



# CirclesEurope

November 2019

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

This is the first Newsletter since the election and appointment of the first CirclesEurope permanent Board and will give you an update on what the Board has focused on since its appointment. We will also give an overview of two countries that celebrated 10 year anniversaries of their Circles provision – the UK and the Netherlands. We will also highlight a new and exciting service ('Angel Blau') which has started in Catalonia. As always we will share some pictures with you, which will hopefully let you get a sense of the happy celebrations and new and positive developments.

## **10 YEARS OF CIRCLES AT DUTCH PROBATION** **By Michelle Vreede, Circles Coordinator**

More than 10 years ago, my colleagues Annemarie Venderbosch and Audrey Alards drove through the south of the Netherlands with homemade flyers to recruit volunteers for the first COSA circle. These COSA pioneers started the first Circle in the Netherlands. The Dutch COSA project was born and turned out to be a success. Soon the other regions followed and by now the Dutch Probation has started and completed 159 circles. At this moment, 175 active volunteers are committed to prevent new victims. Another 100 volunteers will be trained and ready to start new circles.

On 5 October 2019, we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of COSA with all the volunteers and stakeholders. Our volunteers and professionals had an inspiring day, and many experiences were shared. The circles coordinators had prepared a wonderful poem of thanks to the volunteers. In the 'Big COSA Quiz' people could test their COSA knowledge. The quiz explained a number of results of Mechtild's '10-years of COSA study:



COSA 10 Jaar.  
Onderzoeksrapport

### **Becoming friends with paedophiles?**

One of the reasons for the success is the way in which the Netherlands adopted COSA, namely as part of a probation organization and in collaboration with Avans University of Applied Sciences who offered scientific academic support. Former CEO of the Dutch Probation Sjef Van Gennip recollected his memories of those days: how he had to

convince the Ministry of Justice to provide funding for COSA and especially how he had to convince the Minister and the media that this 'small but unpopular' group of perpetrators must be helped in their return to society, which was not always easy to explain. A storm of criticism was received in the early days. In the media we were often blamed for having become 'too friendly' with paedophiles and called names like 'paedo huggers'. Nevertheless, we continued and in 2015 COSA was no longer a 'project' but became part of our standard 'toolbox' of services. Structural and generous funding by the Ministry of Justice has proven to be the key to this success.

### **A new era**

At the Anniversary, the current CEO of the Dutch Probation, Johan Bac, stated that the success of COSA calls for further developing of the model. For example, the Circles model can be used for people who commit cyber and online offences who often live very isolated lives and often because of their isolation commit serious offences. He also promised to offer sufficient resources for the further development and possible expansion of COSA. For him it is clear that by using ordinary citizens/volunteers we do important work to help ex-offenders to regain a place in our society.

### **COSA-Magazine: for and by volunteers**

The volunteers were put in the spotlight at our anniversary. As a 'thank you' for their dedication, they received a COSA Magazine, a one-off edition of Dutch Probation, with featured stories about COSA in the Netherlands and interviews with COSA volunteers. This magazine was made by volunteers and their circle coordinators, with the support of our media and communication department.

Here is what the magazine looks like and if you would like a copy, please contact Mechtild Höing at [ma.hoing@avans.nl](mailto:ma.hoing@avans.nl)



### **COSA research**

On request of the Dutch Probation organisation, some statistics about '10 years COSA at Dutch Probation' were produced by Mechtild Höing, and compiled into a research report, which has been mentioned above in the quiz.

Here is a picture from the Anniversary of all the Circles Coordinators:



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

## **CIRCLES UK 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY By Riana Taylor, CEO OF Circles UK**

Circles UK celebrated its 10 Year Anniversary on 7 December 2018 in London at Friends House. We were extremely grateful that our Quaker Friends were hosting this event, as the Quakers were pivotal in the introduction of COSA to the UK from Canada.

Our celebration was a very personal and interactive journey paying tribute to those who helped create us, support us and sustain us over the years. The evening involved a series of entertaining conversations, performances and films which highlighted the richness and diversity of our work and allowed us to honour the key contributions and components that have contributed to creating a strong national organisation with a network of Circles Providers in England and Wales. We also shone a light on those who represent the foundations of a Circle - the Volunteers, Core Members, Circles Coordinators and Circles Provider organisations - without whom a Circle is not possible.

The evening had many highlights but one of the main ones was the Anniversary cake which was made for Circles UK by a Core Member. Not only did it look beautiful but was extremely tasty. Here is a picture of it:



## EXCITING NEW PROJECT IN CATALONIA: ANGEL BLAU By Patricia Bosch, Catalonia Circles Coordinator

Rosa Nolla and Patricia Bosch, partners of CirclesEurope, have created with other colleagues the Àngel Blau Association, which will be presented in Barcelona on December 12th at the College of Journalists. Its main objective is the prevention of child sexual abuse, and it offers support to both abstinent paedophiles (people who are attracted to children and teenagers, and who have never committed sexual abuse), and to victims of child sexual abuse. This association has been operating in France since 1988, and its creator was Latifa Benari. The Àngel Blau method is innovative and unique: the "Group of words", which is configured as an informal meeting for victims of child sexual abuse and abstinent paedophiles, who have agreed to share a constructive exchange between them.

For more information, you can consult [www.angelblau.com](http://www.angelblau.com).

## UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION BOARD

**Away Day:** The CirclesEurope newly appointed first permanent Board held a very successful Away Day on 9 September 2019 in Amsterdam. The purpose of the day was to plan for the next year of the CirclesEurope Association and was attended by Riana Taylor (chair), Ann Castrel (Secretary), Kieran McCartan (lead for Research and Evaluation), Michelle Vreede (Treasurer) and Mechtild Höing (voluntary member).

At the meeting it was agreed to progress and establish the three sub-groups which had been approved to be set up by the CirclesEurope Association at the General Meeting. These are:

- the Governance, Quality Assurance and membership sub-group (led by Mechtild Höing)
- the Service Development sub-group (led by Riana Taylor)
- the Knowledge sharing, evaluation and research sub-group (led by Kieran McCartan).

If you want to volunteer for any of these sub-groups, please get in touch with the leads of the groups. We have significant work to do in the Association and need helpers, so please come and join us! Most of the meetings will take place by telephone conference.

**Volunteer to help with our website:** At the moment we are specifically looking for a volunteer to maintain our website and help us upload materials, so please get in touch if you are interested (all the contact details of the Board members are at the end of the newsletter).

**Application for CirclesEurope project grant:** We plan to apply for a European Action Grant in January 2020 to enable us to progress another CirclesEurope project. The application will be led by Bart Claes from Avans University and he will work closely with the CirclesEurope Association Board members on this. We will keep all members posted on the progress on this.

**Synopsis of Circles models:** We also plan to compile a synopsis of the Circles models that are in operation in Europe at the moment. Part of the CirclesEurope Association's aims and objectives is to establish consistency and common practices for Circles provision. The Governance, Quality Assurance and membership sub-group and the Service Development sub-groups will both look at this aspect.

## 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.

### Contact

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