



CirclesEurope

December 2020

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

Dear Colleagues

On behalf of the Board of CirclesEurope, I am writing to wish you a relaxing festive period which we hope you are able to share in a safe way with a small group of loved ones. What an extraordinary year it has been. The tragedy of the COVID-19 virus has touched us all in one way or another. Our hearts go out to those of you who have lost loved ones to this dreadful disease, which loss you will no doubt feel acutely over the festive season. Please know that you are in our thoughts.

In this newsletter we will give an update on the work of the CirclesEurope Association and share other news that may be of interest.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CoSA PROVISION

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 virus had a serious impact on CoSA provision and all CoSA Providers have been affected. We should all pause and thank our staff teams and volunteers for their hard work and appreciate all that we have done to keep CoSA going in this toughest of years. The creativity and commitment of CoSA Providers and the innovative ways that staff and volunteers have found to continue to support Core Members through remote and other service provision over the last months is truly impressive.

The CirclesEurope Board conducted an international survey to gauge the impact of COVID-19 on CoSA provision (led by Prof Kieran McCartan who leads the Research and Evaluation sub-group of the Board). A total of 16 CoSA Providers from eight different countries¹ (three UK Providers, five Dutch Providers, one Belgian Provider, one Spanish Provider, one Latvian Provider, one Irish Provider, one American Provider, and three Canadian Providers) completed the survey. Here is a link to the report: <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/6828494>

¹ Please note that different countries have different numbers of CoSA Providers, with some countries having multiple Providers (UK, Netherlands, Canada, USA) and others only having one (Spain, Ireland, Latvia, Belgium).

UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

In the last year the membership of the CirclesEurope Association grew and the Association led a number of initiatives. In March 2020, nine countries were full members of the Association.

Due to COVID-19, the annual General Meeting could not take place face to face and instead took place in July 2020 through an online event. I am very pleased that so many of the members could join us at the event. Another positive is that because it was online, more people were able to attend as would have been the case if we held the meeting face to face. The notes from the meeting were sent out to all of you after the meeting.

We postponed the annual mini-conference in the hope that we could hold that face to face, but as this is sadly not possible, we have decided to arrange the mini-conference for 29 January 2021 through another online event. By now you would have received a formal invite and an event programme and we hope that many of you are able to join us. There are some interesting speakers and discussion topics. We are also very grateful to our Canadian colleagues who will be getting up very early in the Canadian winter to join us on zoom!

The Board also considered the Intellectual Property Rights of the European CoSA model and devised a membership agreement as well as an approach to the use of the European CoSA Handbook. We also continued to work on growing CoSA in Europe and approached countries which have an interest in CoSA provision or who had provided Circles in the past, to become members of the Association and we also liaised with CoSA Providers outside Europe, including CoSA Canada, CoSA Vermont and others.

UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE BOARD SUB-GROUPS

Two Board sub-groups are now up and running, the Knowledge Sharing, Evaluation and Research sub-group (led by Prof Kieran McCartan) and the Quality Assurance, Governance and Membership sub-group (led by Mechtild Höing from the Netherlands). Thank you for those members who nominated CoSA staff to participate in the sub-groups.

The Quality Assurance, Governance and Membership sub-group completed key pieces of work, including:

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 checklist incorporated the principles of the Definitions and Standards document which was compiled in 2013 for Circles4EU and which contained the key principles of Circles provision for European Circles Providers. This self-assessment reflects those principles that encompass the minimum standards that Providers of Circles in Europe should adhere to. The report of the findings should be available in January 2021. We are still awaiting responses from two countries, but the self-assessments that we have received so far demonstrated that CoSA Providers generally work to high standards. Here are some of the preliminary findings of the self-assessment (*this may change once we have received all the outstanding self-assessments*):

- CoSA Providers have an effective and transparent governance and accountability structure in place which governs their CoSA provision as well as adequate financial management and control procedures.

- Data collection meets GDPR requirements.
- Recruitment, training and supervision procedures are in place so that suitable staff ensure that CoSA are delivered safely.
- Recruitment, training and supervision procedures are in place to ensure Volunteers are suitable, appropriately allocated and safely managed. However, not all CoSA Providers have a Diversity statement or policy.
- There is a consistent representation of CoSA, including when engaging in promotion of CoSA. However, not all CoSA Providers have a Media Policy or Social Media guidance.
- All CoSA Providers can demonstrate that they have procedures in place which ensure a consistent and high standard of CoSA delivery. However, written information on the Outer Circle role and service level agreements with Outer Circles members are absent for some Providers.
- Secure communication and information sharing systems are in place to ensure the effectiveness and safety of a Circle, although not all CoSA Providers have Information Sharing Agreements in place.
- All CoSA Providers ensure that a Circle Agreement is signed by all members of the Circle.
- Most CoSA Providers have a defined exit strategy for Core Members in place which includes a formal procedure for when recidivism or an increase in risk occurs, except one.
- Some CoSA Providers have an end of Circle contract signed by all members to ensure clarity of responsibility when the Circle ends. One Provider is in the process of developing this and one has a formal 'farewell' discussion instead of an end of Circle contract.
- Some CoSA Providers have a procedure to evaluate project quality but not all.

As mentioned above, the Knowledge-sharing, Evaluation and Research sub-group compiled a questionnaire for members to assess the impact that the COVID-19 Coronavirus had on Circles provision in the various countries and produced a report.

OTHER EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

i. EU STRATEGY TO ADDRESS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The European Commission has adopted an EU strategy to more effectively address child sexual abuse. The strategy presents a framework for EU action in 2020-2025 to respond in a comprehensive way to the increasing threat of child sexual abuse, both in its online and offline forms. It includes eight initiatives that make use of all tools available at EU level, both legislative and non-legislative (i.e. funding and coordination), covering prevention, law enforcement, and assistance to victims. Let me know if you would like a copy of the Strategy.

ii. CONSULTATION ON LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

As a follow up to the Strategy, the European Commission has now announced a number of initiatives, including legislation to tackle child sexual abuse online effectively and the possible creation of a European centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse. The Inception Impact Assessment (IIA) for a legislative proposal to implement these initiatives has now been published [here](#).

The publication of the IIA offers the opportunity for stakeholders to give their views on the proposal. This feedback will be taken into account for further development and fine tuning of the initiative, which the Commission hopes to adopt by the end of Q2 2021, as per the Strategy.

COSA IN GERMANY

The Probation Service (AJSD) in the German state of Niedersachsen is considering starting a CoSA project. In November, two members of the Quality Assurance, Governance and Membership subgroup provided an online presentation (in German) for about 35 of their staff and stakeholders to give them an overview of CoSA. AJSD has joined CirclesEurope and will be able to obtain further assistance if they start a CoSA project in 2021.

JOINING THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

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. 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.

FINALLY



A merry festive season and a good rest to all of you from the CirclesEurope Board, even if it is a smaller celebration than you would normally have. Thank you for your hard work this year and the support you have given to the Board. Let us remember those who lost loved ones, were unwell or faced hardship and may 2021 be an easier year for us all.

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