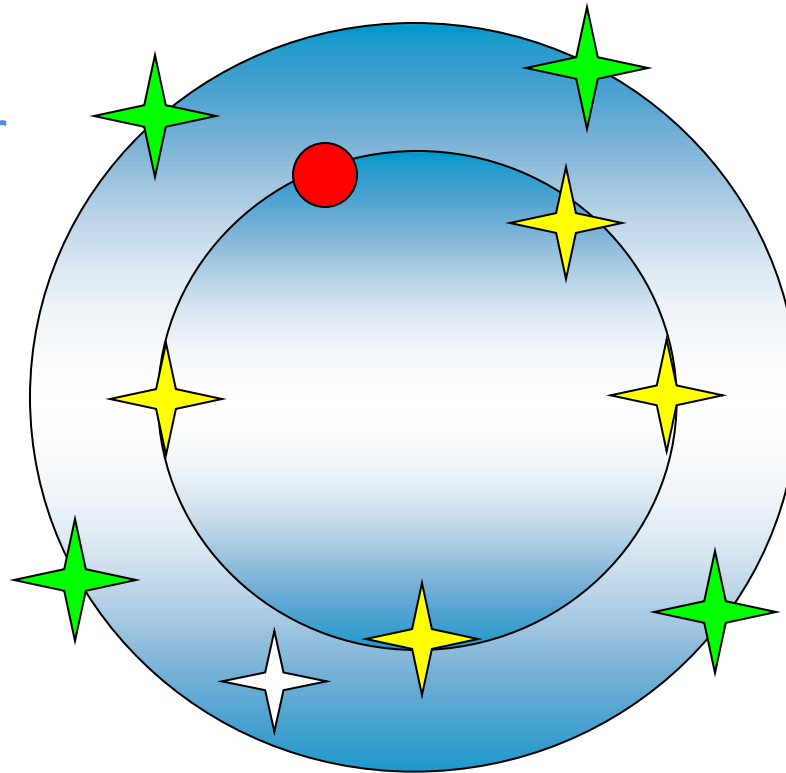
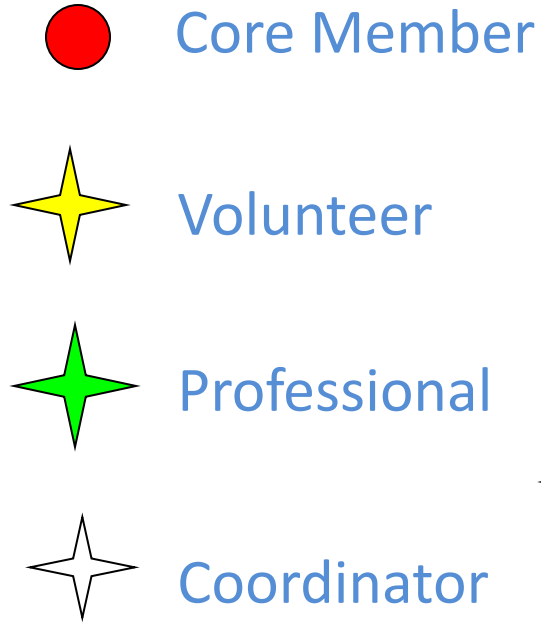
Three research studies have demonstrated CoSAs to be highly effective.

- 83% less sexual reoffending than the matched comparison group
- 73% less violent reoffending
- 71% less reoffending of any kind
- 74% fewer charges and convictions\*

\**Wilson, Cortoni & McWhinnie, (2009)*

# The Model

- Wraparound
- Intentional Community of Care



# Restorative Practices

## Where do we fit?

People are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.

-International Institute for Restorative Practices

### CoSA

- is **voluntary**
- **shares** decision-making
- is **empowering**
- is meant to be **transitional**



# CoSA in the Maritimes

## National Context

- 5 year demonstration project in Canada funded by the National Centre for Crime Prevention designed to research CoSA's effectiveness on a large scale
- 15 sites across Canada participating

# CoSA in the Maritimes

## Partnership

- CoSA Moncton, New Brunswick (since 2003)
- CoSA Halifax, Nova Scotia (since 2010)
- Raising the profile of CoSA both inside the institutions and in the community
- Streamlined referral process
- Unique partnership in institutions and volunteer training





# CoSA in the Maritimes

## Challenges

- Increasing Public and Institutional Awareness
- Reaching Core Members
- Attracting Volunteers

# CoSA

## A growing concern



The Canadian CoSA model has garnered considerable international attention.

Circle projects exist in...

- ❖ England, Ireland, and Scotland
- ❖ California, Minnesota, Colorado, Washington, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, with more on the way
- ❖ All Canadian provinces
- ❖ Interest generated in Latvia, Netherlands, New Zealand, and other international jurisdictions





**Thank you for your interest**

