

Circles of Support & Accountability:

An Innovative Approach to the
Management of Sex Offenders

Thursday, November 10, 2016



Panelists

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Laura E. Zeliger, *Community and Restorative Justice Director, Vermont Department of Corrections*

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Moderator

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Overview

Circles of Support & Accountability

Vermont Department of Corrections: Sharing Reintegrative Responsibility with the Community through CoSA

Current State of Responding to Individuals who have Committed Sexual Violence

JUSTICE CENTER

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Collaborative Approaches to Public Safety

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Represents **all three** branches of state government

Provides **practical** advice informed by **the best available evidence**



The National Reentry Resource Center

- The NRRC is a project of the CSG Justice Center and is supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.
- NRRC staff have worked with nearly SCA 600 grantees, including 40 state corrections agencies.
- The NRRC provides individualized, intensive, and targeted technical assistance training and distance learning to support SCA grantees.

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/>



- ✓ Please register for the monthly NRRC newsletter at:
<http://csgjusticecenter.org/subscribe/>
- ✓ Please share this link with others in your networks that are interested in reentry!

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Circles of Support & Accountability

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Professionals



Circle coordinator



Volunteers



Core member



The Realities of Sexual Offending

- ❖ 95% (or more) of offenders are male
- ❖ The largest age cohort of people who sexually offend is boys aged 13-15
- ❖ People who sexually offend have more than three times the number of adverse childhood experiences
 - Meaning, they have complex needs
- ❖ As many as 95% of people who sexually offend coming into the system are first time caught

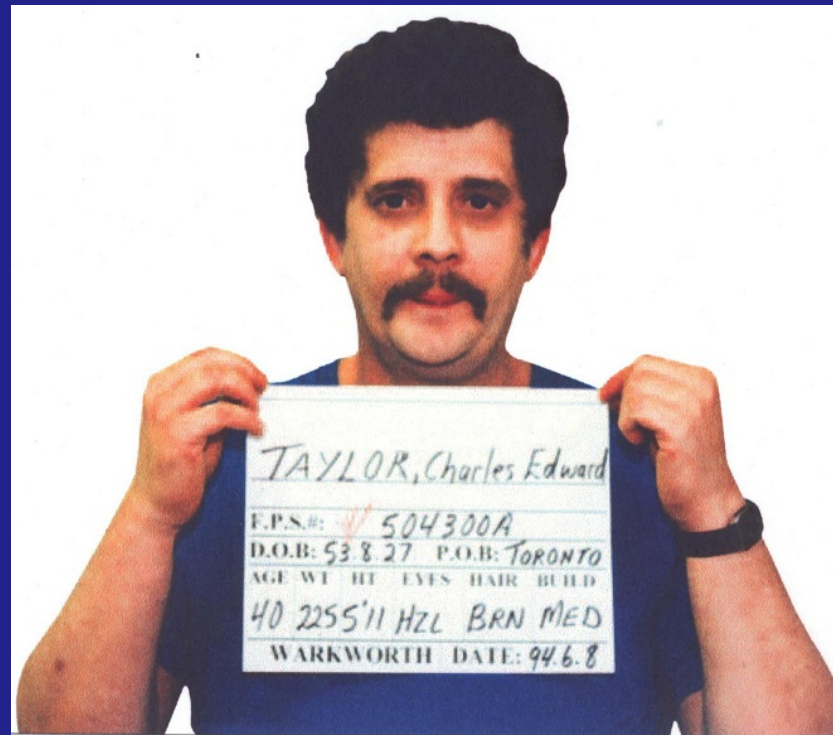
The Realities of Sexual Offending

- ❖ Reoffense rates are lower than most people think
 - Meta-analytic studies (2004) show that about 15% will sexually reoffend within 5-7 years post-release
 - Most Canadian and American jurisdictions now report lower rates (e.g., 10% in 10 years)
- ❖ Identified offenders return to prison more often because of technical violations than because of a new “crime”
 - Reiterating ...they have complex needs
- ❖ Initiatives like CoSA address complex needs

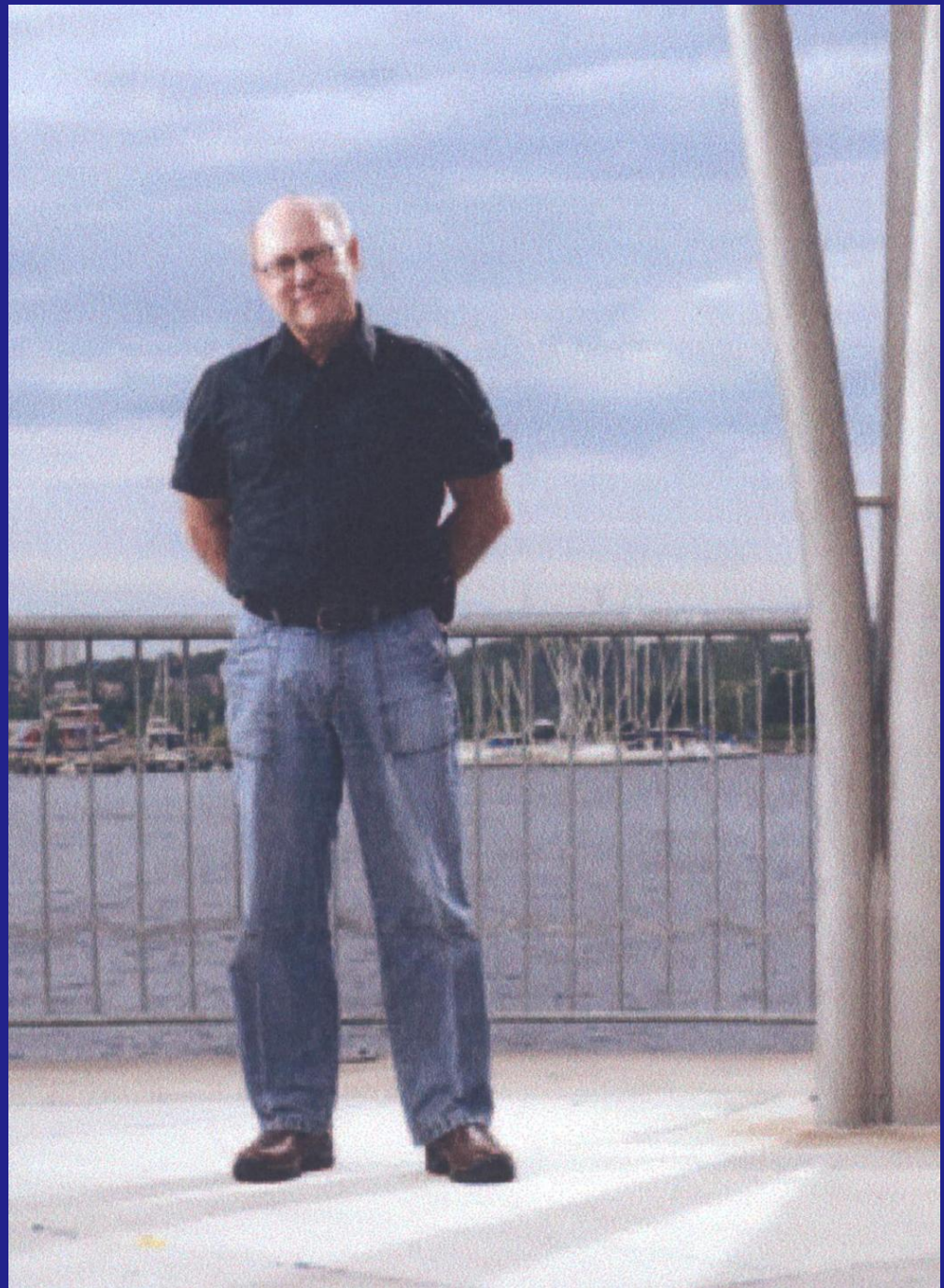
Origins of CoSA: Charlie's Story

Birth of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

Charlie's Story: 1994 - 2006



Rev. Harry Nigh
Circles Pioneer



Where did this idea come from?











Professionals



Circle coordinator



Volunteers



Core member



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;

Why Do Circles Work?

Principles of RNR Model



(Andrews & Bonta, 2010)

Outcome - Recidivism data

Ontario Pilot Sample - Wilson et al., 2007

	Circles (60)	Control (60)
M(SD) age	47.47 (12.27)	43.62 (10.84)
M(SD) STATIC-99	5.60 (2.22)	5.00 (1.96)
M(SD) RRASOR*	3.18 (1.65)	2.12 (1.31)
M(range-mos) follow-up	54.67 (3-123)	52.47 (3-124)
M(mos) until 1 st failure	22.10	18.54
Recidivism		
Sexual*	5.00% (3)	16.67% (10)
Expected sexual	28.33% (17)**	26.45% (16)
Violent*	15.00% (9)	35.00% (21)
General †	28.33% (17)	43.44% (26)
Dispositions	38	49

Fisher's Exact: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ † $p < .10$

Outcome - Recidivism data

Canada Replication Sample - Wilson et al., 2009

	Circles (44)	Control (44)
M(SD) age	42.6 (9.6)	42.9 (8.4)
M(SD) STATIC-99**	4.9 (2.1)	6.1 (1.5)
M(SD) RRASOR	2.7 (1.5)	2.7 (1.3)
M(range-mos) follow-up	35.8 (9-86)	38.6 (8-95)
M(mos) until 1 st failure*	9.6	16.7
Recidivism (convictions + charges)		
Sexual‡	2.27% (1)	13.67% (6)
Violent**	9.09% (4)	34.09% (15)
General**	11.36% (5)	38.64% (17)
# of charges**	17	73

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ ‡ $p < .07$

Bates et al., 2012

Circles SE (UK) 10-year Retrospective

	CSE core members N = 71	Comparison group N = 71
Contact sexual or violent reconviction ^{***, *}	0	10
Non-contact sexual reconviction [*]	3	2
Failure to comply with Sex Offender Register	3	6
Breach of SOPO	2	0

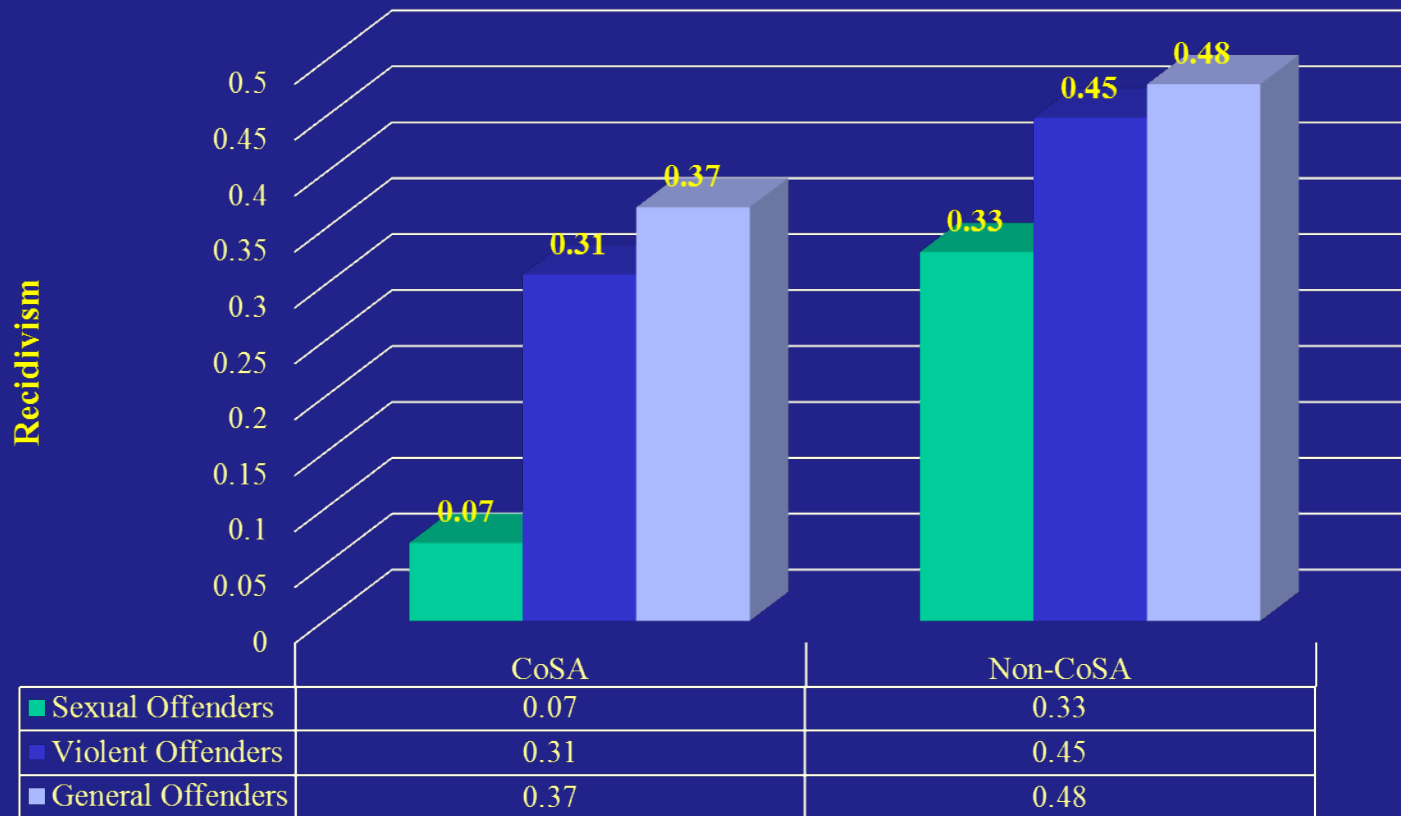
Fisher's Exact, *** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$ (combined—contact sexual, violent, noncontact sexual); SOPO = Sex Offender Protection Order

Duwe (2012) - MnCoSA

- ❖ First US CoSA outcome study
- ❖ Statistically elegant design (RCT)
- ❖ 31 CoSA vs. 31 Control
- ❖ Significant reductions in hazard ratios noted for 3 of 5 outcome indicators
 - 62% fewer rearrests, 72% fewer technical violation revocations, and 84% fewer “any reincarceration”
- ❖ Follow-up time too short to show differences in sexual reoffending
- ❖ Cost-Benefit Analysis = \$1.82

Vermont CoSA Evaluation

Preliminary Findings (Fox et al., in progress)



Comparing Groups

■ Sexual Offenders ■ Violent Offenders ■ General Offenders

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



NEVER DOUBT
THAT A SMALL GROUP
OF THOUGHTFUL COMMITTED CITIZENS
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD:
INDEED IT'S THE ONLY THING
THAT EVER HAS.

MARGARET MEAD

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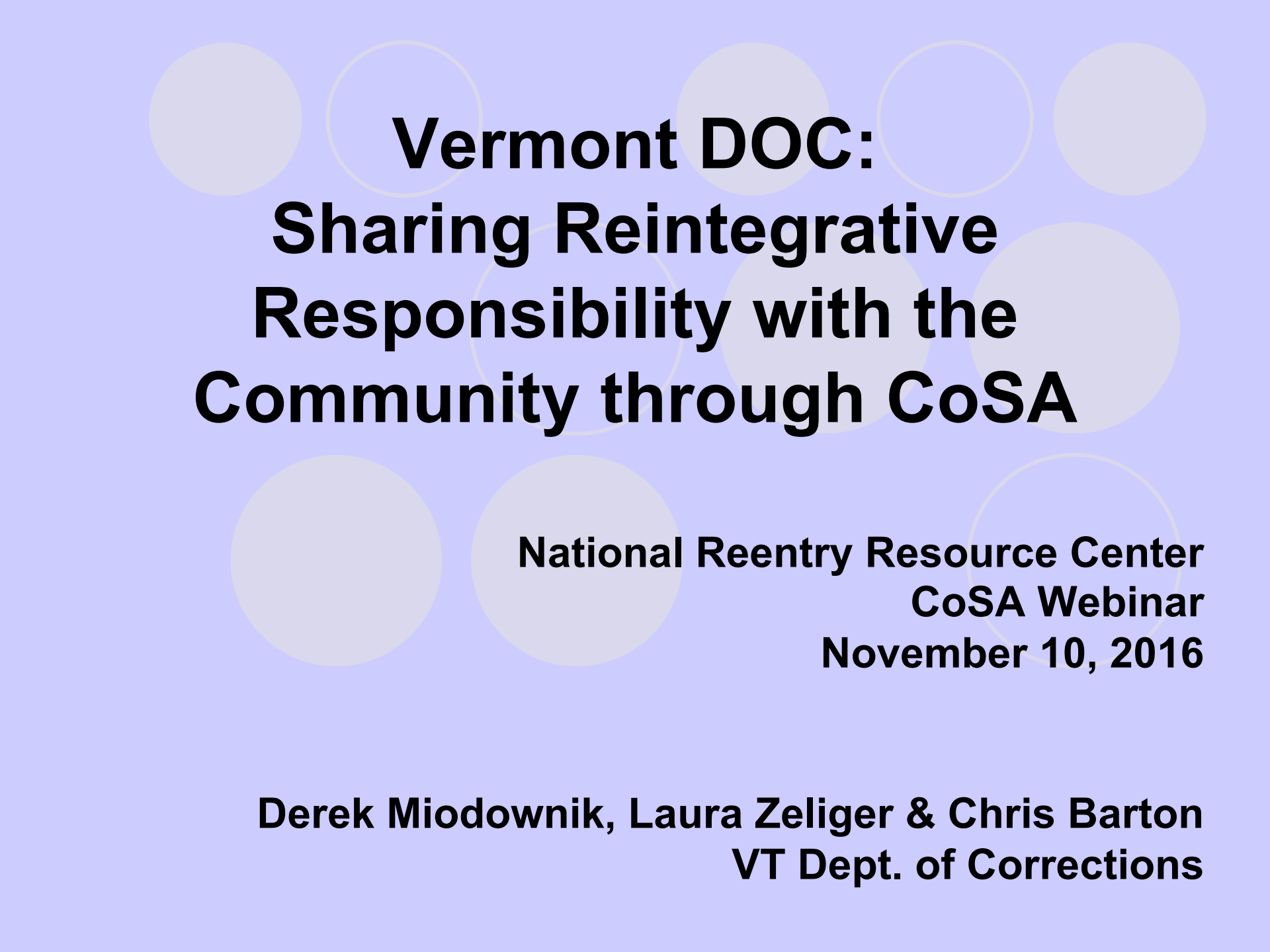
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Overview

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Vermont Department of Corrections: Sharing Reintegrative Responsibility with the Community through CoSA

Current State of Responding to Individuals who have Committed Sexual Violence



Vermont DOC: Sharing Reintegrative Responsibility with the Community through CoSA

**National Reentry Resource Center
CoSA Webinar
November 10, 2016**

**Derek Miodownik, Laura Zeligler & Chris Barton
VT Dept. of Corrections**

Circles of Support & Accountability (CoSA) in Vermont

A CoSA is a group of 3 or more trained and supervised volunteers who enter into structured, voluntary and mutual relationship with an individual reentering the community after incarceration, aka the Core Member.

CoSAs are developed and operated by local Community Justice Centers (CJCs) as an optional enhancement to Corrections supervision.

Core Members are high risk/need, and are willing to commit to the CoSA process as part of their supervision.

In some instances, CoSA is accompanied by housing.

The primary target population is those who have committed sexual offenses but is extended to other types of offenses.

CoSAs are developed and (ideally) convene prior to the Core Member's release; they then meet weekly for at least one year, although often longer.

There are additional meetings/conversations between individual team members and the core member (meeting for coffee, approving outings etc.)

Core Members are faced with the prospect of (re)building a community life after a significant period of confinement without a positive social network, as well as with the many challenges (i.e. housing, employment) that are endemic to reentry.

CJC-based CoSA Coordinator facilitates the program, supervises the volunteers and regularly communicates with DOC Probation/Parole Officer.

Case Conferences every 6-8 weeks include Core Member, CoSA Coordinator/Volunteers, Probation Officer, family, service/treatment providers for a comprehensive and integrated picture of progress, challenges and responsive planning.

The ultimate goal of CoSA is **NO MORE VICTIMS.**



Professionals



Circle coordinator



Volunteers



Core member



2003: Restorative Reentry Planning Begins

VT DOC awarded federal funds and sub-grants to CJC's for planning and developing their own program reentry models based on restorative principles.

2005: Circles of Support and Accountability

(CoSA) is adapted and implemented in VT after several CJC's received training from Canadian CoSA pioneers (*being resourceful Vermonters, we borrowed Probation from Mass. and reentry from Canada*).

2010: VT DOC awarded Second Chance Act (SCA) grant. Sub-grants awarded to CJC's to develop increased CoSA capacity.

2012: Second Chance Act grant renewed for an additional 24 CoSAs.

2013: DOC awarded new SCA grant to include CoSA plus 4 additional restorative reintegration services at CJsCs– Reentry Navigation, Reintegration Panels (aka Diet CoSA), Family Group Conferences, Educational Workshops.

2016: 47 new CoSAs initiated; 81 CoSAs active at fiscal year-end.

Over 280 CoSAs developed to date.

Community Justice Program Evaluations

2007: Empirical study of Reparative Probation shows 23% reduction in recidivism:

<http://doc.vermont.gov/about/reports/reparative-v-probation/view>

2013: NIJ multi-site CoSA Evaluability Study = greatest program fidelity (Dr. Ian Elliot, Penn State)

2010-2013: Qualitative evaluation by Dr. Kathryn Fox, UVM: <http://doc.vermont.gov/about/reports/circles-of-support-accountability-summary/view>

2014-present: Quantitative outcome study by Dr. Kathryn Fox, Dr. Robin Wilson & Megan Kurmin

Qualitative evaluation (Dr. Kathryn Fox, UVM)

Interviewed:

21 Core Members

59 Volunteers

9 CoSA coordinators

Key findings:

Deeper volunteer investment=better

Helps with deinstitutionalization

Team approach key

Voluntary basis is of critical importance

Long on support

**REINTEGRATION PROMOTES DESISTANCE
FROM CRIME**

Social Capital Formation

Core member:

*“I think they helped guide me on the path that **I already knew that I wanted to take...**I walked in and it was just like ordinary people. They’re normal, everyday people. I feel I have connections that I didn’t have before.”*

The top of the slide features five circles arranged horizontally. From left to right, the first, third, and fifth circles are solid light blue. The second and fourth circles are hollow with a light blue outline.

CoSA volunteer:

*“[CoSA] are people who are going to not see him as who he was, but who are willing to help him **manifest his best self**, and are going to be dedicated to it and who are not going to abandon him...”*



Core member:

*“I can’t stress the fact that they’re not getting paid for this. You know what I’m saying? So they’re just, out of the kindness of their heart. **They didn’t know who I was.** And now even when I’m done with this, I’ve got their phone numbers and I can call them up any time, even if it’s just to talk – at 10 o’clock at night if I’m having a rough time.”*

CoSA volunteer:

*“...ultimately they’re going to be coming out; they’re going to become members of our community...do we want to try and break that cycle someplace and turn them into constructive, tax-paying members of society and **people that we’d be proud to have for neighbors?**”*



Core Member:

“Yeah, I’m changed and I feel better about myself. I feel more confident that I can do what I need to do and achieve...It’s a lot because of the CoSA because before, I was like ‘I’m just a nobody, nobody really cares about me.’ You know, ‘forget it.’ ...but now I actually can truly see there’s people out there that do care for me and they care for me for who I am.”

SOME KEY LESSONS LEARNED

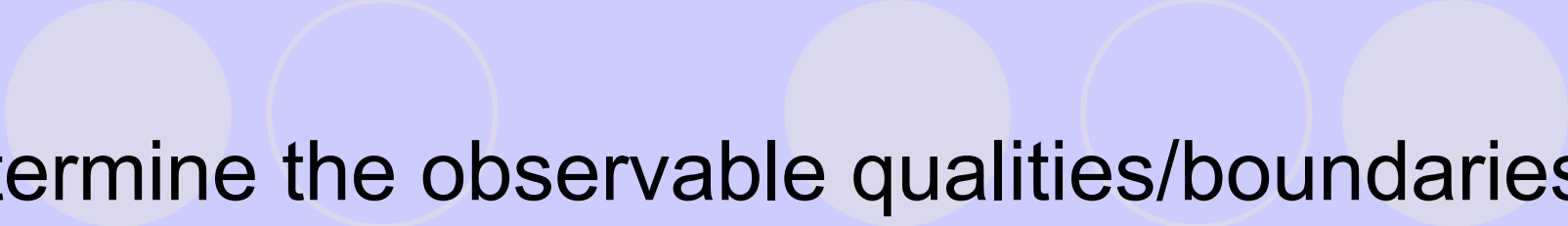
For each program site, establish a point person within the gatekeeper organization (DOC) who understands, values and will operationally support CoSA ***before*** you over invest time/energy/money in community-based capacity building.

Continually align program development process, materials, and all aspects of operations with the primary public safety goal of CoSA: ***No More Victims.***

Establish clear parameters between the role of CoSA and the responsibilities of the supervising agency in an MOU.

Troubleshoot barriers to Core Member's release (i.e. housing) in order to maximize effectiveness and program efficacy.

Staff CoSA meetings with a Coordinator, and establish regular communication between CoSA Coordinator and Probation Officer.

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Determine the observable qualities/boundaries you seek in potential volunteers, and strategize about how you will find such people who are willing to make this significant commitment with the Core Member population.

Consider how you intend to structure the resourcing of CoSA, and how you can clearly demonstrate its success to stakeholders in order to justify continued (and increased) support.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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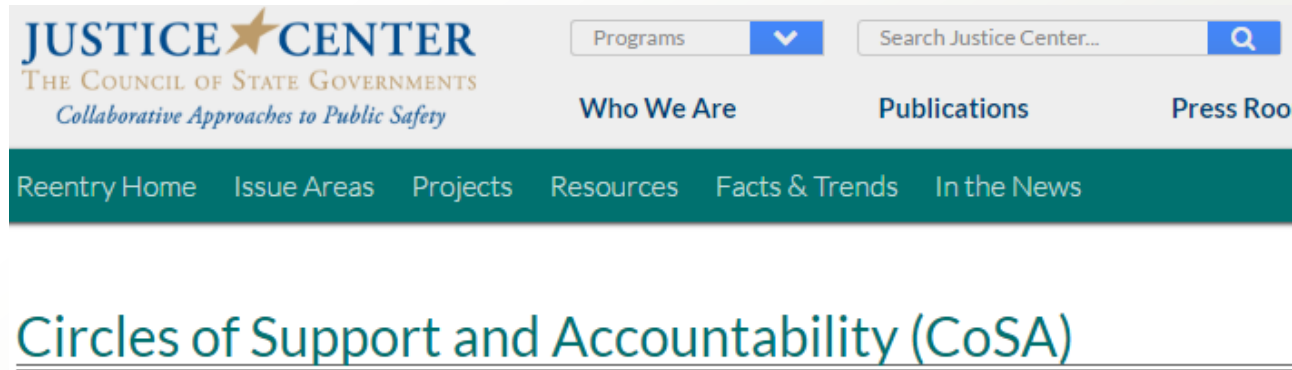
Current State of Responding to Individuals who have Committed Sexual Violence

- The population of who we arrest for committing sexual abuse has changed over the years.
- Supervision and Treatment are slow to adapt to these changes.
- Treatment availability and quality varies dramatically across the country with many sites still not utilizing EBP's and many programs ignoring wider criminogenic factors.
- Medication continues to be underutilized for most individuals.

Current State of Responding to Individuals who have Committed Sexual Violence

- States are beginning to look at the efficacy of current programs and practices to better utilize available resources.
- There is a growing recognition that we have erroneously utilized responses designed for adults with juveniles and the current science is creating a discussion focused on disaggregating juveniles from adults.

Upcoming Resource: CoSA Webpage



A new webpage focused on CoSA, designed to include resources for program volunteers and practitioners:

- **Volunteer Orientation Video Series:** Dr. Robin J. Wilson discusses the history of CoSA, the dynamics of sexual offending, principles of effective intervention, among others
- **Companion Document:** Tips for Being an Effective CoSA Volunteer
- **Resources:** Additional resources for CoSA

Contact Information

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Q & A

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For more information, contact Lahiz Tavarez (ltavarez@csg.org)



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