

## CONTEXT

Currently in England and Wales, as of the 1st January 2016, there are 49,322 Registered Sex Offenders in the community (College of Policing, 2016) which poses a sizeable community management challenge for police, probation, and MAPPA. The Transforming Rehabilitation agenda places the responsibility for the community management of sex offenders under the remit of a downsized and streamlined National Probation Service with opportunities for 3<sup>rd</sup> party/stakeholder organisations, like Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), to offer additional, added value, support.

## METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the outcomes of the CoSA work funded by the Cabinet Office through the Social Action fund. This will be achieved through the adoption of mixed method approach (Robson & McCartan, 2016) through three interlinked studies;

- 1) *Understanding and analysing the Core Members within the Circle:* This study is based on the data collected from all the Core Members who are involved in the social action fund project (n=75); but, not all the all the circles had completed by the end of the research period and therefore there is only complete data for a smaller sample (n=29). 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.
- 2) *Study 2: Understanding and analysing the Volunteers within the Circle:* This is study is based on the data collected from Volunteers (n=62) through the use of an on-line questionnaire comprising a series of Likert scales, demographic questions, nominal questions and qualitative short answer questions.
- 3) *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 = 44: Core Members (n-19), stakeholders (n=15) & volunteers (n=10)).

It is important to note that given the small number of completed circles (n = 29), Dynamic Risk Reviews (DRR) (Complete DRR, n = 27), adapted DRR's (Complete adapted DRR, n = 9), volunteer on-line surveys (n = 62) and the nature of qualitative data we cannot make generalisations to all circles projects nationally based on this research. The current research, therefore, only gives us insights into "on the ground" CoSA practices within certain projects and the impact of individual circles on Core Members.

**FINDINGS**

- The current research reinforces previous findings suggesting that CoSA 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, 2012; 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).
- CoSA deals with, in the main, male, heterosexual sex offenders (who traverse a range of contact and on-line offences with adult females and children) who are medium (n = 21), high (n = 28) and very high (n = 12) on the Risk Matrix.
- CoSA provides social and emotional support to the Core Members across the life of the circle with the majority of the Core Members, who completed their circle (19 Core Members out of 29 Core Members), being in a stronger position to live offence free in the community than at the beginning of their circle.
- CoSA parallels and supports statutory working in sex offender community management.
- 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 Core Members level of risk at different points during the lifetime of the circle.
- While volunteers were happy to work with Core Members they were cautious in telling other people that they volunteered with sex offenders and hesitant to introduce a Core Member to other people in their lives. This suggests that the volunteers separate out their work with CoSA and compartmentalise it as a protective mechanism.
- The findings emphasise 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; 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 a circle. Having a clear balance between "Support and Accountability" is central as CoSA projects are integrated into the UK Criminal Justice System.