

## **Introduction**

The CirclesEurope Association (abbreviated CirclesEurope) is a non-profit private association, registered in Utrecht, the Netherlands. CirclesEurope has the goal to support current Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA or Circles) Providers in Europe as well as further develop provision in jurisdictions where CoSA are not currently in operation.

### ***Background and history of the development of CoSA***

CoSA is a unique approach to rehabilitate medium to high-risk people who have convictions for sexual offences or who cause sexual harm to others. The approach started in 1994 in Canada when the Reverend Harry Nigh and a small number of volunteers from his congregation in the town of Hamilton (Ontario, Canada), offered support and protection to a lifelong recidivist child sex offender, known as Charlie Taylor. The efforts by these volunteers who became known as ‘Charlie’s Angels’, created a better way of ensuring the protection of children as they supported Charlie and assisted him to live an offence free life until his death. This approach became known as Circles of Support and Accountability. From Canada it was successfully adapted and introduced in England and Wales in the early 2000s and from there expanded its scope beyond the borders well into the rest of Europe.

A Circle consists of 4-6 carefully selected and fully trained volunteers from the community who meet with the individual who has caused sexual harm (the Core Member), in order to support them in their transition into mainstream society. People who commit sexual offences tend to experience a high level of social isolation due to the stigma attached to sexual abuse, which research has indicated to be a strong factor in further sexual reoffending. A Circle helps to reduce this isolation and encourages the Core Member to address his or her sexually abusive behaviour. The aim is to help the core member to lead a life without reoffending and thereby minimise the number of victims. The volunteers provide both emotional support, practical guidance and support the core-member in his/her ongoing risk-management. They encourage him/her to take responsibility for his/her own actions.

This inner circle of volunteers works in partnership with an outer circle of professionals who are engaged in the core member’s rehabilitation process. A circle coordinator (an experienced professional) mentors and supervises the volunteers and facilitates the information exchange between the inner and outer circles (Höing & Alards, 2012).

### ***Background to the development of the CirclesEurope Association***

The CoSA model, as developed in England and Wales, was implemented in the Netherlands in 2009. It involved the transfer of Circles knowledge from England and Wales to a different national context after the necessary adaptations were made. This collaboration led to the EU-funded ‘*Circles, Together for Safety*’ project. Against this background, a European CoSA model and implementation guide were created and new CoSA projects were launched in the Netherlands and Belgium.

This experience made it possible to start a new EU-funded project called Circles4EU through which Bulgaria, Latvia, France, Catalonia, Hungary and Ireland joined the already existing network. This project ended in 2015 mainly due to lack of funding. The former Circles4EU members looked for a possibility to salvage the work previously done and further develop the Circles methodology. During this period, a group of five former project partners analysed the needs and possibilities. This resulted in the initiative being resurrected which led to the registration of the CirclesEurope Association in Utrecht, the Netherlands on 15 June 2018.

### **Mission and strategy**

The establishment of an association to oversee the quality, service development and research and evaluation of CoSA in Europe will strengthen the approach to rehabilitate people who engage in sexually harmful behaviour, prevent new victims, involve the community in keeping their communities safe and offer perpetrators of sexual abuse and people with convictions for sexual offences a realistic and safe chance of reintegration into the community.

### ***Our mission***

The mission of the CirclesEurope Association entails the support, development and promotion of Circles of Support and Accountability Services across Europe according to the commonly agreed Circles model and with the intention of overseeing similar developments elsewhere.

### ***The CirclesEurope Association wants to achieve its mission by means of the following objectives:***

- A. To provide and share guidance and advice to members according to the agreed framework for the development and strengthening of the Circles model.
- B. To coordinate the provision of information, guidance and advice on the establishment of Circles in response to approaches from other countries outside Europe, applying the agreed framework.
- C. To protect the intellectual property rights of materials, developed by more than one member for use by other members.
- D. To assist and support evaluation and research for the enhancement of the Circles service, quality and reputation, at national, European and international levels.
- E. To secure funding through a variety of streams, for the promotion of national and international exchange of knowledge and expertise regarding the Circles method and to facilitate ever-wider provision of Circles.
- F. To engage and cooperate with other relevant professional associations and agencies to mutual benefit.

### **SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis**

#### ***Strengths:***

- CirclesEurope is based on an already existing network of CoSA projects and providers in the Netherlands, Belgium, England and Wales, Bulgaria, Latvia, France, Catalonia, Hungary and Ireland ([www.circles4.eu](http://www.circles4.eu)). The network partners expressed the wish to meet through a collaborative platform to exchange knowledge and good practice in order to improve the quality of CoSA provision (Geerts, 2018).
- CoSA's objectives (preventing sexual offences by helping perpetrators reintegrate safely and positively into their communities through the social inclusion and social control of a Circle) serve a strong social purpose.

- The CoSA method has proved to be an extremely effective way of reducing recidivism and is widely acknowledged in academic circles and forensic care (Clarke et al 2015, Duwe, 2018).

**Weaknesses:**

- CirclesEurope is a relatively young organisation, a start-up with limited financial means, resources and capacity.
- The number of CoSA projects and providers is limited. There are few members available for board or leadership positions.

**Opportunities:**

- There is significant dedication and willingness in the existing network to make an active effort to develop and progress the CirclesEurope Association (Geerts, 2018).
- There is also goodwill on the part of the silent majority among the community, who stands behind these goals and CoSA's approach to the issue (Höing et al. 2017).
- A large number of volunteers are active in CoSA provision and can act as ambassadors.

**Threats:**

- The lack of a strong financial basis could jeopardise important goals such as quality control. Some of the network's objectives may hence not be implemented (such as creating a quality framework and developing the service model).
- CirclesEurope sets a high quality standard for CoSA provision as Core Members represent a medium or high risk of harm. CoSA projects or providers flouting the quality guidelines may entail reputational risks and may discredit the Association.

**Current situation of the CirclesEurope Association**

CirclesEurope was registered as an association on 15 June 2018 and the official launch took place at the CEP *Re-framing Sexual Abuse, Practical Directions Conference* in Riga, Latvia, on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018. An interim Board led the process of establishing the Association and oversaw the election of the first permanent Board which was announced at the first General Meeting of the Association which took place on 14 June 2019 in Den Bosch, the Netherlands and was hosted by Avans University (the Research group 'Balanceren tussen dwang en drang' of the Expert Safety Centre ('Expertisecentrum Veiligheid')). The members of the current Board can be seen on page 7 of this Plan.

The first General Meeting was followed by a mini-conference where speakers from the Netherlands, Catalonia and England delivered a series of interesting presentations on a variety of approaches to the CoSA model. This created the tradition of an annual mini-conference which has been continued with every year. When COVID created travel restrictions, the General Meetings and mini-conferences were adapted to take place online. Although this restricted face to face contact and networking, it enabled a larger number of people from more countries to attend.

The Board has continued to develop the Association to the benefit of its members. A summary of the key activities and successes of the last year will be provided below. Funding for the

Association has remained the most pressing challenge and the Board is grateful for the donations that have been received from supporters. The membership fees have been kept low but are essential to ensure the continuation of the Association.

### **Review of the last year (June 2021 to June 2022)**

The following is a summary of the key activities, achievements and challenges of the Association of the last year:

1. Even though the situation has steadily improved, COVID-19 continued to cause global disruption and hardship during 2021/22 which continued to affect face to face Circles provision as well as the activities of the Association. However, the situation continued to stabilise, and it is positive that most Circles provision in the member countries has now returned to face to face. Where face to face contact could not take place, Core Members were continuously supported through alternative means such as telephone contact.
2. The CirclesEurope Board and sub-groups continued to meet and progress various projects despite the impact of COVID-19. Meetings and business were conducted online. In the last year the membership of the CirclesEurope Association grew. In May 2022, ten countries were full members of the Association.
3. The combined Quality, Assurance, Governance and Membership and the Service Development Sub-groups consist of representatives from the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and Catalonia. A decision was taken in 2020 to temporarily combine the two groups due to capacity issues. It was decided to continue with the combined group in 2021 due to the ongoing pressures of COVID-19 which affected capacity to operate two separate sub-groups. Despite capacity issues, it is positive that a number of projects were progressed, including the CoSA self-assessment checklist (which is intended to be completed annually by members) and the survey of international CoSA Models. The latter will be finalised in 2022/23 and be distributed to members.
4. At the last General Meeting it was reported that the Research sub-group led on research into the impact of COVID on Circles provision. The results of the research was published in the ECAN Bulletin themed issue *2020 – a year of crisis or Kairos 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>
5. Due to COVID-19, the annual General Meeting could not take place face to face and instead took place on 8 October 2021 through an online event. However, because it was online, more people were able to attend as would have been the case if we held the meeting face to face. At the meeting the 2020/21 Annual Financial Report and Annual Activity Report were approved as well as the Policy Plan for 2021-22. The meeting was attended by all the country member representatives as well as Circles staff, volunteers and supporters of the Association. There were also attendees from non-European countries. The General meeting was followed by a seminar which was

presented by Prof Bart Claes from Avans University who spoke about the relationship between CoSA and Restorative Justice. It was a thought-provoking seminar which led to interesting questions, comments and discussion.

6. At the 2021 General Meeting we reported on the successful mini-conference which was held online in January 2021. The Board intends to organise another Circles mini-conference toward the end of 2022.

7. Regular Newsletters were produced and provided to members to share information, good practice and communication on the work of CirclesEurope.

8. The CirclesEurope ([www.Circleseurope.eu](http://www.Circleseurope.eu)) website was maintained and further developed. The website contains updated material on the history of Circles, current providers, research into the effectiveness of CoSA and news and updates about CirclesEurope.

9. The Association Finances were managed well and regular reports were provided by the Treasurer to the Board. In January 2022, the Treasurer of the Board, Michelle Vreede had to leave her position on the Board due to having found new employment. We were sorry to lose Michelle on the Board as she made a very valuable contribution. However, Marijke Bijlsma from CoSA Netherland agreed to replace her in the interim for a few months until the election for the new Board which took place in May 2022. We are grateful to Marijke for having stepped in so quickly.

10. The Board continued to maintain positive relationships with CoSA Providers outside Europe, including CoSA Canada, CoSA Vermont and others. This has been very helpful and enabled a sharing of good practice and learning about new approaches in CoSA provision. It was with great sadness that we heard that government funding to CoSA Canada came to an end at the end of March 2022. CoSA Canada lobbied for funding to allow CoSA Canada to continue and the CirclesEurope Board sent a letter in support to the Canadian Minister of Pubic Safety and the Parliamentary Secretary to stress the importance of CoSA for Canada.

11. As it was three years since the last CirclesEurope Board was elected, members were notified in line with the procedures and regulations and nominations and applications for Board membership were invited. The new Board for the next three years will be announced at the General Meeting of 17 June 2022. Mechtild Hoing kindly led this process in her role of assisting the Board in a voluntary capacity.

### **Year Action Plan (2022/23)**

This Policy Plan is valid for one year (1 June 2022 to 30 June 2023).

The key objective of this year is to continue to develop the CirclesEurope Association to enable an increase in membership and encourage more Circles Providers and Circles provision in Europe. The key activities for the next period can be set out as follows:

### Activities

The following specific activities which underpin the objectives of the Association will be focused on in 2022/23:

<b>Key objectives</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Time frame</b>
Grow Circles provision and enable more Circles Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to explore the possibility to apply for funding for a CirclesEurope project.</li> <li>• Continue to promote CoSA as an effective intervention and identify and assist potential new providers of CoSA in Europe.</li> <li>• Identify organisations that could be allies of CirclesEurope and establish contact with them (obtain list of organisations through CEP). Determine how best to keep them engaged (eg. though including them in CirclesEurope Newsletters).</li> <li>• Enable sharing of good practice amongst member countries and provide additional support where needed to ensure that members can grow and develop their CoSA work.</li> </ul>	Continuous
Maintain and develop the CirclesEurope Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the work of the Association</li> <li>• Encourage an increase in membership.</li> <li>• Continue to maintain the members database and ensure that information processing and sharing meets all GDPR and data protection requirements.</li> <li>• Explore areas of funding and sponsorship and create a budget plan for 2022/23.</li> <li>• Notify members when membership subscriptions are due and process membership payments.</li> </ul>	Continuous
Board to meet its governance obligations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board to meet regularly; continue to access an affordable telephone conference and online conferencing system to be used by the Board and sub-groups to enable regular meetings and work sessions.</li> <li>• Continue to lead the sub-groups, co-opt members on the sub-groups as required and ensure the sub-groups are sufficiently resourced to fulfil their terms of reference.</li> <li>• Produce required finance reports.</li> <li>• Produce annual accounts to be presented at the General Meeting.</li> <li>• Produce an annual Policy Plan.</li> </ul>	Continuous General Meeting June 2022 Mini-conference Oct 2022

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange independent audit of accounts before the 2022 General Meeting.</li> </ul>	
Communicate, promote and develop the Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to inform members of progress of the Association through regular Newsletters and other appropriate forms of communication.</li> <li>• Continue to maintain and develop the CirclesEurope website. Continue to try and find a volunteer to manage the website content (or adopt a rotating system between countries). Place links to social media accounts (Linked In, Twitter and Facebook) on the website to enable content from social media accounts to be pulled through to the website.</li> <li>• Continue to promote the Association and CoSA provision through social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook)</li> </ul>	Continuous Newsletters every 4 months
Communicate, promote and develop the Association	<p>Prepare and organise annual General meeting and mini-conference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and arrange venue and catering (if face to face), draft General Meeting agenda and send to members.</li> <li>• Ensure Chair and Treasurers' report are prepared and delivered at General Meeting.</li> <li>• Determine mini-conference theme, speakers, consider funding available for travel and subsistence if face to face, invite speakers, finalise programme and promote conference.</li> <li>• Complete logistical arrangements for General Meeting and mini-conference.</li> <li>• Arrange additional interesting events and seminars for Association members.</li> </ul>	General Meeting: June 2022; mini-conference: Oct 2022)
Develop the CirclesEurope network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise with supporters of CoSA (inside and outside Europe).</li> <li>• Develop additional support and liaise with relevant organisations that link to CoSA or may complement CoSA provision.</li> </ul>	Continuous

### ***Running costs of the Association***

The Board of the Association is extremely grateful to the Dutch Probation Service for an unrestricted grant of 2,000 euros which was received in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 Corona virus the expenditure of the Board in 2021/22 was low as there were no face to face meetings and the mini-conference was deferred to January 2021. The Board is also very grateful for the donations which has been received in addition to the annual membership fees.

In the following year, the remaining Dutch Probation grant, donations and membership contributions will be used to:

- Hosting and maintenance of the website
- Payment of bank fees
- Organising the CirclesEurope General meeting and mini-conference, including providing travel costs for mini-conference speakers (if face to face)
- Providing travel support for Board members (if face to face)
- Cost of video and telephone conferencing and travel expenses of Board Chair sponsored by Circles UK

MINIMUM RUNNING COST: £2,000

Potential sponsors will be contacted through companies, professional organisations, philanthropic institutions, stakeholders already involved in CoSA projects, core members and their families as well as public institutions such as churches and universities.

In the future, we hope to be awarded grants to foster the collaboration with our members and work towards our objectives by means of training sessions, peer audits, new research projects and by income generation through new CoSA initiatives.

#### ***Registration detail of the Association***

CirclesEuropeAssociation

Vivaldiplantsoen 100,

3533 JE Utrecht, NL.

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

[www.circles4.eu](http://www.circles4.eu)

KvK-number:71898190.

RSIN or tax number: 858894592.

Bank account/IBAN: NL73 RABO 0332 4136 67

There is no CBF accreditation. The Association does not have any capital at the moment.

#### ***The Board***

The Board of the Association is unremunerated. There is no other salaried staff working for the Association. The intention is to mainly work with volunteers and sub-committees in the future.

The current board members are:

1. Ms Riana **Taylor**, Chair
2. Mrs Ann **Castrel**, Secretary
3. Mrs Michelle **Vreede**, Treasurer (until January 2022; replaced in the interim by Ms Marijke Bijlsma)
4. Prof Kieran **McCartan**, lead for Research and Evaluation
5. Audrey Andrea Johanna Antonia Fransisca **Alards**, voluntary member
6. Dr Mechtild Alwine **Höing**, voluntary member