

————— **Research Report** —————

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

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**Circles of Support & Accountability:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The latter part of the 20th Century was witness to considerable renewed interest in restorative approaches to crime and offender management. Ironically, professional interest in restoration increased as the public's cries for more punitive measures rang out loud and clear. Politically, such measures as detention, specialized peace bonds, registries, and long term supervision orders were instituted as a means to demonstrate that the system was serious about "getting tough on crime". Meanwhile, meta-analytic reviews of the effects of incarceration and rehabilitative programming continued to suggest that longer, harsher sentences were not likely to achieve the sort of value-added that either the public wanted or the government hoped to achieve. No offender population has been more affected by these perspectives than sexual offenders.

Understandably, the public has rather strong views about sexual offender risk management, and this has been reflected to a degree in policy and practice. However, one simple truth remains: the vast majority of sexual offenders receives determinate sentences and, as such, will return to the community. Experiences in the past 10 years have clearly demonstrated the need for a coordinated approach to sexual offender reintegration, but serious shortfalls in both service provision and offender accountability have remained.

The Circles of Support & Accountability initiative began, quite simply, as an innovative response to a single set of circumstances: a high risk, repeat, child sexual abuser was released to the community from a federal penitentiary. The response of the community was swift - picketing, angry calls for political intervention, heightened media attention, and 24-hour police surveillance. In response to the offender's pleas for assistance, a Mennonite pastor agreed to gather a group of congregants around him, to offer both humane support and a realistic accountability framework. Following a similar intervention with another offender a few months later, the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario (MCCO) agreed to sponsor a pilot project called the Community Reintegration Project, and the Circles of Support & Accountability (COSA) movement was born.

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 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.

The results from that first study show that the COSA initiative has had a profound effect on all stakeholders: offenders, community volunteers, affiliated professionals, and the community-at-large. Core Members generally reported that while they initially felt mixed emotions about COSA, over time, they felt thankful for having its help. In addition, 90% of Core Members reported that in the absence of COSA, they would have had difficulties adjusting to the

community, and two-third felt they likely would have returned to crime without the help from COSA.

Circle Volunteers reported that they felt the community experienced an increase in community safety as a result of COSA and the Core Member would have reoffended had he not been involved in COSA. The majority of Volunteers also reported that they felt supported by the COSA organization and its associated professionals.

Professionals and Agencies surrounding COSA included police officers, social services professionals, and administrators and other similar professions. A majority of these professionals had been involved with COSA for at least 3 years. The Professionals/Agencies respondents indicated that what they liked the most about COSA was that it increased offender responsibility and accountability, and that community safety and support are the focus of the project. In addition, while a third of them, however, reported that they would somewhat change the guidelines governing COSA to add more structure and boundaries between Core Members and Volunteers, three quarters felt that the project should be expanded.

Finally, results from the survey of the community-at-large showed that 68% of respondents from the public reported they would feel safer if they found out that a high risk sexual offender in their community belonged to a Circle. They felt that an offender who participates in a Circle would be receiving additional support and supervision. They also felt that his involvement would indicate that he was motivated not to re-offend

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. For the purpose of the study, recidivism was defined as having a new sexual offense, or for having breached a condition imposed by the Court. Only official documentation was utilized and, in most cases, this information came in the form of CPIC (Canadian Police Information Check, a national database of offense histories) records indicating that a charge had been laid or a conviction registered.

Results show that the offenders who participated in COSA 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 has been noted in the COSA sample, in that sexual reoffenses in this group were categorically less severe than prior offenses by the same individual. This function was not observed in the matched comparison group. Overall, COSA participants have been responsible for considerably less sexual, violent, and general offending in comparison to their matched compatriots, ultimately contributing to savings both financially and, more importantly, in regard to human suffering.

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The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario, the Government of Canada, or the Correctional Service of Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

The release to the community of a sexual offender is frequently accompanied by intense coverage by the media which, ultimately, forces many offenders into hiding or out of one community and into another, where the process starts all over again. This state of affairs is counterproductive to both offender integration and community safety. Secrecy is a critical element of sexual offending, and forcing offenders into hiding does nothing to increase community safety or offender accountability.

In the summer of 1994, a low functioning, repeat child molester was released at his Warrant Expiry Date (i.e., the end of his sentence-WED) to the city of Hamilton in South-Central Ontario. This release was accompanied by considerable media attention and public outcry. The Hamilton Police Service instituted around-the-clock surveillance, reportedly at a cost of many thousands of dollars, and community groups picketed the offender's residence. However, in a bold and unprecedented move, a Mennonite pastor from a small urban congregation agreed to offer assistance to the offender. The Reverend Harry Nigh gathered a small group of members of his church and asked them to volunteer some of their time to help this offender establish himself in the community. This was the birth of Circles of Support & Accountability (COSA-see Silverman & Wilson, 2002; Wilson, Huculak, & McWhinnie, 2002; Wilson & Picheca, in press; Wilson & Prinzo, 2001) although, at the time, it was really a rather *ad hoc* approach to assisting an offender's reintegration to the community. When a similar offender was released a few months later in neighbouring Toronto, the Reverend Hugh Kirkegaard, a colleague of Rev. Nigh's, decided to try the same approach. A short time later, the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario (MCCO) accepted a small contract from the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to establish a pilot project to investigate whether Rev. Nigh's approach could be operationalized and more broadly implemented. Parallel to that endeavour, a research protocol was established to ascertain the efficacy of Circles of Support & Accountability in promoting community safety. This report presents the results of that research.

COSA Mission Statement

To substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting released men in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive, and accountable lives.

Correctional Service of Canada (2002)

Target population

The COSA initiative was originally conceived as a means to fill a gap in service left by government policy. Essentially, those at highest risk of reoffense were being detained until the end of their sentences (i.e., to Warrant Expiry Date-WED), where they were released without a formal process of aftercare. As such, COSA projects have generally set their sights on men released after having completed their entire sentence, and who have been judged to be at high risk to reoffend. In fact, the general rule of thumb has been to target individuals who seem most likely to fail, due to a lack of prosocial support in the community. Those who are likely to attract significant media attention have also been targeted.

Goal of the project

The goal of COSA is “to promote successful integration of released men into the community by providing support, advocacy, and a way to be meaningfully accountable in exchange for living *safely* in the community” (CSC, 2002). In doing so, safety is enhanced for the community, particularly where risk exists for women, children, or other vulnerable persons. Simply put, COSAs promote safety for victims (past or potential) by validating their needs for healing and continued safety while maintaining that ex-offenders are held accountable for behaving responsibly. In return, his rights as a citizen are protected.

Circle mechanics

Although originally conceived as being ideally comprised of one ex-offender (known as the Core Member) and seven community volunteers, difficulties in volunteer recruitment necessitated a revision and a realistic Circle size is now five volunteers. Each COSA has at least one primary volunteer who, in the initial phase of Circle development (typically 60 to 90 days), will meet with the Core Member virtually every day. It is expected that the other Circle Volunteers will be in contact with the Core Member, at a minimum, on a weekly basis during this initial phase. This enhanced degree of coverage during the beginning of the Core Member’s time in the community provides him with support as he meets treatment, social, and other needs. In addition to these individual meetings, the full Circle meets on a weekly basis. A COSA is a relationship scheme based on friendship and accountability for behaviour. As is expected in any

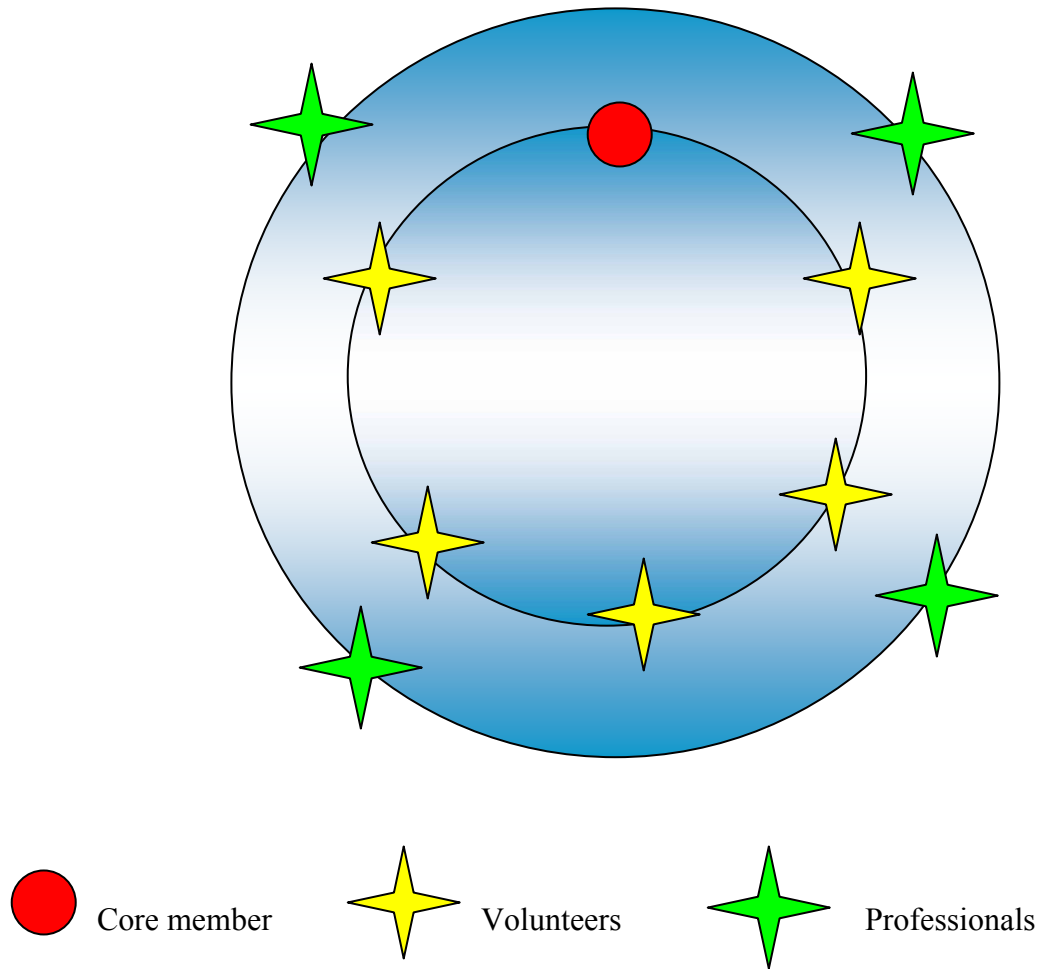
friendly relationship, openness is key. The motto “no secrets” is held close to the hearts of all involved as this is seen as the method by which accountability is most likely to be maintained.

From the inception of the project, it was anticipated that a Circle’s involvement in a Core Member’s life would be necessarily long-term, potentially continuing for years.

It was also expected that demands on members would decrease as the Core Member adjusted to his personal responsibilities in the community. However, it appears that we seriously misjudged what a COSA could (or would) become. Essentially, COSAs have become surrogate families for many Core Members. What was supposed to be a stopgap for a crack in the criminal justice system’s management of offenders has become a way of life.

In addition to the inner Circle comprised of the Core Member and his volunteers, there is an outer Circle of supportive community-based professionals, typically psychologists, law enforcement officers, correctional officials, or social service workers. These professionals also volunteer time in order to support the inner Circle in its work. Because the volunteers are not intended to replace therapeutic or other formal means of accountability, there are times when questions arise that require advice or service from professionals. Having a pool of knowledgeable and supportive professionals is also key to the success of the model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of a COSA



Volunteer recruitment

By far the biggest challenge faced by the MCCO COSA project has been that of volunteer recruitment. And, given that this initiative is entirely reliant on the participation of volunteer community members, it is understandable that this issue has occupied much of the Project Coordinator’s time. Part of the difficulty has come in ensuring that the motives and capabilities of potential volunteers are appropriate to the task of providing support and accountability for high risk sexual offenders in the community. The interested reader is encouraged to peruse the guidelines for volunteer screening and training established by CSC’s Chaplaincy Division (CSC, 2002).

To date, the vast majority of the volunteers associated with this project have come from the faith community, with virtually all denominations represented. This population has been described by some as having a “calling” for volunteerism, or that they are “natural born volunteers”. However, recruitment of volunteers, even from this reportedly proactive population, has also proven difficult. The Project Coordinator has approached various local congregations looking for potential volunteers or other support. However, in some cases the result was a request for assistance with a problematic member of the congregation, not necessarily accompanied by a pledge to assist from that congregation. As the project has matured, and as word of its existence has spread, volunteers from secular backgrounds have also come forward. Nonetheless, volunteer recruitment remains an issue of critical importance to the long-term existence of COSA.

Recruitment of professionals has also, at times, presented difficulties. Generally, the COSA project sought to include professionals already involved in the Core Member’s life in the community (e.g., the family physician monitoring medications and other similar issues). The biggest challenges centered largely on getting professionals to understand, accept, and support the work of the Circle(s). Specifically, some professionals have had great difficulty with the idea that volunteers involve Core Members in their family and social circles.

Volunteer training

COSA volunteers were never meant to be seen as an alternative to proper professional care in the community for high-risk / high-needs offenders. Rather, the training regime instituted by the COSA project is intended to ensure that volunteers have enough knowledge of the dynamics of sexual offending to be effective in their role as volunteers. Essentially, through training, volunteers become more knowledgeable members of their community. Being educated on how to recognize the signs of impending relapse assists volunteers in knowing when to involve professional assistance in the risk management process. The core components of the training program are provided prior to volunteering in an actual COSA, with continuing education opportunities available via partnership with local professionals.

The first step in training, which actually provides an opportunity for screening of potential volunteers, is a half-day orientation session during which the basics of the project are outlined. This is available in two formats, one for potential volunteers and another for

professionals willing to volunteer expertise to the project. Once volunteers are screened-in following the orientation session, they progress through a four-phase training regime, consisting of an additional four days (or equivalent) and followed by placement in a Circle. The phases are: 1. “The Core Workshop” (one day), 2. Skill Building (two days), 3. Forging a Circle (one day), and 4. Walking With a Core Member. The actual topics of training are discussed in the aforementioned guidelines (CSC, 2002)

Resourcing

The MCCO COSA project has functioned almost exclusively on monies received under contract from the Correctional Service of Canada. This contract represents a unique approach by CSC, in that the government has no technical authority to supervise or finance the management of offenders not currently serving a sentence. The funding was provided, interestingly, not on the basis of a legal responsibility but, rather, as a reflection of the government’s moral responsibility to both the community and ex-offenders. The funds received as a result of the contract have been used primarily to hire a part-time Project Coordinator and four part-time project facilitators (one in Hamilton, two in Toronto, and one in Peterborough). However, expenses have also been incurred with respect to rental of office space, purchase of office and other supplies, travel expenses, and rental of pagers to assist in maintaining regular contact with the Core Members. Generally, financial stability has been an issue of critical importance in ensuring the long-term viability of the project. To date, this issue remains tentative.

EVALUATION: DO CIRCLES WORK?

The Corrections literature in the 1990s, and continuing into the 21st Century, has been dominated by “what works?” and “evidence-based practice”. Canadian correctional workers have been greatly influenced by the “risk, need, and responsivity” concepts introduced by Andrews and Bonta (2003), which state that effective interventions are those which match treatment intensity to offender risk, while ensuring that criminogenic needs are precisely targeted in a manner which gives the offender ample opportunity and motivation to change in the desired direction.

One critical aspect of the evidence-based practice movement is the need to empirically demonstrate that an intervention is achieving the desired goal. Project effectiveness has been traditionally gauged by relative rates of recidivism between treatment subjects and matched comparison subjects; however, given relatively low base-rates in many offense categories, particularly with sexual offenders (see Barbaree, 1997), *statistical* significance has often been difficult to achieve. As such, other researchers (see Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996) have suggested that we consider the *social* significance associated with decreases in recidivism that may not reach the traditional statistical $p < .05$ level. In the evaluation that follows, we endeavoured to assess the data from both perspectives, in considering not only the rates of reoffending, but also the impact the project has had on a variety of community stakeholders.

The evaluation of the COSA pilot project in South-Central Ontario was accomplished in two phases. The first study examined the experiences of various COSA stakeholders. The second study compared a group of ex-offenders in a Circle with a group of matched ex-offenders not participating in a Circle.

STUDY ONE

METHOD

Measures

Survey questionnaires were produced to sample the experiences of each of four COSA stakeholder groups: Core Members, Circle Volunteers, Professionals affiliated with the project, and members of the Community-at-Large. A survey was constructed specifically for each group, with all surveys including a section requesting demographic data. For the Circle Volunteers, survey content included previous volunteer and COSA experience and attitudes regarding COSA. The Core Member survey addressed criminal history, initial experience with COSA (i.e., upon release), current experience with COSA, and attitudes regarding COSA. The questionnaire devised for professionals and agency members surveyed experience with COSA and attitudes regarding COSA. Members of the community-at-large were asked to share their feelings and attitudes regarding COSA and its existence in their community.

Procedure

Surveys were distributed to the Core Members, Circle Volunteers, and Professional/Agency members through several means. Some questionnaires were distributed to Core Members and Circle Volunteers following a brief presentation regarding the purpose of the survey. Surveys were also circulated during administrative meetings, with the questionnaires then being distributed to Core Members and Circle Volunteers during subsequent meetings (e.g., surveys were provided to the Project Coordinator who then gave them to relevant Circle Volunteers, who then passed them on to associated Core Members). Otherwise, surveys were emailed to administrators and Circle Volunteers, who then distributed them to other Circle Volunteers or to Core Members, or the surveys were mailed directly to potential participants. The surveys were distributed to the Community sample primarily through prearranged workshops/lectures, faith communities, and places of employment. Regardless of the means of distribution, all respondents were provided with a package that included a letter of introduction and consent, one of the four survey questionnaires constructed specific to the particular group, and a stamped addressed envelope in which to return the completed survey.

Participants

Core members.

Thirty-seven surveys were distributed to past and current Core Members. Twenty-three surveys were returned completed, one was returned incomplete, and the survey of one past Core Member was returned undeliverable (“return to sender”). Overall, there was a 65% response rate (24/37). The Core Member sample consisted of 24 male offenders who have been convicted of a sexual offense and have since completed their sentence and are living in the community.

In response to the relatively low response rate in this group, we attempted to ascertain why some Core Members had refused to complete questionnaires. In some cases, literacy was a major issue. The most common reason for a Core Member’s refusal to complete the survey was due to a generalized mistrust of researchers and other persons affiliated with the correctional system. Simply put, when they found out that the researchers were employees of CSC, they flatly refused to be involved.

Circle volunteers.

Eighty-four surveys were distributed to past and present Circle Volunteers, of which 57 were returned completed, three were returned incomplete, and the survey of one past volunteer was returned undeliverable (“return to sender”). The response rate was 68% (57/84). The Circle Volunteer sample consisted of 35 men, 21 women, and one case where gender was not specified (N = 57). In terms of occupation, 25% identified themselves as being retired. Of the remaining 75%, the majority (48%) reported working in the helping services field (i.e., counselling).

Professional/Agency members.

Twenty surveys were distributed to professionals and agency personnel who had provided consultation services to the project on at least one occasion. Sixteen were returned, for a response rate of 80%. The Professional/Agency members sample consisted of 12 men and four women. In terms of employment, there were several different types of occupations represented. One-quarter of the sample was employed in law enforcement and 31% worked in social services. The remaining respondents were either administrators, managers, or did not specify their occupation.

Community-at-large.

Initially, there were 176 community respondents (65 men, 107 women, and four did not specify gender). However, respondents who indicated that they were employed in the area of

criminal justice or who had prior volunteer experience in the correctional system were selected out, as we did not wish to bias this particular sample by including persons who might be favourably disposed towards the correctional system. As a result, this sample was reduced to 77 (34 men, 41 women, and two did not specify gender). Analyses were conducted only on this subsample. In terms of occupation, 27% were students, 23% worked in the helping service field, and 20% worked as administrators/managers. Twenty percent did not specify their occupation. The response rate for the community sample is unknown as most were distributed in large quantities.

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the four samples.

Table 1. Demographic information

	Core Members (N=24)	Volunteers (N=57)	Professionals (N=16)	Community (N=77)
Gender				
Male	100%	63%	75%	38%
Female	0%	37%	25%	62%
M (SD) Age	48 (11)	55 (14)	48 (9)	40 (15)
Marital Status				
Married/C-L	0%	57%	94%	62%
Div/Sep	38%	25%	6%	11%
Widowed	4%	4%	0%	1%
Never Married	58%	14%	0%	25%
Education				
≥ 8 years	21%	0%	0%	0%
9-13 years	54%	9%	6%	8%
College	8%	9%	6%	43%
University	0%	30%	19%	33%
Graduate School	8%	51%	69%	16%
Other	8%	2%	0%	0%
Dependant Children				
0	87%	61%	44%	41%
1	0%	17%	13%	14%
2+	13%	23%	43%	45%

RESULTS

Core members

The majority of respondents were repeat offenders (provincially or federally). While 67% reported having a previous conviction for a sexual offense, 33% reported having a previous conviction for an assault-related offense. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents also indicated that they had previous conviction(s) for property related offense(s).

For the 83% of respondents who indicated previous incarcerations, 26% reported having an inter-incarceration period (i.e., time in the community between sentences) of less than six months, whereas approximately one-half reported being in the community for two years or longer before being incarcerated again. In terms of inter-incarceration experience, 67% reported experiencing loneliness and 56% experienced lack of support. Sixty-seven percent found the experience of being out and alone challenging.

The respondents reported that they first learned of the COSA project from various sources; namely, other inmates (25%), psychologists (21%), volunteers (13%), and community chaplains while on institutional visits (13%). Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were in the community for more than two years and 17% were in the community for less than six months prior to responding to this survey.

Initial and current experiences with the COSA.

Several of the survey items addressed the Core Members' experiences at the onset of their joining a Circle ("initially") and at the time of completing the survey ("currently").

Initially, why did you enter a Circle?

Eighty-three percent of the respondents reported that they decided to enter a Circle because they did not have any other form of social support. Approximately two-thirds reported that they were willing to try anything that would help them with their reintegration into the community. Negative community reaction to their release was the motivation for just over half of the respondents entering into a Circle.

Initially/currently, how did you feel about being in a Circle?

In terms of their initial feelings about being in a Circle, almost all of the respondents expressed that they were thankful, anxious, and/or relieved for having this type of help available. Sixty-one percent were proud of their involvement, and one-third felt supported by others and were confident that they would be able to cope with difficult situations that may arise. One-third

of the respondents experienced negative feelings, such as concerns about lack of confidentiality, skepticism that their involvement will make a difference, and feeling pressured by others to participate in a Circle. Twenty-nine percent were angry about having to be involved in the project.

In terms of their current feelings about being involved in a Circle, reductions in negative feelings were noted. Specifically, fearful feelings dropped by approximately 20% and anger feelings dropped by approximately 10%, while feelings of confidence increased by approximately 10%.

Initially/currently, I thought/think the COSA was/is going to...

At the onset of their participation in a Circle, 74% of the respondents reported that they believed that the Circle was going to help them adjust to life in the community. Three-quarters believed that the Circle was going to provide them with supportive people to talk with. Seventeen percent of the respondents thought the Circle would provide them with a role model.

After having at least some experience with the project, however, some respondents changed their perceptions. In particular, 86% believed that the project helped them adjust to the community and 48% thought the project provided a role model.

Initially/currently, how would you describe your relationship with Circle Volunteers?

Initial experiences with the Circle Volunteers were quite positive. Between 52% and 70% of respondents reported that they got along with everyone, that the Circle Volunteers were very supportive of them, and that they were very honest and went out of their way to help them.

The way in which Core Members described their relationships with Circle Volunteers became considerably more positive after having some experience with the project. In fact, more Core Members reported that they got along with everyone (52% then versus 90% now) and that the Circle Volunteers were very supportive of them (61% then versus 86% now).

How did the Circle help you cope or adjust to the community when you were first released?

When first released, approximately two-thirds of the respondents reported that the Circle helped them cope/adjust to the community by providing assistance with practical issues such as finding a job or getting identification papers and providing emotional support. Sixty-five percent reported the Circle provided them with an opportunity to socialize. These results remained constant after having some experience with a Circle.

When you first joined, what do you think you got from the Circle?

The majority of the respondents (92%) reported that when they first joined the Circle they experienced a sense of support and acceptance by others. An increase in anxiety/pressure in terms of attending to accountability structures (e.g., Circle contract, Peace Bonds, prohibition orders imposed by the Court) was experienced by 62% of the respondents. Finally, 39% reported that the Circle provided them with a realistic perspective of their position in the community. Briefly, many Core Members failed to grasp that they had to earn the trust and acceptance of society.

When considering their current experience with their Circle, the rates regarding support and acceptance and anxiety/pressure changed minimally: 88% reported experiencing a sense of support and acceptance by others and 67% experienced an increase in anxiety/pressure. More importantly, offenders became more realistic about their position in the community (62% now versus 39% then).

What do you think might have happened if the program did not exist?

The respondents were asked to reflect upon what their experience would have been like if the COSA project did not exist. The vast majority of the respondents reported that they would have become lonely, isolated, and powerless. Ninety percent reported they would have had more difficulty adjusting to the community. Approximately two-thirds reported they would have had difficulty with relationships and would have turned to crime.

Circle Volunteers

Sixty-three percent of Circle Volunteers reported that they were first made aware of the COSA project through friends or family members who either had information about it or who were actually participating in a Circle. Previous experience with corrections or contact with a Core Member provided 40% of the Circle Volunteers with knowledge of the COSA project. Twenty-eight percent of Circle Volunteers learned of this project through interactions with their faith community.

For a large number of the Circle Volunteers (72%), the transition from first becoming aware of the project to actually becoming involved was motivated by an interest in working with this population. Approximately 30% of the Circle Volunteers were motivated by wanting to give something back to their community. Identification with the offenders (through personal experiences or family histories of victimization) was the impetus for approximately one-fifth of

the Circle Volunteers to become involved in a Circle. Slightly more than 10% thought this would be an exciting experience to have.

Approximately 70% felt that the Circle Volunteers experienced a sense of community and 38% reported that they experienced increased self-worth as a consequence of their involvement in the project. Approximately 30% reported that they experienced an emotional bond to others and one-quarter reported that they experienced friendship within the context of the COSA project.

Experience working with Core Members.

Some interesting differences were revealed when initial and current experiences of Circle Volunteers with Core Members were examined. Initially, 32% felt anxious that they would not be able to deal with difficult situations. However, this reduced drastically when considering their current experience, with only 4% reporting such feelings. In addition, 51% initially indicated that they were confident that they would be able to cope with difficult situations; however, only 27% felt this way currently. Sixty percent of the Circle Volunteers felt they were initially supported by the organization; however, this was reduced to 23% when considering their current experience. Lastly, 91% were initially hopeful that they would be making a difference in a former offender's life; however, this was reduced to 43% when considering their current experience.

In terms of the Circle Volunteers' relationship with the Core Members, the vast majority of respondents (92%) felt they were at least somewhat positively received. Only 25% reported that they experienced some pressure to assist the Core Member in a way that made them uncomfortable. Among those Circles with Core Members who experienced difficulties (e.g., lapses or a breach of conditions), 44% of the respondents noted that the Circle was extremely supportive of the Core Member, 12% reported a moderately supportive approach, and 7% reported that the Circle was only somewhat supportive. A majority of the Circle Volunteers also noted that their Circle was effective at recognizing when a Core Member was experiencing difficulties.

"Technical requirements".

Regarding the time commitment required of being a part of a Circle, 84% of the Circle Volunteers felt it was moderately or totally manageable. No respondents reported that the commitment was unmanageable. Circle Volunteers reported that the frequency of Circle

meetings often depended on the needs of the Core Member (32%), although weekly meetings were also common (36%).

Circle Volunteers reported that they were available to respond to the needs of the Core Member in approximately 75% of instances. In cases where they were not available, they were always able to ensure that another Circle Volunteer made telephone contact.

While the vast majority of Circle Volunteers reported that they were at least moderately satisfied with their Circle (93%), only 35% reported that they would not change anything about their Circle if they had the opportunity. Of the changes that they would like to see, 23% reported they would make the Circle larger, 19% reported they would include more social activities, and 14% reported they would like to see more youthful members.

How COSA benefits the various parties.

Almost all of the Circle Volunteers (96%) reported that they believed the Core Member felt supported by the Circle. Ninety per cent believed that the Core Member received a sense of acceptance by others and 82% believed the Core Member was able to establish friendships. In addition, 84% of the Circle Volunteers reported that they felt the Core Member experienced an increase in self-worth, and 68% felt the Core Member experienced a sense of self-acceptance as a result of their participation in a Circle.

Volunteers were asked to anticipate what would have happened had the Core Member not been involved in a Circle. Sixty one percent of the respondents reported that they felt the Core Member would have reoffended. Most believed that the Core Member would have had a difficult time adjusting to the community (93%) or in leading a stable life (82%). Seventy-three percent reported that the Core Member would have become isolated and 91% believed he would have experienced loneliness. The vast majority of the Circle Volunteers (93%) felt the Circle was at least moderately helpful for the Core Member.

In terms of benefits to the community, 89% of the Circle Volunteers felt the community experienced an increase in safety. Seventy-eight per cent felt that Circles were a rational approach to integrating the Core Member back into the community, and 71% of the Circle Volunteer reported that the fear of a re-offense is reduced.

At the personal level, three-quarters of the Circle Volunteers felt that their participation in the project gave them a sense of community. In addition, sixty-six percent reported it provided them with friendship. Finally, just over half (54%) felt they had an emotional bond with others.

Professional/organization support, training and teamwork.

Just over half of the Circle Volunteers felt that they were working as part of a team with the other professionals involved with the project. In terms of the perception of support provided by the organization and associated professionals, the majority of Circle Volunteers found it to be helpful. In particular, 82% found the members of the organization to be generally helpful and 63% thought the organization provided support when needed. Only 5% found that the support provided by the organization was inadequate. In terms of associated professional support, 62% found it to be generally helpful, and approximately half (49%) found that the professionals provided direction when needed. Fifteen percent reported that the professional support provided failed to meet their expectations.

Part of being a volunteer with the COSA project involves working with other volunteers in a Circle. In the survey, almost 60% felt they were working as a team with other individuals in the Circle. Although a quarter of the respondents experienced a sense of teamwork only some of the time, 17% did not feel like they were working as part of a team at all.

Training was received prior to volunteering in a Circle for 55% of the respondents. Approximately 40% reported that more training would have helped prepare them for this experience, and 46% were not sure if more training would have been beneficial for them. While a variety of topics were covered in different training sessions, most received training in restorative justice (61%). In terms of more training opportunities, the area that received the most interest was listening skills and responding to resistance (38%). In terms of improving training sessions, 42% suggested having more sessions available prior to joining a Circle, and 44% suggested having more on-going sessions while in a Circle. Only 7% reported that no improvement was necessary.

Professional/Agency members

In addition to the Circle Volunteers and the Core Members, there are also several professionals and agency members involved with the COSA project. Of the professionals and agency members who responded to this survey, approximately one-quarter were police officers, 13% were psychologists, and 20% were part of the advisory board/working group. A considerable majority of these respondents had been involved with the COSA project for more than three years. In terms of motivation behind their involvement, one-third reported that they wanted to work with offenders who are being given a second chance, and 20% reported they felt

a sense of "call" to work with this population. Most of the respondents (93%) reported that they are still motivated to be involved.

Adequacy of training for volunteers.

The Professional/Agency members were asked a series of questions regarding the training provided to the Circle Volunteers. More than half of the respondents reported that they felt the Circle Volunteers should receive more intensive training in particular topics, and 43% felt more extensive training opportunities should be provided.

Approximately half of the respondents reported they had been asked to provide training workshops or consultations to the Circle Volunteers. Of these respondents, 57% reported that they provided workshops on self-care, and 25% provided workshops on the use of relapse prevention methods with sexual offenders. Twenty-seven percent reported being asked to provide training on more than three occasions, and 25% were actually able to provide the workshop on more than three occasions.

Perceptions of the project.

Most of the Professional/Agency respondents reported a belief that participation in the COSA provides the Core Member with a positive experience. In particular, 94% believed Core Members felt supported by others and 81% believed that Core Members experienced increased self-worth and a sense of acceptance by others. Sixty-three percent reported that the Core Members experienced a sense of community. Interestingly, 75% also reported that they did not think Core Members derived much from this experience.

Approximately 70% of the Professional/Agency respondents believe that the community-at-large would experience an increase in safety in knowing that a high-risk sexual offender is part of a COSA and 63% felt the fear of re-offense would be reduced. In addition, 44% reported that the community would also get a contributing member of society as the Core Member becomes more functional.

Professional/Agency respondents reported that what they liked most about COSAs are that they increase offender responsibility and accountability (70%) and that community safety and support are the focus (63%). What the Professional/Agency members liked the least about this project is that they felt it was difficult for Circle Volunteer to maintain boundaries (33%) and 22% didn't like the lack of structure or formality. Along these lines, 36% reported they would change the project by adding more guidelines regarding boundaries for the Circle Volunteers.

Nine percent felt more structure and more treatment opportunities were needed. Three-quarters of the respondents felt their agency was part of a "team" with the other professionals involved with the project. Three-quarters also felt that the project should be expanded.

Community

Prior to this survey, 46% of the 77 respondents reported having prior knowledge of the COSA through corrections experience, news coverage, courses at school, or word of mouth.

How do you feel knowing that such a program exists?

Knowing that the COSA project exists, 69% reported that they were “glad” that these offenders got extra support, and 62% reported feeling relieved that they are getting help. While 30% reported being positively surprised, approximately 14% reported being skeptical that it would actually reduce crime. A few respondents reported negative feelings, such as anger that these offenders are getting extra support (8%) and irritation that people would want to help these offenders (3%).

How would you feel if you knew that a high-risk offender moved into your community/neighborhood?

Given hypothetical knowledge that a high-risk offender had moved into their community/neighborhood, 33% of the respondents reported that they would feel unsafe, 30% would feel afraid for their safety, and 25% would feel shocked. About one-fifth reported that they would feel angry that this offender was in their neighborhood and 14% would feel angry that the offender was let out of prison. However, 68% of the respondents reported that these feelings would change in the positive direction if they knew that the offender in question belonged to a Circle. They felt that participation in a Circle would indicate that the offender would be receiving additional support from others (48%), he would be under some kind of supervision (53%), and that he was motivated not to re-offend (48%).

DISCUSSION

Overall, it appears that the COSA project has been viewed favourably by all stakeholders surveyed in this evaluation. Although the Professional/Agency members continue to express concerns regarding boundary issues with volunteers and former offenders, it is likely that these concerns are borne of their natural tendency to avoid dual relationships. Unlike psychologists or physicians, however, volunteers are not professionally inclined in this endeavour and, as such, are not bound by such proscriptions. Indeed, the development of friendly relationships between volunteers and Core Members is an intentional component of the COSA project. Both the volunteers and Core Members spoke clearly in describing the reciprocal positive influences their relationships have produced.

One area of potential concern is the perceived negative drift in organizational support for Circle Volunteers and Core Members. We believe that this is a side-effect of the call to provide more Circles without necessarily matching that call with increased human or financial resources. As the community becomes more aware of the successes of the project via various media reports, this shortfall is further exacerbated. The Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada has frequently spoken of her wish to see “Circles” in place for all or most offenders coming out of federal institutions. However, funding and recruitment continue to be the biggest hurdles to the more widespread proliferation of the model. While attempts have been made to solicit support from sources outside of Corrections, those efforts have been met with only mediocre success. However, we are very much inclined to believe that if the COSA model is to achieve broad acceptance and implementation, the community itself must accept ultimate responsibility for ensuring its long-term success.

We have been struck by the positive elements of public education and engagement noted in the questionnaire responses of the community-at-large. In several recent instances in Canada where public outcry has followed the release of a “high-risk sexual offender”, the popular media has eventually focused on the COSA project as a bright light in an otherwise troubling state of affairs. With each piece of television or newspaper coverage, more citizens learn about the challenging work being undertaken by their counterparts. We hope that the eventual result will be that the community learns that risk management is something within their grasp.

STUDY TWO

Study Two of the evaluation of the COSA pilot project in South-Central Ontario was designed to assess the impact COSAs have on the recidivism rates of high risk sexual offenders. Study One, above, demonstrated the effects that the project has had on participants and the Community-at-Large; however, it is of critical importance that those positive effects be accompanied by reductions in recidivism and other concrete indicators of project efficacy.

METHOD

Participants

Two groups of offenders were included in this study. The first group was comprised of 60 offenders who were involved in a COSA after having been released at the end of their sentence. The second group consisted of a matched comparison sample of 60 similar offenders who were also released at sentence completion but did not participate in a COSA. The groups were matched *a priori*, meaning that there was an intentional process involved in selecting the comparison sample, so that it would be a more comparable group for the COSA participants.

Matching criteria

In Canada, detention to sentence completion (i.e., Warrant Expiry Date-WED) requires an order by the National Parole Board following a detailed review of the case. Detention is recommended only in those cases where reoffense is likely to occur prior to WED. As such, detention to WED is reasonably equivalent to a rating of “high risk”. The COSA project was intended to address the post-release needs of offenders detained until WED. To ensure adequate matching, we only included similarly detained sexual offenders in the comparison sample. To further guarantee that the two groups were equivalent in criminality and risk levels, we scored each subject on the General Statistical Information on Recidivism (Nuffield, 1982) scale. Each member of the COSA group was matched with a comparison subject in the same general risk category (e.g., low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, or high).

In matching the two groups of offenders, we also endeavoured to make sure that the matched subject was released on or about the same date as the subject in the COSA group. The purpose for doing so was two-fold: first, this process ensured that the matched subjects were released to relatively the same political and community climate; and second, it allowed for an

easy comparison of the length of time at risk before failure (in those offenders who did commit a new offense).

Last, we ensured that the two groups were matched in regard to prior involvement in sexual offender treatment programming. Given recent results suggesting that completion of a treatment program adhering to the principles of effective correctional interventions can have a significant impact on recidivism, it was important to make sure that any differences found between the two groups were not the result of variations in previous treatment experiences.

Measures

STATIC-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 1999)

The STATIC-99 is a tool that actuarially assesses risk for sexual and violent recidivism based primarily on static risk variables. This instrument has moderate predictive ability ($r = .33$, ROC area = .71), and has extensive survival data from which long-term prognosis of risk potential can be established.

Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offense Recidivism (RRASOR - Hanson, 1997)

The RRASOR is a four-item scale designed to actuarially assess risk for sexual reoffending in known sexual offenders. These four items are wholly contained in the STATIC-99 but, on their own, provide a moderately accurate screening of risk potential ($r = .27$, ROC area = .71). Recent research suggests that the RRASOR might actually outperform the STATIC-99 with certain subpopulations of offenders, including the developmentally-delayed (see Tough, 2001).

Phallometric testing

The phallometric test is a psychophysiological procedure in which changes in penile circumference or volume are measured during presentation of audiovisual stimuli. Differential responding to various age, gender, or activity stimulus categories is helpful in diagnosing deviant sexual preferences (or paraphilias). Although conflicting research exists regarding the psychometric properties of the test (see Fernandez, 2002; Freund & Watson, 1991), it is generally accepted as a useful tool for diagnosis and, by extrapolation, risk assessment.

Recidivism

Recidivism was defined as being charged for a new sexual offense or for having breached a condition imposed by the Court. Only official documentation was utilized and, in most cases, this information came in the form of CPIC (Canadian Police Information Check, a national

database of offense histories) records indicating that a charge had been laid or a conviction registered.

Statistical Significance

In this study, statistical significance was observed at the traditional $p < .05$. However, as noted above, there are times when it is useful to evaluate results in terms of their social significance, that is, the impact the particular finding has on the community. This concept was important in assessing the relative rates of reoffending between the two groups, and is discussed in greater detail below.

Procedure

In order to assess the effects of COSAs on recidivism, we gathered data on the first 60 men offered COSAs in the pilot project. In order to better understand the results we obtained from these men, we also selected 60 similar offenders from the Ontario Region's Offender Management System (OMS) database. The 60 comparison subjects were matched to their COSA counterparts according to the criteria above.

Table 2. Offense-Specific Demographic Information

	Circles (N = 60)	Comparison (N = 60)
M(SD) age	47.47 (12.27)	43.62 (10.84)
M(SD) STATIC-99	5.60 (2.22)	5.00 (2.00)
M(SD) RRASOR**	3.18 (1.65)	2.12 (1.31)
% Deviant PHM	81.58	70.27
Victims		
M number*	3.10 (3.63)	2.05 (1.66)
female only**	43.33%	76.67%
familial only	15.00%	15.00%
children only	58.30%	53.30%

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

RESULTS

Demographic Variables

Demographic data are summarized in Table 2. No significant differences were found between the two groups in regard to age or the percentage of members who had deviant phallometric test results. The two groups were not significantly different on the STATIC-99; however, there is a somewhat higher average risk score for COSA participants. The COSA group is at significantly higher risk for sexual recidivism than the comparison group, when judged by RRASOR score ($F [1,115] = 14.70, p < .01$). However, if the matching process was foolproof, these two groups should *not* differ with regard to risk. In this case, it is clear that there is an over-representation of higher risk WED sexual offenders in the COSA group.

In looking at the victim profiles, the two groups were not different in regard to the percentages of unrelated or stranger victims. However, the COSA group has a significantly higher average number of victims ($F[1,118] = 4.160, p < .05$) and there are significantly more offenders in the comparison group with “female only” victims ($X^2[1] = 13.889, p < .01$). This likely explains why the two groups were different on actuarial prediction scores, as “number of previous sexual offenses” and “male victim” are points on each of the actuarial measures noted.

Time at Risk

As one of the matching variables was “date of release”, the groups should reoffend at the same rate and within the same time frame. Also, because the COSA group was found above to be of relatively higher risk for reoffense, if there was to be a difference, it should be the COSA members who reoffend faster. The opposite was found in our comparisons, although this difference is not statistically significant. The comparison group recidivated more quickly than the COSA group. Specifically, 18 offenders in the COSA group recidivated with an average time at risk of 22.10 months while 26 of the comparison subjects reoffending with an average time at risk of 18.54 months (See Table 3).

Recidivism

As is seen in Table 3, the COSA group reoffended in all domains at a rate considerably lower than their matched counterparts, despite having a higher risk profile. Specifically, regarding sexual recidivism, the comparison group had more than three times as many instances of recidivism as the COSA group (10 versus 3), a statistically significant difference ($X^2[1] = 4.23, p < .05$).

A qualitative examination of the nature of the new offenses in this study show that in each of the three instances of sexual recidivism in the COSA group, the new offense was qualitatively less severe or invasive than the offense for which they had most recently served sentence. For instance, the new offense of one of the COSA members was making an obscene telephone call, while his prior offense was a violent rape. No function of harm reduction was found in the comparison sample; their new offenses were just as violent and invasive as their most recent offense.

Table 3. Recidivism Data

	Circles (N = 60)	Comparison (N = 60)
M(range-mos) follow-up	54.67 (3-123)	52.47 (3-124)
M(mos) until first failure	22.1	18.54
Recidivism		
Sexual*	5.00% (3)	16.67% (10)
Expected sexual	28.33% (17)**	26.45% (16)
Violent** (includes sexual)	15.00% (9)	35.00% (21)
Any (includes violent & sexual)	28.33% (17)	43.44% (26)
Dispositions	38	49

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

In regard to violent recidivism (argued by Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier [1998] to be a more robust indicator of violent, including sexual, recidivism in sexual offender populations), again, the COSA group reoffended at a rate considerably lower than the comparison group ($X^2[1] = 6.40, p < .01$). The difference in regard to any recidivism is on the cusp of significance ($X^2[1] = 2.94, p < .07$), and should certainly be seen as socially significant according to the argument made above. Overall, 28.3% of COSA participants reoffended in any way in comparison to 43.4% of the non-COSA group.

As a group, we expected that offenders who had been assessed as high risk of sexual recidivism would reoffend at a rate commensurate with their actuarial scores. In regard to actuarial projections, the comparison group is much closer to STATIC-99 actuarial projections

(10 observed vs. 16 expected), whereas the COSA group is reoffending sexually at a rate far below statistical projections (3 observed vs. 17 expected; $\chi^2[1] = 11.76, p < .001$).

“Dispositions” refers to the number of discrete reoffense occasions. It is more or less equivalent to “sentencing dates” on the STATIC-99. In the COSA group, 18 offenders were responsible for 38 events, while 26 offenders were responsible for 49 events in the comparison group.

ROC area under the curve.

We predicted that the STATIC-99 would lose its predictive utility when applied to the high risk subgroup of sexual offenders examined in this study due to the lack of variability in scores. In fact, the reverse was found for those offenders who participated in a COSA. The ROC area under the curve for the COSA group regarding STATIC-99 hit-rate was .71 for sexual recidivism, whereas the ROC area under the curve for the comparison group was only .58. Similar results were obtained in regard to any new recidivism and, to a lesser degree, violent recidivism.

DISCUSSION

The recidivism results compiled in evaluating the COSA pilot project are very encouraging. Sexual recidivism by COSA Core Members is 70% lower than that of the matched comparison sample, and is less than one-quarter of the actuarial sexual recidivism rates projected by the Hanson and Thornton STATIC-99 survival curves - a statistically significant result. While recidivism of any sort is tragic and regrettable, the harm reduction effect observed in those unfortunate instances where a Core Member did recidivate sexually was also particularly encouraging.

In looking at the offender profiles and actuarial risk scores, and despite our best efforts at matching, it is clear that the COSA group we examined in Study Two is at substantially higher risk to reoffend than the comparison group. The COSA group has a higher average number of previous victims, more victimization of males, and a higher actuarial risk rating on both STATIC-99 and RRASOR, especially the latter. The fact that the COSA group is a higher risk group is apparently the result of a selection bias; that is, the highest risk WED releases were actively targeted for involvement in a COSA. Given the resource difficulties of the MCCO COSA project, it was imperative that the limited services available be provided to those who needed them the most. As a result, it appears that those offenders at particularly high risk to reoffend were “skimmed” off the top, leaving a somewhat lower risk group for selection of comparison subjects.

Given the differences in RRASOR scores between the two groups, it would appear that the matching protocol used in this evaluation was less than exact. Interestingly, this deficiency should have resulted in differences between the two groups that served to increase Type 2 error, in support of the null hypothesis that COSAs have no effect on offender success in the community. As such, we would have expected rates of reoffending to be higher in the COSA group, with longer survival rates in the comparison sample. In fact, the opposite was found: the comparison group reoffended faster and at a higher rate. This result underscores the ultimate position that COSAs have a marked positive effect on the community integration and long-term functioning of high-risk sexual offenders released at WED.

The comparisons between the two groups on both sexual and violent recidivism between the two groups reached a conventional level of statistical significance. As the number of discrete dispositions is more than 25% higher in the comparison sample, it is clear that the comparison

group has been responsible for considerably more community unrest than their COSA compatriots. Of further indication of the effectiveness of the initiative is the finding of a harm reduction function (Marlatt 1998) in the COSA group. As mentioned earlier, in each of the three instances of sexual recidivism in the COSA group, the new offense was qualitatively less severe or invasive than the offense for which they had most recently served sentence.

The predicted rate of sexual reoffense, as suggested by STATIC-99, was higher in both groups than the rate actually observed. This may be the result of the skewed risk profile in each group (both groups have high average STATIC-99 scores). However, it is also possible that this difference is due to differing base rates between Canadian and international samples of sexual offenders. Generally, rates of sexual reoffending in Canadian populations tend to be relatively lower than international norms (c.f., Hanson & Thornton [1999] versus Motiuk & Brown [1996] or Barbaree, Seto, & Maric [1996]).

We predicted that the STATIC-99 would not provide further assistance in determining which members, within these already high risk groups, would be at highest risk to recidivate, due to the truncated nature of the risk scores. However, the higher ROC value for the COSA group suggests that recidivism in this group conforms to logical models of risk prediction, in that recidivism was positively related to higher STATIC-99 scores. The low ROC value found in the comparison group suggests that recidivism is occurring without a link between scores and outcome in this group. Ultimately, this finding suggests that the Andrews and Bonta risk principle still holds - the highest degrees of support and monitoring should be given to those offenders with the highest risk profiles. In other words, even within COSAs, additional attention should be paid to those offenders who have particularly high STATIC-99 scores.

The results of Study Two show that reinvolvement in crime, generally, is considerably less in the COSA group. In a review by Detective Wendy Leaver of the Toronto Police Service, offenders on a CCC 810.1 order (i.e., a modification of peace bond legislation) were found to be substantially less likely to reoffend when that order was paired with involvement in a COSA (Leaver, personal communication). In fact, after years of “putting these guys in jail”, Detective Leaver is now a particularly active and vocal COSA adherent, having sat on several Circles as a volunteer and served as a critical liaison between the MCCO project and the Toronto Police Service.

The current results need to be put in context with the literature and discussion on treatment and recidivism, generally. The Collaborative Data Project of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (Hanson, Gordon, et al., 2002) has recently demonstrated a substantial treatment effect, in which the treated group reoffended at a rate 41% less than the untreated comparison group (10% vs. 17%, respectively). A recent review of the recidivism rates associated with the Central Ontario Parole District's relapse prevention maintenance program showed that incremental reductions in reoffending can be achieved through a combination of informed parole supervision and community-based follow-up of institutional sexual offender treatment programming (Picheca & Wilson, 2003; see also Wilson, Stewart, Stirpe, Barrett, & Cripps, 2000). COSAs are very much in line with these findings; however, it is important to note that both groups of men included in this study are generally of a much higher average risk rating than those reported in most treatment effectiveness reports. 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 reoffending.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The future of COSA rests fully in the hands of the community. All levels of government are reticent to carry the full burden of financially supporting this endeavour. In many respects, sexual offending is a community-based problem that should, perhaps, be managed in a more intentional manner by the community itself. In this regard, we wholeheartedly agree with Silverman and Wilson (2002), who suggest that a viable solution to community violence is found in community engagement of the criminal justice system. COSA is an excellent example of the community taking an active role in managing risk in its midst. However, the unpalatable nature of our target population continues to make solicitation of both volunteers and funding particularly difficult.

We believe that support of initiatives like COSA represents a more efficacious means by which to manage offender risk in the community. One criticism that has been leveled at sexual offender registries is that they fail to distinguish between offenders of varying risk levels. That is, a high-risk offender committing a crime under a certain section of the Criminal Code of Canada is registered in the same fashion as a lower risk offender committing the same criminal code offense, although the details of the individual offenses might be quite different. Because COSAs are only offered to those offenders with demonstrated high potential for reoffending, they represent a means by which to increase community safety over and above registration.

Based on the dramatic positive results achieved by the COSA pilot project in South-Central Ontario, fledgling COSA projects have been initiated in all Canadian provinces. Projects are well-established in Victoria, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Ottawa. As we write this review, we are aware of several COSA-type projects in development in the United States, including a relatively well-established endeavor in Minnesota and a very enthusiastic group in Denver, CO. In addition, projects based on the Canadian COSA model are also in progress or development in all of the member nations of the United Kingdom (i.e., Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and, interestingly, the Isle of Man), the Republic of Ireland, and the Netherlands. The UK project in the Thames Valley is now in the process of compiling data for an interim evaluation report, having formed more than a dozen COSAs. Interest in the COSA model has also been generated in South Africa, Bermuda, and Australia. Despite the oft-noted unpalatable character of sexual offenders, there is clearly an international will to try other means by which to

increase offender accountability and community safety. As it has always been, “No more victims” is our shared goal.

As a closing thought, the final institutional risk assessment of the first two COSA Core Members put them each at 100% chance of reoffending in seven years (SORAG bin 9, see Quinsey et al., 1998). We are pleased to announce that both of these men have reached their 11th anniversary of offense-free life in the community, although certainly not without many trials and tribulations.

“They are my best friends. You can’t share what we’ve shared and not become friends. If they weren’t there, I’d be back inside by now.”

“Kevin” in *No More Victims* (CSC, 2001)

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