

**FEASIBILITY STUDY INTO CIRCLES OF
SUPPORT & ACCOUNTABILITY (COSA)
FOR IRELAND**

FINAL REPORT

Prepared By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	8
Development & Implementation of COSA Internationally	11
Critical Success Factors	24
Implications for the Irish Context	28
Conclusions & Recommendations	35
Appendix A: Organisations Consulted for the Feasibility Process	43
Appendix B: Summary of Key Model Features	44
Appendix C: Differentiating Features of COSA Models	45
Appendix D: Volunteer Selection Criteria & Training of Volunteers	47
Appendix E: Views from Consultation Process on what could Enhance or Hinder COSA in Ireland	49
Appendix F: Pros and Cons of Different Options	50
Appendix G: Estimated Cost of Pilot	52
Appendix H: Contrasting Experience of Circles in England	53
Appendix I: Summary of Circles UK Remit	55
Appendix J: Cost-Benefit of COSA	56
Bibliography	57

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

The Probation Service commissioned the study in order to examine the feasibility to introducing Circles of Support & Accountability (COSA) into Ireland. The methodology involved a literature review, consultations with 34 key informants in organisations in Ireland and overseas with an interest in COSA (e.g. services involved in running COSA, justice, child protection, victim support, children's services, health, treatment, etc) and discussions with an internal Steering Group established to oversee the research.

What is COSA?

COSA was developed by a Mennonite Minister in Canada in the 1990s in response to the media frenzy and public outcry upon the release of a high-risk sex offender.

While the structural details of COSA vary from country to country, the core model does not. It involves:

- A core member (sex offender) who is part of an inner circle of trained volunteers (4-6 volunteers) who support the core member and hold them to account.
- This inner circle is in turn supported by an outer circle of professionals (e.g. co-ordinator, probation officers, etc).
- The core member is usually classified as being of medium to high risk with few social networks and who is therefore socially isolated and would find it difficult to reintegrate successfully into society.
- To date COSA has been applied only to convicted sex offenders and most are referred to COSA either while still in prison and nearing the end of their sentence or upon their release from prison.
- Participation by the core member is voluntary but they sign a formal contract. Assessing the commitment of the core member is an important part of the selection process.
- The inner circle is tailored to the needs of the core member.
- The inner circle is based in the community and ideally its members are drawn from the local community.
- A host/sponsor organisation is responsible for operating a local COSA. In North America, COSA are frequently operated by faith-based organisations. In England and Wales a range of organisations operate COSA, while in Scotland one community organisation is responsible for a pilot project. In the Netherlands and Belgium, COSA are integrated into the justice infrastructure.
- The inner circle meets regularly (usually weekly initially) and engages in a mix of formal sessions and pro-social activity. The focus is on social supports rather than concrete structural supports and a balance between support and accountability is important (i.e. ensuring the offender is held accountable for their behaviour when in the community).
- Most circles last for 12 months, but can go beyond this period depending on the needs of the core member.
- Adequate data collection and monitoring.

COSA now operates in Canada, some states in the USA, England, Wales and Scotland, the Netherlands and Belgium and interest has been expressed in setting up COSA in Spain and Latvia. The CEP (European probation organisation) has established a trans-national project to develop a Handbook for COSA projects in Europe.

Within an Irish context, a COSA has already operated successfully in the Northwest¹ and in Northern Ireland, five COSA have been piloted successfully.

In Canada, the model is very much community and faith based, with a stronger focus on support. In Europe and the UK it is much more integrated into existing justice structures and linked to probation services, with a stronger focus on accountability/monitoring.

Why is COSA Used?

Evaluations of COSA in Canada and England have shown that it is effective at significantly reducing the rate of total re-offending and sexual re-offending of core members who take part (by up to 70%). The English evaluations have also demonstrated the capacity of COSA to provide early warning of potentially recidivist behaviour.

COSA reduces the risk of re-offending and thereby contributes to enhanced public safety and child protection. By helping the sex offender to reintegrate back into the community it reduces the trigger factors for recidivism. It gives responsibility to the community for its own safety and can result in more open and reasoned debate about the management of sex offenders in society.

It is also cost effective, particularly when the wider societal and justice costs of prosecuting and imprisoning an offender as well as the harm caused to victims are taken into account. Circles UK recently commissioned a cost-benefit analysis². The average cost of running a circle was Stg£11k compared to Stg£147k to imprison an offender. The wider societal benefits resulting from reduced recidivism as a result of COSA were calculated to amount to over Stg£1m.

Is COSA a Feasible Option for Ireland?

All of those consulted with indicated that they believe that COSA is desirable, necessary and feasible in an Irish context.

Those interviewed identified a number of areas that need careful consideration as follows:

- Support (proclaimed publicly) for COSA from highest levels in political circles, civil service, justice agencies, children's services, child protection services, victim support groups and relevant representative bodies (e.g. NOTA).

¹ By the Cosc Service HSE Northwest.

² Elliott, I., Beech, A., 2011, *A cost-benefit analysis of Circles of Support and Accountability*, Circles UK.

- Adequate planning in advance of setting up the pilot. This should include selection criteria and procedures for core members and referral protocols. Appropriate linkages with SORAM, the Sex Offender Risk Assessment & Management structure³ and with other justice services (including clarity over how the sharing of soft information would be handled). A media management strategy. Selection criteria and processes for recruiting volunteers, competencies required by the co-ordinator, access to relevant co-ordinator and volunteer training. Establishing standards of service to be met and establishing monitoring and evaluation.
- Adequate resourcing. Volunteers need to be supported by a professional co-ordinator trained in COSA. Volunteers need proper training and on-going supervision.
- The co-ordinator needs to have a good working knowledge and understanding of sex offending, of COSA and to have credibility with the justice system.
- Media planning and a media strategy were considered crucial in the Irish context.
- Targeting. There was general agreement that COSA should target medium to high-risk offenders who are socially isolated. In the longer-term, non-convicted offenders might also be considered but in the short-term it was considered that the focus should be on convicted offenders.
- An appropriate balance between the support aspects of COSA and the accountability aspects – both were seen as equally important.
- The host organisation must have credibility with both the public and the justice system and have the capacity, knowledge and competencies to operate COSA effectively.

A number of options regarding the structure of COSA in Ireland were explored. These ranged from:

- Hosting of the project by an existing organisation, e.g. in the community and voluntary sector (like the Scottish model) or faith-based organisations (like the Canadian model).
- Establishing a new entity to run COSA (along the lines of Le Chéile mentoring project).
- Having many different organisations running local COSA overseen by a national standards body (like the English model).
- Running the project within the statutory sector, particularly the Probation Service (like the Dutch model).

Key Recommendations

The criteria used to explore each of the above options were cost, credibility, governance, links, specific knowledge of sex offending, capacity and risk. Based on these criteria, the extensive consultation process carried out during the feasibility study, discussions with the Steering Group and the literature review, the following is recommended:

³ Currently being piloted by An Garda Síochána and the Probation Service.

1. After careful consideration of each of the structural options outlined above, the most suitable option in an Irish context is hosting the project by one existing organisation, i.e. along the lines of the Scottish Model.
2. The pilot, hosted by one organisation, should operate under a Service Level Agreement with the Probation Service for the national delivery of COSA.
3. A tendering process and rigorous selection should take place to select the host organisation.
4. The pilot should target medium to high-risk sex offenders coming out of prison who will be under probation supervision.
5. The pilot should aim to operate up to a maximum of 5 COSA (i.e. 5 sex offenders).
6. The pilot should include larger and smaller urban centres in order to prove the concept in both environments and to take account of the mix of areas where sex offenders are likely to reside upon release.
7. The pilot should operate for 2 years with an option to extend it for a further year.
8. The pilot should use trained volunteers from the general local area that a sex offender will be housed in order to maximise community involvement, acceptance and reintegration.
9. Volunteers should be supervised by a professional co-ordinator.
10. Consideration should be given to purchasing in relevant training and manuals from Circles UK and CEP. Manuals may have to be adapted to suit Irish conditions.
11. Evaluation, monitoring and review should be built into the pilot phase and the model adjusted as necessary to reflect Irish conditions.
12. The pilot should operate in areas where SORAM also already operates and test the protocols and procedures necessary for effective communication and linkages between COSA and SORAM, particularly in the context of reporting potentially recidivist behaviour and the response to this.
13. A steering group should be established to oversee the project. At a minimum, it should be comprised of relevant justice services and the host organisation. Ideally, representatives from children's services and victim support groups should also be included.
14. Given that COSA can contribute to the safety of children as well as public safety at large, the funding for the pilot should come from the Departments of Justice and Children.

Demand and Cost

The estimated cost of these recommendations is c. €215k for a two-year pilot operating 5 circles (2 in year 1 and 3 in year 2). This equates to a cost per COSA of €43k.

Based on the number of convicted sex offenders released from prison each year who are the subject of post release probation supervision, and the proportion of these who would be medium to high risk and potentially socially isolated, we estimate that at any one time between 8 and 9 COSA might be required in a full national roll-out. A national rollout would yield some efficiencies of scale and the cost per COSA should reduce over time. A full-time co-ordinator can manage between 4 and 5 COSA at any one time. This means that the on-going cost of COSA would be in the region of c. €25k per circle.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The COSA model is a form of restorative justice that arose in response to the release from prison in Ontario in 1994 of a high-risk child sex offender, which resulted in a media frenzy and community anger and fear. A Mennonite pastor agreed to gather a group of congregates together to offer support and a realistic accountability framework to the offender. A similar response was offered to another offender a few months later in Toronto. Subsequently, the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario decided to sponsor the development of a pilot project and COSA was born. Similar projects now operate across Canada, the USA, the UK and the Netherlands.

1.2 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the feasibility study were as follows:

- An investigation of the use of, benefits from, difficulties with and future consideration of the model in North America and Europe.
- A literature review on the model.
- An analysis of environmental and cultural issues relating to the use of the model in Ireland.
- The identification of key stakeholders in this area within an Irish context.
- Consideration of the application of the various models of COSA in operation in other jurisdictions as above, within Ireland including the strengths and weaknesses of each (including a risk analysis, project structure and associated costings).
- Recommendations based on key findings including, if appropriate, the preferred model, lead agency, funding/costings.

1.3 Methodology

The Probation Service commissioned the feasibility study. A Steering Group was established to oversee the research.

The feasibility study was conducted in four phases as follows:

- Review of international literature and consultations (e-mail or telephone) with organisations interested in COSA in the U.K., Scotland, Northern Ireland, the USA and the Netherlands.
- Consultations with relevant Irish organisations. This included the statutory sector and organisations with an interest in justice, child safeguarding, psychology, treatment, victim support, social inclusion and faith-based organisations.
- Discussion with the Steering Group on a range of options for COSA in Ireland and subsequent costing of the preferred options.
- Drafting of a final feasibility study and presentation of the findings to the steering committee prior to finalisation.

In total, 34 people took part in the consultation exercise, both nationally and internationally. Appendix A provides a list of the participants and the themes covered during the consultation process.

1.4 Irish Context

1.4.1 Legislative Developments

The *Sex Offender's Act* was passed in 2001 in response to the need to reduce sexual victimisation and promote public safety. Part 2 of the Act introduced a sex offender notification system, requiring those convicted of specified or scheduled sexual offences to notify the Gardaí of their address. Part 5 of the Act introduced the option to the Courts of imposing a sentence, which involved a period in custody followed by a period of supervision in the community. Section 28 of the Act requires that the Court, when imposing a sentence for one of the scheduled sexual offences, consider whether an order for post release supervision is required, based on considerations of public safety, including the rehabilitation of the offender and the prevention of further offending. This means that not all offenders receive probation supervision upon release, nor is it appropriate that they should as not all sex offenders upon release pose a high risk.

All persons found guilty of a sexual offence, irrespective of whether or not they receive a custodial sentence, automatically become subject to the requirements of Part 2 of the Act and must notify the Gardaí of their name and address for a period of time (determined by the seriousness of the offence. At any one time there are c.1,000 people obliged to give such notification⁴.

1.4.2 Management of Sex Offenders

In 2009, the Department of Justice produced a discussion document on the management of sex offenders⁵. The report concluded that the most effective way to protect the public and prevent further offences was to identify and focus resources on high-risk sex offenders. Tools are available to support the assessment of risk and it concluded that these should be used. It proposed a much more integrated approach involving the Gardaí, the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service and possibly other agencies. It recommended the use of a throughcare approach to the management of sex offenders from conviction, through imprisonment and out into the community. In the discussion on post-release interventions, it cited COSA as an example of the positive effects of community support in reducing recidivism.

The Probation Service established the High Risk Offender Management Team to develop effective practice. It also has a representative on the Multi-Agency Group on Homeless Sex Offenders (MAG). It has been working in conjunction with the Gardaí to implement risk assessment tools on a common basis.

In June 2010, a model of joint working between An Garda Síochána and the Probation Service was introduced in five areas on a pilot basis. Known as SORAM (Sex Offender Risk Assessment & Management) it is a similar structure to the UK's MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements).

⁴ Department of Justice, 2009, *The Management of Sex Offenders. A Discussion Document*. Department of Justice: Dublin

⁵ Ibid.

1.4.3 Number of Sex Offenders

There are approximately 1,500 convicted sex offenders in Ireland who have/will have requirements under the Sex Offenders Act 2001. Of these approximately 350 are in custody. It is estimated that 90% of sex offenders in Ireland are unconvicted⁶. The number of convicted sex offenders is quite small with the average number of persons convicted of a sexual offence being 130 per annum⁷.

Of those in custody, around 40% (c.130) will be subject to a post release supervision order. Based on the use of risk assessment tools⁸, 10% will be classified as high risk, 20% as medium to high risk, 30% as low to medium risk and 40% as low risk⁹. The levels of recidivism for sexual offending for these groups vary significantly. After five years, 3% of the low risk group can be expected to re-offend, 6% of the low-moderate group will re-offend, 10% of the moderate-high group will re-offend and 18% of the high-risk group will re-offend¹⁰.

⁶ Travers, 2008, National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers.

⁷ Department of Justice, 2009, *The Management of Sex Offenders. A Discussion Document*. The figure is based on the average number convicted of a Scheduled Offence under the Sex Offenders Act 2001 in the years June 2003 to June 2008.

⁸ The Probation Service and An Garda Síochána use STABLE 2007 and ACUTE 2007 along with the static predictor tool RM2000.

⁹ Harris, A., 2010, Opening remarks before the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, April 29th 2010.

¹⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2 DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COSA INTERNATIONALLY

2.1 Introduction

COSA in its truest form has been operating the longest in Canada, where the concept was developed, followed by England, Wales and the State of Vermont in the USA, Belgium and the Netherlands. Scotland has commenced a pilot COSA in Fife. The CEP (European probation organisation) is working with Tilburg University, Avans University of Applied Sciences and Circles UK on the development of a handbook that would be applicable to the European context. Latvia, Spain and South Africa are also interested in establishing COSA. This chapter explores some of the approaches being used in different jurisdictions and presents the findings from two major studies on its effectiveness.

2.2 The Presenting Problem

Sexual offending is considered to be a learned behaviour and therefore amenable to change¹¹. Treatment programmes have become a key resource in dealing with sex offenders' behaviour. It is estimated that around 19% of treated sex offenders re-offend compared to a rate of recidivism of 27% for untreated sex offenders¹².

In addition to treatment there has been a trend towards increased use of intensive probation supervision, home visits and treatment combined together as a viable alternative to standard sex offender probation¹³.

Positive life changes have been observed for offenders on such combined programmes including strengthened social relationships, maintaining sobriety, improved employment status, anger management, taking responsibility for crimes and positive measurements on indicators for risk of recidivism¹⁴.

The levels of intervention and supervision should be commensurate with the levels of risk¹⁵. Those with high levels of risk of sexual recidivism should receive the highest levels of intervention, e.g. treatment and supervision, while those with low risk of recidivism should receive low levels of intervention and supervision.

However, the level of treatment and supervision available to offenders varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Social isolation is known to be a key trigger in sexual offending recidivism. The main categories of stable dynamic risk factors that were identified were:

¹¹ Curnow, R., Straker, P., Williams, E., 1998, *Juvenile Justice Report: Male Adolescent Program for Positive Sexuality*, Department of Human Services: Victoria.

¹² Marshall, Anderson, Fernandez, 1999, *Cognitive Behavioural Treatment of Sexual Offenders*, Wiley: New York.

¹³ Seng, M., Stalans, L., 2001, *Specialised sex offender probation in Cook County links supervision, treatment*, On Good Authority, 4 (7), Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrews, D., Bonta, J., 2003, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*, third edition, Anderson Publishing: Cincinnati.

- negative social influences,
- intimacy deficits,
- problems with sexual self-regulation,
- attitudes tolerant of sexual crimes,
- lack of co-operation with supervision, and
- problems with general self-regulation¹⁶.

The acute factors identified were those mostly strongly related to sexual recidivism in Hanson and Harris (2000)¹⁷, including:

- sexual preoccupations,
- victim access, hostility,
- emotional collapse,
- substance abuse,
- collapse of social supports, and
- lack of co-operation with supervision.

Fox¹⁸ explored issues around reintegration of prisoners. These included extended periods in prison resulting in a break in community ties, inadequate skills by offenders to support reintegration (social, economic, employment, etc), inadequate resources of offenders to support reintegration (e.g. money, housing) and inadequate structural supports for reintegration and substance abuse problems.

McAlinden¹⁹ argued that retributive justice has not been an effective response to sex crime and that restorative justice has been effective at reducing sex offence recidivism and at supporting the reintegration of offenders into the community.

Restorative justice is based on the concept that a crime causes harm to people and relationships and that the harm needs to be redressed, rather than focusing on breach of law that necessitates punishment.

2.3 COSA as a Response

COSA was developed as a means to support the reintegration of sex offenders upon release from custody. It was developed in a jurisdiction (Canada) where post release supervision and support was generally absent. The underlying premise behind COSA is that the approach will reduce the risk of recidivism by combating the social isolation of participants (core members) and providing them with ongoing contact and support.

While not a purest form of restorative justice, COSA does have the potential to involve local communities in taking responsibility for the reintegration of offenders

¹⁶ Hanson, R.K., Harris, A.J.R., Scott, T, Helmus, L., *Assessing the risk of sexual offenders on community supervision: The Dynamic Supervision Project, 2007-05*, Public Safety Canada.

¹⁷ Hanson, R., Harris, A., 2000, *Where Should We Intervene? Dynamic Predictors of Sexual Offence Recidivism*, Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 27 (1), p.6-35.

¹⁸ Fox, K., 2010, *Second Chances: A Comparison of Civic Engagement in Offender Reentry Programs*, Criminal Justice Review, 35.

¹⁹ McAlinden, A.M., *Restorative justice and the reintegration of high-risk sex offenders*, in *Managing High-Risk Sex Offenders in the Community*. Risk management, treatment and social responsibility, K. Harrison (ed)., IPA

and also for holding those offenders to account post release. COSA is sometimes described as a combination of support (by addressing the needs of the offender for reintegration) and safety (by addressing public concerns about safety)²⁰. It is also seen as an addition and complement to Risk Management Procedures²¹.

COSA targets high risk sex offenders. Assessment on a case-by-case basis is an important part of determining the suitability or otherwise for a COSA in a local area.

The basic COSA concept is a core member (sex offender) who is part of an inner circle of support (usually volunteers from the community), which in turn is surrounded by a professional circle and the community. In some models, professionals also act as volunteers and the co-ordinator of a circle is often a paid professional.

The core member is a full member of the inner circle and participates in all discussions and decision-making. Confidentiality does not apply within the circle. If there are signs that the core member is in danger of re-offending they are confronted by the other members of the circle and a report can be made to relevant authorities.

The key features of COSA are as follows:

- A core member (sex offender) who is part of an inner circle of trained volunteers (4-6 volunteers) who support the core member and hold them to account.
- This inner circle is in turn supported by an outer circle of professionals (e.g. co-ordinator, probation officers, etc).
- The core member is usually classified as being of medium to high risk with few social networks and who is therefore socially isolated and would find it difficult to reintegrate successfully into society.
- To date COSA has been applied only to convicted sex offenders and most are referred to COSA either while still in prison and nearing the end of their sentence or upon their release from prison.
- Participation by the core member is voluntary but they sign a formal contract. Assessing the commitment of the core member is an important part of the selection process.
- The inner circle is tailored to the needs of the core member.
- The inner circle is based in the community and ideally its members are drawn from the local community.
- A host/sponsor organisation is responsible for operating a local COSA. In North America, COSA are frequently operated by faith-based organisations. In England and Wales a range of organisations operate COSA, while in Scotland one community organisation is responsible. In the Netherlands and Belgium, COSA are integrated into the justice infrastructure.
- The inner circle meets regularly (usually weekly initially) and engages in a mix of formal sessions and pro-social activity. The focus is on social supports

²⁰ McAlinden (ibid above)

²¹ Kirkwood, S., Richley, T., 2008, *Circles of Support and Accountability: the case for their use in Scotland to assist in the community reintegration and risk management of Sexual Offenders*, SCOLAG Legal Journal, 372, p.236-239

rather than concrete structural supports and a balance between support and accountability is important (i.e. ensuring the offender is held accountability for their behaviour when in the community).

- Most circles last for 12 months, but can go beyond this period depending on the needs of the core member.
- Adequate data collection and monitoring.

Appendix B provides some more detail on the COSA model.

Armstrong et al (2008)²² summarised the pros and cons of COSA based on their literature review. These are summarised in the table below.

Pros and Cons of COSA	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing informal support that is beyond statutory remit. • Combating social isolation of offenders and low self-esteem. • Enhancing supervision and monitoring capacity of statutory agencies. • Empowering local communities to participate in the management of sex offending. • Providing a mechanism for public education for volunteers and their networks ('ripple effect'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be perceived to be providing statutory supervision 'on the cheap'. • Volunteer collusion and safety concerns. • Recruiting an adequate number of suitable volunteers. • Expensive due to cost of providing volunteer training and supervision. • Attributing impact of COSA in reducing re-offending. • Competing demands for criminal justice funding.

2.4 Models in Different Jurisdictions

2.4.1 North America

Two examples are outlined below. The original Canadian model and a version of COSA operated by the US State of Vermont.

Canada

A Mennonite Minister originally developed COSA in Canada in 1994 in response to the release of a sex offender into the community that resulted in a media frenzy and local hysteria. The original model is faith-community based and arose in a context of less developed post-release structures. The approach has grown organically rather than systemically in Canada and continues to be predominately a faith-based response to the social isolation of sex offenders. However, the Canadian government has recognised the benefits of COSA and has committed \$7.4m over five years to support 15 COSA demonstration projects²³.

The original COSA recruited volunteers from the local faith congregation. A major challenge for the Canadian COSA over time was on going recruitment of suitable volunteers. Volunteers must have the right motivation. The issue was addressed through the development of screening and training. The Canadian experience has found that volunteers who gain experience in COSA tend to become more realistic about what can be done and what can be achieved.

²² Armstrong, S., Chistyakova, Y., Mackenzie, S., Malloch, M., 2008, *Circles of Support & Accountability: Consideration of the Feasibility of Pilots in Scotland*, The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research

²³ The Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC), <http://ccjca.ca/projects/cosa/>. The CCJA has been chosen to manage the agreements with the funding agency, the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Having a good co-ordinator and a pool of professionals that the COSA can link into is critical to success. In Canada the outer circle of professionals is comprised of professionals who volunteer their time to the COSA. Issues that arose included getting them to understand, accept and support the work of COSA and overcoming their fears about the use of volunteers. This was addressed through induction training. Community safety and support, along with increased responsibility and accountability of core members, were also important focal points when selling the concept to professional services and agencies.

Given that COSA was never intended as an alternative to proper professional care, training of volunteers should provide them with sufficient information to understand the dynamics of offending but not so much that they feel they are 'expert'. Being able to recognise the signs of relapse and knowing when to call in the professionals is an important part of the training.

USA - State of Vermont

While the original COSA concept was a community-based response. The US State of Vermont has developed an interesting variant on the COSA model. COSA is classified as part of its Restorative Re-entry Programme. Offenders who agree to take part in this programme do so as part of their terms of release. They are offered support in finding a place to live, their rent is paid for a couple of months, they can access small loans for items such as a deposit for electricity/gas being turned on, bus passes or household furnishings and emotional support and encouragement through the COSA.

COSA is a partnership between community volunteers and the Department of Corrections. Local Community Justice Centres (CJCs)²⁴, of which approximately five operate COSA around the State of Vermont, facilitate community volunteers to form COSA for prisoners coming out of state prisons.

The core elements of the COSA model are in place – inner circle of volunteers including the core member (ex-prisoner). CJCs are funded by the Department of Corrections to run COSA. CJCs are local community/ voluntary organisations that operate on state/federal grant money and also whatever additional grants they are successful in receiving. They often partner with other community and faith-based organisations to recruit for volunteers, to find places for offenders to do community service and to develop other helpful connections.

Each COSA is directly supervised by the re-entry/COSA co-ordinator of the local CJC. The co-ordinator communicates regularly with the supervising Probation Officer. The COSAs themselves are largely self-governed within the parameters established in the CJC's COSA Manual and volunteer job description.

While COSA is a partnership with the CJCs, the Department of Corrections still bears responsibility for every case. The COSA is effectively an enhancement of the standard community supervision (i.e. probation supervision) provided to offenders. The Department of Corrections makes the referral to the CJC. The COSA is

²⁴ Community Justice Centres are municipally-based community or voluntary organisations funded by State or Federal grant aid to provide, amongst other things, a range of community based programmes for offenders coming out of prison.

integrated into case conferences. The Department of Corrections manages the case plan and makes all decisions regarding restrictions or restoration of liberties.

Vermont COSAs are developed for convicted high-risk offenders who are nearing release, and coming out of prison under intense community supervision on what is termed Conditional Re-entry status. This is where the offender is given the opportunity to serve the remainder of a sentence of incarceration in the community, but any violation of the many conditions of release will return them to prison. In addition to sex offences, those convicted of domestic abuse and other violent crimes may also be considered appropriate. Thus, while the inner circle is a voluntary structure, it is embedded within a larger professional context and structure.

A typical COSA consists of three volunteers and one core member and lasts for one year. Participation is voluntary and willingness and motivation of the offender are key factors in the success or otherwise of a COSA. In addition to risk, the offender's needs are also taken in account in determining their suitability for COSA. As with risk, high needs are prioritised. The prison caseworker, the community Probation/Parole Officer, and the CJC Justice re-entry co-ordinator conduct the selection process.

A staff member of the CJC carries out the recruitment and selection of volunteers. Faith-based communities are the main source of volunteers. Family members of victims or perpetrators are generally not volunteers. Instead, they are engaged in the case management process in other ways. Department of Corrections' volunteer management staff provide basic screening and orientation for volunteers and CJC staff provide COSA-specific training, often in collaboration with a local Probation/Parole officer to explain the details of Corrections supervision, legal statuses, offender's behaviour patterns etc. A general Corrections volunteer services co-ordinator and a specific supervisor in the local CJC provide supervision of volunteers.

The core members of COSAs have case conferences every 6-8 weeks in which all the relevant service providers (e.g. Probation Officer, Social Workers, etc) and COSA members are convened to share perspectives on progress/challenges and to make sure that everyone is 'on the same page'. Unlike the Canadian and British versions of COSA, where the co-ordinators generally only sit in during the initial stages of a circle, the co-ordinators in Vermont supervise the entire process very closely by attending every circle meeting.

As with the basic model, accountability is an important feature of the model. The fact that offenders are effectively on release under licence provides an added incentive. The core member must be willing to take full responsibility for the offence and the harm they have caused. While in most of the COSA cases, as elsewhere, there is no direct or even indirect contact between victim and offender and no particular amends stated by the victim, the COSA often incorporates some community service as a way of repairing and adding value to the community.

2.4.2 Great Britain

Two slightly different approaches have developed. England and Wales have a number of different organisations that host COSA, but these are now under the umbrella of national standards developed by Circles UK. Scotland, which is

effectively a different legal jurisdiction, is piloting COSA with one sponsor organisation.

England and Wales

The Quakers established the first government-funded COSA project (called ‘circles’ in the Thames Valley in 2002, although the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (see below) operated circles prior to this. The Thames Valley project was part funded by the government and has been evaluated and found to be effective. Appendix H summarises the features that made it successful and contrasts these with a second pilot that was less successful. Circles began to develop in other areas with different sponsor organisations. There are now 10 projects operating 60 Circles in England and Wales.

In 2008, Circles UK was established as a charity with funding the Ministry of Justice from to encourage the development of circles and to ensure consistent quality standards and safety in the work of COSA projects. Circles UK mission statement states that it seeks greater public protection by working towards a sustainable reduction in sex offending by providing a range of services to local projects. It also aims to develop greater public understanding of community approaches to public protection. Circles UK has developed a Code of Practice (effectively national standards) that projects sign up to, including an annual review. Appendix I provides more detail on Circles UK.

The COSA model operating in England and Wales is based on three core principles of:

- supporting (reducing isolation and emotional loneliness, pro-social modelling of appropriate relationships and demonstrating humanity and care),
- monitoring (public protection, safer communities, support to statutory agencies) and
- maintaining (holding the offender accountable, relationship of trust, treatment objectives) in order to reduce re-offending²⁵.

Circles have also been promoted as ‘extra eyes in the community’, restoring offenders back to the community, reducing re-offending, public safety and getting the community involved, rather than as a purely restorative justice model.

Eligibility criteria for core members are based on exclusions and inclusions²⁶. Exclusions include those who are chronic deniers, those with psychopathic personality disorders and those who have not participated or failed treatment programmes. Inclusions are: high needs (including social isolation), high profile offending, lack of/insufficient supervision, low self-esteem, limited or no pro-social supports and a demonstrated interest in wanting to live a healthy, offence-free life. The age and maturity of the offender are also important considerations as are willingness to participate, learning disabilities and substance misuse issues.

²⁵ Presentation to Irish Probation Service by Chief Executive of Circles UK.

²⁶ Armstrong, S., Chistyakova, Y., Mackenzie, S., Malloch, M., 2008, *Circles of Support & Accountability: Considerations of the Feasibility of Pilots in Scotland*, The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

Requests have been made by local justice agencies (police, probation, and prisons) to have circles established in their areas and in some cases these organisations fund local circles or sit on local boards. Circles are embedded within existing infrastructure, notably MAPPA. They are run by professional co-ordinators, most of whom are either employed by probation or have been seconded from probation²⁷, but use volunteers to form the inner circle.

Two types of circles operate in England and Wales. Phase 1 circles involve weekly meetings (usually 2.5 hours) at the same time every week for 6-12 months and Phase 2 circles involve meetings 2-3 times a month and social activities for a further 6-12 months.

Most circles are set up on an area basis with one sponsor organisation hosting circles in any given area. However, a second model, the 'go anywhere' model was developed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) to provide support to the establishment of circles in more isolated areas or where no obvious sponsor existed but there was a desire for a local circle. It was originally developed as a follow-on support to offenders taking part in a sex offender treatment programme. The first circle was set up in Guilford for those attending the treatment clinic who were about to leave. It was successful and the model has been adapted as a flexible response to local needs. LFF can respond quickly and organise a one-off circle anywhere, especially in rural areas.

LFF is now a member of Circles UK, with a national co-ordinator. It is funded as a government pilot project. There is no formal involvement of police or probation in the circle, although they are informed and aware of it. When a local probation/police service requests a circle and they have no resources, LFF does a spot purchase agreement with them whereby the probation/police service pays for LFF to recruit volunteers and set the circle up and LFF then gets local psychologists (members of LFF) to supervise. Volunteers are often recruited from local church congregations. A price is negotiated between LFF and local probation/police.

Scotland

The first pilot of COSA in Scotland will take place between Fife Council, Fife Community Safety Partnership and SACRO²⁸ in 2011. Recruitment and training of volunteers has just been completed and the first circle should become operational in mid 2011.

SACRO is a voluntary organisation that put a proposal to the Scottish government to run three COSA pilots. SACRO has engaged in sex offender group work. The co-ordinator of COSA has a broad range of experience within the criminal justice area and specifically in working with sex offenders. The co-ordinator championed the concept after attending a conference on COSA in 2001. Two attempts to get support to run national pilots, in 2003 and 2007, failed.

²⁷ Salary scales reflect this.

²⁸ SACRO is a national community justice voluntary organisation which provides services in criminal justice, conflict resolution and restorative justice and reparation. In relation to people convicted of sexual offences it provides therapy and a number of accommodation services.

A feasibility study was commissioned by the minority Scottish government in 2008, who, while not directly sanctioning a pilot, agreed not to oppose local authorities or state agencies that came forward to support the development of COSA from within existing resources. The main concerns of the government were in respect of the heavy reliance of the model on volunteers. There were also concerns that justice structures such as MAPPA and Community Justice Authority (CJA) were only just bedding in and COSA could place an extra strain.

Fife came forward and agreed to fund the first SACRO pilot. In Fife the local probation manager who came forward with some funding and along with the Community Safety Partnership (local multi-agency structure of police, social services, health, etc) they both put up Stg£15k and the CJA came up with Stg£5k specifically to cover training. This enabled the co-ordinator to work part-time on the development of COSA.

The pilot will run two to three circles for medium to high-risk sex offenders who are socially isolated. A cohort of volunteers has recently been recruited (mainly by word of mouth), selected and trained. The Circles UK model was used to screen volunteers. The Fife circle has registered with volunteering organisations but no volunteers have come forward from this source. Volunteers commit to being involved for one year. Training and supervision will be provided by the co-ordinator, who took part in Circles UK co-ordinator training. Circles UK was also brought in to co-facilitate the training of the first batch of volunteers, partly to give the project credibility.

The plan is to have Phase 1 and 2 circles, similar to England. The volunteers must step back after a period of time in order to reduce dependency.

The main referral source for core members will be the probation service and all of the initial referrals will be of core members who are already in the community. Another key link will be MAPPA.

A National Steering Committee for COSA has been established that the co-ordinator sits on as well as representatives from the police, prison, probation, faith organisations (especially safe guarding departments) and children's based charities.

2.4.3 Ireland and Northern Ireland

A pilot commenced operating in Northern Ireland by Extern. It ran six circles from 2003 to 2007. The shortest COSA lasted for 14 months and longest was for just over four years.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (who provided Stg€24k towards training and volunteers out of pocket expenses) and Extern (who provided the co-ordinator) funded the project²⁹. There was no funding from the probation service, although it supported the project. The pilot targeted high-risk offenders released on licence. Five of the circles were successful. In the sixth case, the circle ended because the offender was returned to prison for breach of conditions, as identified by the circle. Although the pilot had

²⁹ Communication with Extern.

successful outcomes, it failed to secure core funding and did not move beyond the pilot phase.

In the Republic, a COSA was set up by the Cosc Service (HSE Northwest)³⁰, to support a man who had committed sexual offences against a relative and who was socially isolated. A local priest and 4 other people from the community acted as volunteers. The offender was helped to do undertake gardening, cleaning of gravestones, fishing and singing in the community. A barter system was set up so that he could earn some money. The results were increased integration, improved mood, feelings of belonging and reduced risk of re-offending³¹.

One of the religious orders has operated a circle-type model for its own members whereby its local religious communities provide support to members who have committed sexual offences³². One in Four is planning to set up a circle-type support for sex offenders who take part in its treatment programme.

2.4.4 Europe

The Netherlands and Belgium are the main areas where COSA have developed in Europe. Spain and Latvia have also expressed interest in setting up COSA.

Netherlands

After attending a Circles UK conference about three years ago, the Expert Centre on Public Safety in Avans University of Applied Sciences and the Dutch Probation Service were commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Justice in 2009 to launch the first plan for COSA.

There are no sex offender treatment programs in Dutch prisons. However, the majority of sex offenders take part in mandatory treatment as part of the conditions for conditional release in the last phase of their detention.

The Dutch COSA is funded mainly by the Ministry of Justice, but it also has some funding under the DAPHNE III programme³³. A national organisation, Circles NL, was established to provide support to local COSA projects. Circles NL is a partnership between Avans University of Applied Sciences and the Dutch probation organisation. It provides national support and quality monitoring for local COSA projects. The Dutch probation service operates the local COSA projects using probation personnel as co-ordinators and local volunteers.

³⁰ The Cosc Service was established in 1986 as a response by professionals on the ground in health, probation and welfare to sexual offending. It is funded by HSE Northwest. It provides risk assessment, treatment, aftercare and family support for sex offenders, those at risk of sex offending and their families. It is an integral part of Child Protection Services in the Northwest region.

³¹ Gordon, S., Bolger, S., PowerPoint Presentation, *Building Castles in the Air. Circles of Support and Accountability in North West Ireland*, Cosc HSE NW.

³² Murphy, P., 2000, *How I Developed a Practice and Learnt to Conduct It More Effectively. Assisting a religious community to become more integrated as a community and, in so doing, assisting a member, who is a sexual offender, to live an offence free life*, dissertation Masters Degree in Education University of Western England Bristol.

³³ Daphne III is an EU funded programme that provides funding to contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence, including sexual violence.

COSA was piloted in one area. The project initially encountered difficulties recruiting sufficient volunteers so a national television advertising campaign was embarked on that was successful. Circles UK was contracted in to provide training and consultancy. Local COSA are now operating in three probation regions and two more are in preparation. Two circles have been evaluated and none of the core members have re-offended.

Like the UK model, there is a strong focus on monitoring and formalised procedures have been developed for the sharing of information between the inner circle and outer circle, the latter being comprised of professionals that are directly dealing with the core member (e.g. probation officer, therapist, local police).

The Dutch have a network of organisations called Veiligheidshuizen (safety houses), which are similar to MAPPA in the UK. Local municipalities fund these safety houses. They are partnerships between police, probation, forensic mental health care, welfare, etc that co-ordinate the aftercare of high-risk domestic violence offenders, juvenile offenders and violent offenders. Sex offenders are not currently a specific target group. In the future however, they will be involved in COSA as members of local COSA steering committees for projects.

Belgium

COSA is currently being piloted in Belgium³⁴. Unlike the Netherlands, the Belgian probation service cannot provide staff directly for COSA. The project encountered some difficulties recruiting project staff as a result. This was overcome by developing a partnership with a welfare organisation that is involved in sex offender treatment to provide co-ordinating staff and the University of Antwerp to carry out risk assessment.

A national media campaign was carried out in order to recruit volunteers. Twenty have been selected and are being trained and it is hoped that the first circle will commence in the summer of 2011.

2.5 Outcomes

All of the literature discusses COSA in the context of convicted sex offenders. No where did the researcher come across cases of COSA being used for non-convicted sex offenders and interviews with international experts indicated that it had not been used in this regard.

Two evaluations and subsequent follow-up surveys provide the main evidence on the effectiveness of COSA. An evaluation of the original Canadian project, conducted by Wilson et al in 2005³⁵, confirmed by a subsequent evaluation in 2007³⁶ and one in the Thames Valley pilot in 2005 in England³⁷ and subsequent follow-up in 2007³⁸.

³⁴ Source: CEP.

³⁵ Wilson, R., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M., 2005, *Circles of Support and Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario*, Correctional Service of Canada.

³⁶ Wilson, R., McWhinnie, A., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M., Cortoni, F., 2007, *Circles of support and accountability: Engaging community volunteers in the management of high-risk sexual offenders*, *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46, p.1-15.

³⁷ Quaker Peace and Social Justice, 2008, *HTV Circles Six Years of Safer Communities: Six Year Report, April 2002 to March 2008*, Quaker Organisation.

The Canadian evaluation used a robust matched sampling methodology to examine the Ontario pilot project. It found that sex offenders who took part in a COSA were significantly less likely to re-offend in general, and particularly in respect of sex offences (70% lower than the control group and much lower than Risk Prediction Tools predicted) and violent offences³⁹. Those who did sexually re-offend tended to re-offend with less severe offences (e.g. indecent exposure, obscene phone call) than the original convicted offence (e.g. violent rape).

The Canadian evaluation found that core members believed that COSA had reduced their chances of re-offending. Two-thirds of core members indicated that in the absence of COSA they would have re-offended. This closely matches the actual matched pair results of the study. In addition the results found that COSA improved the emotional well being of core members and helped them to reintegrate into society with 90% of core members indicating that in the absence of COSA they would have had difficulty re-integrating into the community. Sixty-three percent of affiliated professionals believed that core members felt a sense of community as a result of COSA. Two-thirds of the community respondents indicated that they would feel safer if a sex offender in their area was part of a COSA.

The Canadian evaluation concluded that the model was effective at both reducing recidivism and reintegrating sex offenders into the community. Key findings were that the COSA had a profound impact on all of the stakeholders involved, not just the core member.

A second national study in Canada of a matched sample of offenders carried out by Wilson et al in 2009 found a reduction of 83% in sex offending recidivism⁴⁰. In addition, when the sample was compared to the Static-99 risk predictor tool, there was a reduction of 86% when compared to what Static-99 would have predicted for the high risk group supported by COSA.

The evaluation of the pilot in the Thames Valley in England found that after three years none of the 20 participants had committed a new sexual offence (100% reduction), although 8 were engaged in recidivist behaviour suggesting they were about to commit an offence. In 7 of these cases, the recidivist behaviour was detected by the COSA, demonstrating its effectiveness as a public protection and accountability intervention.

Of these 8 members who engaged in recidivist behaviour, 3 were managed within the context of MAPPA⁴¹ and held to account in COSA. Three were recalled to prison, one other who had breached his Sex Offence Prevention Order received a new

³⁸ Bates, A., Saunders, R., Wilson, C., 2007, *Doing something about it: A follow-up study of sex offenders participating in Thames Valley circles of support and accountability*, British Journal of Community Justice, 5, p.19-42.

³⁹ The COSA group had a sexual recidivism rate of 5% compared to 16.7% for the control group. When sexual and violent offences were examined the recidivism rate for the COSA group was 28.3% compared to 43.4% for the control group.

⁴⁰ Wilson, R., Cortoni, F., McWhinnie, A., 2009, *Circles of Support and Accountability: A Canadian national replication of outcome findings*, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 21, p.412-429.

⁴¹ Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement.

Community Rehabilitation Order and one other was suspended from COSA for three months but then allowed to rejoin.

Elliott and Beech⁴² conducted a cost-benefit analysis of COSA in England and Wales for Circles UK. Their findings were as follows:

- The average cost of running a COSA was estimated at Stg.£11,140 per circle (i.e. per core member)⁴³.
- The cost per re-offending⁴⁴ was Stg£147,161 per offender.
- The average baseline re-offending rate for sex offenders against both children and adults is 16%⁴⁵.
- COSA results in a 77% reduction in sexual re-offending and a 63% reduction in any re-offending (i.e. sexual and non-sexual).
- The cost-benefit of those receiving COSA⁴⁶ was calculated at Stg£178,805 per annum.

They concluded that every Stg£1 invested in COSA could result in future cost savings of 18 pence (Appendix J provides more detail on how Beech and Elliott arrived at this figure).

In addition, Elliott and Beech calculated that the societal cost saving of COSA was Stg£956,805⁴⁷.

The US State of Vermont estimates that a successful COSA keeps offenders from returning to prison at a per capita saving of at least \$25,000 per year⁴⁸.

2.6 On-going Developments

CEP, the European probation organisation, has accessed DAPHNE III funding to develop a Handbook for COSA in Europe. Five organisations are involved in this trans-national project: Avans University, Tilburg University, Circles UK, the Dutch probation service and CEP.

The aim of the project is to support the proliferation and development of COSA throughout Europe. A draft has been developed and it is planned that a final version will be available in October 2011. Topics it will cover include what COSA is,

⁴² Elliott, I., Beech, A., 2011, *A cost-benefit analysis of Circles of Support and Accountability*, Circles UK.

⁴³ This excludes the cost of recruiting and training the co-ordinator, but does include their salary costs and related overheads.

⁴⁴ Given that all re-offending incurs a cost, Elliott and Beech used the re-offending rate for all offences, not just sexual offences. The average baseline re-offending rate used for sex offenders was 16%.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice, 2010, *Re-offending of adults: Results from the 2008 cohort*, England and Wales [Statistics Bulletin] ONS: London. The base rates for re-offending against adults was 23% and against children was 8.9% based on cohorts of 2,634 and 3,670 respectively over the period 2002 to 2008. Elliott and Beech take the average of these figures as COSA is available to offenders who have committed offences against children and/or adults.

⁴⁶ Based on a hypothetical cohort of 100 offenders, 50% of whom receive COSA and the raw data obtained from the two UK studies of COSA in practice.

⁴⁷ Non-criminal costs multiplied by 5 (this multiplier figure was originally postulated by Miller, T., Cohen, M., Wiersma, B., 1996, *Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look*, National Institute of Justice Research Report, US Department of Justice: Washington DC).

⁴⁸ Communication with D. Miodownik, Department of Corrections, Vermont.

national context and conditions for implementation, the implementation process, a guide to protocols and manuals, a guide to monitoring and evaluation and how to gather and use evidence.

Other countries expressing an interest in establishing COSA include Spain, Latvia, Australia and South Africa.

CHAPTER 3 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

3.1 Introduction

Based on a review of the literature and consultations with those involved in COSA in the USA, the Netherlands and UK, important success determinants for a COSA are summarised in this chapter

3.2 Public Support

Support from many sectors in society is required. This includes:

- Political support and champions within government and at departmental level.
- National and local support from experts and professionals in the sex offending rehabilitation field.
- National and local support from organisations with an interest in community and social inclusion, public safety, child protection and victim support.
- Knowledge, understanding and buy-in from justice services to the COSA concept and processes.
- Local openness to a COSA (overcoming NIMBY⁴⁹ and positive media attention).
- Communicating with and involving the local community where there is a COSA is very important.
- Co-ordination and joined up service provision by statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

3.3 Governance

There must be a clear mission and goals for each COSA as well as a clear structure, governance and accountability. The sponsor (host) organisation(s) must understand the issues and have credibility with both the public and the justice system. The sponsor should have knowledge and experience of sex offending. A good track record in project management and/or volunteer management but without sex offending experience was considered insufficient. Sponsor organisation must have good structures, systems and governance and buy into the concept of COSA, its rationale and the basic model. There should be Service Level Agreements clearly stating the service to be delivered, standards, and outcomes required. National standards and compliance with these will be required if there is more than one sponsor organisation involved.

Employing a co-ordinator that understands sex offending and the COSA concept and that has credibility with the justice system is critical. There must be clarity over the role of the co-ordinator (link-point with volunteers, professionals and statutory agencies as well as over-seeing the project, volunteers and core members).

Strong systems must be in place including adequate data recording and reporting, monitoring, evaluation and review.

⁴⁹ NIMBY is an acronym for 'Not In My Backyard'.

The COSA must have adequate funding. While using volunteers is cost effective, it is not cheap.

3.4 Core Member

There should be clear eligibility criteria and a selection method for offenders. The COSA should focus on highest risk first – convicted sex offenders of medium to high risk who are socially isolated. However, it may also be suitable for those exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour who are not convicted⁵⁰. COSA is not considered suitable for chronic deniers or those with severe personality disorders⁵¹. The risk of including offenders who have offended against adults or committed rape must be carefully considered and managed⁵². COSA is considered to be safer for paedophiles and offenders against young children from a volunteer safety perspective⁵³.

Participation for offenders (core members) should be voluntary, with the right to opt out. Offenders must want to take part. They must also be willing to give informed consent so that relevant information can be shared. The core member must be fully briefed by the co-ordinator. Ideally they should be met as the circle volunteers are being selected and trained as this aids the matching process. Volunteers must be fully briefed about the core member.

A formal contract is signed by all members of the inner circle including the core member detailing explicit behavioural expectations⁵⁴. A ‘no secrets’ policy should apply in the circle and be clearly understood by all. If a circle becomes aware of recidivist behaviour or a breach of the terms of probation orders they must report this and the core member is made aware of this.

The COSA should be tailored for each core member. However, it should involve regular consistent meetings between the core member and volunteers⁵⁵ in the initial stages. The COSA should be kept in place for as long as the risk to the community and the offender is above average. Most COSA involve an initial twelve-month commitment by both core members and volunteers. An exit strategy should also be developed for core members.

3.5 Volunteers

There must be clarity and agreement over the role of volunteers who would have an obligation to comply with all policy and procedures. An adequate, on-going supply of volunteers is necessary to ensure sustainability. Planning for volunteer fatigue and dropout is essential.

⁵⁰ This has not yet happened in the UK. It was also suggested that linking the COSA model to Stop It Now might be a worthwhile development if resources permitted.

⁵¹ Merseyside has an adapted model (not called a circle) for those with severe personality disorders, Resettle Crackims Project, funded by health and probation. Also SOVA in London run Hubs in partnership with Brackston Clinic. There is no research to say if circles-type models work with this group.

⁵² Communication with Circles UK.

⁵³ Communication with Circles UK.

⁵⁴ In England circles are not used for those going for parole (as they could use it to manipulate the parole board). Circles are not (nor is it considered that they should) be part of licence conditions.

⁵⁵ In Scotland, the core member will be given the option of having their probation officer present at the first circle meeting.

Volunteers should be recruited from the local community. Targeted recruitment, e.g. through faith or community organisations, universities and word of mouth have proven effective.

Screening⁵⁶ of volunteers is essential to check for motivation, attitudes, beliefs, understanding of isolation and risk, maturity (but not necessarily age) and emotional awareness and intelligence. A combination of methodologies works best – informal interviews, application forms, reference checking/clearance, training and role-play.

Volunteers must be appropriately trained (initial and on going) and there must be on going resources to do so. Appendix B summarises core areas that training should cover.

There should be matching of volunteers with offenders. This is to ensure a balance in the membership of a circle in terms of age, gender, skills, and experiences so that the circle is reflective of the community and also ensures that it is not skewed towards either being overly supportive or overly safety/monitoring-minded. Volunteers should be made aware of all the terms of the offender's release (if applicable) and their risks.

Ideally co-ordinators must have an understanding of issues of risk management combined with the needs of volunteers. Regular supervision and de-briefing of volunteers and of the COSA process is essential. However supervision should not be over-burdensome and must be able to respond to the needs of volunteers – some will require one-to-one, for others group supervision will be adequate and for others, telephone conversations will suffice. It is very important that the co-ordinator ensures that volunteers do not become vested in/ collude with core members and understand how to manage boundaries.

Finally, exit strategies for volunteers should be in place.

3.6 Linkages with Other Agencies

Agency buy-in at a high level is needed and from as many agencies as possible. One way to achieve this is to involve key agencies in the planning of COSA and to have champions within agencies. Another is to build strong relationships and links to local justice, welfare, housing, employment, child protection, etc, agencies. There must be clear understanding of the relationship between COSA and what statutory agencies do. Justice personnel, especially probation services, must support the offender's participation and appreciate the complementary role served by the COSA. Clear protocols must be agreed and signed up to. Boundary issues between volunteers and professionals must be managed.

There should be regular contact (not just when issues arise) between the COSA co-ordinator and relevant justice personnel. Clear reporting lines/communication lines and procedures should be in place in advance of the COSA coming into operation, particularly in the event that a core member's behaviour suggests recidivism. The

⁵⁶ Currently family members of offenders are not used as volunteers in England, Scotland or Wales but victims are. However, the selection process for the latter is extra careful and the risks need to be managed very carefully.

basis for reporting and procedures required must also be clear, particularly in respect of risk. Ideally, COSA should be embedded into existing multi-agency infrastructure.

3.7 Media management

Media and PR management is important and a media strategy and plan should be developed⁵⁷. Volunteers should receive training in communication with the media. Gaining public support from other organisations, e.g. children's groups, victim support, community groups should form part of the communications strategy.

⁵⁷ In Scotland, in parallel with a feasibility study, considerable awareness raising and promotional work was undertaken to promote how sex offenders are managed and housed in the community.

CHAPTER 4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IRISH CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises environmental and cultural factors of interest to the Irish context supported by the views of those interviewed on key success factors for the development of COSA in Ireland. Appendix C summarises views on factors that could enhance or hinder the introduction and development of COSA in Ireland.

4.2 Focus

All of those interviewed were familiar with the COSA concept and did not suggest that Ireland should stray from the basic model. The balance between support and accountability were considered to be equally important.

4.3 Public Support

Ireland is a small country where anonymity is difficult to achieve and maintain. Sexual offences not only create fear and stigma for the offender, but also for the victims, particularly in family circumstances. Ireland has yet to engage in a balanced, mature debate about the management of sex offenders and their reintegration into the community post release. Obtaining public support for COSA from representative bodies, Ministers, high level civil servants, justice agencies and organisations with an interest in public safety, social inclusion, victim support and child protection as well as the general public was considered very important to its future success.

Rural locations of some sex offenders could also impact on the practicalities of providing COSA and the cost involved. The NIMBY phenomena was identified as a potential hindrance, particularly if efforts were made either to impose COSA on communities or if effort was not put into helping communities to understand about sex offending, the risks posed and how COSA can help.

4.4 Political Support

The political environment needs to be open to the concept of COSA so that, at the very least, obstacles are not placed in the way of developing a project like COSA and funding is made available. Those interviewed believe that it is very important that COSA has champions both at political and senior administrative level who exhibit a willingness to stand behind the project publicly.

4.5 Planning & Resourcing

None of those interviewed felt that there are any insurmountable barriers to the introduction of COSA provided that there was proper planning for the introduction of the initiative, adequate resourcing and funding to cover all operating costs and volunteer costs and to allow for contingencies and selection of a co-ordinator that had relevant knowledge and experience and the confidence of relevant organisations.

4.6 Stakeholder Involvement

All of those interviewed are supportive of the concept of COSA and of introducing it to Ireland and consider it both desirable and feasible. A number of organisations expressed a specific interest in operating COSA.

The role of faith-based organisations in other countries is quite prominent (Mennonites in Canada, Associated Ministries in US, Quakers in England and Wales).

The outcomes of various reports on child abuse within the Catholic Church, e.g. Ryan Report, Ferns Report and Cloynes Report, etc. has resulted in considerable anger and frustration with the church and how it has handled these events. However, one positive is that people are more aware about sex offending and there is at least some dialogue on the issue, while in the past it was secret and not for discussion.

The majority view of those interviewed was this is not the time for the Catholic Church to be involved in an initiative such as COSA, e.g. by being directly involved in either running or co-ordinating COSA. A minority expressed the view that if a national steering committee was established to oversee or advise COSA then this might be an appropriate structure for the faith-based organisations to be involved.

There was also a view that Ireland has relatively few strong national C&V organisations with the capability to operate an initiative like COSA. Credibility with both the public and the justice system were considered important ingredients to success.

There was general agreement that COSA in Ireland should engage fully with the relevant justice agencies and requires joined up and co-ordinated statutory services.

4.7 Media Coverage

The media was perceived by the majority to be the biggest potential stumbling block to the introduction of COSA in Ireland.

Concerns were expressed about media demands for fuller information, ‘public right to know’ versus professional concerns about offenders being ‘outed’ and consequently making it more difficult for them to reintegrate and also to maintain ongoing contact and monitoring or treatment provision⁵⁸. Media coverage in Ireland of high profile cases has resulted in precisely this happening, e.g. Murphy case. Some of those interviewed believe that the media is completely sensationalist and opposed to any type of supports for sex offenders while others believe that there are sections of the media that are more balanced and that can be worked with.

Armstrong et al 2008⁵⁹ in their feasibility study for Scotland considered that the involvement of the community might help to change simplistic media representations of sex offenders. The experience in England has been an increase in the number of volunteers coming forward after negatively biased reporting. All of those interviewed believe that COSA in Ireland will require a proper media management strategy.

The majority believe that proper education and awareness raising about COSA should be undertaken from the start, while a minority believe it should be kept quiet and a ‘softly softly’ approach adopted.

⁵⁸ Kirkwood, S., Richley, T., 2008, *High risk sex offenders in the community: The case for circles of support and accountability in Scotland*, The Scottish Journal of Criminal Justice Studies, 14, p.26-30.

⁵⁹ Armstrong, S., Chistyakova, Y., Mackenzie, S., Malloch, M., 2008, *Circles of support & accountability: Consideration of the feasibility of pilots in Scotland*, The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

4.8 Legislation

Unlike the UK, Ireland does not release sex offenders under licence⁶⁰ and temporary release for sex offenders is uncommon so there is no ‘carrot and stick’ for core members to volunteer to take part and to remain within a circle. However, it can be argued that COSA was never designed on a ‘carrot and stick’ basis as the core values encompass voluntary participation, reintegration into the community, personal accountability and community responsibility.

4.9 Integration with Existing Structures

There was a strong view that the mechanisms and protocols of working with existing structures and agencies needed to be worked out in detail prior to COSA becoming operational. These include referral protocols, the mechanics of reporting, the circumstances in which reports need to be made and to whom, and how ‘red flag’ warnings would operate (and actions follow).

There was general agreement amongst those interviewed that COSA should be linked in some way to SORAM. In Scotland, the proposal to introduce a pilot in 2008 was not agreed to partly over concerns that the MAPPAs, relatively new structures for the management of sex offenders, needed more time to bed down and did not need the added complication of integrating COSA into them at that time. While those interviewed would welcome a link between COSA and SORAM in Ireland (e.g. formal reporting relationship or ‘red flag’ warning system), a small number wondered if the same concerns of integration that arose in Scotland might apply here also.

Finding appropriate accommodation for sex offenders upon release can be a major challenge. Difficulties have arisen for local authorities. Responses, where required, tend to come from either the community & voluntary sector or the private rented sector. Internationally, it can be seen that offenders tend to gravitate to larger urban centres where they can be more anonymous. Linking COSA to existing structures that assess the accommodation needs of sex offenders, e.g. homeless services, the MAG, etc. could be beneficial.

4.10 Information Exchange

Ireland currently does not have a statutory basis for the sharing of so called ‘soft’ information between agencies. While the majority of those interviewed believe that this can be overcome by getting the offender to sign an agreement to enable sharing of relevant soft information, a small number were strongly of the view that this is potentially open to a legal challenge. The basis for this view is the judicial decision made in the case of *M.Q. v. Gleeson* in 1998 which indicated that legislation to allow the sharing of soft information between agencies (other than the HSE) could be open to a constitutional challenge.

4.11 Target Group

The majority view of those interviewed is that COSA should target medium to high-risk offenders who are socially isolated. Social isolation is a key selection criterion. There was a small minority view of ‘safely safely’ starting with the lowest risk and building up to higher risk categories. The latter is not recommended as it is a poor use

⁶⁰ Although the court has the power to suspend part or whole of a sentence and make the suspension subject to conditions

of resources and does not prove the model's effectiveness for the intended target group (COSA was designed for high-risk offenders who are socially isolated).

There were mixed views on whether participation in COSA by core members should be mandatory or voluntary. The majority view was that it should be voluntary as the nature of the relationship with volunteers could be severely impacted on and volunteers might not be willing to be involved in a mandatory system. However, some professionals who deal with offenders felt that an element of compulsion would be useful as sometimes offenders needed a push to get them to a place where they realise they need support. On balance, and based on international experience, voluntary participation is recommended.

In addition, there were mixed views on the suitability of COSA for non-convicted persons. COSA might be suitable for this group if the person was socially isolated, not in chronic denial (most are)⁶¹, willing to acknowledge behaviour and to change. Legal issues and constitutional rights were also raised as potential barriers to targeting this group of offenders. Overall, by those who supported the inclusion of this group it was considered a longer term objective.

4.12 Piloting

There was consensus that COSA should be formally piloted. Based on UK experience, one co-ordinator can handle 4-5 COSA. The number of COSA should be small enough for one co-ordinator to handle in a pilot but large enough to be robust. This suggests that a pilot building up to a figure of 5 circles would be reasonable.

A basic COSA runs for one year with the potential for a smaller, informal follow-on period of another year or more (in Canada it is open-ended, in the UK it is reviewed after 6-12 months). It was considered important that the pilot is able to mirror the longer-term intention of COSA for Ireland. It also needs to be operating for long enough to prove its effectiveness. Finally, the lead in time in terms of recruiting and training a suitable co-ordinator and recruiting and training volunteers as well as preparing the core member while still in prison is a minimum of six months and needs to be built into the pilot timeframe. This suggests that the absolute minimum period for the pilot should be two years.

The majority view is that the pilot should start as we intend to go on. It should thus target medium to high risk offenders who are socially isolated, test both urban and rural (small town) locations and be operated either by an existing C&V organisation or set up as an independent project. A minority view was expressed (mainly, but not exclusively by some of the statutory sector) that COSA should be operated by the State.

Evaluation needs to be built into the pilot from the very start to provide an evidence base and proof of its effectiveness.

⁶¹ Schneider, S., Wright, R., 2004, *Understanding Denial in Sexual Offenders. A Review of Cognitive and Motivational Processes to Avoid Responsibility*, Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 5 (1), January 2004, p.3-20, Sage Publications.

4.13 Operational Matters

The interviews with stakeholders and international experts covered key operational matters that need to be considered in setting up COSA. These are summarised below.

4.13.1 Assessment & Selection of Core Members

Most of those interviewed in Ireland did not put forward any views on the assessment process for selecting core members, although they did comment that whatever target group was agreed would impact on the type of referral processes and procedures that would need to be established.

Those that did comment on assessment processes were professional psychologists and suggested assessment in respect of risk, psychological, motivation, life style, living environment, and social networks/supports. They expressed a view that COSA should try to be as inclusive as possible (for the intended target group). However, those with psychopathic tendencies should probably be excluded and those with significant mental health issues would need careful selection both in terms of core member and volunteers and training of the latter. In the UK chronic deniers are excluded and the majority view was that this should also apply in Ireland but a minority felt that COSA could still be of benefit for those in denial.

It was considered important that the selection process should involve the referral agency (e.g. IPS, PS, Gardaí, and HSE), the core member, the co-ordinator and possibly family members.

4.13.2 Use of Volunteers

There was a strong majority view that volunteers should be used for the inner circle rather than paid professionals. Some professionals felt that this was a very specific area and knowledge and expertise was necessary and suggested a mix of professionals (in a voluntary capacity) and volunteers. The experience overseas is that this can lead to tensions in the group if the professional takes over unless there are very clear boundaries on everyone's role.

Finding sufficient volunteers of the calibre required can be a challenge for COSA. Ireland has a strong culture of volunteering, which has been particularly awakened during the current economic downturn as professionals who are out of work seek to maintain their skills and others look to replace employment with meaningful activity. Some concern was expressed that volunteers could be stigmatised through their association with COSA. However, in general those interviewed do not believe that attracting and retaining volunteers, despite adverse negative publicity towards sex offenders, will be a major challenge provided they are managed and supported properly and they are adequately trained and supervised.

Clear understanding of boundaries and of confidentiality by volunteers was considered extremely important. Proper selection, screening, training and supervision of volunteers and matching them with core members were considered critical to success. Training should form part of the selection process. Planning for volunteer dropout and potential burnout was also considered important. If there was considerable churn or dropout this could affect the quality of the process and consistency for the core member. Each core member has on average 5 volunteers working with them. Thus, if 5 COSA are to be set up during the pilot phase in

Ireland, then 25 suitable volunteers must be recruited, selected, trained. Allowing for dropout and weeding out, double this number may need to be on the books.

The majority view was the family members of victims; victims themselves and the family members of offenders should be allowed to volunteer as they can bring valuable insight and commitment. However, their involvement must be subject to very careful selection and on-going supervision to check motivation and to ensure re-victimisation does not occur and that they have worked through their own situation in full (particularly in the case of victims).

The advantages and disadvantages of using volunteers outlined during the consultations were as follows:

Using Volunteers for COSA	
Advantages	Disadvantages/Potential Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated and committed. • Human values and compassion. • Credibility with the offender. • Reintegration into the community especially if volunteers are from the local area. • Flexibility and ability to respond – can operate beyond 9-5 and at weekends. • Bring a range of interests and experiences. • Able to befriend and socialise in a way that professionals cannot. • Provision of a normalising environment. • Potential to widen the debate within communities. • Cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining boundaries. • Understanding when confidentiality can and cannot be broken. • Understanding balance between support and accountability of offender. • If there is a poor mix within a circle. • Motivation to be involved. • If there is inadequate provision of training, supervision and support.

Le Chéile is a Probation Service funded community-based project that uses volunteers to support young offenders (but not sex offenders). Lessons from it in respect of the use of volunteers in the context of COSA are summarised in Appendix B.

4.13.3 Co-ordinator

The basic model of a co-ordinator who co-ordinates and supports a cohort of volunteers who in turn supports a core member was accepted by those consulted with for the feasibility study.

A large part of the co-ordinator’s time will be managing volunteer associated activity. There was general agreement that the co-ordinator must have knowledge and experience of sex offenders. There was a minority view that experience of managing volunteers was also crucial (this view came from organisations that have direct experience of working with volunteers).

4.13.4 Training

Adequate training for both co-ordinator and volunteers was considered crucial to success. Buying-in Circles UK training for the co-ordinator and volunteers was considered a sensible option – the ‘wheel’ is already invented and proven, the training was described as excellent, and it will provide credibility (the cost would be approx. Stg£5-6k). Another option would be to buy in Le Chéile expertise in selecting,

recruiting and training volunteers but additional capacity would be needed to adequately cover sex offending issues.

4.13.5 Supervision of Volunteers

On-going supervision of volunteers is critical to success. Generally, the co-ordinator was considered the most appropriate person to provide supervision, but there were some suggestions that access to professional supervision should be made available as well.

4.13.6 Link to Other Jurisdictions

The majority view was that it would be useful for any Irish COSA to develop links with other jurisdictions operating COSA, e.g. sharing learning, contracting in expertise, etc. However, there were mixed views on whether this should be formal or informal. In general, the view was that whatever the nature of the link there had to be adequate flexibility to allow for Irish context and change to meet this context.

4.13.7 Evaluation & Review

There was general agreement that evaluation and review must be built into any Irish pilot from the start in order to demonstrate outcomes and value for money. This should include progress and twelve monthly interim reports.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores options for Ireland and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The option that is considered the most suitable is identified and costed.

5.2 Conclusions

The COSA concept has been proven to be an effective intervention for high-risk sex offenders reintegrating into society upon their release from prison. It has also been used to support sex offenders in the community.

There is considerable interest at present in the concept internationally – its timing seems to be right and it is seen as a humane and innovative way to manage risk. In Canada, the government has provided a substantial grant for COSA. In Britain, the Ministry of Justice has made positive references to circles and awareness and satisfaction seems high. In Europe, the CEP has taken the lead in the development of a good practice guide for COSA.

All those consulted with for this feasibility study accepted the basic COSA model of a core member supported by an inner circle of volunteers, which in turn is supported by an outer circle of professionals. There was widespread support for the establishment of COSA in Ireland. All considered it a necessary and worthwhile intervention. All considered that it should be feasible with no insurmountable hurdles identified.

The benefits of COSA outlined by those interviewed who have direct experience of operating it and the international evaluations include:

- Reintegrating sex offenders into the community by combining befriending and surveillance.
- Reducing re-offending – by 63% in UK, by 70% in Canada (the former uses more conservative measures)⁶².
- Providing offenders with access to social capital that models and practises what pro-social relationships look like as well as stabilising factors such as supporting access to housing and employment.
- Identifying whether the risk of an offender is reducing or increasing over time and identifying potentially recidivist behaviour prior to an offence actually being committed.
- Promoting conversations/dialogue about sex offending in communities where a COSA operates –volunteers often act as community advocates for COSA, with some volunteers being very open and engaged in public debates that helps to change attitudes.

⁶² Bates, A., Saunders, R., Wilson, C., 2007, *Doing something about it: A follow-up study of sex offenders participating in Thames Valley circles of support and accountability*, British Journal of Community Justice, 5, p.19-42; Wilson, R., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M., 2005, *Circles of Support and Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario*, Correctional Service of Canada; Wilson, R., Cortoni, F., McWhinnie, A., 2009, *Circles of Support and Accountability: A Canadian national replication of outcome findings*, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 21, p.412-429.

5.3 Structural Options

There were four main options for the structure of COSA in Ireland that those interviewed put forward. These are discussed below and presented in order of frequency. The pros and cons of each option is summarised in Appendix F

5.3.1 'Scottish' Model

This is where there is one existing host organisation with responsibility for co-ordinating, establishing and running local COSA under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) or Partnership Arrangement with a lead agency. This was the preferred option of the majority interviewed in Ireland.

Most suggested funding from Justice followed by joint funding by Justice and Health or Justice and Children, with the lead being taken by the Probation Service. A number of organisations have expressed interest in being the host for COSA.

In this option, clear links to the Probation Service and other parts of the justice system will be necessary. A number of those interviewed suggested that another version of this option would be a joint venture between the Probation Service and the national host along the lines of existing sex offender programmes such as Lighthouse.

Strengths

The advantages of this model were considered to be potential credibility with the public and the justice system if the right organisation was selected, i.e. one with knowledge and understanding of sex offender issues and volunteer issues.

An existing organisation will already have structures and systems in place and should have mechanisms for providing supervision and support for the COSA co-ordinator.

Because only one organisation is involved the potential for quality control and consistency is high and it should provide consistent learning for the pilot that can be readily evaluated.

Finally, this model should be cost effective as new organisational structures do not have to be put in place and the host organisation may be willing to contribute resources in-kind.

Weaknesses

The potential drawbacks of this model include possible lack of credibility and lack of established links with the justice system for some organisations that might be interested in operating COSA. Others also lack experience of working with volunteers.

The impact of and potential bias arising from existing organisational remits and strategies – 'contamination' – would have to be carefully considered. There is also the potential for negative impact on the image of the organisation by being associated with sex offenders.

Existing structures and governance might be weak and the host organisation must be prepared and capable of putting in time and resources. There are very few organisations with all of the relevant competencies that have a strong national base.

The nature of linkages to the Probation Service and SORAM would require very careful consideration and development prior to COSA coming into being. Finally, the quality of the SLA, and monitoring of same, is critical to success and to ensuring accountability.

5.3.2 *New Structure*

While in other countries, COSA is generally located within existing structures or partnership arrangements between a number of organisations, there was a view that a new national structure for COSA should be established in Ireland.

This new national COSA structure would have responsibility for co-ordinating, establishing and running local COSA with an independent Board/Steering Committee. In addition, a small number of those interviewed suggested affiliation or accreditation or branding under Circles UK (however, Circles UK are not funded to operate circles outside of England and Wales, although they trade their know-how and expertise with other jurisdictions).

Strengths

While a minority view, those who expressed it made a very strong case for this model. The reasons put forward included the opportunity to develop COSA in Ireland using a clean slate, to integrate existing learning and to establish best practice from the start.

Pre-existing culture or structures or ‘bad organisational habits’ would not contaminate a new structure. Thus, quality control and consistency across the COSA can be established and managed by the national project from the start.

There is also the potential to develop links to SORAM in the best way. There is potential for ensuring that the national co-ordinator has relevant knowledge and experience. A new structure also affords the opportunity to include relevant stakeholders on the Board.

Weaknesses

The potential disadvantages of this model are the absence of credibility with public at the initial stages as the new structure will have no track record. The new organisation could also lack of credibility with the justice system unless the co-ordinator has established links and credibility.

A new structure will have its own independent Board and this has the potential for the organisation to go ‘off message’ unless there are strong connections between the funder and the Board.

A new structure is likely to need a CEO as well as a co-ordinator in order to cover all of the ground that is needed when establishing a new project and servicing circles. Combined with the additional costs of premises, administration and establishing an identity for the new structure, this makes this option quite costly.

5.3.3 *‘Dutch’ Model*

Under this model, COSA would be set up and run by a State organisation such as the Probation Service or HSE. There was a minority view (mainly, but not exclusively,

from the statutory sector and similar to the numbers suggesting a new structure) that COSA (at least in the pilot phase) should be run by a State organisation.

Strengths

The advantages of this model are that if a relevant State organisation operates COSA then there will be knowledge, understanding and experience of sex offending issues. Existing links to SORAM will be already established and there is the potential to further cement co-ordination between organisations. COSA would be operated in a way that the State feels is most appropriate for Ireland.

Weaknesses

The drawbacks are that if COSA is operated entirely within the statutory sector, then a core tenet of the model, i.e. working with the community and community reintegration is lost. The experience in England of statutory-only operated circles has been relatively poor.

Longer-term, if COSA is operated by a justice organisation then this limits it to sex offenders involved in the justice system, unless the HSE is also involved. There is the potential for bureaucracy, particularly if more than one statutory organisation is involved.

Given budgetary constraints and the embargo on recruitment, the COSA would either have to be co-ordinated as part of an existing workload on a part-time basis (not ideal) or on a full-time basis at the expense of existing work.

A COSA operated by a statutory body could give rise to negative perceptions of it by sex offenders and be overly focussed on monitoring and accountability. The statutory sector also lacks experience of working with volunteers which raises the question would volunteers effectively end up being drawn from professional staff within the justice system.

5.3.4 'English' Model

Under this model there would be a range of host organisations running local COSA (with individual SLAs) reporting into a National Steering Committee (e.g. Circles IRL) or National Co-ordinator. While a number of organisations expressed interest in running local or regional COSA, this was the least favoured option for Ireland.

Strengths

The pros to this model include local and regional coverage that could meet the needs of sex offenders located in different parts of the country. Local organisations running COSA have the potential to bring added local credibility and to engage more with the community.

By having a mix of knowledge and experience through different organisations operating COSA there is the opportunity to learn from each other by establishing a learning network.

Existing organisations already have structures and systems already in place and should have mechanisms to provide supervision and support for their COSA co-ordinator.

Weaknesses

The disadvantages of this model are that some of the organisations might lack of credibility and established links with the justice system and existing structures and governance could be weak.

There is also the potential negative impact on the images of these organisations by being associated with sex offenders and subsequent decisions by Boards to dropout of COSA.

With a number of different organisations involved there is the potential for doubling up on costs of co-ordination, 'too many cooks', inconsistencies in approach, impact and potential bias arising from existing organisational remits and strategies – 'contamination', conflict and competition. The use of national standards and quality control systems that organisations would sign up to was considered important in this model.

Clear links to the Probation Service and other parts of the justice system will be necessary and a number of those interviewed suggested that under this model the Probation Service should take the lead in acting as a national co-ordinator.

This means that in this model additional costs are incurred as a result of the cost of establishing national oversight and quality standards as well as overlapping funding for co-ordinators in each organisation as economies of scale are unlikely to apply.

Finally, with a number of organisations involved in running COSA, there is potential for inconsistencies in the approach. There are also too many variables at play to effectively evaluate the project, although using different organisations does provide the opportunity to 'compare and contrast' and learn what works best.

5.4 Potential Demand

We estimate that at any one time between 8 and 9 COSA might be required in a full national roll-out based on the following estimates:

- The number of convicted sex offenders released from prison each year (c.130), who are the subject of post release probation supervision (c.40% of 130 = 52).
- The proportion of these 52 who would be medium to high risk (c.30% of c.52 = 16).
- The proportion of these 16 who potentially would be socially isolated (c.50%-60% = 8/9)

5.5 Key Recommendations

The criteria used to explore each of the above options were cost, credibility, governance, links, specific knowledge of sex offending, capacity and risk. Based on these criteria, the extensive consultation process carried out during the feasibility study, discussions with the Steering Group and the literature review, the following is recommended:

1. After careful consideration of each of the structural options outlined above the most suitable option in an Irish context is hosting the project by one existing organisation, i.e. along the lines of the Scottish. Model.
2. The pilot, hosted by one organisation, should operate under a Service Level Agreement with the Probation Service for the national delivery of COSA.
3. A tendering process and rigorous selection should take place to select the host organisation.
4. The pilot should target medium to high-risk sex offenders coming out of prison who will be under probation supervision.
5. The pilot should aim to operate up to a maximum of 5 COSA (i.e. 5 sex offenders).
6. The pilot should include larger and smaller urban centres in order to prove the concept in both environments and to take account of the mix of areas where sex offenders are likely to reside upon release.
7. The pilot should operate for 2 years with an option to extend it for a further year.
8. The pilot should use trained volunteers from the general local area that a sex offender will be housed in order to maximise community involvement, acceptance and reintegration.
9. Volunteers should be supervised by a professional co-ordinator.
10. Consideration should be given to purchasing in relevant training and manuals from Circles UK and CEP. Manuals may have to be adapted to suit Irish conditions.
11. Evaluation, monitoring and review should be built into the pilot phase and the model adjusted as necessary to reflect Irish conditions.
12. The pilot should operate in areas where SORAM also already operates and test the protocols and procedures necessary for effective communication and linkages between COSA and SORAM, particularly in the context of reporting potentially recidivist behaviour and the response to this.
13. A steering group should be established to oversee the project. At a minimum, it should be comprised of relevant justice services and the host organisation. Ideally, representatives from children's services and victim support groups should also be included.
14. Given that COSA can contribute to the safety of children as well as public safety at large, the funding for the pilot should come from the Departments of Justice and Children.

5.6 Estimated Cost

The estimated cost of these recommendations is c. €215k for a two-year pilot operating 5 COSA (2 in Year 1 and up to 5 [2+3] in Year 2). This equates to a cost per COSA of €43k for the pilot phase. Over time, a co-ordinator should be capable of running 5 COSA at a time, thus creating economies of scale. This would reduce the annual cost per COSA to c. €25k⁶³. A national rollout would yield some efficiencies of scale and the cost per COSA should reduce over time. More detail is contained in Appendix F.

5.7 Measuring Success

Based on international findings⁶⁴, possible measures that could be used to gauge the success of the Irish pilot include:

- No/reduced re-offending.
- Core members reverting to old behaviours are identified early and held accountable (but not abandoned) resulting in no further victims. In the UK this has been by way of recall to prison for some offenders but with contact maintained with the Circle while in prison and re-entry to the Circle post release.
- Volunteers are happy to take part and remain; i.e. there is low volunteer turnover/churn.
- Evidence of co-operation between COSA, local communities and statutory agencies.
- Evidence that local communities accept COSA in their midst and are not fearful.
- Victim support groups welcome COSA as an intervention and support it.
- Areas call to have a COSA set up (e.g. in the UK there are over 60 Circles and calls from a range of local organisations as well as regional probation and police services to have a Circle set up in their area).
- Demand from referrals exceeds supply.
- Response of core member.
- Changes in risk level.

⁶³ The UK average cost per circle for established COSA is Stg£11k, while in the Scottish pilot it will be c. Stg£18k.

⁶⁴ Bates, A., Saunders, R., Wilson, C., 2007, *Doing something about it: A follow-up study of sex offenders participating in Thames Valley circles of support and accountability*, British Journal of Community Justice, 5, p.19-42; Wilson, R., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M., 2005, *Circles of Support and Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South-Central Ontario*, Correctional Service of Canada; Wilson, R., McWhinnie, A., Picheca, J., Prinzo, M., Cortoni, F., 2007, *Circles of support and accountability: Engaging community volunteers in the management of high-risk sexual offenders*, The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 46, p.1-15; Wilson, R., Cortoni, F., McWhinnie, A., 2009, *Circles of Support and Accountability: A Canadian national replication of outcome findings*, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 21, p.412-429.

Appendix A: Organisations Consulted for the Feasibility Process

Circles UK
SACRO Scotland
Extern Northern Ireland
University of Strathclyde
Department of Corrections State of Vermont USA
HSE
Cosc HSE (project for sex offenders)
COSC
Dublin Archdiocese
Capuchin Order
Irish Prison Service
Le Chéile
NOTA
An Garda Síochána
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Rape Crisis Network Ireland
One in Four
CARI
Probation Service
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Barnardos
Granada Institute
PACE
Circles NL

Themes Discussed in the Consultation Process

- Current management of sex offenders and role COSA might play.
- Targeting and selection of core members and related issues.
- Role of sponsor organisations and relevant competencies.
- Role of co-ordinator and relevant competencies.
- Role of volunteers and relevant competencies.
- Key success determinants for COSA in general.
- Key success determinants for COSA in an Irish context.
- Main implementation issues that need to be addressed.
- Benefits and potential of COSA.

Appendix B: Summary of Model Features

The key features of COSA are as follows:

- Supporting a core member (sex offender) by an inner circle (4-6 volunteers), who in turn are supported by an outer circle of professionals or a professional co-ordinator.
- Community based (in North America frequently operated by faith-based organisations).
- Identification/referral of potential participants while still in prison is the ideal.
- Assessing the potential participant's commitment.
- Targeting high-risk sex offenders after completion of sentence.
- Tailoring of each COSA to each participant.
- Using trained volunteers (4-6 per participant) to provide an inner circle of support and monitoring upon release.
- Linking to professionals (in England a mix of paid professionals and volunteers is used in the inner circle. In Scotland, the co-ordinator is a paid professional with experience of sex offenders).
- Focusing on social supports rather than concrete structural supports.
- Providing a balance between support and accountability (i.e. ensuring the offender is held accountable for their behaviour when in the community).
- Data collection and monitoring.

Role of Volunteers

Using trained volunteers is a core feature of COSA. Because volunteers give their time freely, this gives them legitimacy with offenders that paid professionals could not have. The 'authority' of volunteers is derived from the quality of the relationship that they build with the offender without any of the inherent power imbalances that exist between offenders and paid professionals. This means that they can be a powerful agent of change⁶⁵.

Holding Offenders to Account

The COSA model is a blend of social support and accountability for a core member's behaviour.

Accountability happens in the COSA through transparency and the inner circle looking together at difficult realities. Specific ways COSAs do this include⁶⁶:

- Keeping an open line of communication with the relevant probation officer, treatment providers, etc.
- Committing to a 'no secrets' policy.
- Considering together the consequences of a core member's past and potential actions.
- Helping the core member learn about the effects of past offences on others and self.
- Establishing expectations for behaviour in the community.
- Talking about risky thinking or behaviour.
- Challenging assumptions that are related to offending, etc.

⁶⁵ D. Miodownik, Vermont Department of Corrections, USA.

⁶⁶ Based on the State of Vermont's *Restorative Reentry Program – MCJC & GBCJC 2010 Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) Volunteer Role*

Appendix C: Differentiating Features of COSA Models⁶⁷

While the basic concept of the different COSA models is the same (safety and support), how it operates in various places is different. The table below summaries the main differentiating features between the Canadian and British models.

In Canada and some US States (e.g. Pierce County in Washington) COSA is community-driven (faith-based), and professionally supported. Individuals from the community (often from specific Churches) volunteer their time. They are screened and trained. They have access to a pool of professionals (psychologists, GPs, law enforcement, probation) who also volunteer their time to prepare, support and educate community volunteers. They are drawn from the local community and effectively act as a safety net for the volunteers. COSA operates outside the criminal justice framework and returns responsibility for community safety to ordinary citizens (appropriately trained and supported). Local COSA's are usually overseen by an advisory panel or steering group (frequently sponsored by a local faith organisation) and in some projects by a board of directors.

In Canada, funding was originally provided by faith based organisations (it is now provided mainly from the Canadian government). The model was therefore built around community collaboration and communication. A local COSA often has a very long-term engagement with an offender and effectively they can become surrogate families for offenders.

In Britain and some US States (e.g. Oregon) COSA is professionally-driven and community supported. Effectively, COSA in the UK is a 'statutory' agency supported by the community. It is more treatment focused working with offenders who are still in the criminal justice system. Where possible, COSA in Britain operates within MAPPA.

In Britain, COSA operate in two stages. A stage 1 COSA is the standard model, involving a core member and around 5 volunteers in formal weekly meetings for about one year. A Stage two COSA is where the circle is extended for a further one to two years and can be smaller in terms of number of volunteers involved and more informal.

Both models are considered effective.

Differentiating Features of Canadian & English/Dutch Models

	Canada	England/Netherlands
Source of response	Community fear resulting in a community response.	Government response.
Focus	Reintegration and accountability.	Reintegration and monitoring.
Principles	No more victims. Friendship and trust. Accountability for behaviour.	Support. Monitor. Maintain.
Core member targeting	High to very risk with no supervision. Due for release at end of prison sentence.	Medium to high risk. Can be drawn from different parts of the justice system – in the UK those on licence, under supervision or registered.
Links to justice infrastructure	Organic. Informal links to local justice agencies. Volunteers provided by local justice agencies.	Systemic. Involvement of MAPPA in UK and other justice structures in NL. Involvement of justice professionals in co-ordinating COSA.
Use of volunteers and where drawn on	Drawn from the local community (but many were either formerly in justice or caring professions or had	Drawn from the local community. Play a supporting role to that of professionals.

⁶⁷ Drawn from Wilson et al 2007 and material provided by Circles UK and Circles NL.

	contact with offenders). Central to the model.	
Training of volunteers	Local professionals.	Circles UK, Circles NL and local co-ordinators.
Role of professionals – paid or unpaid	Support of inner circle on a voluntary basis. Drawn from local community. Act as safety net for inner circle volunteers.	Closely linked to the inner circle on a paid basis.
Supervision of volunteers	Local project co-ordinator.	Professional co-ordinator.
Co-ordination and oversight	Local.	Circles UK and Circles NL at national level. Probation service in NL. Co-ordinators at local level MAPPAs in the UK Project steering committees in UK and NL
Quality control	No national standards ⁶⁸	Circles UK/Circles NL – national standards
Governance and accountability	Local steering committees/ advisory groups/boards of directors. Accountable to local community.	Local project (usually joint venture between community & justice bodies) overseen by Circles UK. Local probation projects overseen by probation service and Circles NL. Accountable to MAPPAs and local project partners in UK. Accountable to probation service in NL.
Nature of support	Long term, dependency	Short term, empowerment

⁶⁸ A recent significant grant for COSA from the Canadian government means that it is likely that national standards will be developed.

Appendix D: Volunteer Selection Criteria & Training of Volunteers

Volunteer Criteria (Source: Mountpelier CJC State of Vermont USA)

COSA volunteers are community minded people who are interested in making a difference by helping others develop the self-awareness and self esteem necessary for making choices that don't hurt themselves or others.

Typical traits of an effective COSA volunteer:

- **Broad minded** – able to see and appreciate complexities inherent in a situation
- **Cautious** – aware of the possibility of being manipulated; wary
- **Victim sensitive** – willing to confront risky behaviours, victim blaming, and justifications
- **Compassionate** – understanding and caring about people who are victimised and able to be empathetic with someone who has done wrong
- **Reliable** – has a pattern of following through with commitments
- **Self-regulating** – understands and maintains healthy personal boundaries; easily differentiates between oneself and others
- **Good humoured** – laughs easily and helps others use humour to get through tough and serious situations
- **Balanced** – can see multiple sides of a person or situation; responds rather than reacts
- **Patient & Realistic** - holds reasonable expectations regarding how change happens; able to recognise and honour small milestones
- **Encouraging** – able to recognise, acknowledge, and nurture strengths

Training of Volunteers (Source: Consultations with Circles UK, Sacro and State of Vermont)

Core areas that should be covered in training include:

- what COSA is (and is not) and its role,
- personal boundaries and appropriate boundaries with the offender,
- beliefs and attitudes,
- role of volunteers,
- how to be non judgmental,
- how sex offenders operate,
- how the sex offender justice system operates,
- working in partnership with statutory agencies,
- self-care and self-management,
- risk factors, risk management and early warning signs,
- child and public protection,
- manipulation and collusion,
- confidentiality (when it does and does not apply),
- reporting requirements and procedures, particularly in respect of information that should be shared with the appropriate authorities.

In the UK, initiation training is for 16 hours over 2 days at a weekend using two facilitators. The training should be used as part of the screening process. Role-playing is considered to be a very effective tool.

Lessons on the Use of Volunteers (Source: Le Cheile)

- Having clear selection criteria and processes. Reasons for excluding as well as including volunteers should be used in the selection process, e.g. attitudes to crime in general and sex offending in particular, communication skills, reasons for/motivation behind wanting to volunteer, time availability/commitment, expectations of their role and likely impact. Performance during training also should form part of the selection/de-selection process. Circles UK also use this methodology.
- Ensuring that references are checked and Garda clearance is received prior to the volunteer commencing in their role (this can delay things considerably so Le Cheile has developed a pipeline system to ensure volunteers are available with clearance when a mentee is referred).

- Formal contracting with the volunteer so they understand the nature and length of their commitment. In the UK and Scotland volunteers are asked to sign up to COSA for a minimum of one year (the typical length of a first stage circle).
- Having guidelines in place covering, amongst others, health and safety, information and confidentiality, complaints and review procedures, language and behaviour and dress, boundaries, giving and receiving gifts, procedures when knowledge of potential re-offending or a crime actually committed comes to the volunteer's attention, etc.
- Informing the volunteers about the offending behaviour of the core member.
- Providing initial and on-going training.
- Providing group supervision, access to professional supervision, networking and peer learning opportunities.
- Ensuring boundaries are understood and maintained by volunteers – clear guidance in this respect.
- Supporting volunteers to complete necessary paperwork.
- Putting an exit strategy in place in advance of the volunteering relationship coming to an end either because the volunteer wishes to leave or the circle is at an end.

Appendix E: Views from Irish Consultation Process on what could Enhance or Hinder COSA

Enhance	Hinder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of volunteers – good standing in the community, capable of opening doors, mature, and right motivation. • Willingness of volunteers to give time commitment required. • Understanding by volunteers of the issues involved. • Rigorous screening and selection of volunteers. • Quality training of volunteers. • Regular supervision of volunteers. • Awareness by volunteers of what the core member needs to do to stay offence-free. • Pre-release planing for the core member. • Preparation and induction of the core member. • Experienced co-ordinator (knowledge of sex offending as important as volunteer management experience). • Support and commitment by statutory sector. • Ministerial and high level civil service champions. • Buy-in from the C&V sector. • Strong commitment to confidentiality by all stakeholders involved including referral agencies and statutory bodies. • Media management strategy. • Positive media coverage. • Promoting COSA as a community safety, child protection and prevention measure. • Independent project or a credible existing organisation to act as host. • Proper governance structure, systems and procedures. • Adequate funding. • Links to appropriate justice, psychological and social support services in order to respond to increases in risky behaviour by offenders. • Clear lines of reporting with appropriate protocols. • Clear lines of referral with appropriate protocols. • Linked to SORAM. • Community spirit and openness. • Respected public advocates in local communities. • Support from local organisations linked into the community such as CDPs. • Support from victim support, representative bodies like NOTA, child safe guarding organisations, national bodies like the GAA, ICA, etc. • Linked to other jurisdictions in terms of learning, networking, using resources already designed and tested. • Development of clear output and outcome indicators. • Regular review and provision of evidence-base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small size of Ireland – everyone knows everyone, lack of anonymity, breaches of confidentiality. • Rural location of some offenders (practical and cost issues of supporting them). • Lack of understanding and knowledge in the community about sex offending and the risks posed. • Unbalanced, sensational reporting in certain sections of the media and media interference. • Burn-out/churn/drop-out of volunteers. • Stigma by association for volunteers. • Volunteers feeling they do not have a voice. • Consistency by volunteers especially if they are replaced part way through a circle. • Forcing COSA into a community. • Poor word of mouth – volunteer experience, statutory perceptions, etc. • Poor outcomes early on. • Inadequate management of risks. • Inadequate resources and funding. • Bureaucracy.

Appendix F: Pros and Cons of Options for Ireland

The pros and cons of each options for the structure of COSA in Ireland is set out below:

Option	Pro	Con
One host - existing organisation (Scottish model)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential credibility with public. • Structures and systems already in place. • Supervision and support for co-ordinator. • Potential for quality control and consistency. • Knowledge and understanding of sex offender issues. • Knowledge and understanding of volunteer issues (by some). • Provides consistent learning for the pilot that can be evaluated. • Cost effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of credibility and lack of established links with justice system for some. • Lack of experience of working with volunteers for some. • Impact and potential bias arising from existing organisational remits and strategies – ‘contamination’. • Potential negative impact on image of the organisation. • Existing structures and governance could be weak – how to vet these organisations? • Host must be prepared and capable of putting in time and resources. • Few are strong nationally. • Nature of links to Probation = ? • Nature of link to SORAM = ? • Overall accountability - quality of SLA critical.
New national COSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean slate – opportunity to establish best practice from the start. • Not contaminated by pre-existing culture or structures or ‘bad organisational habits’. • Cost (only one layer of co-ordination and reporting) • Quality control and consistency across the COSA established and managed by the national project. • Potential to develop link to SORAM in best way • Opportunity to integrate existing learning. • Opportunity to hire co-ordinator with relevant knowledge and experience. • Opportunity to include relevant stakeholders on the Board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of credibility with public as no track record. • Lack of credibility with justice system unless co-ordinator has established links and credibility. • Cost in terms of time of establishing a new structure. • Board must be strongly connected to the funder. • Additional costs in terms of premises, new governance structures, administration, supervision for co-ordinator. • Need to establish a new identity – time and PR costs involved. • Likely to need a CEO as well as co-ordinator to cover all of the ground in establishing a new project and servicing circles.
Hosted by a State organisation (Dutch model)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge & understanding of the issues. • Existing links to SORAM established. • Opportunity to further cement co-ordination between organisations. • Operated in way State wants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSA will not be a community model. • Limits COSA to those involved in the justice system if HSE not involved. • Potential for bureaucracy. • Potential negative perception of COSA by core members if State operated. • Budgetary constraints. • Resource & capacity issues - impact on existing resources and caseloads – recruitment embargo. • Lack of experience of using volunteers. • UK experience of COSA run solely by statutory agencies is poor.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of/limited experience of running projects directly.
Range of host organisations (English Model)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional coverage. • Local credibility. • Mix of knowledge and experience – opportunity to learn from each other by establishing a learning network. • Structures and systems already in place. • Supervision and support for co-ordinator. • Some have experience of volunteers (others do not). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of credibility and lack of established links with justice system for some. • Lack of experience of working with volunteers for some. • Doubling up on costs of co-ordination. • Potential for ‘too many cooks’. • Potential for inconsistent approaches. • Quality control and standards. • Potential for inconsistencies in approach. • Cost due to overlapping funding as economies of scale unlikely to apply. • Impact and potential bias arising from existing organisational remits and strategies – ‘contamination’. • Potential negative impact on images of organisations. • Existing structures and governance could be weak – how to vet these organisations? • Too many variables at play for effective evaluation of the pilot. • Potential for conflict and competition. • Potential for poor communication. • Nature of links to Probation Service if core member is under probation supervision already = ?? • Nature of links to SORAM = ?? • Overall transparency and accountability = ???

Appendix G: Estimated Cost of Pilot in Ireland

Assumptions:

Number of convicted sex offenders released from prison each year = 130

% who are subject to post release probation supervision = 40%

% who would be medium to high risk = 30%

% who would be socially isolated = 50%

Number of circles per co-ordinator = 5

Pilot phase – number of circles = maximum of 5 in 2 years, i.e. one co-ordinator managing up to 25 volunteers and 5 sex offenders.

Two circles operating in year 1, 3 circles operating in year 2.

National rollout – number of circles at any one time = 8-10, i.e. 2 co-ordinators managing 40-50 volunteers and 8-10 sex offenders.

Co-ordinator is employed full-time

Contribution to organisational overheads = 30% of salary costs.

Pilot Phase

The estimated cost of the recommendations is c.€215k for the pilot phase broken down as follows. It assumes that COSA is hosted by an existing organisation.

	Year 1 of Pilot	Year 2 of pilot	Total
Number of circles	2	3	5
Co-ordinator salary and employer costs	70k	70k	140k
Training of co-ordinator and manuals ⁶⁹	7k	-	7k
Recruitment and training of volunteers ⁷⁰	3k	3k	6k
Insurance ⁷¹	2k	3k	5k
Co-ordinator and volunteer travel and expenses ⁷²	4k	6k	10k
Meeting cost for volunteers ⁷³	2k	3k	5k
Contribution to overheads	21k	21k	42k
Total	109k	106k	215k
Average cost per circle for pilot	€43k Note: If a co-ordinator can manage 5 circles in a year, the cost reduces significantly to c. €25k per circle		

National Roll-out

Nationally, the number of circles required at any one time is estimated at between 8 and 10. A co-ordinator can manage between 4 and 5 circles. If two co-ordinators were employed running 10 circles each year, then the annual cost per circle could decrease to c. €25k per annum.

⁶⁹ Based on Circles UK data

⁷⁰ Based on Circles UK data

⁷¹ Based on Le Cheile data

⁷² Based on Circle UK and Le Cheile data

⁷³ Based on Circles UK data

Appendix H: Contrasting Experiences of Circles in England

Thames Valley

A number of unique factors contributed to the particular success of Thames Valley circle. These included:

Initiation:

- The idea of COSA was put forward by the Quakers to the Home Office in 2000 at a time of crisis in the management of offenders in the community.
- Planning for MAPPA was happening in tandem so the Home Office saw COSA as potentially the 'human face' of MAPPA.
- The Home Office agreed to fund three pilots – Thames Valley, Hampshire and Northumberland.
- The Thames Valley area already had a multi-agency structure working pre the development of MAPPA.
- Quakers do not usually become involved in implementation; they see their role as championing ideas. However, one of their prominent members was the Prison Governor in Grandon therapeutic prison and they championed the COSA concept and the Quakers being sponsors both internally and externally. This gave the project considerable weight and credibility in the Thames justice region.
- The Thames Valley Chief Constable was keen on restorative justice (RJ) – there were RJ projects for young offenders and it had also been used, to a lesser extent, with adults. Although COSA has no direct involvement with victims, the Quakers see it as a form of RJ and promoted it as such, both to its members and to others.
- Although the Home Office had money for RJ projects it funded COSA out of its Dangerous Offender monies (as it did MAPPA). This meant that two divergent communities could be appealed to – RJ proponents (e.g. Probation Service) and public protection proponents (e.g. police). The Quakers also provided funding for the project.

Governance & Management:

- A management committee was set up and chaired by the Grandon Prison Governor. His presence gave it credibility with both the Quaker community and the justice system. The project reported directly into this management committee and it in turn liaised with MAPPA.
- Two Probation Offices were recruited full-time to run the project who had experience of sex offenders – this gave it credibility with local justice infrastructure. It also meant that volunteers received excellent training which these two full-time co-ordinators developed and delivered (this has since formed the basis for training provided by Circles UK).

Volunteers:

- Considerable time and effort went into the selection process for volunteers. Thames Valley is a wealthy middle-class area so it was easy to recruit professional social workers, psychologists, etc as volunteers, i.e. the balance of volunteers were professionals rather than lay people. A mix of young and old was recruited. Recruitment was mainly through the Quakers and other faith-based organisations.
- A strong cohort of on-going volunteers developed. Volunteers signed up to work in a circle for a year and occasionally a volunteer might be involved in two circles at the same time. Volunteers worked as a team and had to be capable of working in a group and to equally value each other's experience and expertise.
- The role of volunteers was not just befriending – it was also oversight and surveillance and the training reflected this. Volunteers understood that they had to inform Probation of issues or concerns.
- Volunteers received regular supervision and support. Managing risks was through training and supervision.

Target Group:

- The target group was high-risk convicted sex offenders but some medium risk offenders were also included (across all COSA in England and Wales all core members are convicted).

- The co-ordinators were involved in selecting the offenders. They met them while they were still in prison. The circle was set up while the sex offender was still in prison, near the end of the sentence. A typical circle lasted 18 months.

Linkages:

- Protocols were developed on sharing information with paid professionals.
- The circles worked closely with local statutory infrastructure and this provides reassurance in taking on high-risk offenders.
- The co-ordinators reported into MAPPAs.

Media Management:

- There was a media strategy – initially local media were hostile to the circles calling them ‘Paedo Pals’ but there was a public backlash to some of the coverage by the media with people coming forward to volunteer to help COSA, especially after incidents of bad press.
- The Quakers actively sought out publicity in order to put forward their view on managing sex offenders.
- Training of volunteers covered dealing with the media.

The Quakers do not plan to be involved in running COSA long term and already Thames Valley has been floated off as an independent project that is no longer funded by the Quakers.

Hampshire & Northumberland

Both the Hampshire and Northumberland circles were not that successful. Factors involved included:

- Hampshire was sponsored by a voluntary organisation using a part-time co-ordinator. This co-ordinator had no direct experience of sex offenders (but who was a former probation officer with experience of housing sex offenders). The project thus had limited credibility with local police.
- The Quakers sponsored Northumberland but there was never full commitment to it and it lacked a clear focus.
- There was no MAPPAs in place in Hampshire.
- There was no local Chief Constable with a RJ focus to champion the projects.
- There were very limited referrals.

Eventually Hampshire was taken over by the Quakers and a new co-ordinator was appointed after a contact the Quakers had in Toronto (a police officer who championed COSA in Canada) came over and convinced local police of the value of COSA. In Northumberland there was division at board level over its focus with some members championing a focus on sex offenders and others championing a focus on learning disabilities. Eventually, the project decided to focus on the latter target group.

Appendix I: Circles UK

There is no national steering committee for COSA operating in England. However, the Quakers were instrumental in ensuring that a national standards body, Circles UK was established to support the development, quality, co-ordination and effectiveness of local circles in England and Wales. It can also act as a broker between local partners interested in setting up a circle. It is also involved in the CEP funded project to develop a handbook for European practice for COSA. Circles UK is effectively a federation and has a membership structure of circle projects. It is 50% funded by the Ministry of Justice. The rest of its funding comes from a range of sources including fee income and charitable trusts.

Circles UK now has a Code of Practice for members, training manuals, protocols, newsletter, model job descriptions, etc. Circles UK provides a 3-day training course (free to members) for co-ordinators. To access all these resources the local circle must be a member. UK circles tend to be local partnerships rather than just one sponsor organisation. To be a member, they must satisfy Circles UK that they have the right governance structures in place and that they have secured funding for at least one year and they must commit in writing to adhere to the Code of Practice and have a plan for sustainability⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ The Ministry of Justice has indicated to probation chiefs and Directors of Offender Management that funding can only be provided to sponsor organisations that are members of Circles UK.

Appendix J: UK Cost Benefit Analysis

Beech and Elliott (2011) conducted a cost-benefit analysis of COSA based on Circles UK projects. The key components of this analysis were:

- The average cost of running a circle based on the direct and indirect running costs of a number of established UK circles. This figure was calculated to be Stg£11,140 per annum.
- The estimated cost per re-offence including criminal justice court costs, Crown court costs, Prison Service costs, SOTP costs and non-criminal costs. The average cost per re-offence was calculated to be Stg£147,161 per offender.
- The average rate of re-offending (23% for adult victim sex offenders and 8.9% of child victim sex offenders), calculated at 16%.
- A hypothetical cohort of 100 sex offenders, 50 of whom are provided with a COSA and 50 of whom receive no COSA.
- Reduction in re-offending by 63% for the COSA cohort.
- Applying the above data to the hypothetical cohort, 8 of the 50 non-COSA cohort can be expected to re-offend (42 will not) and 3 of the 50 COSA cohort can be expected to re-offend (47 will not).
- The cost of re-convictions for the non-COSA cohort will be Stg£1,117,288 (8 re-offenders x cost of re-conviction of 147,161). This is also the total cost because there is no intervention cost.
- The cost of re-conviction of the COSA cohort will be Stg£998,483 (3 re-offenders x cost of re-conviction of 147,161 plus the cost of COSA (3 x 11,140) plus the cost of COSA for the 47 non re-offenders (47 x 11,140).
- The cost-saving is thus the total cost for the non-COSA cohort (i.e. Stg£1,177,288) less the total cost for the COSA cohort (i.e. Stg£998,483) which equals Stg£178,805. When this figure is divided by the total cost of the COSA cohort (i.e. Stg£178,483 ÷ 998,483) a benefit-cost ratio of 0.179 (rounded off to 0.18) is produced or for every Stg£1 invested in COSA, future savings of 18 pence are generated.

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