



CirclesEurope

February 2019

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

It is amazing how time flies and we are already heading towards the end of February. We at the CirclesEurope Interim Board hope that 2019 will bring you all very positive things for Circles. We thought that you would find it interesting to get an updated picture on what is happening internationally with Circles provision and thought we would start off by focusing in this newsletter on Ireland, Catalonia and Canada. Thank you to our colleagues in those countries that have so kindly provided updates. In addition to this, we will also update you on how the CirclesEurope Association is progressing, the planned elections of the first permanent Board and the arrangements for the first General Meeting and mini-conference of the Association which will take place on 14 June 2019 at Avans University in the Netherlands.

COSA IN IRELAND, CANADA AND CATALONIA

COSA IRELAND



PACE is a community based organisation in Ireland that provides a range of services including three separate prevention programmes for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. This includes Safer Lives (a community based treatment programme), Foothold Floating Support Service and Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles). Circles have been provided since 2015 in partnership with the Probation Service, An Garda Sochána and other agencies. Since inception, 14 Circles have been provided (funded by the Probation Service) and over 68 volunteers recruited. Circles are provided for male and females, people with Intellectual Disabilities and the first Prison Circle has just started.

The volunteer resource is well developed and 85 % are female. They have to be over 21 years of age. Volunteers report that volunteering for Circles has a positive impact on their lives and they speak highly of the support offered to them by PACE as the following quote demonstrates:

“The Circle has been a life changing, greatly life enriching experience for me, with both the Circle set up and my fellow volunteers teaching me so much about what it means to be a good person. Lessons I will take with me into my classroom, my personal relationships and my community. I genuinely think that the benefits of CoSA go far beyond those immediately involved in the process. All of our meetings from training to personal & group reviews have been extremely helpful and your extra mile support has been essential in this being the excellent experience it has been. The Circle has done wonders for my faith in humanity.”

Likewise, Core Members report similarly positive experiences of their involvement in a Circle. Here is one example:

“I find it (the Circle) very positive, it is a huge load of my mind being able to go to talk to a group of people without being judged. There is no pressure and it is relaxed, it’s just like an ordinary conversation with people and you can have a laugh. It’s like having a conversation with a family member or a group of friends. It’s contact with the outside world that I wouldn’t have without it. I’d encourage anyone who needs it to give it a try, you’ve nothing to lose and everything to gain”.

It is also clear that the agencies and organisations that work in partnership with PACE have high regard for Circles and the positive contribution they make in assisting people to live a life free of crime and harmful behaviour. Here is what a Probation Officer said:

“I have been impressed by the warmth and non-judgmental attitude demonstrated by the volunteers to the Core Members. The support and social contact with people who are aware of the Core Member’s history, but who are willing to support and engage with them in a pro social way has been a very positive experience for both clients. One client has particularly commented on how this has helped him.”

COSA CANADA

In 2015, after many years of strong collaboration between COSA sites (Providers) across the country, COSA Canada was formed as the national association of Canadian COSA sites. The formation of COSA Canada was done with the following broad mandate:

- To secure ongoing, sustainable, nationwide funding for COSA;
- To develop and update an Operational Model common to all Canadian COSA sites;
- To develop best practices and resources;
- To act as a hub for academic research and clinical practice using the Canadian COSA model;
- To promote and encourage COSA within Canada and internationally;
- To develop key partnerships with government and with the criminal justice, mental health, and victim support communities;
- And to advocate for COSA, for our core members, and for the issues that impact both them and the community.

In May of 2017, COSA Canada received a five-year funding package through the National Crime Prevention Strategy at Public Safety Canada. Using this funding, COSA Canada will

work with 14 COSA partners across the country to implement the COSA National Capacity Project. In addition to improving the COSA Canada Operational Model and developing good practice and materials to support it, this project will also support and grow COSA across Canada. The project also includes an independent evaluation which will add to the already strong body of research supporting the work.

As COSA Canada grows we will continue to provide a platform for COSA sites to learn, grow, and collaborate with one another. Coming together under the banner of COSA Canada will allow COSA sites to learn from the experiences of each other and to meet new challenges together.

COSA CATALONIA



Our colleague Patricia Bosch, from Catalonia ('CerclesCat') participated in a training day for "Abusive people, an unavoidable social reality", organized by the Vicki Bernadet Foundation on October 17, 2018. This Foundation treats people who have experienced sexual abuse. Her speech was entitled "CerclesCat, main objective: no more victims", and she was accompanied by a volunteer of the project, Xavier Badia, who also explained his experience as a CerclesCat's volunteer. Patricia works in an NGO called "Fundación Salud y Comunidad", and since 2011, collaborates with Justice Department in the implementation of "Circles of Support and Accountability". There are currently 21 Circles running in Catalonia with 149 volunteers. Here is a picture of Patricia at the event:



Patricia also participated in a seminar "Circles of Support and Responsibility" organized by the University of Barcelona on December 1, 2018, with Grant Duwe from Circles Minnesota. Other professionals of CerclesCat, and professionals from the Justice Department also participated in the meeting. Here is a picture of the participants:



JOINING THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

We are pleased that the membership of the Association is steadily growing. Please look at the Circles4EU website for details on the types of membership that is available as well as the details on how to join as we look forward to growing the network of Circles Providers.

ELECTION OF THE FIRST PERMANENT BOARD OF THE ASSOCIATION, FIRST GENERAL MEETING AND MINI-CONFERENCE

As we have communicated in the last Newsletter, the first permanent Board of the Association will be elected to coincide with the first General Meeting of the Association which will be held on **14 June 2019** at Avans University in the Netherlands. Avans University is very kindly supporting us in this event and we are pleased to announce that a mini-conference will be arranged as part of the proceedings of the General Meeting. Speakers have been invited and the focus will be on showing the innovative ways in which Circles have evolved in the various countries and we will look particularly at Prison Circles from the UK, a new pilot project on Circles for Core Members who are not under probation supervision of the Netherlands and a presentation on Circles in Catalonia. Details of the event as well as the nomination and election procedures for the Board will be sent out soon, but in the meantime please put the date in your diaries as it would be wonderful if as many people as possible can join the event and celebrate the Association and appointment of the first permanent Board.

Please note that you have to be a [member of the Association](#) to be nominated for the Board and to be able to vote. Potential Board nominees and voters need to register as a member by **latest 18 April 2019** to allow the preparations for the 14 June 2019 General meeting to proceed within the required timeframes as set out by the Statutes and Regulations of the Association.

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