

Previous research Other research discussing wider aspects of Circles :

A U.K. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Circles of Support and Accountability Interventions

Abstract: Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) aim to augment sex offender risk management at the point of community reentry by facilitating "Circles" of volunteers who provide support, guidance, and advice, while ensuring that the offender remains accountable for their actions. In this study, the authors provide (a) a rapid evidence assessment of the effectiveness of CoSA in reducing reoffending, and (b) a U.K. cost-benefit analysis for CoSA when compared to the criminal justice costs of reoffending. From the study analysis, the average cost of a "Circle" was estimated to be £11,303 per annum and appears to produce a 50% reduction in reoffending (sexual and nonsexual), as the estimated cost of reoffending was estimated to be £147,161 per offender, per annum. Based on a hypothetical cohort of 100 offenders-50 of whom receive CoSA and 50 of whom do not-investment in CoSA appears to provide a cost saving of £23,494 and a benefit-cost ratio of 1.04. Accounting for estimates that the full extent of the cost to society may be 5 to 10 times the tangible costs substantially increases estimated cost savings related to CoSA.

Elliot, I. and Beech, A. (2013), 'A U.K. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Circles of Support and Accountability Interventions' Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 211-229

Link to article: <http://sax.sagepub.com/content/25/3/211>

Evaluability Assessments of the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) Model

Abstract: Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) is a restorative justice-based reentry program for high-risk sex offenders with little or no pro-social support. There have been no rigorous large-scale outcome evaluations of COSA conducted to date. A weighted average of three significant estimated reductions attributable to COSA from smaller evaluations suggest a reduction of 77% in sexual recidivism (Wilson et al., 2007). However, because of the varying quality of these studies it could be argued that this figure should be considered only an estimate of effectiveness. Therefore, at this time there is not enough evidence to confidently state that COSA is proven to be effective in reducing sexual recidivism.

This report outlines an evaluability assessment of COSA across five sites with the goal of assessing the readiness of COSA provision in the U.S. for rigorous evaluation. The assessment aimed to clarify program intent, explore program reality, examine program data capacity, analyze program fidelity, and propose potential evaluation designs for future evaluation. An 'intended model' was developed, adapted from the Correctional Services Canada model (CSC, 2002; 2003) that sought to illustrate the espoused theory of COSA. COSA program reality was established via site visits to five locations delivering, or intending to deliver, COSA programs in the U.S.: Fresno, CA; Denver, CO; Durham, NC; Lancaster, PA; and Burlington, VT. During these site visits in-person interviews were conducted with key program personnel, other stakeholders, and any documented materials related to COSA policies and procedures were collected.

All of the sites have implemented versions of the CSC model, adapted to suit their needs. The site reports suggest that VT-COSA alone could be considered to have high program fidelity, with COSA Fresno and COSA

Lancaster demonstrating adequate fidelity, and Colorado COSA and COSA Durham demonstrating low fidelity. It is concluded that there are five potential obstacles that need to be addressed in order to conduct a successful experimental evaluation of COSA: (1) choice of outcomes; (2) significant differences in program implementation; (3) core member selection issues; (4) sample size, site capacity, and low baselines of recidivism; and (5) ownership of data. It is concluded that there is no methodological or ethical reason why a randomized control trial of COSA provision in the U.S. could not be conducted. The obstacles to an RCT are all such that they can be addressed with a combination of realistic tightening of program implementation, rigorous experimental control, and an increase in real-world resources. Finally, three action recommendations for future evaluative activity are presented: (1) conduct an experimental evaluation of the Vermont COSA program alone; (2) conduct an experimental evaluation that combines the Vermont COSA and COSA Fresno programs; or (3) allow the fledgling sites to develop and conduct a multi-site evaluation of COSA in the future.

Elliott, I.A., Zajac, G. & Meyer, C.A. (2013) Evaluability Assessments of the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) Model, Cross-Site Report. Document No. 243832

Link to article: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/243832.pdf>

Experiences in Reconciling Risk Management and Restorative Justice: How Circles of Support and Accountability Work Restoratively in the Risk Society

Abstract: Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) is a restorative justice-based model that originated in Canada in the mid-1990s for the postincarceration reintegration of those who have offended sexually. Although the roots of COSA are in restorative justice philosophy, the program has also found favour, to some degree, with organisations such as police services and corrections that are traditionally concerned more with protecting community safety than with the ideals of restorative justice. Informed by the author's research and personal experience as a COSA volunteer, and analysis of recent and historical representations of COSA, this article explores theoretically how the development of the COSA initiative has been influenced by the seemingly disparate concerns of both the restorative justice and community protection movements, and examines the importance of balancing these paradigms in the everyday practices of circles.

Hannem, S. (2013). Experiences in Reconciling Risk Management and Restorative Justice: How Circles of Support and Accountability Work Restoratively in the Risk Society. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology. Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 269-88.

Link to article: <http://ijo.sagepub.com/content/57/3/269.full.pdf>

Reversing the roles: An examination of Circles of Support and Accountability as an example of non-traditional criminal justice groupwork

Abstract: Groupwork in a criminal justice setting has traditionally taken the form of a group of offenders undertaking a programme of structured work facilitated by (usually two) professionals. Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) represent a departure from this traditional model. The COSA model uses a group of volunteers to form a 'Circle' around an offender who is viewed as being very much part of the group. The approach is currently being used in the UK as part of the risk management process for convicted sex offenders who are experiencing social isolation, a factor that has been linked to the risk of re-offending. The goal of our research was to understand the COSA group process and this article presents a study of a relatively new and different approach to groupwork within criminal justice. We looked at the expectations and opinions of both core

group members and volunteers to make some assessment of how this non- traditional form of groupwork operates. The research presented an almost entirely positive picture of COSA from the perspective of both the volunteers and the core group members. All Core members (and we acknowledge that the research focus is a small group of male offenders) felt that the group experience offered them support and a sense of belonging that had previously been missing in their lives.

Bellamy, C. and Watson, A. (2013) 'Reversing the roles: An examination of Circles of Support and Accountability as an example of non-traditional criminal justice groupwork', Groupwork, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp.15-31

Link to article: <http://essential.metapress.com/content/60324253617321hk/>

Circles of Support and Accountability: Tensions Between Faith-Based and Rational Utilitarian Responses to Moral Panic Over High Risk Sex Offenders

Plain English summary (abstract not available): Petrunik's paper examines different models of Circles, in relation to whether they are faith-based or not. He examines the differing applications of the Circles model, from its original faith-based roots (of acceptance above exclusion, and embodying the notion that a person is capable of redemption) to that of a secular intervention aligned with criminal justice organisations (focusing more upon risk management, and working alongside state organisations, albeit still reflecting the faith-based roots). Petrunick highlights tensions between these two differing models, and uses case study examples of each type to discuss how this shift from faith-based to a more secular 'utilitarian' approach may impact upon Circles as an intervention.

Petrunik, M. (2007) Circles of Support and Accountability: Tensions Between Faith-Based and Rational Utilitarian Responses to Moral Panic Over High Risk Sex Offenders, International Journal of Restorative Justice, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 66-89.

Link not available

Releasing Sex Offenders into the Community Through "Circles of Support"-A Means of Reintegrating the "Worst of the Worst"

Abstract: Using the philosophy of restorative justice, the Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario, has created a program entitled Circles of Support which endeavors to reintegrate sex offenders back into the community in a productive, supportive fashion while still holding the ex-offender accountable. Most ex-offenders appear to join a Circle as a means of self-protection. All seemed aware of the reality that often surrounds the release of a high profile sex offender. A critical motivating factor for participating in Circles, for many volunteers, is the perceived benefit to the community. The majority of volunteers felt that the community derived enhanced safety or the community benefited from the reintegration of the offender. Circle members felt that Circles of Support were able to assist the ex-offender both emotionally and practically. Ex-offenders themselves indicated that they would have returned to a lifestyle or situation conducive to re-offending had it not been for the existence of Circles.

Cesaroni, C. (2002) 'Releasing Sex Offenders into the Community Through "Circles of Support": A Means of Reintegrating the "Worst of the Worst"', Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 85-98

Link to article: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J076v34n02_06#.Uwd-VGJ_soc