



# CirclesEurope

April 2020

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

This Newsletter will focus mostly on the response of European Circles Providers to the Corona COVID-19 crisis. This virus already affects all our lives on a global and international scale to a level that we have never experienced before. It will no doubt continue to impact all our lives over the coming months and is worrying for us all. The CirclesEurope Association Board send you all our best and kindest wishes during this difficult time. On a positive note, maybe this experience will make us more appreciative of the freedoms and other benefits that we often take for granted.

In this newsletter we will share what Catalonia, the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK are doing to keep Circles going under the current lock down restrictions.

**CIRCLES AT DUTCH PROBATION**  
**By Michelle Vreede, Circles Coordinator**

In the Netherlands we have to deal with the 'intelligent lockdown' since March 16<sup>th</sup>. That means all schools, public venues and a lot of public institutions and shops are closed. We are allowed to go outside if we follow the rules of social distancing and gatherings (no more than three people). Because of the social distancing requirements, the Dutch probation decided that face to face group meetings for COSA must be cancelled.

Ever since, it has been a challenge to adhere to the COSA model, especially in this current crisis time when it is important to stay connected with each other. Fortunately it is great to see beautiful and creative ideas arise and that circles manage to keep in touch with the core member without physical contact.

We provided a groupapp for volunteers from different circles to exchange ideas. Circles are making contact through video conferences, telephone and email but they also share ideas about playing online games with the circle instead of doing social activities face to face. One group is doing groceries for the core member, another volunteer is taking walks with the core member; of course with enough distance between them. Even a core member himself developed new behavior by taking care of his vulnerable neighbours by doing the gardening for them.

The Circle Coordinators are managing to keep the COSA process going by continuing evaluations, coaching and the contacts with the professionals via remote and online meetings.

We are proud of all the volunteers who are still supporting the core members in these difficult times!

If you want to find out more about COSA in the Netherlands, visit [www.reclassering.nl](http://www.reclassering.nl) for more information.

## **CIRCLES IN THE UK**

### **By Riana Taylor, CEO OF Circles UK**

I have agreed with the Circles UK staff team to work remotely and to avoid any but essential travel. One staff member accesses the Circles UK office to deal with some practical aspects. However, we will be fully contactable by phone or email. All meetings will take place via telephone or video conferencing. All training and other face to face events that have been arranged for this period will be postponed, although we are currently considering whether we can do some training through creative means like webinars.

We have also been in touch with all the Circles Providers and they have put in place alternative and creative service provision where possible. The well-being of our service users (Core Members), Volunteers and Staff is paramount but we are mindful that the social distancing measures will exacerbate feelings of social isolation and exclusion already experienced by our Core Members and Providers will therefore provide a virtual service where at all possible, thereby also continuing to provide an additional layer of risk management. I am mindful that some of these measures are not possible for all Circles Providers due to restrictions on the use of some digital technology and having had to re-deploy staff to other parts of the business due to the demands of COVID-19. Those Providers that are able to use digital technology have adopted the following measures where possible:

- Current face to face Circles meetings are suspended. Where possible Circle meetings will instead be held virtually through means such as teleconferencing, video-calling, Skype and Zoom. Where this is not possible, telephone contact with the Core Member will be maintained and even increased where deemed necessary with their Circle Coordinator and Volunteers. Relevant intelligence will continue to be shared with statutory agencies.
- For new Circles, Providers will, where possible, set up 'Virtual Circles' through teleconferencing, video-calling, Skype and Zoom. Where this is not possible new starts will be postponed to such time that social distancing measures are relaxed.
- Referrals for new Circles are welcomed at this time and potential new Core Members can be assessed and some of the pre-Circle preparatory work can be done remotely.

In the UK the government has made additional funding available for charities. Circles UK worked with Circles Providers and prepared a proposal for the Ministry of Justice of additional temporary (remote) services that Circles Providers can provide to the Probation and other criminal justice services to support service delivery for people with convictions for sexual offences. We are hoping that our proposal will be accepted which will enable us to provide additional mentoring services.

## **CIRCLES IN CATALONIA**

### **By Patricia Bosch, Circles Coordinator**

From CerclesCat in Catalonia, we have postponed the following because of the travel and social distancing restrictions:

- Informative talks (Universities and Civic Centers are now closed).
- Volunteer training.
- Training provision.
- Informative talks in prisons.

Online tools are used for:

- Team meetings are by Zoom.
- Group supervision of Coordinators takes place by Zoom.
- Individual supervision of coordinators takes place by Zoom, or video call.
- The coordinators follow up and provide support to Core Members by telephone, and also by video call where possible.
- Coordinators meet volunteers by Zoom.
- Meetings of all the partners and participants of Circles take place by Zoom.

CerclesCat has also now published the third evaluation report of their Circles. The information can be accessed [here](http://ceife.gencat.cat/en/recerca/cataleg/crono/2020/avaluacio-cerclescat-3/index.html) and contains a very interesting infographic: <http://ceife.gencat.cat/en/recerca/cataleg/crono/2020/avaluacio-cerclescat-3/index.html>

Here is a photograph of the team doing group supervision via Zoom:



## **CIRCLES IN BELGIUM BY ANN CASTREL, CIRCLES COORDINATOR**

In Belgium, we have put in place digital circles (in Antwerp as well as Brussels), using video conferencing to communicate with Core members. For 2 circles, that were in the starting process, we put up a rotation where the volunteers take turns calling the Core member.

## **ADVICE FOR PEOPLE AT RISK OF COMMITTING A VIOLENT OR SEXUAL OFFENCE WHILE IN SOCIAL ISOLATION**

Recently, there have been reports of how instances of sexual abuse, online and in person, and domestic abuse is going to increase during the COVID-19 crisis along with concerns of potential victims and related individuals being put at risk. In the UK we have seen our first COVID-19 related domestic homicides. Kieran McCartan and David Prescott wrote a helpful blog with advice which can be accessed here:

<https://blog.atsa.com/2020/04/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-committing.html>

## **CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION GENERAL MEETING AND MINI-CONFERENCE**

We have previously told you that the next CirclesEurope Association General Meeting and Mini-conference would take place on 19 June 2020. However, due to the Corona COVID-19 restrictions it is likely that we will have to postpone this event to a later time in the year. All obviously depends on how the lock down in the various countries progress but we will communicate with you once we are clearer on when we can hold this event.

## JOINING THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

We are pleased that the membership of the Association is steadily growing. If you are not yet a member: please visit our website to [see our types of membership](#). Please remember to circulate the information to all your volunteers and staff and encourage them to join the Association. We are currently looking for funding and the limited funding that we have at the moment is limiting how much work we can do at the moment. 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.

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