



CIRCLES SOUTH WEST: REHABILITATION SOCIAL ACTION FUND EVALUATION



Dr Kieran McCartan
(Kieran.mccartan@uwe.ac.uk)

Currently in England and Wales there are 49,322 Registered Sex Offenders in the community (College of Policing 2016: data at 1st January 2016), around 4,500 of whom live in South West England (MAPPA SMB Annual Reports 2014-2015). This poses a sizeable community management challenge for police, probation and MAPPA. Since 2014, Sex offender management in the community has been the responsibility of a downsized and streamlined National Probation Service, with opportunities for 3rd party/stakeholder organisations, such as Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), to deliver services to support sex offender reintegration.

A consortium of CoSA projects¹, led by Circles UK, successfully applied for funding from the Cabinet Office Rehabilitation Social Action Fund (RSF) in 2013, delivering the RSF project for 17 months between 2013 and 2015. With part of this funding an independent evaluation was commissioned².

This report is a bespoke analysis of the Circles South West (CSW) data from the larger Cabinet Office RSF Evaluation, prepared for the Circles South West Annual General Meeting in September 2016. Circles South West was established in 2010 and delivers CoSA in Avon, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall.

METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

The research takes a mixed method approach (Robson & McCartan, 2016) through three interlinked studies which provides us with a series of preliminary insights into “on the ground” Circles South West practices and the impact of individual circles on Core Members.

STUDY 1: UNDERSTANDING CIRCLES SOUTH WEST’S CORE MEMBERS

This study is based on the data collected from the CSW Core Members where involved in the social action fund project (n= 27); but, not all the circles had completed by the end of the research period and the completion data is based on a smaller sample (n=7). The data for this study was compiled from a number of different sources, including, Core Member Demographics, Original DRR with Volunteers, Adapted DRR with Core Member and the End of Circle Report.

Demographic Information

All 27 of the Core Members were male, White British and aged between 21 – 67 years. The majority of the Core Members self-identified as heterosexual (17 Core Members), with smaller proportions identifying as homosexual (6 Core Members) or bi-sexual (1 Core Member). A proportion of the Core Members identified as being religious, all of whom were Christian (7 Core Members). A small

¹ Circles South West, Yorkshire & Humberside CoSA; Circles South East; Circles North East

² The overarching evaluation was conducted by Dr Kieran McCartan (University of the West of England) and is available from - <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/28279/>

proportion identified as having a disability or learning difficulty (6 Core Members), which mainly consisted of being diagnosed as having dyslexia or Asperger's Syndrome; however, none were registered disabled. The majority of Core Members had some academic qualification, with 1 Core Member having a University Degree, 3 Core Members having A-Levels, 12 Core Members having GCSEs, 4 Core Members having a vocational qualification and 5 Core Members having no qualifications.

Offences

The Core Members had committed a range of offences, including, rape of an adult female (3 Core Members), Rape of a Child Female (1 Core Member), Rape of a Child male (1 Core Member), sexual assault of an adult female (3 Core Members), sexual assault of a adult male (2 Core Members), sexual assault of a child female (7 Core Members), sexual assault of a child male (6 Core Members), abduction of a child (1 core member), indecent exposure (1 Core Member), internet offences (10 Core Members), possession of child sexual abuse imagery (10 Core Members) and other offences (including, attempting to meet a child; sexual grooming; breach of SOPO; making and distributing child exploitation material; sexual activity with a child) (10 Core Members).

Referrals

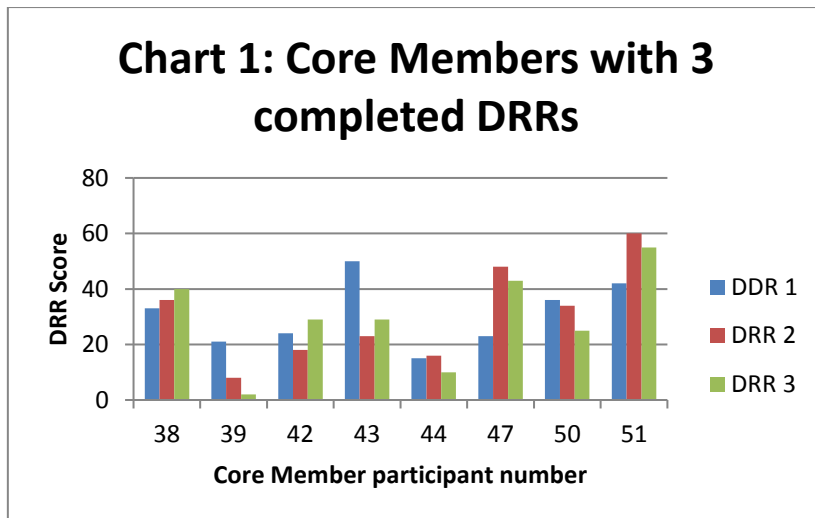
The majority of Core Members were referred from probation (21 Core Members) with less being referred by the police (6 Core Members); with over half (17 Core Members) being on Licence and/or having a Sex Offender Prevention Order (16 Core Members) when referred to the circle. The majority of Core Members had completed a prison sex offender programme (10 Core Members completed programmes while in prison), with a large majority having done a community sex offender programme in addition (15 Core members in total: 7 Core Members completed and 8 Core Members were still completing).

Risk & Risk Management

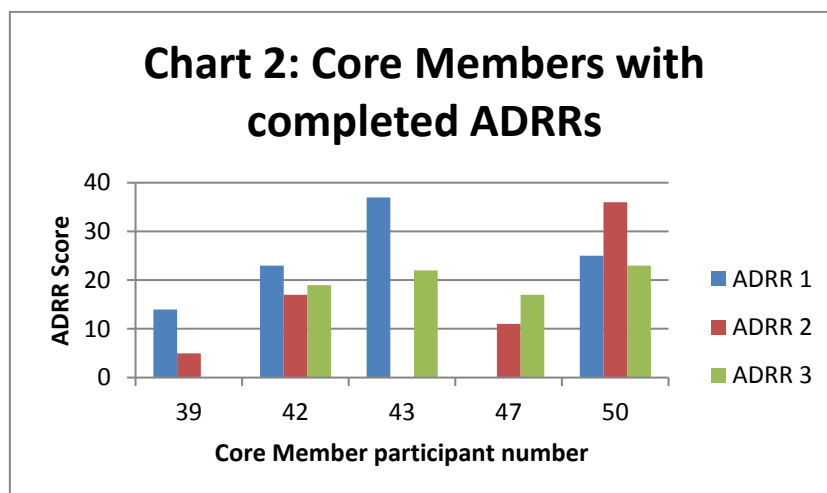
The majority of the Core Members are MAPPA level 1 (23 Core Members) or MAPPA level 2 (4 Core Members); none are MAPPA Level 3. In terms of the Risk Matrix 2000 scores 5 Core Members were very high, 9 were high, 6 were medium and 7 were low. In respect to the 16 Core Members OAsys score Risk of Harm General Public are 5 high, 6 medium and 14 low; Risk of Harm Children are 14 high, 7 medium and 4 low; Risk of Harm Professional Staff 25 Core members are low; Risk of Harm Known Adult are 4 medium and 21 low. None of the Core Members MAPPA, risk or OAsys designations changed across the life of the circle.

The Dynamic Risk Reviews (DRR)³ were not complete across all 27 Core Members, with some having not completed their circle at the end of the data-collection period (and therefore not having a complete set) and others only having two, rather than three, completed DRRs. At the end of data collection, we had complete sets of DRR data for 8 Core Members which is what we have based the following analysis on. We then ran an adapted DRR (ADRR) (a semi-structured interview schedule which is based upon and parallel to the DRR) (Figure 2) between the Core Member and the coordinator to better understand the "service user" voice; there were five Core Members that completed adapted DRRs, but only two of these were complete with a minimum of three across the life of the circle (but because of the small sample size we have included adapted DRRs with two sets).

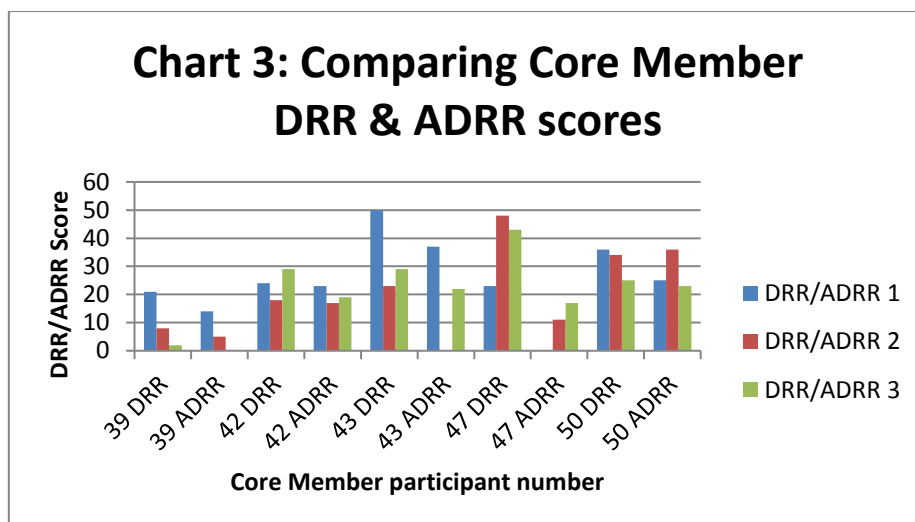
³ For the purpose of this report and analysis the researcher, in conversation with Circles UK, has defined the outcomes of the DRR as being – High risk = 50+ ; medium risk = 30-50; low risk below 30.



Across the life of the circle, according to the volunteers, four Core Members (participants 39, 43, 44 and 50) reduced their risk, whereas the remaining four Core Members (participants 38, 42, 47 and 51) increased their risk. It is important to note that five of the Core Members' risk changed within their original risk banding with three changing their risk designation (participant 43 dropped from medium to low; participant 50 dropped from medium to low; participant 51 increased from medium to high).



Across the life of the circle, according to the Core Members, four Core Members (participants 39, 42, 43 and 50) believed that they had reduced their risk, whereas the remaining Core Member (participant 47) believed that they had increased their risk. It is important to note that four of the Core Members risk changed within their original risk banding with only one changing their risk designation (participant 43 dropped from medium to low).



We were able to compare the sets of DRR data, adapted and original, for two Core Members (participant 42, 50). It must be noted that this sample is not big enough to prove significance or make attributions, which shows some general relationships between the volunteers and Core Members in respect to where the Core Members were at.

In the main, the majority of Core Members and volunteers agreed that the Core Member's risk had reduced by the end of the circle with the exception of Core Member 47 (where both the Core Member and the Circle thought that their risk had increased across the life of the circle) and Core Member 42 (where the Core Member thought that their risk had decreased and the circle thought that their risk had increased across the life of the circle). The data indicates that there was not always a direct agreement between the two participant groups about the Core Member's risk level at any given time during the lifetime of the circle.

Core member social status and well being

Of the 27 Core Members, 2 Core Members were in a relationship; the majority of Core Members were unemployed (24 Core Members), with less being retired (1 Core Member), having part-time jobs (1 Core Member) or volunteering (1 Core Members). The Core Members lived in a broad range of accommodation including on their own (8 Core Members), in approved premises (8 Core Members), in a hostel (4 Core Members), or with another family member (7 Core Members). The Core Members had additional stressors including issues with Mental Health (11 Core Members), benefits (23 Core Members), debt (5 Core Members), alcohol (8 Core Members) and lack of family contact (9 Core Members).

Changes were noted for Core Members across the life of the circle; 1 Core Member remained in a relationship but none of the others formed new relationships. 1 Core Member moved from volunteering to unemployment, 3 Core Members came off benefits, 2 Core Members resolved their debts, but 1 Core Member gained new debts. 1 Core Member restarted communications with their family, 1 Core Member resolved and managed their mental health issues and 1 Core Member resolved their problems with alcohol. Some Core Members experienced a change in accommodation during the life of the circle (2 moved from an institution to their own premises, 1 moved from an approved premises to a hostel, 1 moved from living with family to an institution and 1 from supported accommodation to a hostel).

STUDY 2: UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYSING THE VOLUNTEERS WITHIN THE CIRCLE

This study is based on the data collected from Volunteers (n=14) through the use of an on-line questionnaire comprising a series of Likert scales, demographic questions, nominal questions and qualitative short answer questions.

Volunteer socio-demographics

An online questionnaire was completed by 14 of CSW's volunteers. The questionnaire indicated that all the volunteers were white British, majority were female (13 participants), half were parents (7 volunteers) and a minority (2 volunteers) stated that they had a disability. The volunteers were a broad spectrum of age, including those aged 22-30 (5 participants) and 61 -70 (5 participants), 51-60 (2 participants), 41-50 (1 participant), and 18-21 (1 participant). The majority of these circles volunteers either held no faith (agnostic 2 participants; atheist 5 participants), Quaker (3 participants) or identified as Christian (protestant 2 participants). The majority of these circles volunteers were employed (full-time employment 6 participants; part-time employment 1 participant), with less being retired (5 participants) or in full-time education (3 participants).

Volunteer discovery of CoSA

The majority of CSW volunteers who participated found out about circles on-line (3 participants), through friends or peers (5 participants), through the media (1 participant). In addition, 5 participants found out about CoSA via alternative means including university lectures, volunteering advice/guidance points, religious meetings, studying/research and/or other volunteers.

Volunteers views of involvement in CoSA & training

The majority of CSW volunteers who participated had been involved for less than a year (9 participants), the others having been involved for longer (2 participants between 1 – 5 years and 3 participants for over 5 years). Circles volunteers who participated gave a range of reasons for wanting to get involved, these were mainly pro-social and included curiosity in respect to the offending population, preventing victimization, giving something back to their local communities and a belief that people could change. The majority of circles volunteers were pleased with the training that they had received (13 participants said that it was appropriate or very appropriate). All the CSW Volunteers who completed the questionnaire (14 participants) believed that they had a better understanding of sexual violence since being involved in CoSA.

The CSW volunteers views differed about whether they felt that they would tell another person that they volunteered with CoSA with some saying yes (9 participants), some saying no (1 participant) and some saying sometimes (4 participants). In the main the circles volunteers said that if they were going to tell anyone they would tell partners/significant others, children, friends, and peers; but they would be hesitant because of the population in question. They stated that they would not tell some people because of the nature of the population and public attitudes towards them.

Volunteer's perspectives of CoSA

The CSW volunteers saw the main function of CoSA to support the Core Member's social reintegration (7 participants), to hold the Core Member accountable in terms of (potential) future offending (10 participants) and past offending (4 participants), assisting in the community management of the Core Member (3 participants) and befriending them (8 participants). CSW volunteers believed that the circle had a positive impact upon the Core Member with the majority stating that that circles assist

Core Members reintegrate back into society (10 volunteers), that circles assisted Core Members to confront their offending behaviour (8 volunteers), that the circle assisted the Core Member to broaden their social network (11 volunteers) and that the circle assisted the Core Member to develop positive social relationships (7 volunteers). However, the volunteers were split as to whether circles assist Core Members in reducing their reoffending (4 volunteers said yes, 7 said maybe and 3 said no).

The majority of CSW Volunteers believed that being in CoSA had been a positive experience (11 participants), stating that they felt that they had helped reduce reoffending, helped turn people's lives around, gained more knowledge and broadened their own social network. The majority of CSW volunteers (8 participants) said they would recommend volunteering with CoSA.

STUDY 3: UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF THE CIRCLE ON CORE MEMBER INTEGRATION

This study is based on the data collected from a series of in-depth follow-up qualitative interviews with a cross section of all three participant pools (n = 12: Core Members (n=4), stakeholders (n=5) & volunteers (n=3)). The semi structured interviews yielded 5 themes

The perceived positive impact of circles:

All the participants interviewed said that Circles was a positive addition to the state working with sex offenders and that the Circle helped the Core Member manage their behaviours, thoughts and reintegration.

"It helps me, I can talk about things with them ... they understand what I am going through, they can listen and help me in a way that others cannot. My Probation Officer is busy, I can't really ask them to help me understand things, but I can ask the guys [in the circle]" (Core Member)

"I hope that it gives the Core Member a place to talk about things that they cannot really talk about with other people, outside of probation.." (volunteer)

The role of the Volunteers:

The volunteers were seen by different participants to have different roles and allegiances, with Core Members thinking that they were there to support and help them to reintegrate, stakeholders thinking that they were there to support them manage the sex offender and prevent re-offending, and the Volunteers believing that they straddled the two perspectives.

"For me a lot of it is intelligence collection, not what the offender wants to hear but... it's things that they will say to the circle members that they won't say to me" (stakeholder)

"We are here to help them, to support them. This could mean acting as a translator with the police or probation, or pointing out the problems in their behaviour and attitude. We can act as a filter for probation" (volunteer)

Responsibility, safeguarding and the role of the circle:

The responsibility and the role of the circle was in the main seen as being the same by the stakeholders and the volunteers, that is stopping the Core Member reoffending. The stakeholders stated that circles

helped them monitor and police sex offenders in the community, often stating that they needed to see more data to prove its effectiveness but despite this they felt that based upon their experiences with circles that it was working effectively.

“People that we would refer to circles have poor socialisation and issues in integration, they are not necessarily the most high risk but they are the people that we think would struggle to make friends, settle back into the community well.” (Stakeholder)

This was reinforced by the volunteers who were very positive about their experience with circles stating that they felt that they were making a positive impact upon the Core Members life while protecting the community.

Relationship, co-working and training:

The professionals felt that there needed to be a good working relationship with the Circle and with the volunteers in particular, suggesting that when the volunteers needed training regarding sexual offending and sex offenders, that they should provide it.

“I often go to their [Circles South West] events and talk to the volunteers. I see this as an important part of my role. The volunteers need to be trained by professionals given the role that they are taking on. I don’t mind doing this, I could maybe do more” (professional)

The volunteers also felt that they needed the support of the police and probation to help them in their work with the Core Member; they felt that training was an important part of this relationship.

“The training is great, as a volunteer I get to meet police officers and probation officers who help me understand their work and how my work [with circles] helps them. This is really good, especially as I want to join the police after Uni, I can see what the job could be” (volunteer)

Some felt that they would benefit from more support from the professionals and Circles South West in respect to the informal support and mentoring that they received.

“When I was a xxxx xxxx I could discuss cases with colleagues, I don’t feel that I can do this here with circles. I would like to talk about my experience more with other staff or volunteers...” (Volunteer)

Support vs Accountability or Support & Accountability:

Participants had different perceptions of the sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory and often paradoxical role of “Support and Accountability” within the circle.

“The guys (volunteers) are there to help me, support me doing stuff day to day..” (Core Member)

“It keeps them on time, in appointments and means that they are less likely to be breached or recalled to prison for a minor infraction. It helps support them in their day to day lives.” (Stakeholder)

“I think that there is a fine line with some Core Members where they treat you like a support group or like a therapy group, where they befriend you and we have to remind them that we are not there to be their friends...” (Volunteer)

Which resulted in a real need to clarify and understand the role of “support” and “accountability” in the circle, how different people understand this and how these understandings can be better aligned.

CONCLUSIONS

The current research reinforces previous research suggesting that CoSA, but particularly CSW, assists in the reintegration of sexual offenders back into the community by providing pro-social support, role modelling, a positive platform and grounded assistance (including., Bates, Saunders, Wilson, 2007; Bates, Macrae, Williams & Webb, 2012; Cesaroni, 2001; Duwe, 201; Wilson, Cortoni & McWhinnie, 2009; Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo, 2007; Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo, 2005; Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo, 2007; Thomas, Thompson and Kardstat, 2014; McCartan et al., 2014).

Core Members and volunteers agreed that the Core Members’ risk had reduced by the end of the circle. However, Core Members and volunteers had different perceptions of the level of risk that the Core Member posed at different points during the lifetime of the circle.

Volunteers indicated that they were cautious in telling other people that they volunteered with sex offenders. This is important as it suggests that the volunteers separate out their work with CSW and compartmentalise it as a protective mechanism. This does raise questions around the type of support that volunteers need to complete their role, who should be providing it and if the current training/support meets their needs.

The findings stress the central role of volunteers in the circles process, suggesting that volunteers act as a bridge between Core Members and communities.

Clear roles, responsibilities and training are essential to the work done by CoSA and CSW. It is important to recognise that CoSA works in parallel with statutory agencies in a productive and collaborative way; therefore, it is essential that there are clear boundaries, cross-agency training and support.

These findings suggest that the different groups of participants have different views on the role, function and viability of “Support and Accountability” within the circle. Having a clear balance between support and accountability is central as CoSA projects are integrated into the UK Criminal Justice System.

END