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Contact info:
mojanalyticalservices@justice.gsi.gov.uk

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Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA): A Case File Review of Two Pilots

McCartan, K; Kemshall, H; Westwood, S; Solle, J; MacKenzie, G; Cattel, J; and Pollard, A.

The University of West England, De Montfort University and the Ministry of Justice

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a community-based initiative that aims to prevent further offending and sexual abuse by sexual offenders, who are referred to as 'Core Members' within Circles.

This research summary provides a description of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) and an overview of evidence about the delivery, effectiveness and added value of CoSA to statutory supervision of sexual offenders. It presents findings from a case file review of two CoSA pilots that were funded by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) between April 2008 and March 2010.

Key findings

- The NOMS funded CoSA pilots supported and complemented statutory supervision. They did not duplicate or fulfil the same function.
- The CoSA pilots supported risk management through proactive monitoring of behaviours and activities.
- The CoSA pilots reduced the social isolation of Core Members, provided practical help to support compliance with treatment programmes, and enabled Core Members to develop appropriate pro-social activities.
- Whilst CoSA is a volunteer-led initiative, it is not cost free. The average cost of a Circle, excluding volunteer costs, was £9,800 for a Circle managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and £7,900 for a Circle that was managed by Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles.
- There are no large, long-term and independent evaluations that have investigated the impact of CoSA on recidivism in the UK or elsewhere.

Background: Supervision of sexual offenders in England and Wales

Supervision and rehabilitation of sexual offenders is a complex and challenging issue. Sexual offenders who are sentenced to 12 months or more imprisonment are subject to statutory supervision by the Probation Service following their release on licence.¹

All licences include standard conditions such as a requirement to live in accommodation approved by the probation offender manager and to report to him or her as directed. The licence may also include additional licence conditions to manage specific risks presented by the offender, such as not to go to a particular place, not to contact a specific person or not to stay in accommodation where there are children.

In addition, since 2001, all registered sexual offenders and offenders disqualified from working with children are subject to management through the statutory Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).² Within MAPPA, the police, probation and other services work together to assess and manage the risks presented by offenders. This reduces the risk that important information about the offender will be lost, or not acted upon.

All sexual offenders released from prison, whether or not they are also subject to probation supervision on licence, must comply with the Notification Requirements of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, often referred to as being on the 'sex offender register'. This requires all offenders subject to the notification requirements to notify the police of their address. Since August 2012 they have also been required to notify the police of their bank details, any travel abroad and whether there is a person under 18 living at their address. Local police will work with other agencies to manage the offender, including making unannounced visits to the offender's address. An offender who has served 30 months or longer in prison is currently subject to notification requirements for life. The offender is able to seek a review of their indefinite notification requirements

only after they have completed 15 years of complying with the requirements.³

The number of offenders sentenced for sexual offences in England and Wales was 5,955 in 2011. On the 30th June 2011, there were 10,935 prisoners in the prison estate for sexual offences (including those on remand), and since 2005 the number of sexual offenders under post-release licence supervision has ranged from 2,750 to 3,024 (Ministry of Justice, 2013).

In addition to statutory supervision requirements, there are also voluntary sector initiatives that contribute to post-release supervision and re-integration of sexual offenders. Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a community-based voluntary sector initiative that aims to prevent further offending by sexual offenders.

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

CoSA in the UK was set up by the Religious Society of Friends in 2002. The CoSA model was based on projects which had been running in Canada for a number of years that had supported the safe integration of high risk and high profile sexual offenders in local communities (Hanvey, Philpott and Wilson, 2011).

In 2008, Circles UK, a national body supporting the development, quality, coordination and effectiveness of CoSA in England and Wales, was launched. The organisation has a Code of Practice and Good Practice Guidelines for CoSA operating in England and Wales and is responsible for providing training, co-ordinating activities and setting standards.

Between April 2008 and March 2010, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) funded two CoSA pilot sites in Hampshire and the Thames Valley (HTV) and a national pilot run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.⁴

'Circles' consist of four to six local volunteers and one sexual offender who has recently been released from custody and is subject to statutory supervision

¹ As part of the Transforming Rehabilitation Programme, it is proposed that statutory post-release supervision will be extended to sentences of less than 12 months.

² For further information about MAPPA please see <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/mappa/mappa-guidance-2012-part1.pdf?type=Finjan-Download&slot=0000023D&id=0000063C&location=0A64020F>

³ The notification requirements of offenders who have served shorter custodial sentences can be reviewed via the following link <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/42/contents>

⁴ The Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) is a UK-wide child protection charity dedicated to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. It managed one of the original CoSA that were funded by NOMS and is a full member of Circles UK.

on licence. The volunteers are known as 'Lay Members' of the Circle, whilst the sexual offender is referred to as the 'Core Member'. The volunteers regularly meet with the Core Member and aim to provide social and practical support to reduce the risk of social isolation, to monitor their actions to ensure the local community is safe, and to hold them accountable for their actions and participation in treatment programmes. The aim is to reintegrate the Core Member safely into his/her community and to reduce their risk of re-offending.

CoSA work with, and aim to complement, agencies working together as part of the local Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels and other relevant professionals. The Circles model is often conceptualised as two concentric circles (Circles South East, 2012; Wilson et al, 2008) that liaise and work closely with each other. The inner circle consists of the Core Member and volunteers who focus on providing support and monitoring activities. The outer circle includes psychologists, the offender manager, the police and medical professionals who address probation violations, mental health problems and indications of imminent risk of re-offending.

In order for Core Members to participate in a Circle, the requirement is that she or he must have demonstrated some understanding of their offending behaviour and be committed to playing an active role in developing a positive, non-offending lifestyle (Lucy Faithfull Foundation, 2013). Each Circle meets with the Core Member on average once each week, but this will vary according to the needs of the Core Member. Circles meet in a neutral location within the community, rather than at a probation office, and generally operate for 12 to 18 months.

Volunteers participate in an assessment day and screening process to determine their suitability. All volunteers are interviewed before and after the training course, are required to submit references and are subject to an enhanced criminal records check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (the Criminal Records Bureau service when the CoSA pilots were operating). They undergo an initial two day training course, undertake a further month of training before meeting the Core Member and receive regular supervision and support from the local CoSA co-ordinator (Wilson, Bates and Völlm, 2010; www.circles-uk.org.uk).

The CoSA process has two distinct phases. In the first phase Core Members are often supported in accessing suitable accommodation, joining appropriate clubs and societies, accessing educational resources, updating their skill sets, and using services to increase employability. Phase One lasts for approximately nine to twelve months and is the most intensive part of the Circle. This phase aims to support the Core Member to engage in safe activities that will enhance their life.

The second phase of the Circle lasts for approximately six to nine months. During this period the emphasis is on helping the Core Member to become increasingly self-sufficient, to perform a greater proportion of the support and accountability functions for themselves and to require reduced time and levels of support from volunteers. During the second phase, the volunteers tend to perform an 'advise and direct' function rather than a 'hands on assistance' function. The Circle's work with the Core Member ends when the local CoSA co-ordinator reviews and assesses progress, risks and subsequently decides that the Core Member has developed the skills and tools necessary to enable them to function in the community more safely. The Probation Service and other statutory agencies may be involved in discussions and this decision.

Throughout the life of the Circle, volunteers provide feedback to their CoSA co-ordinator who liaises with and passes relevant information to the statutory agencies. CoSA is not responsible for the effective management of the Core Member in the community; this remains the responsibility of statutory agencies.

CoSA volunteers

In 2012 there were approximately 600 volunteers actively engaged in Circles throughout England and Wales, 172 of whom were volunteering in the South East, where the NOMS-funded Hampshire and Thames Valley pilot was located (Circles South-East, 2012). There is limited evidence about the profile and motivations of volunteers. Of Circles South East volunteers, 74% were female and 26% were male. There was a wide range of volunteer ages, with the oldest volunteer born in 1930 and youngest in 1991. The Circles South East report notes that the largest self-reported occupation among volunteers in 2012 was 'student' (30%). This proportion has increased from 2% in 2005.

Volunteers reported that they have benefitted personally, emotionally and socially from participating in CoSA (Circles South-East, 2012). The main reported motivations of CoSA volunteers in the South East of England are as follows

- Supportive of the humanist approach upon which CoSA is based.
- Professional interest based on current/future employment.
- Issues related to personal experience as a survivor of sexual abuse.
- Child protection focus.
- Desire to create safer communities.
- Personal interest in social/criminal justice work.
- Religious belief informing social and volunteering activities.

Theoretical context of CoSA

CoSA is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the Good Lives Model (GLM)⁵ and Restorative Justice. The GLM is based on developing desistance through building strengths and capabilities to reduce risk of re-offending. It is a strengths-based approach to offender rehabilitation that advocates for intervention being an activity that adds to an individual's repertoire of personal functioning, rather than only managing problems and restricting activities in order to reduce re-offending (Ward and Stewart 2003). The GLM seeks constructive and collaborative ways of working with offenders to enhance their capacity to live meaningful and constructive lives so that they can desist from further criminal activities, whilst also seeking to ensure public safety (Ward and Maruna, 2007).

Restorative justice⁶ is concerned with offender remorse, repair and reconciliation. Marshall (1999) defines consensual restorative justice as 'a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future'. Whilst CoSA does not involve the victim and offender directly in a restorative process, the combination of the local community's disapproval of offending, finding a positive way forward for the offender, as well as

holding the Core Member to account are key to CoSA. In this sense, CoSA can be understood as a restorative intervention, with a focus on offender accountability and support, safe community reintegration, and where possible behaviour change.

Case File Review of two CoSA pilots

In 2012, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a small independent qualitative study of two NOMS-funded CoSA pilots that were delivered by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) and Hampshire Thames Valley (HTV) Circles⁷ between April 2008 and March 2010. The study was commissioned to enable the Ministry of Justice to understand the added support and value that is provided by CoSA to statutory supervision of sexual offenders, rather than to investigate the impact of CoSA on recidivism. The sites had different operating models, with LFF operating nationally, and HTV using a more local model.

Aims

The aims of the study were:

- To explore the additional value of CoSA when used alongside standard offender supervision.
- To provide insight into the economics of CoSA, essentially the establishment and maintenance costs, and costs per Core Member.
- To provide an overview of the existing evidence-base for CoSA.

Approach

The research methodology comprised three inter-related strands: collation of demographic management data on Core Members; a review of the (32) Core Member case files; and collection of available finance data to provide insight into the costs of setting up and running CoSA at each site. Information was collected using a case reader template (see Annex 3) that was specifically designed for this research project to ensure that information was collected consistently and systematically. Data were analysed through an iterative process of describing, classifying and connecting. This provided structure, consistency of approach and an audit trail of qualitative findings for each case that could later be collated. The completed case file readers were discussed by

⁵ For further information about the Good Lives Model (GLM) please see Ward and Maruna, 2007)

⁶ For further information about Restorative Justice, please see 'Restorative Justice: The Evidence' by Sherman and Strang (2007) and Shapland et al. (2011) Restorative Justice in Practice. London: Routledge.

⁷ HTV has recently changed its name to Circles South East, but because it was known as HTV during the timeframe that this research encompasses it will be referred to as HTV throughout this report.

the research team and the initial coding was developed. The file readers were collated, and the researchers subsequently discussed, developed and agreed analytical themes. The team worked in pairs on coding and analysing, presenting key results to others in the team to ensure reliability and consistency.

Case file material included needs assessments (self-reported and co-ordinator assessed); risk assessments (RM2000, OASys – standardised assessment tools developed by NOMS and the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR) tool – a standardised evaluation tool developed by Circles UK); minutes of CoSA meetings (completed by volunteers); correspondence between volunteers, CoSA co-ordinators, Core Members and statutory supervising officers; details of previous convictions; treatment group feedback; prison reports; psychometric assessments; quarterly professional summaries (completed by CoSA co-ordinators) and end of Circle reports (completed by CoSA co-ordinators).

The case file material was not written for research purposes and it is not possible to assess the validity or the reliability of this material. The research is based on a small sample of the case file material available about the 32 Core Members and did not include any interviews. The study did not aim to evaluate the impact of the CoSA pilots on recidivism. Instead, it aimed to provide an insight into CoSA's contribution to statutory supervision of sexual offenders in the community and the cost of CoSA.

Key findings

The profile of Core Members

The Core Members who participated in the pilots between April 2008 and March 2010 were predominantly white, middle aged men, heterosexual and convicted of contact sexual offences. There was one female sexual offender in the sample. The Core Members were mainly classified by OASys and Risk Matrix 2000.⁸ The CoSA pilots were therefore working with a relatively challenging group of medium to high risk sexual offenders.

⁸ OASys (the Offender Assessment System) is a national risk and needs assessment tool used across probation areas and prisons. RM is a risk assessment tool used specifically with sexual offenders.

The criminal and offending histories recorded in the case files are based on self reported offending from the Core Member and other criminal history information provided by third parties such as probation and prison reports. Core Members were reported to have committed a range of sexual offences (incorporating both previous and current offences) including rape of an adult female (two incidents), rape of a female child (four incidents), sexual assault of a female child (five incidents), rape of a male child (three incidents), sexual assault of a male child (eight incidents), sexual assault of an adult male (one incident), indecent exposure (two incidents), voyeurism (two incidents), internet offences (21 incidents) and possession of child sexual abuse imagery (six incidents). Further details about the profile of Core Members are included in Annex 1.

Activities and the role of CoSA

There was evidence from the case files that the CoSA pilots provided emotional support and practical help, and that they were successful in enabling Core Members to develop pro-social activities and networks. Case files showed that the majority of Core Members (21 out of 32) received support from their Circle to engage in pro-social activities including safe leisure activities, volunteering, support groups, education courses, hobbies such as use of a gym (but only with a volunteer in attendance), social events, employment, volunteering and going to church. Circles worked with the Core Member to identify appropriate and safe pro-social activities.

Relationship with statutory supervision

There was also evidence from the case files that the CoSA pilots complemented statutory supervision, through activities such as discussing offending behaviour and key triggers. Circle minutes indicate that Circles supported Core Member compliance with statutory supervision and treatment programmes by providing a safe space in which the Core Member could discuss anxieties about treatment programmes, the requirements and challenges of statutory provision. The amount of liaison with statutory agencies varied across the pilots. There was only recorded evidence of proactive liaison with statutory agencies in a quarter of cases. This may reflect lack of liaison or liaison not being recorded. Circles UK now require all Circles to liaise with the Offender Manager and statutory services.

The case files suggest that the CoSA pilots did not duplicate or fulfil the same function as statutory supervision, but supported and complemented it. The majority of Circles (19 out of 32) discussed offending related behaviours and how the Circle worked with the Core Member to pursue safer goals and activities. Some Circles discussed detailed time lines and history of offending and many focused on motivation to change and support for formal treatment plans and interventions.

Contribution of CoSA to risk management

Documentary evidence from minutes, end of Circles reports, co-ordinator summaries and case notes provide some evidence about the ways in which the CoSA pilots contributed to risk management. However, the added value of the CoSA pilots to risk management is difficult to fully assess because minutes of Circle meetings and case notes were not written with this purpose in mind.

The CoSA pilots appeared to contribute to risk management through proactive monitoring of the Core Member, particularly of negative 'lifestyles', any contact with other registered sexual offenders, or contact with children, if this was not allowed. Volunteers challenged the Core Members to account for these behaviours in meetings. Evidence about such activities was recorded in the majority of Core Member case files (21 out of 32), usually by volunteers reporting concerns over Core Member behaviour to the co-ordinator, who then informed the Offender Manager by email or telephone.

The further actions taken by the police and probation service were not consistently recorded in case files, but a number of case files did contain positive feedback from the police and the probation service. Evidence about the contribution to risk management is also present in Circle minutes and co-ordinator summaries sent to statutory agencies, emails from co-ordinators to statutory staff, and from end of Circle reports. For example, Circles were recorded as passing intelligence to the police and the probation service about the risks and problematic behaviours of the Core Member when concerns were raised by Circle volunteers. However, the sample is small and evidence is limited to case file

material, such as Circle minutes and co-ordinator summaries.⁹

Reported changes for the Core Member

Case files showed that the majority of Core Members (21 out of 32) were recorded as reporting some positive change in attitudes and motivations after they had been a member of a CoSA. These included self-reported reduction in anger, the implementation of a relapse prevention plan and increased coping skills such as the use of self talk and distraction techniques, a decline in grievance thinking, greater insight into offending, development of suitable hobbies, use of self report, and the development of coping strategies.

Some End of Circle reports reported negative or mixed ability of the Core Member to self-manage. A small number of files recorded a lack of engagement, openness and honesty from the Core Member and there were some documented cases of risks escalating accompanied by reluctance from the Core Member to manage risks, failure to engage with relapse prevention plan, association with other registered sexual offenders, and general lack of self awareness.

The cost of Circles

The two organisations delivering the pilots used different modes of service delivery. The LFF has a national remit, and the delivery of their pilot reflected the structure of their organisation. Their delivery approach involved travelling wherever in the country they were needed, recruiting lay members, setting up the Circle and monitoring from afar. HTV had a local remit where they accepted a number of referrals from a local prison, and local co-ordinators provided management and support to local Circles.

Whilst CoSA is a volunteer delivered intervention, it is not cost free. The cost analysis¹⁰ shows that the average cost per Circle for HTV was £7,900 and £9,800 at LFF excluding costs for the volunteers, both in 2011/12 prices. Costs included the Circles Co-ordinator salaries, training and support for the co-ordinator and volunteers, accommodation/office expenditure, travel and subsistence. Based on the

⁹ The researchers did not interview statutory staff for feedback or Core Members for their perception of impact on their risk and behaviour, as this was not possible due to the historical nature of the sample.

¹⁰ Costs were collected for a two year period (April 2008 to March 2010) and converted to 2011/12 values using HM Treasury's June 2012 GDP deflator to calculate 2011/12 values.

cost analysis the local delivery model seemed the most efficient, and this model has been more recently adopted by LFF. Local or broadly regional models of delivery are the most likely to provide economies of travel and set up costs, balanced against a big enough pool of potential referrals and volunteers to ensure a viable number of Circles can run.

Table 1: Total annual cost and average annual cost per Circle (converted to 2011/12 costs) of Lucy Faithfull Foundation Circle pilots

Measure	Without volunteer cost	With volunteer cost ¹¹
Total annual cost of the programme	£176,600	£295,500
Average cost per Circle per annum	£9,800	£16,400

Table 2: Total annual cost and average annual cost per Circle (converted to 2011/12 costs) of Hampshire Thames Valley Circle pilots

Measure	Without volunteer cost	With volunteer cost
Total annual cost of the programme	£260,000	£415,300
Average cost per Circle per annum	£7,900	£12,600

Published Evidence about the Effectiveness and Impact of CoSA on Recidivism

The case file review findings should be considered and reviewed within the context of wider published international evidence about CoSA and proven re-offending rates for sexual offenders. This is because the case file review only studied recorded case file evidence about two CoSA pilots that were operating between 2008 and 2010.

Recidivism rates over two and five year periods are known to be relatively low for the general sexual offender population. A Home Office 21-year reconviction study of sexual offenders in England and Wales by Cann, Falshaw and Friendship (2004) calculated that the sexual recidivism rate over 21 years was 25%. This study concluded that the two and five year rates of sexual reconviction were not

¹¹ Volunteer costs include subsistence and travel costs. Please see Annex 2 for further information.

indicative of levels of sexual reconviction over 20 years. Only 10% of sexual offenders had been convicted of a sexual offence over two years and 16% had been convicted over five years. Consequently, the follow-up periods for studies that have investigated outcomes of CoSA are too limited at the present time to provide conclusive evidence about the impact of CoSA on recidivism. Reconviction rates do not reflect all re-offending and there are relatively low levels of reporting of sexual offences to the police in comparison to other offences.¹² The Ministry of Justice standard measure of recidivism is 'proven reoffending'. Proven re-offending is defined as any offence committed in a one year follow-up period and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one year follow-up or a further six month waiting period.¹³

There are currently no independent, large-scale studies of the recidivism of CoSA Core Members. A small number of evaluations have studied recidivism of sexual offenders who have participated in CoSA, but most studies have small sample sizes and have limited information about the matched comparison group.

Four outcome evaluations with small sample sizes have investigated recidivism among sexual offenders who have participated in CoSA. These studies have observed low levels of re-offending with average (mean) follow-up periods of approximately three years. However, it is not possible to conclude whether this is because sexual offenders who choose to participate in CoSA are less likely to re-offend, because Circles are successful in reducing re-offending or whether the low levels of recidivism found over the short term will persist over a longer period of time.

A study of CoSA in Minnesota (Duwe, 2012) is the only evaluation of CoSA to use a randomised experimental approach to investigate recidivism. Randomised experimental approaches are the most reliable and robust ways to investigate impact as

¹² An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales (MoJ, Home Office & ONS) 2013 provides further information about reported sexual offences and convictions in England and Wales.

¹³ For further information about the definition of proven re-offending please see Proven Re-offending: Definition and Measurement (MoJ 2012) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192407/proven-reoffending-definitions-measurement.pdf

they remove systematic biases and differences in the intervention and comparison groups. This study had a small sample size of 31 sexual offenders who participated in CoSA and a matched control group of 31 sexual offenders who did not participate in CoSA and were identified through a surplus in sexual offenders wishing to participate. The analysis is based on five measures of recidivism.¹⁴ The follow-up period for recidivism was not consistent and ranged from 3 to 47 months, with an average of 24 months.

Analysis using Cox regression models showed that participation in a Minnesota Circle significantly reduced the chance (hazard ratio) of recidivism for three of the five measures of used in the study: re-arrest (for any offence), technical violation revocation, and incarceration for either a new offence and/or a technical violation revocation.¹⁵ There were no statistically significant differences in re-convictions for those who had participated in CoSA and those who had not. None of the Minnesota CoSA offenders had been rearrested for a new sexual offence compared to one offender in the control group. This is a non-significant reduction in sexual recidivism. There are some important differences between the Minnesota and UK Circles, such as that CoSA in Minnesota are led by the Department of Corrections, with a Circle often beginning when the Core Member is in prison (Duwe, 2012). In contrast, in the UK, CoSA work with and aim to complement statutory services when the offender is released from custody and is led by the voluntary sector.

Two Canadian outcome evaluations have compared recidivism among sexual offenders who participated in Canadian CoSA to a matched comparison groups of sexual offenders (Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo, 2007 and Wilson, Cortoni & McWhinnie, 2009). Wilson et al (2009) compared recidivism of 44 high risk sexual offenders who participated in CoSA with a matched comparison of sexual offenders who did not. The average follow-up period of the study was 36 months (the range was between

9 and 86 months). The study reported lower levels of sexual recidivism¹⁶ among sexual offenders who participated in CoSA in comparison to sexual offenders who did not (a re-offending rate of 2.3% among the CoSA participants and 13.7% for the comparison group). This finding is statistically significant. Using a three year follow up of 19 sexual offenders in the CoSA group and 18 in the comparison group, Wilson et al (2009) reported statistically significant reductions of violent re-offending and any type of offending among the CoSA participants.

Wilson et al (2007) found a statistically significant reduction in sexual recidivism over an average follow-up period of 54 months (with a range of 3–123 months) compared to a matched comparison group. The study observed a 5% rate of sexual recidivism among CoSA participants in comparison to a rate of 16.7% in the comparison group. Wilson et al (2007) compared 60 high risk sexual offenders who were CoSA Core Members with a matched comparison group of 60 offenders. Offenders were matched based on their risk-category and release date. Wilson et al's (2007 and 2009) studies include limited information about the methods that were used to identify a suitable comparison group of offenders. As mentioned, these studies were based on small sample sizes and the Canadian variant of CoSA (which has some notable differences when compared with the UK model¹⁷).

The only British outcome evaluation that has observed recidivism among sexual offenders who have participated in CoSA (Bates et al, 2013) investigated recidivism of 71 sexual offenders who participated in Circles in South East England with a comparison group of sexual offenders who were referred to CoSA but did not join. The comparison group was identified and matched based on risk status. The study reports a statistically significant reduction in sexual offending over an average follow-up period of 55 months. There was a 4.2% sexual reconviction rate among the CoSA participants in comparison to 16.9% of the comparison group. As with the studies led by Wilson (2007, 2009), the evaluation has a small sample and

¹⁴ The main outcome measure used in the study was recidivism, which was operationalised as: a) Re-arrest b) reconviction c) re-incarceration in prison for a new offence d) re-incarceration for a technical violation and e) re-incarceration for either a new offence and/or a technical revocation.

¹⁵ Results from the Cox regression analyses show participation in the Minnesota CoSA decreased the hazard ratio and met the conventional alpha of 0.05.

¹⁶ Defined as a charge or conviction for a new offence.

¹⁷ In Canada, CoSA developed organically, as a grassroots initiative led by faith-based communities and without support from statutory agencies. Canadian CoSA work with Core Members who do not have post-release supervision from statutory agencies.

contains limited information about whether there were differences between offenders in the two groups (causing possible selection bias).

The current status of CoSA

In July 2013 there were 96 Circles operating in England and Wales.

Following the end of the NOMS-funded pilots in 2010, NOMS have provided funding to Circles UK rather than to individual Circles. Local Circles are generally funded by local probation trusts, charitable foundations and occasionally by the local police force.

Conclusion

CoSA is a community based initiative that aims to reduce further sexual offending and sexual abuse by sexual offenders. It aims to achieve this through a combination of supporting the Core Member to reduce their social isolation, holding them accountable for their actions and monitoring their activities. There are no large, long-term, independent evaluations that have investigated the impact of CoSA on recidivism in the UK or elsewhere.

The case file review of the NOMS-funded pilots shows that Circles did support the Core Member, and complemented statutory supervision through supporting compliance with treatment programmes and monitoring the activities of Core Members, as well as providing a positive social network for the Core Member on release from prison. The average cost of a Circle, excluding volunteer costs, was £9,800 for the Circles managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and £7,900 for the Circles that were managed by the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles.

To build further knowledge, it would be valuable to explore the delivery and outcomes of CoSA in England and Wales. In particular, it would be valuable for research studies to investigate the Police, Probation Service and other statutory agencies' views and experiences of CoSA and the views of Core Members. It is also important that Circles continue to collect robust monitoring data about Core Members to enable outcome and impact evaluations of CoSA to be completed when there is sufficient longitudinal data available.

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