



# CirclesEurope

June 2021

**WELCOME TO CIRCLESEUROPE**  
*The Association for European Providers of  
Circles of Support and Accountability and their supporters*

Dear Colleagues

It feels like a long time since we last connected with all at the end of January 2021 at the CirclesEurope mini-conference. What an impact COVID-19 has had on all our lives, both personal and professional. On behalf of the CirclesEurope Board I continue to wish you, your loved ones and colleagues well as we continue to face the challenges and impact of this pandemic. Despite the turmoil of the last year, CoSA Providers have continued to find innovative and creative ways to support their Volunteers, Staff and Core Members and have learnt new ways of providing support through digital and virtual means. The CirclesEurope Board has also been heartened by the many positive projects and initiatives that member CoSA Providers have been engaged in. This Newsletter will give information on some of these initiatives, update on the work of the CirclesEurope Association and share other news that may be of interest.

## THE CIRCLESEUROPE MINI-CONFERENCE

Due to COVID-19 we had to arrange a virtual event on 29 January 2021. However, the Board was pleased to see the high rate of attendance and from countries that would not usually be able to attend if the mini-conference was held face to face. Nine countries attended which included representation from non-European countries like Canada, Australia and the US. The programme focused on three themes:

- The impact of COVID-19 on CoSA provision and Prof Kieran McCartan presented the results of the survey that the Research sub-group conducted of all CoSA Providers;
- An introduction of different CoSA models by Dr Mechtild Höing followed by a presentation by Leah Warwick, Circles UK's National Development Manager on the Youth Circles programme which was developed in the UK;
- A focus of CoSA outside Europe with a presentation on CoSA in Canada and the experience of working with CoSA over the last 30 years by Kathryn Bliss, Director of CoSA Canada.

All the presentations were very well received and led to interesting discussions. The Board would like to extend a special thank you to the speakers and especially to Kathryn and our

Australian and American colleagues for having woken up so early to join the event!

The Board is planning another mini-conference for early in 2022. The date will be confirmed in a few months' time, but in the meantime, if you have any ideas for themes or topics, or would like to do a presentation at the mini-conference, please get in touch and let us know your ideas.

## **UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION BOARD AND SUB-GROUPS**

We are pleased to report that the membership of the CirclesEurope Association continues to grow. At the moment ten organisations are full members of the Association and the individual associate membership has increased. The following is an update of the key projects that are currently in progress:

### **The Self-Assessment Checklist:**

You will remember that the Quality Assurance, Governance and Membership sub-group designed a self-assessment checklist for member Circles Providers to enable them to complete an annual self-assessment to reflect the quality of their Circles provision. This self-assessment reflects those principles that encompass the minimum standards that Providers of Circles in Europe should adhere to. Most of the country members have now completed and returned the checklist to the Board. However, one or two responses are still outstanding and Mechtild Höing has been in touch to remind members about it. Once we have received all the responses we can compile a report of the responses which can be shared with all members.

### **Survey of International CoSA Models:**

Since the original CoSA model was designed, there have been various developments and adaptations and new models of CoSA have emerged in different countries. Examples are the Youth Circles model which was referred to at the mini-conference. Members said that they were interested to know more about the various models and as a result, the Quality Assurance, Governance and Membership sub-group devised a survey of all the international models that exist which was sent to all members. Information is still being received and once it is all available, a report will be compiled which will be shared with all members. If you have not yet completed the survey and need more information, please get in touch with Mechtild Höing.

## **NEWS FROM COSA PROVIDERS**

### **FROM COSA FLANDERS IN ANTWERP, BELGIUM BY ANN CASTREL**

#### **CoSA Flanders is out of the woods ... for now!**

In Flanders, CoSA has always been a small project, that had to fight for its survival. We had to re-apply annually for the necessary funds so we could go on for another year. Each year we tried to get a long-term approach with long term funding but every time the answer given by the Flemish government was the same: sorry, but no!

And then 2018 came. Once again, CoSA Flanders applied. Not just for the upcoming year, but for several years. Much to our surprise, the Flemish administrations' reply was somewhat different this time: "*We do not have the policy to fund temporary projects anymore. CoSA would be funded for the last time in 2019 in Flanders*". Does this mean that 31st December 2019 would be the burial date for CoSA?

Not necessarily! Both I.T.E.R. (CoSA Brussels) and CAW Antwerpen (CoSA Antwerp) decided to go on for another year using its own financial resources to ensure CoSA's survival.

### **New Government, New Rules**

The 2019 elections in Flanders resulted in new policy makers. A new Flemish Ministry of Justice was created. Could this open new doors for CoSA? In 2020 the Flemish Minister of Justice published her plan to deal with sexual violence. Operational goal 2.7 of that plan describes the Minister's ideas about the treatment of sexual offenders. CoSA was mentioned as good practice! Not just for the Brussels and Antwerp regions, but for all of Flanders! Could this imply that CoSA will be re-instated and even made available for every sexual offender in Flanders?

### **CoSA Flanders lives on high hopes!**

2021 will be an exploring and planning year for CoSA in Flanders. The Flemish Minister of Justice commissioned a survey to explore the possibility to start CoSA Circles while the Core Member is still in prison and implement CoSA in the whole of Flanders. Depending on the results of this survey, both CoSA Brussels and CoSA Antwerp could receive funding. Does this mean that we are back to square one? We certainly hope not. CoSA Brussels and CoSA Antwerp live on high hopes that 2022 will be the year of the big CoSA launch for Flanders!

## **FROM THE UK – CIRCLES REBOOT (A COSA SPECIFICALLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ACCESS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION MATERIAL, CSEM)**

In the UK, after many months of delay due to COVID-19, the Circles ReBoot pilot roll out has finally commenced. This programme is part of the CoSA brand in the UK, but is shorter (12 sessions over 6 months) and a bit more structured than a traditional Circle and was designed specifically with CSEM in mind. The target audience are men and women over 18, assessed as presenting a medium or low risk of harm.

The design of Circles ReBoot is underpinned by relevant research. Desistance research, trauma informed work and approaches such as the Good Lives model and Self-Regulation contributed to the approach and programme content. During the design phase, the programme benefitted from the advice of Professor Derek Perkins and Dr Hannah Merdian from onlinePROTECT at Lincoln University. They have developed a new assessment tool specifically for individuals who access CSEM; this tool will be an integral part of Circles ReBoot and will be used at specific points in the programme.

The Circle is strength-based since offending behaviour work that recognises and harnesses the skills and aptitudes that an individual possesses have been shown to be most effective. Core Members are encouraged to take responsibility for their own life – they identify areas of their life they want to focus on and define and work towards specific goals. Setting realistic and positive goals for the future has been identified as a significant element in achieving an offence free lifestyle.

During a ReBoot Circle, the Core Member works through Keys for Change, learning new skills which assist them in developing self-awareness, self-efficacy and ways of coping with the challenges of daily life. The Keys for Change are intended to address aspects of life frequently apparent in the lives of those who access CSEM (e.g., social isolation, difficulties managing negative thoughts and feelings, issues around identity, etc.). At the end of the Circle, the individual has space to reflect on what they have learnt and plan for the future. The intention throughout the Circle is to look to the future with hope, without ignoring the

past.

12 Circles ReBoot will be implemented as a pilot and will be evaluated. We are really pleased that after a six-month delay, the first Circles ReBoot pilot Circle started at the end of May 2021 and is provided by Circles South West. The second pilot Circle will start the middle of June and is provided by Circles South East.

The full pilot should hopefully be completed by December as it is a shorter CoSA programme after which we plan to finalise the evaluation (COVID permitting!). The results will be shared with CirclesEurope members at a special seminar.

## FROM IRELAND – PACE

PACE in Ireland recently held a very successful CoSA seminar:

It was amazing to hear from Rev Harry Nigh himself as well as getting information on the wonderful work that PACE is doing.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Members of CirclesEurope actively contribute to research papers and publications. Recently the following have been published:

1. The ECAN Bulletin themed issue *2020 – a year of crisis or Kairos* published an article that was written by CirclesEurope members called *'The impact of COVID-19 on Circles of Support and Accountability'* by Rosie Kitson-Boyce, Nottingham Trent University; Robin

Wilson, McMaster University; Kieran McCartan, University of the West of England; Mechtild Höing, Avans University; Riana Taylor, Circles UK and Isotta Rossoni, CIPM. Here is a link to the publication (the article can be found on page 29).

<https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ECAN-Bulletin-Themed-Issue-1-March-2021.pdf>

2. The Monument Trust Fellowship book also recently came out with a chapter by Riana Taylor. The chapter (*'Circles of Support and Accountability: reducing shame, bringing hope and preventing further victims of sexual abuse'*) can be accessed here on page 204:

<https://www.khulisa.co.uk/resources/humane-justice/>.

3. Circles UK recently published two blogs on the Completing the Circle project (a National Lottery funded project) which extended the provision of Circles to areas where they have not been provided before. This blog gives some interesting information on the project and focuses specifically on the experience in London. The blog can be accessed through this link: [https://www.circles-uk.org.uk/images/documents/Blog\\_CtC\\_London\\_Final.pdf](https://www.circles-uk.org.uk/images/documents/Blog_CtC_London_Final.pdf)

The second blog focuses on the results of the evaluation of the project which was undertaken by a research team at the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCMRU) of Nottingham Trent University. The evaluation found a number of statistically significant findings and the blog can be accessed through this link:

[https://www.circles-uk.org.uk/images/circles/docs/Blog\\_CtC\\_Evaluation\\_Final.pdf](https://www.circles-uk.org.uk/images/circles/docs/Blog_CtC_Evaluation_Final.pdf)

Remember to also regularly check the new CirclesEurope website. Michelle Vreede and Mechtild Höing who kindly look after the website ensure that relevant articles, blogs and other interesting information are placed on the website ([www.circleseurope.eu](http://www.circleseurope.eu)).

## CIRCLESEUROPE GENERAL MEETING

The CirclesEurope General Meeting usually takes every year in July. Due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, the Board decided to hold the General Meeting a bit later this year on **8 October 2021 (10h00 to 12h00 British time/ 11h00 to 13h00 Continental time)**. **Please put the date in your diaries as it would be wonderful if all members can attend.**

It will be an online event and aside from the usual business of the General Meeting, we plan to also present an interesting seminar. If you have any suggestions for seminars or any topics that you think may be of interest, please let us know. We want to plan an interesting and engaging event for all attendees. Even though we would have liked to organise a face-to-face event, the online format will enable our non-European colleagues from Canada, Australia and the US to attend.

The CirclesEurope Finance Report needs to be approved by 1 July. Michelle Vreede, our Treasurer is currently preparing the report which will be sent to you before 1 July for approval by email. The report will again be presented at the General Meeting in October 2021. We would not usually ask for approval by email, but due to the exceptional circumstances around COVID-19, the Board has considered the matter and decided that email approval by members would be acceptable.

## JOINING THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

Full membership of the Association is open to all Circles Providers in Europe, including Trustees, Staff and Volunteers. Associate and Associate Individual membership is available for non-European Circles Provider organisations and individuals, as well as those with an

interest in Circles but who are not CoSA Providers. If you want to join the Association, details are available on the website: [www.circleseurope.eu](http://www.circleseurope.eu). Membership fees are 40 Euros for full membership, 25 Euros for Associate Membership (for organisations) and 10 Euros for Individual Associate Membership.

We are pleased that the membership of the Association is steadily growing. Please circulate the information to all your volunteers and staff and encourage them to join the Association. We are always looking for funding and the limited funding that we have at the moment is limiting how much work we can do. Please may we therefore ask that you continue to share the news of the Association, and that we need donations and members to grow the Association to the benefit of CoSA in Europe. The Board will of course continue to keep you updated on its work and progress.

## CONTACT

[info@circleseurope.eu](mailto:info@circleseurope.eu)

[www.circleseurope.eu](http://www.circleseurope.eu)

### **Board:**

Riana Taylor: [riana.taylor@circles-uk.org.uk](mailto:riana.taylor@circles-uk.org.uk)

Ann Castrel: [ann.castrel@cawantwerpen.be](mailto:ann.castrel@cawantwerpen.be)

Michelle Vreede: [m.vreede@reclassering.nl](mailto:m.vreede@reclassering.nl)

Kieran McCartan: [kieran.mccartan@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:kieran.mccartan@uwe.ac.uk)

### **Voluntary assistance to the Board:**

Mechtild Höing, [ma.hoing@avans.nl](mailto:ma.hoing@avans.nl)

Audrey Alards, [a.alards@reclassering.nl](mailto:a.alards@reclassering.nl)

*CirclesEurope Association – Vivaldplantsoen 100, 3533 JE Utrecht, the Netherlands,  
Chamber of Commerce No. 71898190 (KvK Utrecht, the Netherlands),  
Bank Account NL73 RABO 0332 4136 67 (BIC code RABONL2U)*