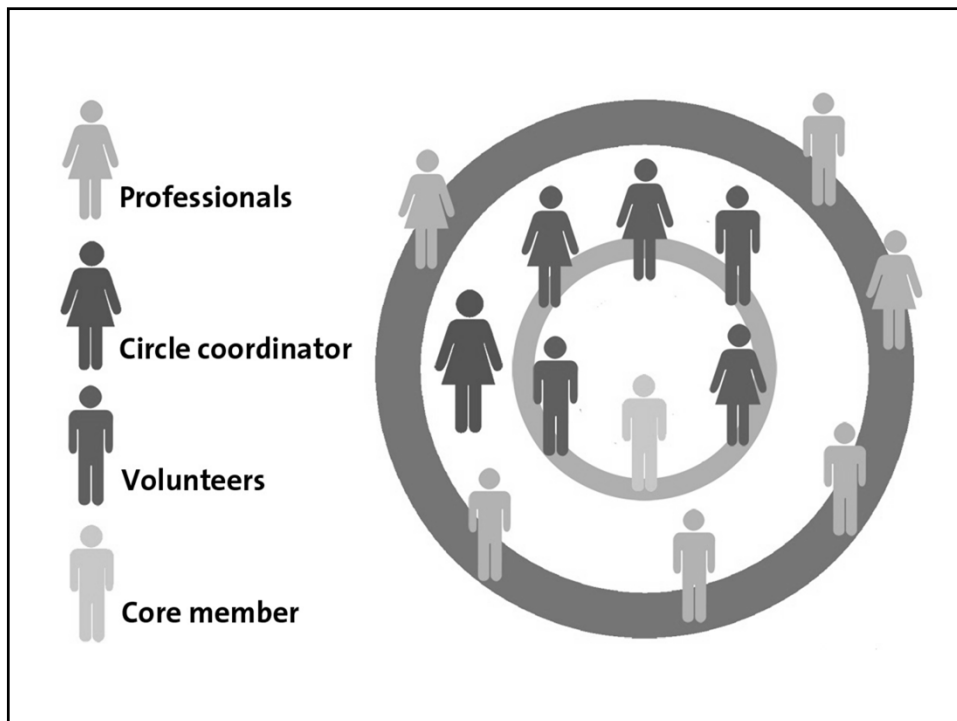


An Introduction to Circles of Support & Accountability

The video associated with this presentation can be found at:
<https://youtu.be/xLWZpWgPqOs>

Some slides in this presentation were adapted from materials originally created by
Kathy Fox, Ph.D. of the University of Vermont.



Desistance

Why do some people desist from crime?

External
Stabilizers

- Employment
- Marriage/family

Internal
Stabilizers

- Identity shifts
- Relabeling by others

Desistance

Maruna (2001) found that successful desistance depends upon:

- ❖ Narrative:
 - Persisters versus desisters
- ❖ Change in self-concept:
 - Disapproval of the act, not the person

What is under-theorized?

Role of the Community

- ❖ “Supervision” function within a particular context
- ❖ Rehabilitation function by modeling pro social behavior/relationships
 - contributes to identity shift
- ❖ Belonging=social capital formation
 - Increased community safety

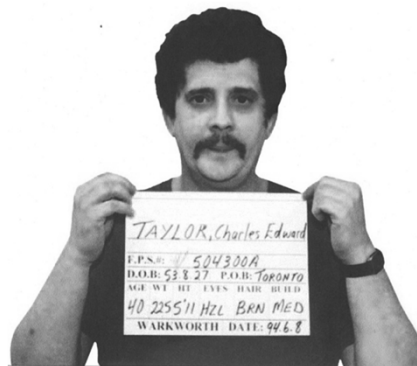
Question?

Is there a legitimate role to play for the community – for otherwise ordinary citizens – in terms of community safety when it comes to the safe return of people who have engaged in sexual violence?

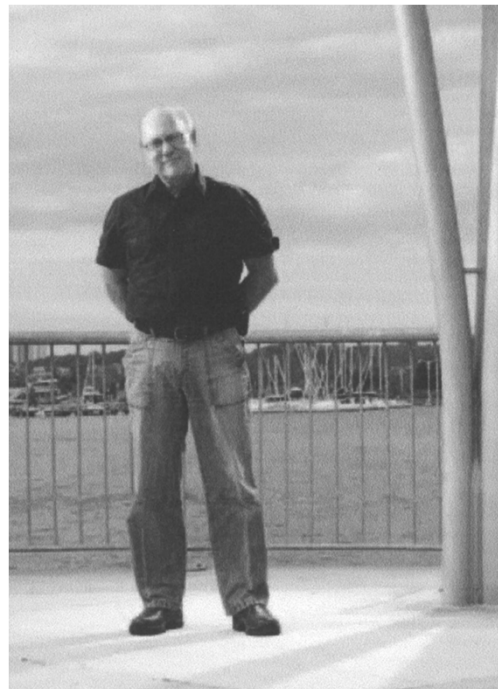
Origins of CoSA: Charlie's Story

Birth of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

Charlie's Story: 1994 - 2006



Rev. Harry Nigh
Circles Pioneer



What is a Circle of Support & Accountability and where did this idea come from?

Agents of Change

As concerned citizens and practitioners, our goal is to ensure that all persons who have offended build a

**balanced,
self-determined lifestyle**

Contemporary research in our field suggests that learning to live a “good life” is inconsistent with antisocial behavior.

Sir Robert Peel

- ❖ Prime Minister of the UK in early 1800s
- ❖ Generally acknowledged as the “father” of modern policing
- ❖ Famous quote:

**“The police are the public
and the public are the police.”**

Nils Christie (1977)

...community is made from conflict as much as from cooperation; the capacity to solve conflict is what gives social relations their sinew. Professionalizing justice “steals the conflicts,” robbing the community of its ability to face trouble and restore peace. Communities lose their confidence, their capacity, and, finally, their inclination to preserve their own order. They instead become consumers of police and court “services” with the consequence that they largely cease to be communities.

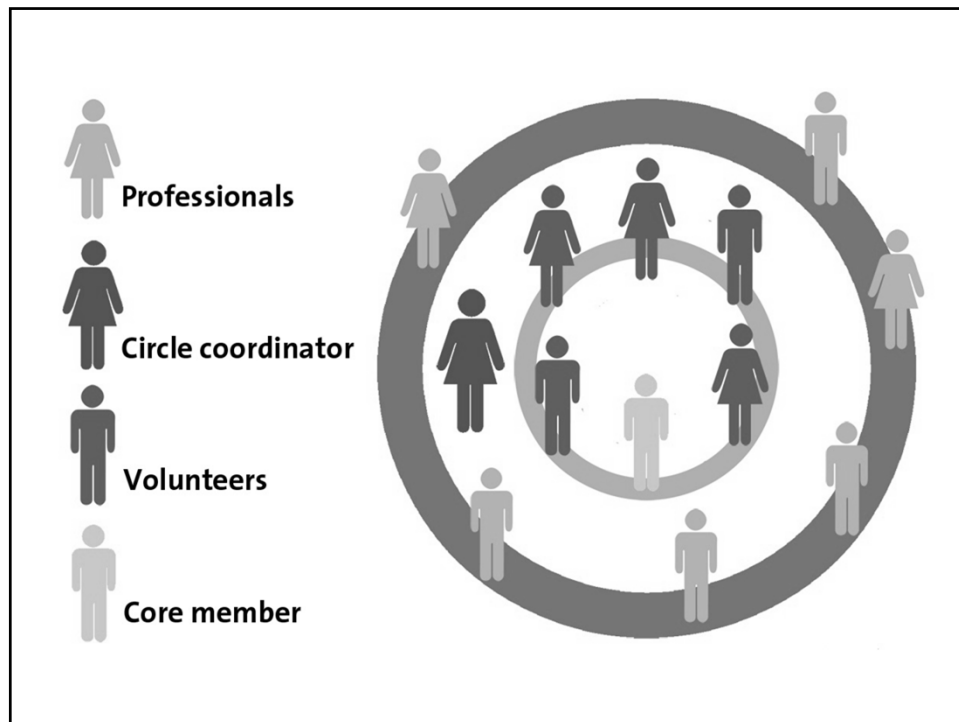
Jane Jacobs (1961)

The Death and Life of Great American Cities

The first thing to understand is that the public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves. No amount of police can enforce Civilization where the normal causal enforcement of it has broken down.

CoSA - The Model

- ❖ Based on “wrap around care”
- ❖ Late 1960s to 1970s early precedents:
 - Native American/Canadian traditions
 - Canadian Larch programs
 - Kaleidoscope, Chicago
 - Alaska Youth Initiative (AYI)



CoSA - Terminology

Inner Circle: A collection of one Core Member and 3-5 volunteers

Core Member: Person who has sexually offended

Volunteer: Member of the community

Outer Circle: Professionals volunteering to support CoSA project

Not a “Program”

- ❖ Collaboration and flexibility among service providers is needed for this process to work effectively.
- ❖ For CoSA, professionalism gives way to *relational* processes needed to build and contribute to a sense of community.

Mission statement

To substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting released men in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive, and *accountable* lives.

Core Principles

- ❖ No one is disposable
- ❖ No one does this alone
- ❖ No more victims
- ❖ Community is responsible for its victims and those who offend against them

Volunteer recruitment

- ❖ stability in the community
- ❖ known in the community (references checked)
- ❖ maturity
- ❖ healthy boundaries
- ❖ availability
- ❖ balance in
 - lifestyle
 - viewpoint

Topics of training

- ❖ overview of the criminal justice system
- ❖ restorative justice
- ❖ needs of survivors
- ❖ the circle model
- ❖ effects of institutionalization
- ❖ human sexuality and sexual deviance
- ❖ risk assessment
- ❖ boundaries and borders
- ❖ conflict resolution
- ❖ group dynamics
- ❖ substance abuse and impulse control

Topics of training

- ❖ building group cohesion
- ❖ circle functions
- ❖ crisis response and preparing for critical incident stress
- ❖ working with correctional officials, police, news media and other community professionals
- ❖ needs assessment
- ❖ building a covenant
- ❖ court orders
- ❖ closing a Circle
- ❖ other topics as necessary

Why Do Circles Work?

With Whom Does CoSA Work?

Traditionally, the inclusion criteria were:

- ❖ Sex offender
- ❖ High risk, high need, and/or high profile
- ❖ Little or no means of positive, prosocial support
- ❖ Willing to take responsibility for offense(s)
- ❖ Willing to voluntarily enter into a “covenanted” relationship with a Circle to do what ever it takes to ensure there are “No More Victims”

What Happens in a Circle?

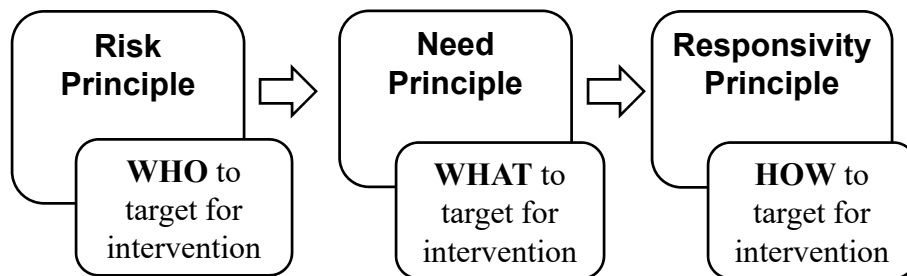
- ❖ Building a capacity for trust and friendship
- ❖ Building not just *human capital*, but *social capital* – the capacity for relationships
- ❖ There is confidentiality, but there are also no secrets
- ❖ Acceptance, non-judgment *of the person*, and reciprocity

Bonta & Andrews (2016)

Three Principles:

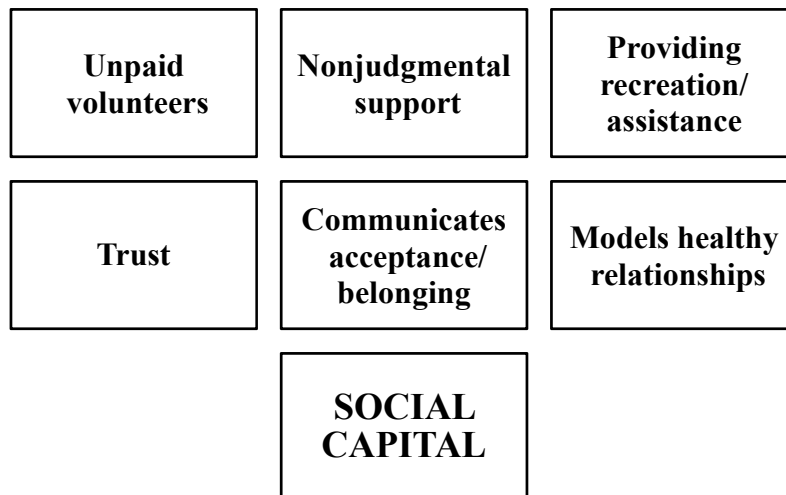
- ❖ Risk
- ❖ Need
- ❖ Responsivity

Principles of RNR Model



(Bonta & Andrews, 2016)

How does CoSA promote desistance?



Core Member experience

Without my Circle, I may have ...

- ❖ had difficulty adjusting
- ❖ had difficulty in relationships with others
- ❖ become isolated and lonely
- ❖ turned to drugs or alcohol
- ❖ reoffended

CoSA Research Interpreted

- ❖ To date, there have been five evaluations of the CoSA model
 - 2 from Canada
 - 1 from UK
 - 2 from USA
- ❖ All studies show the same basic findings
 - CoSAs can contribute to lower reoffending and better community reintegration
- ❖ However, it is important to note that, so far, these are but 5 studies with small samples and short follow-up
 - more research is necessary

Why Do You Need CoSA in Your Community?

Circles of Support and Accountability lead to:

- ❖ Reduced sexual victimization
- ❖ An engaged and better informed community
- ❖ Healthier (and, therefore, safer) communities
- ❖ Less isolated, positively motivated core members
- ❖ Lesser gaps between institutionalization, community supervision, and social re-entry

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

~ Margaret Mead ~

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