Circles of Support and Accountability

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Circles of Support & Accountability: A prison-model

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Circles of Support & Accountability in the Community

What are Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)?

- A Circle involves 4-6 volunteers who offer support to a medium
  - high risk sex offender
  - Screened, selected and trained
  - Meet with a Core Member (sex offender) in the community once a week to offer social support
  - Lasts around 18 months

- Volunteers are supervised by a professionally qualified Project Co-ordinator
  - Provides advice and support through supervision
  - Communicates and shares information with other risk management agencies through the MAPPA process
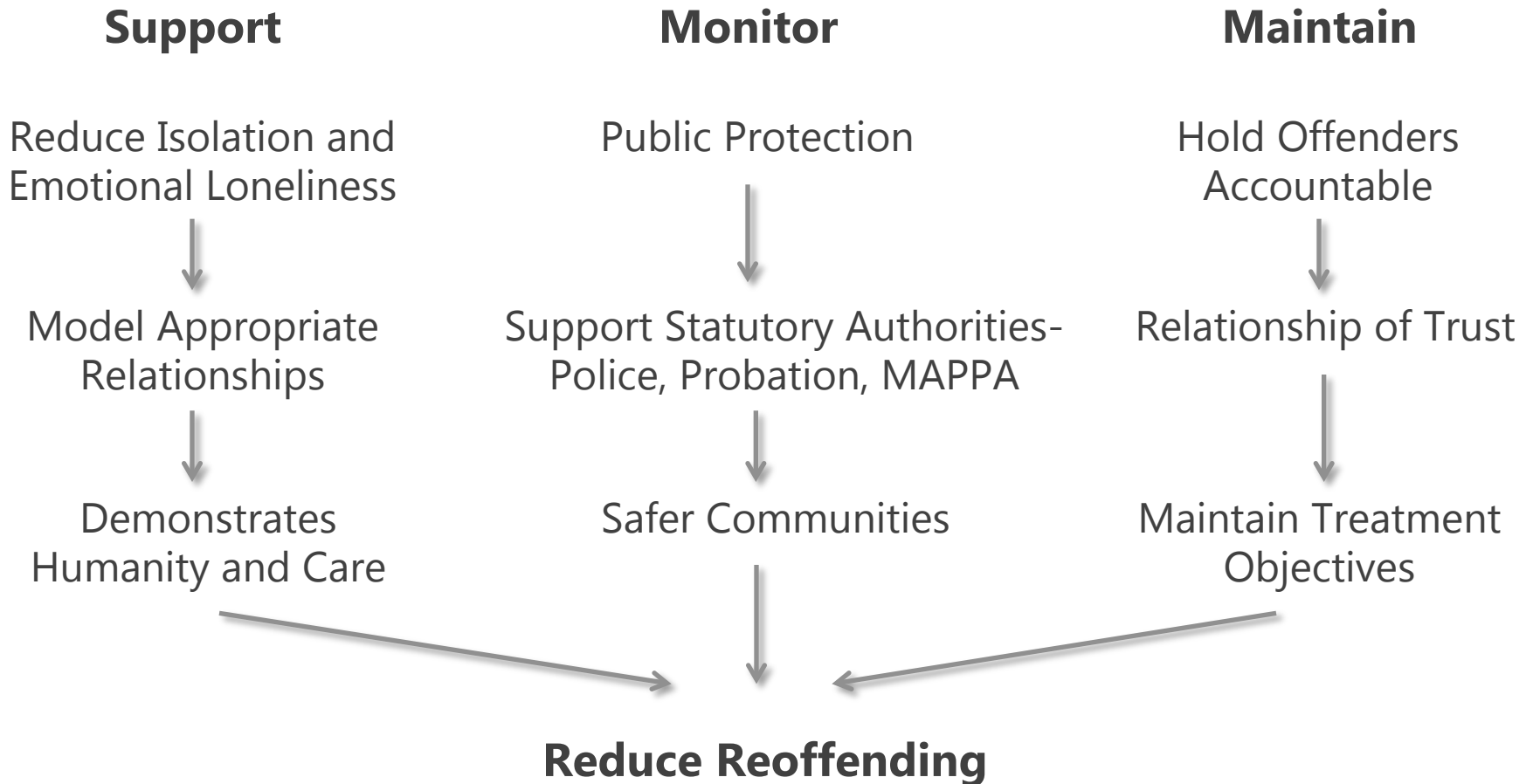
Where did CoSA come from?

Circles were shown to help to successfully reintegrate individuals back into society whilst at the same time helping to enhance community safety.

Following its success in Canada, the UK Government funded three pilot CoSA projects in 2002: Thames Valley; Hampshire and; the Lucy Faithful Foundation.

Circles are used with high risk sex offenders to support and enable their reintegration back into society, whilst still holding them accountable for their behaviour.   *Cesaroni (2001*)

How do Circles work?

Support	**Monitor**	**Maintain**
Reduce Isolation and Emotional Loneliness	Public Protection	Hold Offenders Accountable
↓	↓	↓
Model Appropriate Relationships	Support Statutory Authorities- Police, Probation, MAPPA	Relationship of Trust
↓	↓	↓
Demonstrates Humanity and Care	Safer Communities	Maintain Treatment Objectives

Reduce Reoffending

Saunders & Wilson (2003)

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How effective are CoSA in the UK?

A UK study observed 60 Circles over the first eight years in the UK

• One sexual reconviction – Circle still reported as making positive progress due to reduction in CM's risk of harm & severity of offending behaviour

• 70% resulted in an improvement in the offenders' emotional well-being - reducing their emotional loneliness and social isolation

• Almost 50% of Core Members had improved links with their families and increased their support networks

• 50% had increased their engagement in age-appropriate relationships

Significant as majority of offenders previous crimes involved child victims.

Circles promote pro-social reintegration as well as reducing re-offending

Bates, McRae, Williams and Webb (2012)

How effective are CoSA in the UK?

Studied 71 out of the 100 Circles established in the South East of the UK in the first ten years since the project started.

• Core Members had a significantly lower number of sexual or violent re-offences than the comparison group of persons referred to, but not placed, in a Circle.

• Critics have stated there is not enough evidence to suggest whether or not CoSA significantly reduces sexual recidivism by the core member - existing research varying in quality and involving a lack of statistically significant results – See Elliott, Zajac & Meyer (2013) for more detail

• Low base rate makes demonstrating this hard though.

• Many other benefits to Circles

Bates, Williams, Wilson & Wilson (2014)

CoSA: The prison-model

Following the success of the community CoSA projects in the UK, for the first time ever, prison-based Circles have been established in the UK.

•Established under the Safer Living Foundation - a charitable organisation including:

-HMP Whatton, Nottingham Trent University, National Probation Trust (Nottinghamshire), Nottinghamshire Police, Circles UK representatives.

•The Circles begin 3-6 months before a prisoner's release and will continue into the community.

•The volunteers come in to the prison for weekly circle sessions with the core member.

•They then continue the circle sessions in the community once the core members have been released from prison.

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CoSA: The prison-model

•Core Members consist of high-risk sex offenders who are either elderly (55+) and/or Intellectually Disabled

•Concern some high risk prisoners were leaving Whatton without family or community support.

- Particularly those with Intellectual Disabilities and the elderly
- These type of sex offenders are particularly vulnerable and can often find the transition from prison to the community the most difficult and socially isolating.
- Known that social isolation is a significant risk factor for further reoffending
- Those who do not meet the above criteria but who for example have a severe lack of social support on release will still be considered.

CoSA: The prison-model

Data was collected from when the project was first started in 2014 until August 2016

Qualitative and Mixed method data collected from the core members at 3 time points:

T1. Prior to the core members starting the prison-model CoSA (n=9)

T2. Just before the core members were due to be released back in to the community (n=6)

T3. Once the core members were in the community but still part of the CoSA (n=7)

Qualitative interviews were also collected from volunteers (n=10).

Evaluation of the prison-model

Knowing they'll have support

Without the circle the core members would be facing release alone

'They (Prison-model coordinator) approached me yeah because I haven't got any erm support network out there at all, there's no family, friends or anything' **Core member participant 2**

The importance of this support coming from 'normal', 'non-professionals' – volunteering and not being paid to be there

Improves well-being and motivation to change - what characterises the social relations, that assists the ex-offender in realising their pro social aspirations the most is a sense of solidarity and 'we-ness' (Weaver & McNeill, 2015).

'Because you know, they're volunteers, they come all this way to see a prisoner but they want to come and see you for a purpose…we talked a lot about it and it's wonderful.' **Core member participant 7**

Evaluation of the prison-model

Building relationships

Enables time and space for the relationships to be built and dynamics to settle before the reality of release sets in.

Ex-offenders are more likely to accept direct guidance regarding desistance from people whereby the relationships involve rapport and listening to one another (Barry, 2007; McCulloch 2005)

'as I say it takes erm several times to meet each other and talk to each other and understand each other and trust each other but once that's all done it's good.' **Core member participant 7**

HMP Whatton - a safe place, which reduces anxiety and additional 'head space' for the prisoners to reflect upon the self and contemplate change. (Blagden, Winder & Hames, 2016)

Would prison-models of CoSA be as beneficial in different prisons with different climates?

Evaluation of the prison-model

Being prepared

Talk through potential issues/ risky situations

'Err explaining things to me in a different light, how I deal with like err somethings I don't grab and they're on about doing like roleplays, I don't mind doing that, they talk to me and everything so that's a good thing.' **Core member participant 4**

Put practical plans in place i.e. filling out forms/ arranging housing

Through the gate

Core members are supported through the difficult and often scary period from prison to community

It was good because we'd already met inside **** (prison) I think we met for 6 months inside before so it was good to have a couple of familiar faces' **Core member participant 10**

Evaluation of the prison-model

Support & accountability immediately on release

Encourages them to 'stay on track' / stops them slipping back in to old behaviour during the sensitive period of release

'with the group yeah I found them very supportive, they was always there straight away swapping phone numbers and stuff like that and then they explained to me who was going to be on duty that weekend you know if anything happened I could get in touch with them and they're still doing that now.' **Core member participant 2**

Barriers to reintegration

-Despite the benefits of the prison-model core members are still worried about never being able to leave the 'sex offender' label behind.

-Concerned that they will always face restrictions and be afraid of people finding out.

'There is no normal once you've been inside really, you're forever under conditions, even after probation finishes you're still under conditions, you're not free really' *Core member participant 9*

Kitson-Boyce, Blagden, Winder & Dillon (2017)

Evaluating community-based Circles of Support and Accountability from the perspective of core members: successes, failures and everything in-between

National Research – 188 Circles
- Strong focus on success vs failure

Rationale

- Strong focus upon recidivism risk

- Paucity of research into failed Circles

- Mostly quantitative data

- Little research into core member experiences

Aims

- Enhance knowledge in the area of failed Circles

- Provide recommendations to Circles UK

- Develop understanding in core member rehabilitation and community reintegration

Reasons for CoSA failure

- Core Member dropout
- Recall to prison
- Core Member exclusion
- <u>Volunteer disbandment</u>

(Bates, Williams, Wilson & Wilson, 2013; Höing, Vogelvang & Bogaerts , 2015).

Reasons for treatment non-completion

- Premature termination by the offender
- Termination of treatment due to **recall to prison**/failure to comply with probation release conditions.
- Exclusion from treatment by the treatment team

(Larochelle, Diguer, Laverdière and Greenman, 2011)

Voluntary drop out:

Reasons for CoSA failure
- Core Member dropout

Reasons for treatment non-completion
- Premature termination by the offender

Causes
➢ Therapist - confrontational style of engagement

(Marshall, Marshall and Ware, 2009)

➢ Volunteer – Negative attitude towards Core Member

(Höing, Vogelvang & Bogaerts , 2015).

Planned research

Quantitative research with 188 Core Members
- Dynamic Risk Review (DRR)
- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

Qualitative research with Core Members
- Untimely ended Circles (N=15)
- Successfully completed Circles (N=15)

Other Qualitative research
- Volunteers (N=10)
- Professionals (N=10)

Potential Implications

What we do know…

•Individuals who drop-out of treatment have higher rates of recidivism than treatment completers

        (Hanson, Gordon, Harris, Marques, Murphey, Quinsey, and Seto, 2002).

•Individuals who have had their treatment terminated early by a therapist have been evidenced to reoffend at a higher rate than those who drop-out from treatment

        (Romine, Miner, Poplin, Dwyer and Berg (2012).

What does this mean for Core Members?

Thank you for listening

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