

HTV Circles Six Years of Safer Communities

Six Year Report
April 2002 to March 2008



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Dedication

Editor's note

As the report title suggests, we are now entering the seventh year of operations of Circles of Support and Accountability. Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability has just set up our forty seventh Circle, has mentored twenty-one men, and has helped a dozen by offering professional counselling. To date we have had no offenders (Core Members) convicted of a further sexual offence. This extraordinary achievement is largely due to the commitment of the group of volunteers and Core Members who offer their time and energy in order to secure safer communities. This report is dedicated to you.

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Introductions

The Scared and the Sacred

There is much to celebrate in the work that has been done during the six years covered by this report by the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles staff team and their committed volunteers. But the story of Circles coming to Britain started several years before that. In Canada it goes even further back, to one local church in Hamilton, Ontario, which in 1994 found itself able to respond bravely and positively to the needs and challenges of one man.

Charlie was coming out of prison to a very scared community. The group of churchgoers who offered to provide some sort of protection to Charlie from the community – and to the community from Charlie – almost inevitably acquired the nickname ‘Charlie’s Angels’, but the phrase Circles of Support and Accountability soon began to be used to describe what they were doing, and the idea spread to other churches. It was in due course taken up by the Mennonite church in Canada, who provided liaison and a more structured approach, with the help of a little funding from the Correctional Services of Canada (prison and probation). Most of the volunteers at that time were recruited from churches and the early literature about the idea was couched in Christian terms.

In 1999 I was working with one of the committees of Quaker Peace and Social Witness. QPSW is the department of our central organisation which helps British Quakers to live out our faith in the world. The committee, now known as the Crime, Community and Justice Group, focuses on one of our most longstanding areas of concern, that of criminal justice. (The fact that part of the Home Office building in central London is named after nineteenth century Quaker and penal reformer Elizabeth Fry – and that her portrait appeared on a recent five pound note – is proof that we have a lot to live up to.) A member of that committee and I both happened to read a short article by a Canadian Quaker about his experience of becoming a Circles volunteer, and it struck us that the idea was an exciting one, that its approach fitted our own Quaker approach very well, and that there was no obvious reason why it should not work in Britain too. The committee member found out more and the committee went on liking what they learnt. They decided to take the idea to the Home Office.

Quakers are used to advocating unpopular ideas, or at least ideas ahead of their time. Doors tend to get shut in our faces, so we were delighted when the Dangerous Offenders Unit (now called the Public Protection Unit) invited us in and took us seriously, drawing on the advice of expert bodies such as the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. They agreed to co-host a seminar in June 2000 when five of the most knowledgeable Canadians came over and presented their work to the representatives of key organisations.

Out of that event was born a group of people who were interested enough to want to pursue the idea further. They continued to meet, under Quaker auspices, and the Dangerous Offenders Unit invited two Probation Areas to set up pilot projects. Hampshire rose to the challenge. At this point, it would have been easy for the Quaker committee to feel it had done what it could, but they grew more and more convinced that they should dare to set up a Circles pilot project. It wouldn’t be easy – they had to find funding, expert staff, premises. There were obvious risks – would the statutory agencies agree to work with us, and agree

that volunteers should be permitted to work with sexual offenders? What if an offender re-offended and the media blamed the Quakers? It would be a big task for a small church, and we were decidedly nervous.

One key source of reassurance, contacts and expertise was Tim Newell, a member of the committee and at that time Governor of HMP Grendon in the Thames Valley. It was largely because of what – and who – he knew that we went ahead with setting up a pilot in the Thames Valley area, where police, probation and prisons were working in a cooperative way which could only benefit our work.

The small committee took their proposal through the Quaker decision-making processes and it was striking to see the degree of wholehearted support it received. Our first bid for government funding was turned down, but late in 2001 we were promised three years of funding to set up an official pilot of Circles of Support and Accountability. We advertised for staff and found office premises next to the base of the Thames Valley Partnership, who have supported the project from the start. Chris Wilson started work as Project Manager in April 2002 and Rebekah Saunders joined him soon after. Their experience and expertise gave the work a flying start.

The story from then on is well told in other articles in this report. As Chris and Becky's line manager, I was drawn deeply into the complexities of the ever-changing plans for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), of the intense media interest in this field and of the politics around sexual offending. As the project got off the ground, we began to receive expressions of interest from other parts of Britain and beyond. We always remembered that we had set up this pilot to show that the model developed in Canada would work in the UK too, and that this humane, restorative approach, drawing on the energy and commitment of community members, could be more effective than more punitive methods.

We had at first expected to run the project as a pilot for three years, then hand it on to a local independent body. However, the government's plans for devolving funding and control for work with offenders to local or regional level, through NOMS, were repeatedly delayed, and so we repeatedly extended this period. During this time, we recognized that the work on liaising with and advising other Circles projects around the country needed to be launched separately, otherwise there would not be the necessary distance between the project and the mechanism for quality control. Thus the idea of Circles UK, as a separate charity, was born – see Chris Wilson's article.

And so it came about that on 1 April 2008, we were able to hand over responsibility for running the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability project to the newly formed (secular) charitable company HTV Circles, transferring the four staff over to their new employer. And on the same day we transferred another four staff to Circles UK, including Chris Wilson, who had by that time become their National Development Manager.

Although the structural ties have now been severed, I have absolutely no doubt that Quakers as individuals will go on supporting Circles in all sorts of ways, including as volunteers and as trustees, and will I hope go on feeling some satisfaction in the part we have been able to play in getting this important work established in Britain.

Helen Drewery
Assistant General Secretary
Quaker Peace and Social Witness

The Road to You

(A personal journey into the world of national Circles development)

Last year was the 50th anniversary of the study and publication 'Family and Kinship in East London'. This iconic sociological study presents a picture of community where hardship, poverty and fear were countered through acts of kindness, inclusion and support. Some twenty years later society was to become fragmented and insular with an ideology that promoted the individual. The result of this ideology led to communities and neighbourhoods being characterised by fear and suspicion, a fear and suspicion which was never more so than that relating to sexual harm. It is for this reason that the success of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles as a government-funded pilot site is so important. Their success reflects a number of profound achievements not just within the context of criminal justice and public protection but also in relation to the restoration of those previous values reflected in the aforementioned study. The government's commitment to Circles of Support and Accountability, within a context of media campaigns of "name and shame" was a courageous attempt to place a high profile and politically sensitive subject firmly into the arenas of restorative justice and civil renewal.

The successful growth of the HTV Circles project is already well documented. Its operational success in reducing sexual recidivism¹, recruiting, training and keeping quality volunteers has led to a proliferation of new Circles projects across the country. The interest from other agencies resulted in an increased need to disseminate the best practice being developed by the pilot projects. It became clear that what was needed was a system whereby new and developing Circles projects could be supported, ensuring sustainability as well as guaranteeing the delivery of a quality service. This awareness resulted in the creation of a government funded umbrella organisation/charity called Circles UK. Charged with the task of ensuring that all projects deliver a high quality of service, the question that has to be asked is; how does Circles UK balance this with the growth of Circles, which as a process is highly effective, without stifling or suffocating creativity? In order to answer that question it is important to acknowledge that any process needs a structure in which it can be delivered. These structures can be very different and are represented, not least, between the two lead pilot agencies, HTV Circles and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. The former, based on a model of infrastructure and developed solely to provide Circles, while for the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, Circles represents a small part of their overall work.

It is accepted as the perceived wisdom that the structure for a successful Circles project is one that is geographically rooted in its locality and built in partnership with local statutory agencies. However the difference between the two pilot agencies proved pertinent with regard to the development of other local Circles projects. The fact that the Lucy Faithfull Foundation had a national remit, operating by parachuting into an area and 'cold calling', facilitated the ability to engage with potential volunteers and manage a Circle while work continued to support local criminal justice agencies in the creation of an infrastructure to secure their own sustainable Circles project.

Time and practice has proven that the strength of Circles lies in its independence from

¹ 2007. Bates A, Saunders R and Wilson C; Doing Something About it: a Follow-up Study of Sex Offenders Participating in Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability. *British Journal of Community Justice* Volume 5 Number 1 Spring 2007

the statutory agencies². However success can only be achieved with the full confidence and respect of those agencies. In turn gaining their confidence and respect can only be achieved through a meaningful partnership and partnership work has its own inherent tensions. While common objectives are often shared the route to achieving them can be seen through differing perspectives. It is therefore essential that every agency involved in the management of high risk sex offenders perceives themselves, in a meaningful way, as a stakeholder in their local Circles project and that a shared framework of understanding and communication is developed to assist in achieving the aim of enhancing public protection.

It is therefore testimony that in a period of a few years the national map of circle activity is now greater than that in Canada when they undertook their evaluation³. An evaluation where the reduction in recidivism was so impressive it led to the British government funding their own pilot projects. In the North West of England there continues to be growth and activity reflected in the development of a North West Circles Forum attended by five Probation areas. North Wales has a partnership between North Wales Probation area and the charity Community Justice Interventions. The project is based at the Wrexham Approved Premises and continues to grow from strength to strength. Leicester Probation area is currently running two Circles. It was announced this year by the East Region's ROMs office that in agreement with the area's six chief officers from Probation that each area will contribute financially to seed a regional Circles project. Humberside is operational through a Social Enterprise organisation called the New Leaf Trust and North Yorkshire, like North Wales, has created a partnership between Probation and SOVA.

Following a successful presentation to the Justice 2 committee, the Scottish parliament requested that a feasibility study be undertaken by Glasgow University with a view to the appropriateness of Circles in a Scottish context. The University focused on HTV Circles as a model of best practice.

It has been a privilege to have been involved in both the management of the successful HTV Circles pilot project and then the subsequent development of Circles nationally. I am aware that Rebekah and her team have worked extremely hard keeping practice effective and cutting edge. Their practice has not only had to be balanced with the competing demands of research but has also had to compete with the move away from pilot status and the creation of an independent charity. I am convinced that the past six years of this new and creative work undertaken by the staff of HTV Circles will result in a new iconic model of community where, once again, fear and ignorance are countered through acts of kindness, inclusion and support.

Chris Wilson
National Development Manager
Circles UK

² 2006, Wilson C, A Problem Shared, Safer Society *The Journal of Crime Reduction and Community Safety*, Number 30 Autumn 2006

³ 2005, Wilson R, Picheca J, Prinzo M, *Circles of Support and Accountability: An evaluation of the pilot projects in South Central Ontario* Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada



Chair's Introduction

It is a privilege to write for this Report as the Chair of the new Board of Trustees for HTV Circles.

Reports usually reflect a period of challenge and change and this one will be no exception!

The past year, especially in the latter months, has been the most hectic and logistically challenging time for the Project. Not least wise because 'Circles of Support and Accountability' has gone, and out of the ashes HTV Circles is born to a whole new world of charity status and a governing Board of Trustees.

The new Board of Trustees was formed under the watchful eye of the Advisory Board to whom I am already indebted as it has been their skilful experience and support that has provided enthusiastic and knowledgeable back-up for Becky and her team to enable the objectives of Circles work – to support Offenders in the community by engaging the community – to be fulfilled.

Such is the ability of Becky, her skilled team and the quality volunteers, the re-offending rate of those supported by HTV Circles still stands at 0% – testimony as to why this project is so vital in restorative justice and so exciting to be involved in.

As Chair I shall strive to maintain the progress already evident in respect of the success of the Project, as will all of the focused and experienced Board members.

A major challenge for us all will be maintaining existing funding and securing on-going monies without which of course we will not survive. I am grateful to Circles UK and Helen Drewery especially, for helping enormously in the days over the 'change over' for the assistance with charity funding applications, some of which have already been successful.

As a Board and with the team we will look to continue to develop HTV Circles, seeking to ensure our profile is high within all statutory and voluntary agencies in the area and that the sense and success of the Circles principles are evident for all to see.

We hope to develop new areas of work in training and family based assessments in order that this alternative yet complimentary approach to restorative justice can be applied and furthered through joint work or consultation within established social welfare and child protection systems.

Finally, working with sexual offenders is demanding, we must all take every opportunity to explain where ever we can the complexities and difficulties of the work. We should challenge the media, the layman, the politician and those who choose to discredit the work with the evidence of the successes of HTV Circles, where communities are supporting communities and successfully reducing the re-offending of the most emotive and challenging of crimes.

Kay Taylor-Duke
Chair

Membership of The Board of Trustees of HTV Circles as at June 2008

Kay Taylor-Duke	Chair	Ruth Davies
Elizabeth Nyawade	Vice Chair	David Beck
Mark Goldup	Treasurer	Peter Colquhoun
Monica Walford		Stephen Barber

Six years on

An overview of the development of HTV Circles, lessons learnt and what has been achieved

In June 2002 I joined a team of one, Chris Wilson, in a small office in Thame. At the beginning of the project we had the luxury of time having been given three years funding from the then Home Office to establish Circles in the Thames Valley area. This allowed us to consider how we were going to safely recruit volunteers from local communities, who would be suitable for a circle, how we were going to train and supervise members of the public, and how we were going to convince professionals that volunteers could work successfully with high risk individuals who have committed sexual offences.

We did have some advantages that we could maximise to ensure the success of the project. We were working in a specific geographical area, we were trusted due to our backgrounds by the statutory agencies, and we were able to identify very quickly, due to our previous role with Probation, appropriate Core Members. By November 2002 we were ready to run our first training event consisting of eight potential volunteers. This was an interesting experience as we had very little information to provide our volunteers with and did not know then the answers to many of their questions and concerns. However, we did take away an important learning point; Circles would only work if we established an understanding with all involved with Circles that we were a team piloting a new initiative. We needed to listen and learn from each other and through our experiences we could develop the Circles model and see the project grow.

I firmly believe that the reason we have been so successful with operations is due to working in partnership with the volunteers, Core Members and professionals from the statutory agencies. It is only through these partnerships that we have been successful in producing an effective model that now plays an essential role in the long term risk management of men and women who have committed sexual offences.

Obstacles and Considerations

There are always going to be concerns expressed by professionals and the media over the use of volunteers in the risk management of high risk offenders, in particular those who have committed sexual offences. These concerns generally focus around the issues of:

- Management and supervision of volunteers
- Collusion and Manipulation
- Volunteers developing “friendships” with Core Members
- Volunteers’ ability to maintain firm boundaries
- Volunteers undermining the work of statutory agencies

It is important to acknowledge that Circles is a community initiative and we are not training our volunteers to replace the role of the professional, but rather to compliment the work of the statutory agencies and bridge the gap between professional and the community.

However, it is essential for the success of the project that our volunteers are safely managed and appropriately trained to deal with the challenging role of being a Circles volunteer.

The last six years have provided us with the opportunity to learn through experience and observation and have helped us be in the position to address the above concerns effectively. We now have the following in place to ensure that Circles is a success and remains a safe community initiative with effective results.

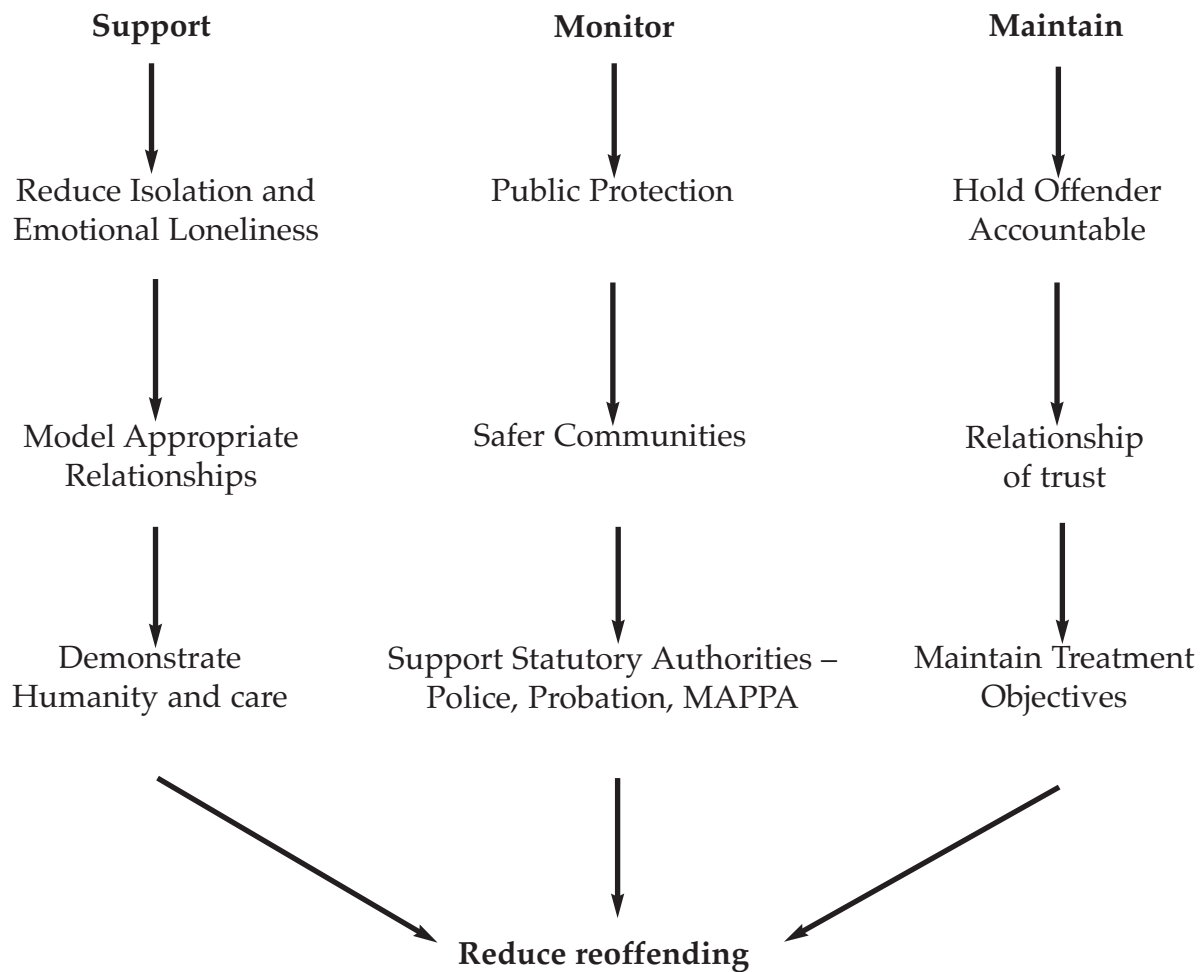
Volunteers now have access to an initial training programme with contributions from Circles staff and sexual offender treatment facilitators. Volunteers are able to leave the initial training with the ability to make an informed decision about whether to continue and volunteer with Circles. Their concerns and questions can be answered and they are provided with an overview of the British Criminal Justice System and an insight into the management of men and women who have committed sexual offences. They are able to leave with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and reassurance that they will be supervised and managed by professional specialist staff.

Our extensive supplementary training programme for volunteers is outlined later in this report. However, I believe the fact that many volunteers stay with us for more than one year moving from one Circles to the next evidences the quality of the training we deliver and the support we provide. We have volunteers involved in two Circles offering all their free time to support emergency referrals of men and women requiring immediate support. However, the training is a secondary factor in why volunteers remain with HTV Circles; I believe it is their commitment to finding a constructive approach to tackling sexual abuse and a desire to see their communities become a safer place that is the key to volunteer retention.

It has been important that we have taken time to establish effective working relationships with our statutory partner agencies. We have the Prison, Police and Probation services represented on our advisory panel. This group meets quarterly with the Board of Trustees to discuss issues linked with operations and to contribute to the growth and development of the project. We have Service Level Agreements in place with both Hampshire and Thames Valley Strategic MAPPAs (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) Management Boards and have been included within the Hampshire and Isle of Wight MAPPA protocol. Circles Coordinators have worked hard to meet with professional teams equipping them with referral packs and information. We are grateful to professionals who have felt confident to share their concerns about our work and assisted us in how to address the issues, ensuring effective partnerships develop. Professionals from partnership agencies and employment and housing agencies contribute regularly to the annual volunteer training programme and meet and are in regular communication with Circles volunteers.

Since the beginning of HTV Circles, we have adhered to the three Key Principles outlined overleaf.

The Three Key Principles



Additionally, from this we have identified five golden rules that we aspire to follow:

HTV Golden Rules

- **Partnership**

Circles will not work in isolation. Circles can only be a success if all agencies involved with the offender work together.

- **Communication**

Circles cannot work without clear lines of communication. Communication has to exist between the Core Member and volunteers, the Circles and the Coordinator and the Circles and professionals.

- **No Secrets**

Sexual abuse exists in a world of secrets, therefore it is essential that no secrets are kept between all individuals involved with the Core Member. This also helps manage the potential of collusion and manipulation within the Circle. Although Circles is not a “duty to cooperate” agency we have agreements in place to ensure we fully cooperate under child protection arrangements and serious sexual offence reviews. Although the counselling service we deliver is confidential we have an agreement in place which ensures any concern of risk to the individual or community is appropriately disclosed.

- **Flexibility**

Circles have run in Canada for over twelve years and in Britain for six years. Circles are still in new territory regarding the involvement of volunteers in the management of high risk offenders. As each year passes we learn more and more about working with volunteers and safely managing their work. We also face surprises within our work, often faced with questions and situations arising that we never thought were possible. As a professional who has worked in this area for the last ten years I have constantly had to revise my thinking and judgements regarding the management of the project. Therefore a Circles team has to be clear that there are still new challenges ahead. Equipping a project to deliver a flexible service, allocating services appropriate to an individual's assessment of risk and need will ensure the project is able to start to meet the demand for its resources.

Circles plug a huge gap in the long term management of high risk sex offenders. The knowledge we are gaining in monitoring recidivist behaviour long past the end of statutory supervision allows us to maintain appropriate oversight of offenders' behaviour. Until the development of Circles there was minimal monitoring of offenders behaviour long term. Therefore Circles volunteers and staff will be dealing with issues that they are not prepared for. We need to be prepared to be open minded and willing to review procedures and policies on a regular basis.

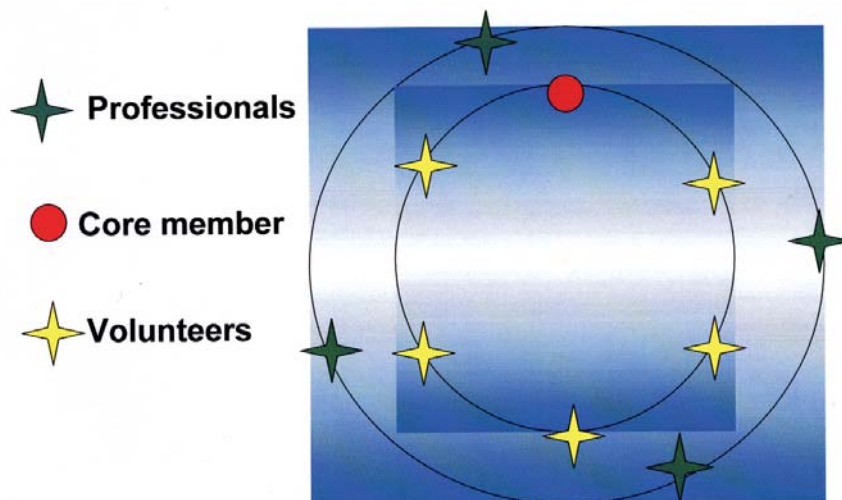
- **Team Work**

I cannot state enough that Circles is not just about equipping a project with an experienced staff team. Circles are about a holistic approach to the risk management of Core Members involving the community, the offender, and professionals. We have to work together in order for Circles to be a success.

What makes an Effective Circle?

HTV Circles now believe we have a workable Circles model that is an intrinsic part of the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements. Our version of an effective Circles can be represented by this diagram:

Circles of Support & Accountability



The Circle comprises volunteers from the community who are supported by professional staff

HTV Circles recommend the following areas are carefully considered when establishing a Circle:

- **Selection of Core Member**

Core Members must be motivated to lead an offence free lifestyle and voluntarily agree to engage with a Circle.

- **Appropriate balance and selection of volunteers**

Group dynamics are the key to a successful workable Circle. The Circles must be an effective team with the ability to work individually without undermining the other members of the group.

- **Involvement of key professionals**

Circles cannot work in isolation. The Core Member must see and be involved in the partnership between the Circles and professionals.

- **Trust and Honesty**

The Core Member must remain open and honest with the Circle staff and volunteers. The volunteers must remain open with the Circles staff supervising them and not hold information back from the authorities. Circles are a valuable resource and deception cannot be tolerated within Circles. However, it is accepted that trust and honesty can take time to develop and this is encouraged through establishing a respectful relationship between all members of the Circle.

- **Maintaining firm and clear boundaries**

Clear Volunteer Policies and Procedures must be in place. Circles projects must ensure volunteers receive the level of training and support required for this difficult role. All volunteers must sign the policies and any volunteer not following the procedures will risk being de-selected. Projects must be prepared to be strict within their selection and ongoing facilitation of volunteer involvement. Circles projects should be prepared that a volunteer's involvement with the Core Member will change over time. Volunteers may become more relaxed with the Core Member and begin to lose the balance between support and accountability. Volunteers may begin to let their boundaries slip and it is essential that no matter what level of support is provided the volunteer complies with the policies in place.

Achievements

In the last six years the project has received four awards, culminating in our winning the 2006 Justice Award for Outstanding Contribution to Engaging Communities. This has provided recognition and validation of the volunteers work in Circles and we are very proud of the volunteers' achievements.

We have been successful in promoting the concept of Circles nationally and have witnessed the development of the new national body, Circles UK as a result of the work of the two national pilots. We have continued to receive support from the Ministry of Justice assisting our development and growth and helping establish HTV Circles as a sustainable charity.

Most importantly, we have seen offenders fearful of entering the community gain significant life improvement from their time in Circles. We have watched the growth in volunteer's confidence and commitment to their work in Circles. Volunteers now promote



**Members of the Circles team being presented with the Justice Award 2006
by Baroness Scotland**

not only the concept of Circles to the wider community but the positive intervention undertaken by the statutory agencies. We have listened to the relief of professionals being able to access long term support for individuals leaving the care of statutory supervision. We have, we hope, ensured that potential victims of sexual abuse have remained safe within their home and communities.

I have had the opportunity to experience Circles as a volunteer, a Coordinator and now a Manager. I hope my experience and that of the team will ensure that I am in the position to continue to record the success of Circles in a further six years.

On the 1st April we launched HTV Circles as an independent charitable company with the team now working with the new Board of Trustees. Although there are still going to be many obstacles to face, in particular securing long term funding for the project, the future for Circles is both encouraging and exciting.

**Rebekah Saunders
Chief Executive
HTV Circles**





Volunteers



As mentioned earlier, volunteers are the backbone of HTV Circles, without whom there would be no project! Below are two accounts of life as a volunteer for Circles. First is Anon (we encourage anonymity, particularly where the media or publication are concerned), who writes of her experience as a new volunteer. Then James gives an account of over two years' experience.

I am a new volunteer. I came to know about Circles having attended the "Stop it Now"* training and thought that if ever there was work that needed to be done, this was it. I had spent a lifetime working with children and for children and for their families and was called in to help when they were being excluded from their schools for unusual behaviour; this often came about through neglect or mismanagement or undiagnosed syndromes or through some form of abuse. I had early in my career experienced anger and revulsion at the adults who had so mistreated the children but this had gradually led to compassion at their lack of understanding or self restraint.

On reading about the work of Circles, I experienced again of the old feelings of anger but it seemed a good use of my energy to join in this kind of preventative work. If one person could be stopped from abusing a child because of our devoting a few hours a week to the work, it would be time well spent.

On joining the basic training programme, there was surprise at two things; one was the youth of many of the new volunteers – what an encouraging sign that they were not all white, middle class and decrepit like me – and secondly the quality and thoroughness of the short initial training programme. It covered things I wanted to know and things I did not know that I needed to know and a few that I knew already. The manual was detailed and explicit and clearly born of huge experience. It has been essential reading since been allocated to a circle.

It is hard not to feel overwhelmed when first learning about the Core Member's offences. Once the first meeting is over however, the old experience of sadness returns at the lack of love and guidance and missed opportunities for a normal development that he has suffered. Are they all so heart- rending? Even more painful is the knowledge that the small, everyday happinesses that constitute our lives – such as going out with friends for a swim at the leisure centre and walking the dog in the park, or caring for the children in the extended family – have been denied to our Core Member because of the risk that he poses. I find myself reflecting more and more on the quality of my own life and how that came about- at least at first – more by chance of birth and education than by my own endeavours.

These feelings go hand in hand with frustration at his negativity and avoidance techniques. Action plans are for other people, not him and this is aggravated by poor literacy and even poorer expectations. However, his dignity and acceptance of the position is surprising. What a blessing it is to be supported in the struggle to understand him by sensitive and experienced Circles volunteers. It would be good to have a greater span of

* See www.stopitnow.org.uk

ages so at least some of us were more at his life stage and it would be good to have the Circles meeting closer to home! However, the support and guidance of our supervisor is great and I am really impressed at the programme of continuing training that Circles members have, not least the amazing event last year led by Clark Baim.

What are the down sides?

Travelling on my own around a town I don't know in the dark and cold with my navigation system on strike whilst trying to find a Meeting House. Losing my way in deep dark country side miles from any housing at the end of a very long day. Feeling despondent at the loneliness and small opportunities for rehabilitation into a normal family life of the Core Member. Feeling helpless and unskilled in front of a man with such enormous and life-long difficulties.

I have a lot still to learn, mostly about myself.

Anon.



You're ok; some of what you have done is not ok.

Sometimes it is hard to accept this, but it is a firm belief I have. It comes from the idea that everyone is "born equal".

When I joined Circles I met a new group of people. Some I knew already and some I had never met before. I suppose one of my reasons for joining was that I liked everyone I met, whether they worked or volunteered for the organisation.

The process of becoming a volunteer was always gentle. Training was sometimes fun, serious, thought provoking, or enlightening. The initial two meetings as a Circle were just for the volunteers. The first was a sociable evening to get to know each other. The second was more formal where we were introduced to some of the offender's back ground. Then we met as a complete Circles every Thursday evening.

It became about six people. Our relationships with each other, our friendships, niggles, moods, our likes and dislikes – I still can't believe some people drink their coffee so strong and other people run marathons, but it takes all sorts. Of course, most importantly it was about our common goal to help the Core Member lead a crime free and fulfilling life.

Each week we met. It was a bit like hearing an orchestra tuning up before the start of a concert, lots of bits of conversation. The greetings; how are your studies? How is your training? How was your week? And then the meeting. It never was mundane. I could come away feeling happy, sad, buoyant, frustrated, optimistic, annoyed, drained, pleased, fearful....

The early meetings were full of getting to know each other, sorting out our boundaries, our place in the Circle, and letting each other know what we liked and disliked. Some of these meetings were also testy and tense. An underlying threat from the Core Member would warn off an unwanted question. This is dangerous territory for the Core Member, a kind of "don't go there" or "don't look inside". "What right have you to ask me that?". I would ask myself, "what was that all about?" Why not ask that? This is where the training

kicks in and I realised how useful it was. It can be hard for a Core Member to speak from the heart when their self worth is low and they are used to hiding their feelings. I imagine day to day life can be hard, being on your own or being with people too. Motivation can be an effort. But speak they must and most importantly about their difficulties or a risky feeling or a thought they might have. I found I would be trying to walk the line between recognising that this is someone who has been through the mill but also the need for them to be accountable for their actions. I need to be sensitive and empathic but at the same time help them to look at what they have done and maybe what they are doing and find a different way of dealing with it.

There often seemed to be so much ground to cover. Sometimes it took a lot of listening. Sometimes it's hard to listen. I mean to listen without a question or a thought in your head. To just listen. At times I found the things I heard shocking, interesting and boring. I wondered what sort of spin there was in a story the Core Member was telling. How much it took into account the other persons views? Sometimes I found it hard to pick out what was real and what was not and I wanted to question or comment on all this. This wasn't always easy to do. Everyone wanted to ask a question and we all had to take it in turns. The Circles is made up of dynamic individuals each one of us with something to say. It has been important for us to respect each other and to allow everyone to have their say. At times when I have had a question in my head someone else has asked it in a different way or it has been answered by the Core Member with out me asking.

But why do I do this?

I do it because I get something out of it. I want where I live to be a better place and the people in it to have better lives. A better place for me has strong safer communities and acceptance of everyone no matter who they are. You can't change who you are but you can change what you do, I like to be part of helping people do this.

James – Circles volunteer



Core Members

Alongside the dedication shown by Circles volunteers is the commitment of the ex-offenders, who turn up night after night to meetings that can sometimes be very challenging and difficult. They are obliged to account for their previous sexually abusive behaviour, and to spell out repeatedly the steps that they are taking to avoid reoffending. It is important to remember that they are under no statutory obligation to attend Circles, but that they are trying to do their bit to help ensure there are no more victims.



Len

Having finished Probation, I moved onto the Circles group, which was set up in Winchester for me by Dominic. Facilitators is the wrong word to use so for me it is the group, Juliet, Ken, Steve and Mary.

At first I was very nervous and didn't know what to expect. Once I knew what the meetings consisted of I became relaxed. I achieved a lot by opening up to the group and telling them more about myself. We also had a "side group" that Ken and Mary set up on Anger Management. I learnt a lot about how to cope with anger and to control it and to use it in an appropriate manner. That was very useful indeed.

When Adele (Hampshire Co-ordinator) came on board it also made a difference. I meet up with Adele once a fortnight at least since the group closed after a year. She is very good at the job she does.

Finally I would like to say a big thank you to the whole group. It has been thoroughly worth it. I recommend it to any sex offender finishing Probation or Prison.



Rick

I was offered the opportunity of using an assumed name, but I've chosen to use my real name as hiding is no longer an option for me.

I'd like to point out that I never thought I'd feel good about myself again but thanks to my new thinking and my wide network of support, in which "Circles of Support and Accountability" is playing a major part, I'm a changed man now.

I'd always considered myself to be a good judge of character in others....it's just that I would not be honest about my own character....they say you can't fool yourself....let's say I had a damned good try.

The first thing I want to say is that Circles is not a soft option, so if you've got a Circle or

are contemplating getting a Circle... you can only expect to get out what you put in.

There have been a lot of times in my life when I've not been honest and until I admitted to myself that I need help did I really start to get on the right road.

I have ups and downs in my life, but more downs than ups... some self-inflicted and some not. At various times in my life I've been confident and successful. I have not always been a sex offender. I've had loving tender full relationships with adult women. I have the capacity to love and be loved appropriately.

To me, Circles is just another tool in my box... it will not be there forever so I've used the times we've had together to help me understand myself and early on I realised that unless I was completely honest with my Circles I couldn't expect them to help me or for there to be any trust or respect.

The Media portray sex offenders as "repeat offenders" and "hopeless causes" and "predatory" and "dangerous" to the community. I can assure anyone reading this that whereas I was many of those things, I am not now.

Why should you believe me when I say these things? It's a fair question.

The Media pander to a certain section of the public with sensational stories with regards to sex offenders. The reason why you'll hardly ever read a story about Circles is that it works.

It's worked for me and I know several other sex offenders who it's worked for too. But something that works is not going to sell newspapers so it doesn't get printed. That's why I feel honoured to be able to write this article knowing it will be printed so hopefully people can have a balanced rather than biased view.

As I stated earlier Circles is not a soft option and the "Accountability" tacked on the end is as important as the "Support" I receive. It is a two-way street that helps me to continually challenge myself and to be challenged, to assist me and aid them in how best to manage myself, and to rehabilitate myself for the day when I fly solo with no need for a Circle of Support and Accountability.

A Circle is made up of volunteers who are not professionals but are ordinary members of the public, who don't take the view that there is no way back for sex offenders, and give up their time for someone who wants to change.

Each Circles is tailor-made wherever possible to the individual needs of the Core Member and the volunteers selected for their suitability so that, as with my own, a rapport can be built up to enable the best possible outcome for everyone.

We have regular meetings and social outings, and communicate by sending texts and having telephone conversations. They and myself are regularly assessed by a Circles Co-ordinator, and all the information is shared by various agencies that are there to help me manage and monitor my progress, and to protect the public.

I see all these agencies and this information-sharing as a good thing, as each and every person has the same objective – that is for me to remain offence-free and for me to continue to be a useful law-abiding citizen again.

I consider myself to be very fortunate to have a Circle and, as I know it will not be there forever, I have gradually retrained myself to think and act differently. My Circles volunteers work with me and as trust has always been a live issue with me, I can honestly say that I trust them, and I'm sure they trust me.

Without going into specifics, my adult life prior to when I began offending was as

ordinary as many other peoples' lives, but it was coloured by sexual abuse that I underwent when I was a child. As a young man I had the feeling of being sexually inadequate when in the company of adult women and still carrying the stigma of being a victim for much of my later childhood and for which I blamed myself.

This is a fact. It is not to detract from my full ownership of my later offences. It's just that I felt safer in the company of children rather than mistrusting adults who I saw as likely to let me down and who I couldn't trust.

It was only when I was prepared to open myself up to new ideas that I've been able to see how my problems started.

In later life I fell apart when a series of misfortunes occurred close together, including a long-term relationship ending, my losing a well paid job, and in turn my self esteem and confidence. I turned to drink and saw myself as unattractive, and my behaviour became such that I was later to become a sex offender myself.

Prior to having a 'Circle' I attended various 'group sessions' and early on I experienced a 'revelation' that changed my thinking, when I realised that instead of 'searching' for the 'keys' to my own future, and I needed to 'retrain' myself into thinking and acting positively and legally, but I knew at the time that I could not do it.... Alone!

After completing these courses I was offered a Circle and I have found it to be very rewarding and as a person who has had 'trust' issues with adults I can honestly say that I trust each and every one of them and count them as friends.

With the help of my Circles I have reached a point where I am genuinely remorseful for having created victims of my own when I'd previously been a victim myself and realising that the one can never excuse the other.

Instead of dwelling on the negatives in my life and what might have been, I'm now grateful for every day and determined never to re-offend.

It may be difficult for you to comprehend the sea of change that has happened to me having attended various courses and being in receipt of counselling and my support network which includes my Circle, as now I am not afraid to ask for help.

I'm certain that having the opportunity to have a Circle has helped me to become the person I am now and has given me the space to reflect on what has gone before, but now I have regained a sense of worth I can continue on my present course in the knowledge that I do not have to do it alone.

Most days I wake up with a smile and look forward to the day as I know that the epithet of me being referred to as being a 'sex offender' is a thing of the past and in no small measure due to the fact that I have a Circle to support me and to whom I continue to be accountable.

In closing, I would like to take the opportunity of thanking all those involved in deciding to offer me a Circle and to still allow me to have one. All of my Circle volunteers know how grateful I am to them for their support, honesty and help and the only sadness is that the service is not available country-wide.

Thank you for reading my story in my own words.

I hope it's widened your knowledge about the positives of having a Circle.

Actually Rick's wish for a country-wide service is becoming a reality – see Stephen Hanvey's piece at the end of this report!

A Circles Co-ordinator's Perspective

In April 2007 I took on the role of Hampshire Co-ordinator; the aim was to develop 'Circles' further within the Hampshire area and to establish a known point of contact for both professionals and volunteers alike.

Having been seconded from Hampshire Probation Area, I was able to utilise my contacts and continue to lay the foundations by promoting 'Circles' amongst key professionals; such as Offender Managers within the Probation Service, hostel managers, Police MAPPA Officers and Offender Supervisors within the Prison Service. By undertaking presentations and attending relevant meetings I was able to clearly outline the work of 'Circles'; dispelling any concerns by clearly explaining the referral process, the recruitment and training of volunteers and the ongoing support all receive. This groundwork soon led to many referrals and to date, we have six current 'Circles' within Hampshire and five Core Members assessed as suitable, waiting to be placed.

Over the year I have worked with 'Circles' it has been imperative to have ongoing communication and liaison with the relevant agencies. Not only those key professionals already mentioned, but 'Circles' was able to briefly work in partnership with 'Creating Futures', a Hampshire Probation partnership whose aim is to assist ex-offenders who fall under MAPPA, in gaining employment, training and appropriate activities. Two of our Core Members were able to utilise this and jointly 'Circles' and 'Creating Futures' supported one Core Member in his attendance at a book club and another Core Member worked closely with volunteers to practise interview skills, developing a CV and talking through appropriate disclosure to a potential employer. Unfortunately, this partnership has now come to an end, however 'Circles' can take forward much of the expertise and advice given and implement this within future Circles.

As my past experience is directly linked to working with offenders and more specifically, those who sexually offend, my new challenge was working with volunteers. Finding appropriate avenues to publicise 'Circles' in order to recruit, is an ongoing challenge but good links have been forged with volunteer bureaux and University careers centres in Portsmouth and already the pool of volunteers within Hampshire is growing.

With this in mind, I have been working towards developing a training programme in Hampshire that mirrors the workshops available within Thames Valley, but utilising Hampshire professionals. We have already held two initial training events for new volunteers and both Advanced training, the Good Lives workshop and a Professionals workshop within Hampshire; other events are scheduled. This is an area that will continue to grow in order to support our Hampshire volunteers.

Having met most of the volunteers within Hampshire and worked closely with many, I continue to be amazed by the motivation, flexibility and good will of all. It has been a new area for me and I hope you have all benefited from the close support a Hampshire Co-ordinator brings.

Finally, I would like to thank all the volunteers, as without you, 'Circles' just doesn't work. It has been a real pleasure.

Adele Toovey, Hampshire Circles Co-ordinator

Testimonials

We have said that good working relationships with our partnership agencies are crucial to the success of Circles operations. Below are some thoughts and comments from our colleagues in the Ministry of Justice, alongside the Police and Probation services.

From the Ministry of Justice

Within the Ministry of Justice, the Public Protection Unit's Sex Offender Team coordinates NOMS's approach to dealing with sex offenders, including working with the voluntary sector, where it provides support and monitoring of sex offenders in the community. Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability is one of the projects supported by the Ministry.

Since 2001 the Public Protection Unit, NPD and now NOMS, has supported pilots of Circles of Support and Accountability, including the Hampshire and Thames Valley project. Over these years we have seen the work of Hampshire and Thames Valley develop, to better meet the needs of those who have offended, to ensure public protection, and to improve the recruitment, selection, and training of volunteers.

The protocols that have been developed by Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles over the years of the pilot have now taken on a national significance with the establishment of Circles UK. Circles UK is a new, infrastructure body that will assist, monitor and set standards for Circles of Support and Accountability across the country. The policies and protocols for volunteers selection, recruitment and training as well as the operation of Circles have been shared with Circles UK in order to assist in setting national standards, and this in itself is an ongoing reflection of the value of work done by Thames Valley and Hampshire.

We believe that the key to success in any community response to reducing sex offending is when agencies work together. We have continuously seen Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles meet the targets we have set them. Very often they have achieved beyond their targets. We have seen additionally the various services they provide in mentoring and counselling.

The creation of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) last year offers the opportunity to work more closely with criminal justice partners to ensure that we are able to deliver the best approach for each offender. The business of tackling offending is not easy, and never will be. To deliver the sentences of the courts, protect the public, and tackle the high level of re-offending in our society we will need a concerted effort from all involved including our voluntary and private sector providers.

The success of Hampshire and Thames Valley is in our view down to the dedication and determination of their way of looking forward and overall running of the project. We wish the whole team a success and look forward to another year of working with them.

Mark Farmer
Head of the Sex Offender Team
Public Protection Unit
Ministry of Justice

From the Hampshire Constabulary

I am the Hampshire Constabulary lead for Public Protection and sit on the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements Strategic Management Board. I have been involved in Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support & Accountability for the past two and a half years. I am pleased to say that I have seen Circles go from strength to strength in Hampshire. Circles has grown since the launch conference in Hampshire two years ago when there were no Circles to the current position of having six active Circles, with other Circles pending and a number of Core Members being mentored.

I am most pleased that we have achieved the appointment of a Hampshire based Circles Coordinator, and in my view it is this appointment which has most influenced the increased take up of Circles in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight area. That is not to say that the rest of the Circles team have not worked extremely hard to promote Circles because they have, but that a local contact has cemented the relationship between HTV Circles and the MAPPa process in our area.

In fact Circles is now an intrinsic part of MAPPa management and there is a Service Level Agreement between MAPPa and Circles which provides a structure around which we can operate. I am seeing increasing evidence that Circles are being seen as part of the MAPPa process; they are referred to in our new MAPPa protocol and will be presenting at the Duty to Cooperate Conference in March 2008.

One of the strengths of Circles is Community involvement. The Community are understandably very concerned about the risk that Child Sex Offenders, in particular, pose. Circles have the advantage in that it allows members of the community, appropriately selected and trained, to engage in the risk-management process.

The Support element of Circles is very powerful and complements statutory agencies methods of reducing re-offending by providing appropriate role models and encouraging appropriate social networks. It also reduces the prospect of re-offending by providing very practical assistance which allows Core Members to access such things as appropriate housing, education and training which they may not achieve independently or may not want from statutory agencies. Another powerful element linked to this is the voluntary nature of Circles – this is not mandated and everyone has to buy into the fact that it is all about preventing re-offending.

Finally, the Accountability element of Circles is crucial and from my perspective the engagement of Circles with the MAPPa process allows very strong messages to be sent to those Core Members who would seek to re-offend or who may lapse into risky behaviours which could lead back into re-offending. In fact to date there have been no serious re-offending by Core Members in the life of HTV Circles; there have, however, been many occasions when Core Members have been breached for behaviour which has sent them back to prison.

I am very glad to be part of HTV Circles and would commend them to anyone wishing to introduce it to their area.

DCI Mark Ashthorpe – Hampshire Police



Probation and Circles of Support

From a treatment provider perspective

Thames Valley Unit (TVU) is part of the programmes team of Thames Valley Probation. Our main aim is to provide treatment by way of our group work programme in order to equip the Offenders with the skills to avoid behaving in a sexually abusive way, thereby lessening the risk of future victims.

We are now into our fourth year of working with HTV Circles with this particularly challenging and complex group of offenders. Reviewing/evaluating our work together is done on a regular basis and the importance of effective communication and clarity on roles and boundaries is always high on our respective agendas.

Having recognised the need for this, we have put various measures into practice i.e. having a liaison officer scheme between TVU & HTV Circles, clear process for referrals, exchanging of information and clarity on the type of service each agency will provide. This has all gone towards establishing better working practices such as some of the following;

Liaison Officer scheme

There is a named liaison officer in each of our respective agencies and this has seen the development of;

- processes and procedures for referrals to HTV Circles thereby ensuring clarity for all.
- updating the training package for the Circles Volunteers. The training package has included having TVU staff assisting in the delivery of some of the sessions to the Circles Volunteers. This is because we both respect and recognise the importance of sharing knowledge and expertise with the Circles volunteers, contributing to their development in an informed and consistent way.
- holding regular meetings between the two liaison officers. Their agenda includes exchanging information on the progress being made in treatment with TVU and the progress being made in the community via feedback from the Circles volunteers, (the Thames Valley Offender Manager has the overall responsibility for the Offender so they are always included into any exchanges of information) and any issues relating to risk/management. The importance of this exchange, other than monitoring an offender's progress, has led to treatment needs being reviewed as the offender begins to make progress, facilitators in the group work setting being able to challenge statements made by the offender on a more informed basis, as well as an overall contribution to the offender's risk management plan including forums such as MAPPA.

Service Provision

As the Probation service is limited by their statutory role, agencies such as HTV Circles are needed, amongst other things, to compliment the group work treatment programme provided for the offender. The Circles Volunteers do this with the offender by

- assisting them in their motivation
- monitoring how they put their learning of managing their behaviours into everyday practice

- assisting offenders to explore problems and develop problem solving techniques for matters that can and do arise on a daily basis.
- having a clear policy between the offender and the Circles volunteers about the need for exchange of information and the importance it plays in managing an offender's risk. It is also made clear that there are no 'secrets' between Circles Volunteers and those that they work with, lessening the risk of being seen as collusive with any inappropriate behaviours

The main group of offenders that Circles of Support work with those who;

- are at high risk of sexual reoffending and have high levels of personal needs
- have committed themselves to attending for treatment thereby evidencing their commitment to change,
- are lacking in social skills (and quite often this goes together with low self esteem),
- are isolated in the community, not having anyone to provide appropriate reliable support to assist in the process of avoiding behaving in a sexually abusive way

The time that the Circles volunteers input in terms of working closely with TVU is during or just after the treatment group work programme finishes. The treatment programme consists of blocks of treatment namely Foundation Block, Victim Empathy, Life Skills and Relapse Prevention. Overall there are 174 hrs of treatment which are split into four 'blocks' allowing enough time in between each one for the offenders to put their learning/theory into practice and build on it as they go along. Normally it is sufficient to do this with the support of the group facilitators and the Offender Manager. However, for some offenders they need additional appropriate support and encouragement to develop the necessary skills in order to avoid behaving in a sexually abusive way. Therefore there are particular times that the input of the Circles Volunteers are most needed;

- during the second 'block' – Victim Empathy – the Circles Volunteers support the treatment programme with offender's who appear 'stuck' in their own victimisation issues. The Circles Volunteers support the work of the treatment by enabling them to see their sexually abusive behaviour as being just that.
- during the Life Skills and Relapse Prevention blocks, the Circles Volunteers will support the treatment by enabling the offender by put his learning/theory into practice whilst in the Community. This may include assisting the offender to develop appropriate ties in the community eg. taking up education.
- similarly, at the end of group work treatment programme; if it is identified that due to his social isolation, the offender is likely to struggle in maintaining his offence free behaviour then Circles volunteers will continue with their service. It is particularly important that whenever the support is provided it is done so in a non collusive, appropriate and enabling way. Furthermore, it is important that the offender doesn't become dependent on the Circles volunteers in order to maintain their none sexually abusive behaviour. The training and the regular input of the Circles Co-ordinator ensures that the Circles volunteers engender this ethos from the outset of their input so that, as and when the Circle is appropriately withdrawn according their processes and procedures, it doesn't have a detrimental effect on what the offender has achieved.
- when risk management plans are being formulated. This ensures clarity as to the role/focus of each agency, thereby lessening the risk of duplication and importantly, any 'mixed' messages' being given to the offender. Circles Co-ordinators attend the MARMM/MAPPP together with a TVU representative and this enables contribution to

the formulation of a clear plan being made to effectively manage the risk of the offender and is done in an informed and collaborative way.

The above are just some of the ways that TVU and Circles of Support work together to lessen the risk of future victims. It requires the dedication and professionalism of both agencies to enable the work to be continued for the benefit of the community that we both serve.

**E.M. Adamczyk (Mrs)
Programme Manager/SPO
TVU
Thames Valley Probation**

Hampshire Probation Perspectives

Chris Mitchell, Director of Interventions for Hampshire Probation service writes:

Circles of Support from Hampshire Probation Area's (HPA) perspective has developed effectively since the appointment of an area wide co-ordinator in April 2007. HPA is represented on the management advisory group through the Senior Probation Officer responsible for managing our accredited sex offender groupwork programme. HPA groupwork tutors are involved in the training programme for Circles volunteers. Liaison and referral arrangements from HPA to Circles have been significantly enhanced by the Co-ordinator developing strong links with probation staff, attending team meetings and the Multi-Agency Public Protection forums. This is reflected in the very positive development between HTV Circles and the three Approved Premises in Hampshire where many of the referrals have derived. The work that Circles are able to undertake before a Circle is formulated has also been an important element in the offender's risk management arrangements. Of particular note is the work that has started to link HTV Circles with another of HPA partner initiatives on education, employment and training. It can be problematic for an offender with the offender profile typical of a Circles referral to find and sustain suitable employment. Circles have worked on two cases which have involved joint work with our Employment Training and Education partners Creating Futures to improve the offenders' potential for employment. The development of Circles in Hampshire has been well managed and we now have a further five offenders waiting to join a Circle. There is little doubt that an offender's risk management can be considerably enhanced through involvement in a Circle of Support which is well illustrated by the following case study:

"I have recently had the pleasure of working with Circles of Support and Accountability whilst supervising a sex offender serving a three year community sentence. The Offender, who was subject to the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and was coming to the end of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP), was classed as a high risk of harm to children.

The offender soon overcame his initial concerns and began to build up a relationship with the Circle. He was aware of the concerns we had with regard to his risk and engaged well with the Circles in order to reduce the risk of him reoffending. It was clear that the offender gained a great deal from his involvement with the Circles including improving his communication skills within a group setting, which in turn helped with his self esteem. Employment training and education were also covered within the meetings with the group helping the Core Member with his choice of college courses and disclosure information.

Due to the confidence the Core Member built up in the group and his understanding and acceptance that he was accountable to the group, the Circle was able to gain information on his relationships and any risks involved. With regard to risk this was clearly an area at the forefront of the Circle's work and the Core Member had access to the other Circle members via their mobile phones and was able to contact them and discuss any problems or issues such as having inappropriate thoughts or concerns about reoffending.

The Circles volunteers always came across as both professional and conscientious, always able to communicate with other agencies and the Core Member. As an available resource for specific/targeted offenders, I believe Circles of Support and Accountability to be an asset to our overall management of offenders serving their sentence in the community."

Tom
Hampshire Probation Officer

Hampshire Approved Premises working with Circles of Support

The role of Approved Premises is to provide enhanced supervision as a contribution to the management of offenders who pose a significant risk of harm to the public. In addition Approved Premises encompass a planned, structured regime of interventions, rehabilitative components and promote safe and timely move-on to suitable accommodation within the community. The aim of Circles of Support and Accountability is to enable the successful reintegration and rehabilitation of a sex offender into the community through the identification of suitable members of the public who will monitor, support and maintain them. Consequently it has been found beneficial if Circles of Support are engaged during the period that an offender is resident at Hampshire Approved Premises in order that an assessment can be carried out to assess a resident's suitability for a Circle before his return to independent living within the community.

A formal Protocol has been agreed between Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability and the Hampshire Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPP) Strategic Management Board which clearly sets out the framework within which these organisations will seek to enhance public protection and clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of the statutory agencies, including Police, Probation, prisons, Case Managers, volunteers and programme staff involved in the management of the Circle's Core Member.

Clear guidelines have also been included in respect of referrals, information exchange, the principles of co-operation and mutual assistance. The Protocol will be monitored and reviewed annually by representatives of the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability and the Hampshire MAPP Strategic Management Board. The appointment of Adele Toovey, Hampshire Circles Coordinator, has also strengthened the link between Circles of Support and Hampshire Approved Premises which is enhanced by her experience of working with sex offenders. Adele attends MAPP panel meetings regularly in respect of residents who have been referred to Circles by their offender managers. In November 2007 an offender manager and I were afforded the opportunity to meet Circles volunteers and contribute to their training to provide an overview of the working with sex offenders from an offender manager and approved premise perspective. This joint exercise has strengthened the partnership and hopefully met the objective of increasing volunteers knowledge from a Probation perspective.

Over the past year a number of residents from Hampshire Approved Premises have been referred to Circles of Support and Accountability, undergoing assessment and being

accepted, either for a Circle or to be mentored by an experienced volunteer, where the latter is considered more appropriate. This has the benefit of ensuring that when offenders return to independent living in the community they are well supported by volunteers whom they have previously met, ensuring they are less isolated and thus helping to reduce the risk of reoffending. I look forward to continuing to work with Circles of Support and Accountability over the coming year and hope very much to participate in future training for Circles volunteers in order to further strengthen the partnership between our two organisations.

Sonia Wensley-Smith
Senior Probation Officer
Manager, Approved Premises



Further Important Aspects of HTV Circles' Work

Our training programme has been developed to equip volunteers with the background knowledge and skills necessary to carry out this challenging work. However, we are also pleased to respond to the wishes and requirements of our volunteers, many of whom use their experience with Circles to further their professional development.

Volunteer Training Developments

The last two years have seen significant development of the volunteer training programme. This is partly due to the staff broadening their skills and knowledge base in order to facilitate a range of new additions to the yearly volunteer training programme, but also in response to advice from the Volunteer Action Group (*who are represented later in the report – ed*).

2007 was a busy time for the team. One of our main tasks was to revise the training manual to reflect the new developments to the initial two-day training event. We also introduced the Advanced Training for experienced volunteers. This reflects one of the recommendations from the Volunteer Action Group. The group represents the views of our volunteers and they were asked to research what the key training needs as expressed by our volunteers were. The co-ordinators also carried out their own research among the volunteers and we then reviewed the joint findings to see if we could facilitate a training programme that not only reflects the volunteers' views, but also fitted in with the aims and objectives of HTV Circles.

The volunteer training programme has been structured to fit with the government's key strategy in reducing offending. Effective risk management and a holistic approach is needed. The seven pathways identified to support offender management are:

- Accommodation
- Skills & Employment
- Health
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Children and Families of Offenders
- Finance, benefit and debt
- Attitudes, thinking & Behaviour

As you can see there is certainly crossover between the seven pathways and the work of Circles.

We do not want to over professionalize our volunteers but because of the type of work we ask them to carry out, it is important that they have a good working knowledge of what we see as key areas. In light of this we have introduced several new training events to supplement the existing programme. All of our volunteers have to attend our initial two day training before they can be considered to become a Circle member. Additionally our advanced training is compulsory.

The initial two day training covers:

- Attitudes and beliefs to sexual offending and related issues
- A presentation on Circles
- Roles and Responsibilities of Circles volunteers
- Personal Boundaries and Self Care
- Sex Offender Treatment
- Relapse Prevention

This gives new volunteers grounding in what we are attempting to achieve. The focus over the two days is to demonstrate how sex offenders need to self manage themselves in the community. Social isolation and emotional loneliness have been identified as risk factors and Relapse Prevention strategies which include a support network are essential if the Core Member is to self regulate his future behaviour. The training uses a mixture of case studies and presentations and we have a half day input from facilitators of the SOGP (sex offender group work) teams from the Thames Valley and Hampshire Probation areas.

The Advanced Training is a one day event for volunteers who have been in a Circle for one year. It was recognised that it would be helpful to not only revisit the initial training but to also cover in more depth the management of manipulation and collusion. The day also covers a review of personal boundaries and self care. One of the main components of the Advanced Training is looking in detail at group dynamics and how this might affect the level of support and accountability that the Core Member receives.

We run a variety of training days and workshops throughout the year which although not compulsory can be informative and increase our volunteer's knowledge and understanding of working with men and women who have committed sexual offences.

The 2008/9 training programme retains the Professional Workshops which are run by our partnership agencies. We have also kept the media training, though this is now facilitated by the Communications Officer for Thames Valley Probation Service. We are also continuing to run the Housing Training.

Our Professional Workshops are again split into two half-day sessions, the first run by an Approved Premises Manager (SPO) and an Offender Manager. The workshop is designed to give our volunteers an insight into the day to day issues involved in the management of high risk sex offenders in the community. There is an opportunity to discuss specific issues regarding their Core Members and the relationship between probation and Circles will be discussed. The facilitators also explain their respective roles and look at Licence conditions, Sex Offender Prevention Orders and Recall of offenders to prison if they breach their orders. Session two is facilitated by the Police Public Protection Team. The session is designed to give an overview of the sex offender register and the role of the police in managing this. The police value Circles for their contribution to public protection and will give a detailed account of the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

Our Housing Training is run by James, one of our experienced volunteers who is also a housing professional. James covers the following areas:

- Legal issues
- Grants and deposits
- Housing providers
- Case Studies
- Contacts

- Benefits
- Keeping the Tenancy

We have recognised that the media are increasingly asking for access to Circles and we have overhauled the media training and have brought in Fiona Tarrant who is the communications manager of Thames Valley Probation Service. Fiona is also an experienced journalist with many years experience. The training is designed to increase awareness of the media's agenda and the nature of the media, facilitate volunteers' ability and confidence in engaging with the media (if and when appropriate) and to provide volunteers with the skills and techniques they can apply if confronted by the media.

In addition to these training events we are pleased to introduce three new training workshops.

The first of these is the Self Regulation and Good Lives Workshop. The aim of the workshop is to give volunteers an understanding of the two models and how they fit in to the aims and objectives of HTV Circles. The training will look at the theory and how it can be applied. The workshop will demonstrate how Good Lives and Self Regulation theories can be combined in a robust treatment procedure and how Circles can assist their Core Members achieve the healthy lifestyle needed to live fulfilled and offence free future lives.

The second addition to the training programme is the Child Protection/Victims Unit combined workshops. These workshops are long overdue in the Circles annual training programme. The day is split in to two. The first is run by the Manager of the Thames Valley Probation Services Victims Unit. The workshop looks at the Victims perspective in detail. We then move on to the Child Protection workshop in the afternoon facilitated by the Manager of the Social Services Child Protection Team in High Wycombe. This workshop's focus is on the role of Social Services Child Protection and how they operate.

Finally, Aim Higher is a national employment initiative and our local organisation for Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire will be delivering a half days training aimed at increasing the aspirations of offenders in terms of education, training and improved employability. The day will equip our volunteers with mentoring skills to assist their Core Members to access higher education/training.

HTV Circles are committed to improving the skills of our volunteers and are constantly revising and updating our training. This is to ensure that we give the Core Member's the best possible support and that our volunteer's make a significant contribution to their communities' safety.

Ron Macrae
Circles Co-ordinator

Circles Counselling

I have been working for Circles of Support and Accountability since 2003, initially as a volunteer member of a Circle for two and a half years and for the remainder of the time as a counsellor. During that period I have seen sixteen clients at different stages of their involvement with Circles and for a variety of short- and long-term work. I also work as a Quaker prison chaplain at HMP Grendon.

I follow an Adlerian counselling model, named after Alfred Adler (1870-1937), one of the early psychoanalysts who, unlike Freud, drew his clients from the working classes of Vienna. Adler served as an army doctor in the First World War, and set up centres for family

counselling, child guidance and teacher education in Austria which were subsequently closed by the Nazis. Adler diverged from Freud's theory of drives and did not see sexual instinct and aggression as the most important shapers of the personality, but instead emphasised the primary human needs of belonging, connection, co-operation, making a contribution and also striving for perfection and completion.

The notion of the 'inferiority complex' has been attributed to Adler because he described the feelings of inferiority and discouragement which confront us when we feel unequal to the tasks of life, that there is no place for us and that we have nothing to contribute. He also identified the avoidant, controlling, compensatory and over-compensatory behaviours that we employ to mitigate the pain of these feelings. By contrast, selfhood in the Adlerian scheme is intrinsically tied to community feeling: mental health and strong, cohesive communities are considered synonymous. Emotional growth is characterised by social interest and a movement away from self-centredness.

A key notion in Adlerian psychology is that all behaviour has a purpose and thus is not deterministically caused but is future-directed. Many of our goals are unconscious or not fully understood, and how we move towards them is dictated largely by our 'private logic' formed early in life. As small children we are keen observers but often poor interpreters of events and experiences, and our private logic is based on how we perceived the world, what threatened our safety and what we believed was possible for us. This selectivity has elements that are unique to each person, and uncovering our personal bias can be a step towards reorientation when life puts our belief system to the test. Private logic tends to become more rigid under threat and existential crisis or breakdown occur when it is no longer sufficient to meet the demands of life and has become lacking in social interest, co sensuality or 'common sense'.

It could be said that Adler was a forerunner of the humanistic movement in psychology and that he anticipated the cognitive, constructivist and systemic approaches. In my own work I believe that the focus on goal-led behaviour and private logic aligns well with the cognitive-behavioural orientation of the sex offenders' treatment programme (SOTP), but also complements it by examining historical antecedents of a person's life to give a greater depth of understanding of how core beliefs have become defined. In addition, the Adlerian emphasis on social embeddedness and holism is highly congruent with the whole ethos of Circles and also with the emerging Good Lives Model in the treatment of sex offenders (Lindsay, Ward, Morgan & Wilson, *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 13(1), March 2007).

Counselling sessions with clients include work with early recollections, dreams, family values, birth order and the family constellation. I particularly invite a client to recall as many key early memories as possible, preferably from before the age of nine. We examine the recollections in detail, looking for fears and threats, hidden strengths and resources, any indications of social feeling as well as the individual's unique style or movement in life. There are no chance memories: what we remember from our early childhood is reflective of what we believe now. It does not matter if they are inaccurate or complete fiction as they will still be in accord with a person's basic conceptual framework. These central convictions can be summarised in a syllogism:

I am ...

The world is ... /Life is ... /People are ...

Therefore in order to survive/feel safe/have a place, I must ...

As I work with a client to elicit this summary of core beliefs I do not pose as the expert, but search collaboratively until we find a wording that simply hits the spot. This is often signalled by a 'recognition reflex' such as a smile, a sigh or a grimace which is quite hard to disguise.

One client was referred after release from a year's imprisonment during which he had completed the SOTP. He was due to start a relapse prevention programme (Better Lives) in the community in a few months' time, but had requested counselling in order to look at troubling childhood issues and his difficulty in forming relationships. At the beginning of counselling he expressed his beliefs about himself and the world in these words:

I am helpless.

The world is very scary.

The world can be a very cruel place.

Life is unhappy.

There's no-one to turn to.

In order to have a place I avoid confrontation at any cost.

In order to survive I go into fantasy land.

After sixteen sessions I invited him to compose a new draft, which he did in these words:

I am a man.

The world is smaller.

Life is OK.

People are nice.

In order to feel safe I need other people.

In order to have a place I need to belong.

He had forgotten his original formulation of four months ago and was amazed at the difference, but could also identify new behaviours which were reflecting and confirming these beliefs. He was also able to envisage a possible future in which he would like to say:

I am happy.

The world is wonderful.

Life is good.

People are good.

In order to feel safe I must love and be loved.

In order to have a place I must be open.

(Quoted with client's consent)

I believe the counselling process in this case helped the client move towards a happier relationship with himself and others and was also likely to enhance his subsequent engagement with treatment professionals and groupwork.

In addition to working in a purely Adlerian mode, I use therapeutic imagery: artwork and guided visualisation, role-play, voicework, communicating with the Inner Child and I am about to train in EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) in order to be of more help to clients whose specific presenting issue is unresolved trauma.

Yvonne

Yvonne is one of a group of HTV Circles counsellors, who use different techniques. The work is particularly valuable for Core Members who have sexual victimisation issues of their own, which can often "block" progress in sex offender treatment. It can be a useful tool in maintaining men waiting for Circles or as a service in its own right.



Volunteer Action Group

The Volunteer Action Group was set up two and a half years ago. Its aims are as follows:

- 1. To represent all HTV volunteers*
- 2. To provide an opportunity for volunteers to have their say*
- 3. To provide confidence and assurance to HTV volunteers*
- 4. To undertake an informing role*
- 5. To contribute ideas to the development and growth of the project*
- 6. To provide support and advice on behalf of volunteers to the Circles staff team*
- 7. To provide representation on the HTV Board of Trustees*
- 8. To contribute to the implementation of new policies, procedures and developments*
- 9. To contribute to the two day volunteers training event*
- 10. To ensure the wellbeing and safety of volunteers is considered by Circles staff at all times*

The group meets quarterly.

The Volunteer Action Group exists to represent Circles volunteers, by raising any issues that they have. The group also works closely and proactively with the Circles team to improve the volunteer experience, and promote changes to volunteer policy and processes where necessary. As an example of this, it was suggested by VAG that follow-up training would be useful for volunteers on a yearly basis, to keep them all abreast of changes and developments in Circles and in the rehabilitation of sex offenders. This was then implemented, and has proved very successful in providing and maintaining the tools used by volunteers in their work with Core Members.

The Volunteer Action Group also seeks to bring volunteers together at social events, to share experiences and understanding. This can be very important, as it is not always easy for volunteers to find acceptance when turning to friends or family members, in order to discuss the thoughts and feelings raised by their work with Circles. Such events are also a good time for us to remember that we are people too, and that we can relate to one another outside the volunteer context. Circles work is an important contribution to a serious issue, and an opportunity to have fun together can be very welcome from time to time.

The Group members often give short presentations at initial training, the Christmas conference, and at other training sessions where necessary, and are keen for volunteers to be able to contact them. To that end, we have recently set up a contact email address for the Group, and are planning a few social events for the coming months. We also hope to have a Volunteers' Forum on the forthcoming Circles website*, to facilitate communication and discussion.

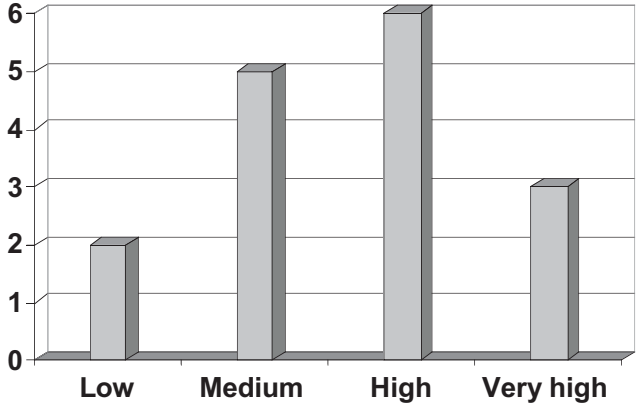
Deborah
Circles volunteer and Volunteer Action Group member

TV Circles Evaluation Update 2008

In Spring 2007 the first ever evaluation of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) in the UK was published in the *British Journal of Community Justice* (Bates et al, 2007). This evaluation focused on the follow-up of sixteen Core Members who had been involved in Thames Valley COSA from its inception in 2002 until the end of 2006. The evaluation took the form of a reconviction study backed up by what is known as a recidivism study i.e. a study of the various behavioural outcomes exhibited by those subject to an intervention, not just court reconvictions. These involve problematic behaviours observed and recorded by various public protection agencies as exhibited by each subject of the research (in this instance the Core Member). In this way we gather more information about the behaviour of sex offenders during or after an intervention has taken place which allows us to understand more about them as well as the intervention and if and how it might be said to be effective. A recidivism study was ideal in the case of TV Circles as this local organisation held a large amount of detailed information about its Core Members regarding their social functioning – more than would be available in the recording systems of other public protection agencies, although on only a limited number of cases.

Risk levels

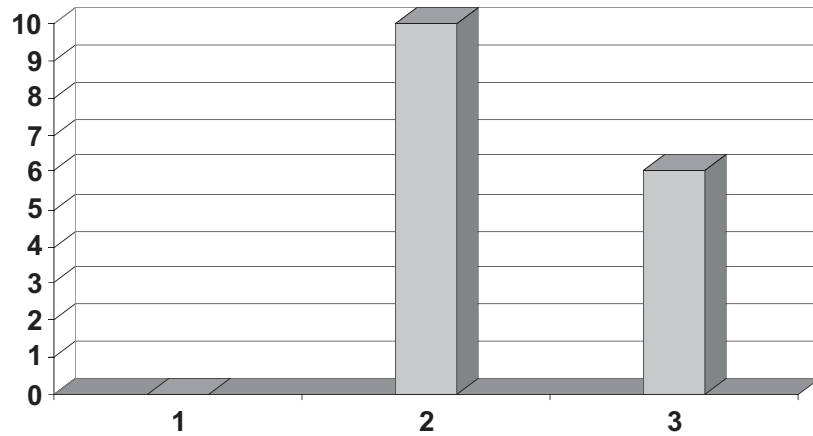
It is important to recognise that the Core Members involved in TV Circles represented a significant level of risk of future reconviction as measured by Risk Matrix 2000 (Hanson and Thornton, 2000). This is illustrated in the graph below:



We see from this graph that nine of the sixteen Core Members were at least HIGH risk on this assessment method. The expected reconviction rate for HIGH risk sex offenders runs at 26% over five years (a rough approximation of the follow-up time of the current study). The VERY HIGH risk rate runs at 50% over a similar period. Five of sixteen Core Members were MEDIUM risk (13% expected reconviction rate over five years) with only two LOW risk (3%).

MAPPA levels

MAPPA levels (definition provided in the box below) can change according to circumstances over an offender’s license period. The following graph illustrates the MAPPA levels of the sixteen Core Members followed up in this study. Again, we note that all cases were managed at level two or three at least upon their first involvement with COSA.

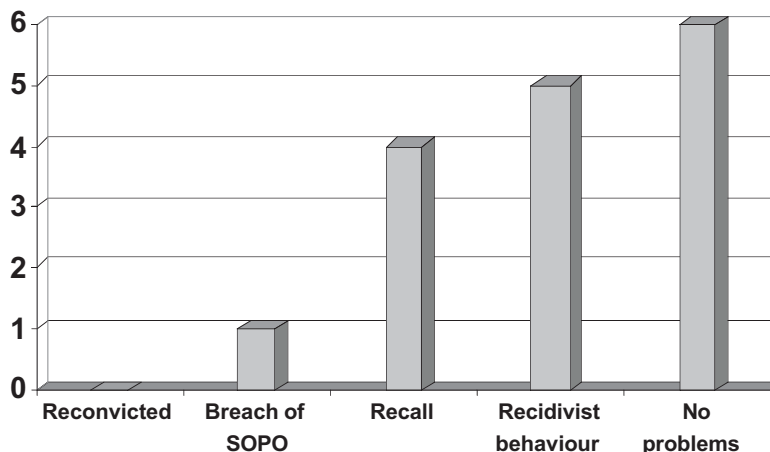


- LEVEL ONE:** Case presents low-medium risk of serious further harm and is managed by single agency.
- LEVEL TWO:** Case presents high risk of serious further harm and requires management by more than one agency
- LEVEL THREE:** Case presents imminent risk of further serious harm which can only be managed by application of additional resources from public protection agencies which would require senior management authorisation.

Bearing in mind the above statistics it is particularly significant that there were NO sexual reconvictions of any Core Members involved with TV Circles over the course of the evaluation period. It should be noted that the longest period 'at risk' (e.g. during or after the intervention) for any Core Member was five years (2002-6 inclusive) and a number of Core Members were at risk for less time than this (in order to make comparisons with the RM2000 reconviction rates) but none-the-less this is a very positive outcome of the reconviction element of the evaluation.

A more detailed account of the functioning of TV Circles is made available through the Recidivism element of the evaluation. Although there were no further convictions for a sexual offence this was not to say that lives of core-members after release from prison ran without problems. A number of core-members encountered significant difficulties in their post-release behaviour which may well have led to their committing further sexual offences had it not been for the activity of COSA and other public protection agencies (probation, police, housing etc.) which, in fact, resulted in no further victims being created.

The following graph illustrates the range of post-release behaviours exhibited by Core



Members. In one case this resulted in a court conviction for breach of a Sexual Offence Prevention Order (SOPO), in four cases return to prison for breach of parole license and in five other cases some other kind of problematic 'recidivist' behaviour.

From this graph we note that no less than ten of the sixteen cases studied exhibited recidivist behaviours which may have led to further sexual offending (as predicted by Risk Matrix 2000) and in five of these cases there were formal consequences (e.g. breach of SOPO, recall to prison). However, this fact illustrates the 'Accountability' aspect of COSA which is particularly important in considering it as a public protection agency. TV Circles had not prevented all problems from occurring ever again (a highly unlikely and over-optimistic scenario) but was able to contribute to the effective risk management of behaviours which were expected to re-occur but in such a way as to prevent further sexual victimization, which is the key objective of the work.

Some examples of recidivist behaviours and the ways in which COSA contributed to their detection and/or management are given below:

Core-member (CM) X

Problem behaviour: Secretly purchased a car, which had been part of his modus operandi for his previous sexual offence of abduction. Used car to travel to visit a previous associate involved with him in grooming of children. Two girls aged 6 and 14 were found in his flat by housing warden.

Role of circle in detection/management of recidivism:

1. Circles volunteers gained knowledge of car and reported this to police Public Protection Officer.
2. Circles staff and volunteers visited CM when children were present in his flat; housing warden had been trained by and was included in circle.
3. Circles volunteers acted as appropriate adults during investigation by police into breach of SOPO, for which he was eventually convicted.

Core Member Y

Problem behaviour: CM found to be grooming girls under 16 in Internet Chat Rooms.

Role of circle in detection/management of recidivism:

CM informed volunteer that he had met with female child and drunk alcohol with her. Volunteer informed the police and probation of this matter but supported CM through this process, which led to recall to prison.

Core Member Z

Problem behaviour: CM developed a relationship and moved in with a single mother with three children aged under 16. CM breached contact with circle and statutory agencies on a number of occasions but was not recalled (MAPPA decision).

Role of circle in detection/management of recidivism:

1. Volunteers aware of relationship with single mother.
2. When CM began to miss meetings this information was passed onto PPO and social services.

3. Outcome: Social services re-opened case and conducted assessment of woman.
4. CM suspended from circle for six months – suspension lifted after three.
5. Ongoing contact for CM with experienced volunteer during suspension period.

The above is only a summary of three cases from the study where recidivist behaviours were identified and managed. Readers are referred to the full study (see reference below) for a more detailed account of each case and all of the outcomes for each Core Member. It should also be noted that COSA activity was not central to the risk management of every case where recidivism occurred and in one case at least a lack of communication between the Circles and public protection agencies was clear – although this was identified and led to a change in policy and procedures governing such communications in the future.

Future developments in research and evaluation

Other plans for research and evaluation of COSA are underway. These will also be applied to new COSA initiatives which are now coming into being under the overall direction of the newly-established Circles UK agency. Two such future projects are:

1. Dynamic risk factors checklist

Work has begun to design a checklist which focuses specifically on dynamic risk factors (i.e. changeable factors identified in an offender's current attitudes and behaviours) identified from the relevant literature (see Thornton, 2002) to be periodically completed based upon a Core Member's functioning within a Circle. This would provide vital information consistent over time and across different Core Members and Circles to provide detailed, meaningful, research-based and ongoing monitoring. This information should be processed at regular intervals for the purposes of ongoing qualitative evaluation of the management of risk and the results also made available to the volunteers if not the Core Member as a way of identifying progress or the lack of it.

2. Random-allocation control group

Over the longer term we will need to identify if reconviction rates for Core Members differ from a matched sample of sex offenders who have not been involved in a circle. One way to achieve such a group is simply to allocate half of all sex offenders found suitable for a circle into the control group where they receive no COSA input but are similarly followed up for their reconviction/recidivism. Alternately (and perhaps more ethically) we might utilise a so-called 'waiting list' control group which thereby controls for motivation (a key aspect of COSA involvement) by following up, as a comparison to a group of Core Members, a group of sex offenders who had volunteered for a circle and been found suitable for one but not received one because none was available. One problem with this methodology is that over time these individuals might eventually be placed into a circle and therefore the vital control group would diminish or even disappear.

The existing evaluation of TV Circles is encouraging but remains a limited piece of research following on outcomes for quite a small number of Core Members over a relatively short period of time. With the expansion of the COSA initiative in other parts of the UK it will be important to replicate and expand on this study using methods described above among others in order to fully demonstrate the effectiveness of this most powerful method of promoting social inclusion, community responsibility and public protection in years to come.

References:

Bates, A., Wilson, C. and Saunders, R. (2007) Doing Something About It: A Follow-up Study of Sex Offenders participating in Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability, *British Journal of Community Justice*, Vol. 5, No. 1 pp 19-42

Hanson, R. K., & Thornton, D. (2000). Improving actuarial risk assessments for sex offenders: A comparison of three actuarial risk scales. *Law and Human Behaviour*, 24, 119-136.

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Andrew Bates
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Introducing Circles UK... and the future!

In a report which rightly spends time looking back, and reflecting on some extraordinary achievements for Hampshire and Thames Valley, let's indulge our imaginations and run forward an equivalent period to the summer of 2014.

At last positive news is appearing on a marked slowing-down in the shrinkage of the polar ice-caps and environmentalists are hopeful for the new coral out-crops off the Australian coast. The recent meeting of the G11 summit pledged itself to build on the progress of the last three years, and to achieve the final eradication of poverty across Africa, with fully accessible health care for those still living with the impact of the AIDS virus, which is no longer claiming new cases on the continent. The England World Cup squad celebrate their victory in a memorable final over Germany, astonishingly repeating their success in the previous tournament in 2010, but this time needing no penalty shoot-out. And in a prison in the UK staff are talking with a sex-offender shortly to be released, and reminding him that wherever he ends up living, it will certainly be possible to provide a Circle of Support and Accountability to help him avoid re-offending. Too fanciful.? Well the bit about the penalty shoot-out may be, but all else is achievable given those same qualities of passion and competence which have resulted in the progress marked in the rest of this report. It's this same energy and drive for a more effective and just way of managing sex offenders in our communities which has resulted in the establishment of the umbrella charity Circles UK, which I'm privileged to introduce here.

Over a remarkably short period of time, a modest number of people with perception and vision have been watching the exciting work of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles, and the pilot project managed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, and wondering how best the model can be safely replicated elsewhere. Happily, some of those people are in the Ministry of Justice and with their financial and moral support, together with help from Futurebuilders it's been possible to set up Circles UK to link the existing and new Circles projects. Awareness of the realism of the risks in working with sex offenders in the community has been one of the trade-marks and saving-graces of the Circles initiative. This is no naïve programme which simplistically affords the 'benefit of the doubt' to a penitent offender, and allows their dangerous behaviour to go unchecked. That would be as unfair to that particular individual, as it is irresponsible in relation to the wider community. Risks are real and one way of reducing them is to bring together the lessons learnt from every-day practice, share them with others planning to set up their own Circles, and agree some common standards and procedures so that there is a reliable quality and consistency in the service. The concept of a post-code lottery came from a realisation that people in one part of the country could not access the same health care in their treatment for cancer as others elsewhere. If the Probation, Prison and the Police services are to have any confidence in making referrals to Circles of Support and Accountability, they must know their local project is based on tried, tested and proven practice, with high standards specified and guaranteed. The local community and indeed survivors of sexual abuse themselves must be able to expect no less.

To this end Circles UK will be acting as a hub for the Circles projects, with a small team serving as a resource to help those on the front line delivering Circles. We define our key purposes as:

- *Development* of Circles by providing coordination of information, advice, training and support.
- *Quality assurance* through the development and implementation of training and assessment procedures for local service delivery.
- *Learning, evaluation and research* in partnership with local Circles and academic facilities constantly to raise effectiveness.
- *Public awareness and media relations work* in order to promote consistent and accurate information about Circles through the media.
- *Influence* by maintaining the profile of Circles activity with strategic partners at national and regional levels
- *Sustainability* for all Circles projects, and indeed expansion through a coordinated approach to funding varied opportunities.

What will that look like on the ground? Well for instance one of the first contributions by Circles UK will be a fundraising tool-kit to help Circles projects in their own local income generation. Circles UK will do its best to raise national awareness of the potential and real benefits already seen in such projects as Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles and this will in itself assist the work on the ground. But fund-raising is always going to have a predominantly local basis, and knowing where to begin and how to go about it, is not necessarily the background of many involved in running Circles. Fielding national media interest is another area in which hopefully Circles UK can support the local projects, in part by acting as a 'buffer' at times of unhelpful and intrusive attention.

The Code of Practice now in preparation specifying the common standards and requirements for Circles delivery, will form the bench-mark and rule by which we measure and manage ourselves. Equally importantly, and badged with the trade-marked Circles UK logo, it will give confidence to those wondering about the appropriateness and safety of using or funding the local Circles service.

The progress and impact of the work of Becky and her team is truly remarkable, and has already been publicly acknowledged via prestigious awards. Circles UK would not have been possible without this foundation. The vision now is widened to see Circles of Support and Accountability as an automatic consideration in the management of sex-offenders in the community. Roll on 2014!

Stephen Hanvey
Chief Executive Officer
Circles UK



HTV Circles Team

Left to right: Adele Toovey, Hampshire Circles Coordinator; Ron Macrae, Circles Coordinator; Becky Saunders, Chief Executive; Dominic Williams, Circles Coordinator; Anne Holmes, Office and Finance Manager (Company Secretary)



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Core Member Quotes

'It keeps me in check. It keeps me straight; it keeps me going down one road not breaking off down two or three. I never had this before. I want it to work'

'It is important because if I have got problems I know that I can pick the phone up or meet volunteers and explain my problem. They can give me some advice. Where I don't like talking to many people they already know me and I can say I have a problem is there any chance you can try and help me sort this out. I know that they are going to be there, someone on the end of the line. '

'When I have needed them they have always been there. The group meetings are where you have formal chats and if there are things worrying me, I can bring them to the group. As well as challenging me directly they support me to make the right decisions, which is what I want them to do.'

'When I was released from prison the first time my future looked bleak and scary. I was alone, all my friends and family has turned their back on me. I was a sex offender, that's who I was, that's what I did. Eighteen months later I was in Prison again. It was then that I first heard of Circles of Support. I got Probation to sort me and I got a circle on release. It has made all the difference. I have been out of Prison for three years. I could not have done it without my circle. They know my history and what I have to do to avoid re-offending. Last year I was having a bad time and was really low and they bought the police into my circle and it got sorted. If they hadn't done that I might have re-offended.'

'I've learnt that it's not about letting my Circle down if I re-offend it's about letting myself down. I don't want to re-offend and cause any more harm and the circle although supportive ensure that I'm responsible for my behaviour. They hold me accountable but in a manner that is respectful. I have a safe place to go and discuss anything no matter how hard it might be. I know that these people know everything about me and won't judge me but won't let me slip back to my old ways.'

'I was really suspicious when I first heard about Circles. I couldn't understand why members of the public wanted to meet me other than to get at me. From the first meeting I was told why each person was there and understood, that they like me, wanted no more victims.'

Volunteer Quotes

'For John it seems to me the most significant thing he has gained from our relationship has been the fact it is based upon honesty. He doesn't have to hide what he had done or lie about it. The friendship is based upon this openness. The use of volunteers within Circles is I think crucial. As volunteers we are not paid and are not involved because we have to be, but because we choose to be. This changes the context of the relationships that are developed, enabling them to become real friendships rather than just professional relationships.'

'What Circles has helped to remind me is that we are all human beings made up of many facets of interests, skills and personalities. John isn't a sex offender; he is someone who as one part of his life has committed sex offences. There is a substantial difference in these views. The former denies someone's humanity, the later affirms it.'

'My gut feeling is that working in this Circle has substantially reduced the likelihood of our core member re-offending. To me, as a survivor, that is the greatest reward I can imagine – that other little girls are spared.'

'To me, this Circle seems like a small miracle – a simple but effective tool that has enabled a sex-offender to be met precisely where he needs it. It has confirmed my belief in citizenship and collective responsibility. No-one knows what challenges lie ahead, but so far only good has come out of this.'

'I now have a much deeper understanding of how the twin pillars of support and accountability are in fact inseparable. My conviction of the vital part played by Circles in the reduction of sex offending remains rock solid.'

'Circles have a very real and essential function to provide. Being a member of a Circle has given me the opportunity to provide practical and emotional support – friendship and encouragement plus a commitment to listening as well as finding the core member a job and accommodation.'