

# **Circles South East**

## **Ten Years One Hundred Circles**

### **Community Safety - What Can Be Done**

Ten Year Report  
April 2002 - March 2012





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# Dedication

## Editor's Note and Dedication

Firstly thank you to all the people and the organisations that have supported us over the past ten years. These include the Quakers, Police and Probation services, funders and external trainers, media that have represented us fairly, meeting houses, churches and community centres who have accommodated us and to the Ministry of Justice.

Secondly thanks you to all the people and organisations that have contributed to this report and evaluation. In particular the contributions of Professor McNeill and Dr Wilson, whose overall contributions have added depth and extra dimension not only to the report, but to the Circles Project as a whole.

Finally, this report is dedicated to the volunteers without whom none of this would happen. It is dedicated to the Circle volunteers, the Mentoring volunteers, the Counsellors, Trustees and Core Members who are contributing so much to public safety, restorative justice and the humane and effective approach. Thank you.

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## Part 1 • Preface

### Reciprocity and Desistance: Why Circles Work

Five years ago, I published a book on Reducing Reoffending (co-authored with Bill Whyte). The book covered a lot of familiar ground in relation to what we think we know by now about ‘what works?’ to support that outcome, but it also tried to look beyond that question by engaging more fully with the question of why and how people desist from crime. Exploring that evidence base produced a ‘Towards effective practice’ section of three chapters. The first the nature and processes of ‘offender management’ or (as we preferred to put it) change management; the second looked at how we could support the development of human capital (meaning the skills, knowledge and capacities) of people moving away from crime. There was then (and still is) plenty of material to draw on in writing those two chapters.

The third chapter in that section (and the final chapter in the book) posed more of a challenge. Our reading of the evidence about desistance – not least from the work of leading researchers like Jon Laub and Robert Sampson in the US and Steve Farrall in the UK – made obvious the need to look beyond the role of interventions in supporting personal change and to consider how social reintegration might be accomplished. Developing positive (or legitimate) social capital – meaning essentially the networks of relationships that generate and support opportunities -- is central to the desistance process. Yet back in 2007, very little had been written about how professionals and others in and around the criminal justice system might undertake that task.

Unsurprisingly, the chapter starts out with theory – looking at the different ways in which Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam had developed and deployed the concept of social capital. It was easy enough to go on and provide evidence about how a lack of social capital seems to be apparent amongst persistent offenders and, more generally, in high crime communities. People in these circumstances might have tight ties to kith and kin (‘bonding social capital’ in the jargon), but they lack the kind of social capital that ‘bridges’ or ‘links’ them into new opportunities for living differently.

Despite that kind of bridge building – not least with local organisations, communities and employers – being a key part of probation’s history, by the turn of the century it seemed to have gone out of fashion; working on the ‘offender’ not with and around the person seemed to be the preferred approach by then. In the chapter, we followed Farrall in suggesting a re-engagement in working with families; both families of origin and families of formation, pointing to the importance of ‘generativity’ (making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of others) in the desistance process. We also argued for revival of community engagement and for proactive work with employers. Regrettably, we didn’t mention Circles of Support and Accountability in that chapter; perhaps I hadn’t come across the developing literature around COSA by 2006, when I was writing Reducing Reoffending. When I did, it wasn’t too difficult to join the dots (it is no accident that a collection I edited on ‘Offender Supervision’ in 2010 does provide coverage of COSA).

COSA impress and inspire me so much because they focus their not on the ‘low-hanging fruit’ of those that might be most easily reintegrated but on those for whom

the process is at its most challenging; those who are amongst the most vilified and isolated people in our society. Social capital is essentially about trust and reciprocity – about building and honouring relationships. The violations of trust and relationships, and the corruptions and failures of reciprocity involved in serious sexual offending, and in societal reactions to sexual offending, therefore make the development of social capital for this group of people especially challenging.

And yet, the evidence is that COSA can and do succeed in supporting reintegration and in keeping people safe. Moreover, they do it not through the imposition of incapacitation and control – not through a reliance on containing, constraining or excluding a threat, but through human processes of accountability, support and monitoring that enable, encourage and engender change. Basically, good people helping other people live better lives.

As an academic criminologist, I have to recognise both the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence base for COSA as a means of reducing reconviction. As with any intervention seeking that goal with this population, they face profound methodological challenges in seeking to ‘prove’ their effectiveness – among them problems of low base rates, selection effects, statistical significance, whether and how to run RCTs, and even more fundamental problems of how exactly to define success and failure.

But evidence is steadily accumulating, and perhaps we can and should begin to think about it in a different way. Desistance theory helps us to understand why COSA should work, and why they may work to support change. We know that their approach is based on helping to build relatedness and belonging and to create the relational contexts of inter-personal accountability that help all of us to live better and more rewarding lives. In this sense, they are and should be as much about doing ‘the good’ as they are about avoiding ‘the bad’. Perhaps that should be the focus of our evaluation of COSA, and of their further development. Better lives for better citizens, bounded and enriched by mutual accountabilities. Reciprocity has shaped human evolution – it still shapes human and social development. That’s how and why Circles work not just to avoid further damage, but to build something better.

**Fergus McNeill**

**Professor of Criminology & Social Work**

**University of Glasgow**



## **Chair's Forward**

To paraphrase Lord Ian Blair speaking at the Circles UK National Conference in 2011, what an amazing idea to enable volunteers to safely reintegrate convicted sex offenders into society. Could such a concept possibly work? Well, yes it can and it does and this report is witness to that fact.

It has been my privilege to be a member of the Board of HTV Circles (as it was originally called) for a number of years and to be its Chair for the past 18 months. As such I am extremely pleased to write this Forward to the 10 year report.

For the past four years we have been an Independent Charity and it has been the Board's responsibility to oversee the organization. The Board is there to ensure that the organization complies with all the relevant laws and regulations and applies its resources exclusively in pursuance of its objectives. In addition it has a key responsibility to set the overall strategic direction and ensure the organization remains financially stable.

We achieve these tasks by endeavouring to have a Board with a wide range of skills, which include financial experience in both the private and public sector; business experience; experience from the charity sector; experience of criminal justice organizations; experience of working with people who have been abused and experience of working with disabled offenders. We are also extremely fortunate to have Board members who have experience of being volunteers within a Circle of Support.

As a Board we are conscious of the need to balance the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, our commissioners, our funders, our staff, the core members and the volunteers. As a significant Public Protection Charity we must always recognize that the safety of the public is paramount in our thinking.

The last 10 years has been a challenging journey, we have grown geographically, in the services we offer and in the staff we employ. None of this would have been possible without the support of our partners, the time and dedication of Board members, a superb staff team and the skill, enthusiasm and leadership of our splendid Chief Executive.

I would like to extend my thanks to all who have made this 10 year journey such a success and to all who have contributed to this report.

We are extremely proud that our organization has led to a significant reduction in recidivism and that we have met our objective of reducing sexual harm. With the support of our partners we look forward to continuing to develop and provide high quality successful services.

**John Williams**

**Chair Board of Trustees**



## Chief Executive's Overview

10 Years, 100 Circles, 32 Mentoring Cases, 320 Volunteers through training, 5 awards received and an increase from 2 to 9 staff members. A lot has been achieved over the ten years. Most importantly we have supported and held accountable 132 core members with the work of our volunteers contributing to a significant reduction in recidivism ensuring local communities are safer. As a Public Protection Charity we have been and continue to be successful with our objective of reducing sexual harm. As a Community Project we work with and for the community successfully engaging the public in a constructive solution to the long term management and monitoring of high risk sexual offenders living in the community.

At the heart of our project are the volunteers. We continue to work hard to meet their needs through providing support, training, development opportunities and ensuring their wellbeing at all times. Out of the 320 Volunteers trained we currently have over 172 active in the community. Over the last ten years only 6 volunteers have had to be de-selected illustrating that we have an effective selection and management process in place. However this has only been achieved through the lessons we have learnt and the risks we have taken in the process of establishing the model.

Reflecting back on the first volunteer training events that we delivered it is astonishing that we actually managed to recruit and allocate any volunteers into Circles. We were unable to answer any questions that volunteers had, we had no structures or systems in place, no policies or standards to comply with. What we had however was a group of individuals all committed to Circles being a success, all with a belief that through giving their time they could make a difference. Those volunteers at the commencement of the pilot were prepared to work with us, to share ideas, to have patience, to discuss their needs, their observations, helping us produce a model that we have continued to review and revise over the last ten years.

Following a successful pilot we launched as an Independent Charity in April 2008. This marked the end of our partnership with the Quakers who had managed us since we commenced in 2002. In 2010 government core funding ended and we became reliant on funding from Police and Probation and Charitable Trusts and Foundations. Our strategy has been to secure core infrastructure costs and development funding from the trusts and foundations whilst ensuring that our statutory partners are paying for the running and maintenance costs of services for core members. This has not been an easy task and there have been times over the last 4 years that we have come very close to not being able to continue operating any more. However the commitment and support we have received from our funders has helped sustain the project and we remain grateful for the belief and investment they have made in our work.

We are now positioned to deliver services across the South East Region. We have an established service running in Hampshire and Thames Valley and since 2011 have been developing a Circles Project for Kent Probation. Due to our expansion it no longer felt appropriate to be delivering Circles under Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles. We now deliver our Core Services (services accountable to the National Code of Practice) under the Circles South East logo and in the future will be moving to formally change the name of the charity in order to recognise the developments that have taken place and to avoid any confusion over our identity. It is not possible however to deliver all the services we provide under Circles South East and therefore we launched the HTVC brand where we are able to deliver additional and developing services.



We are a charity that has worked hard to achieve its full potential. We are a creative team with a clear vision and we have not been afraid to pursue new ideas and directions. Having successfully established Circles we began to consider how to appropriately expand the services we provide.

We wish to remain at the forefront of developing new approaches and new applications of the principles that the charity works upon. The charity will shortly be providing 8 different services:

### Core Services

Following assessment a core member will be allocated to one of the three services. Having a range of services provides us with the flexibility to tailor the support package in order to effectively meet the needs of the core member and manage their risk.

- Circles of Support & Accountability
- Adult Mentoring Service
- Counselling Service

We have established a free counselling service across Hampshire and Thames Valley and hope to replicate this service as we develop in Kent. Counselling is available to:

- Core Members
- Non-Abusing Partners
- Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Providing a free counselling service to survivors of sexual abuse has been something that we have tried to achieve for a number of years. Finally we have established the appropriate links and have been able to secure the time of professionals that are able to undertake this work. Over the past months we have begun to increase the number of referrals we are able to accept and we hope to continue to widen this service increasing availability.

### Additional Services

- Non Abusing Partner Intervention and Support Service
- Training & Consultancy Service
- Assessment Service

The expertise we have within the team and consultants working for the charity mean we are well positioned to provide expert training and consultancy. We have the flexibility to tailor training specifically to the need of the agency and are happy to provide consultancy to our statutory partners as part of our on-going arrangements.

The Non-Abusing Partner Support Service is a two year pilot project that is being evaluated. We recognised the need for intervention to be available for partners of the core members we were working with as well as women vulnerable to targeting by sexual offenders. We addressed this through commissioning the design of the 'Breaking the Cycle' group work programme. However, it was still clear that this was not fully meeting the needs of those we wished to support and we recognised that volunteers

could equally provide support and assistance to women who were struggling to deal with their situation following the disclosure that their partner had committed a sexual offence. Receiving over 60 inquiries from potential volunteers wanting to be trained to provide this support reassured us that we would be able to develop this resource and we currently have 8 Volunteer Mentors trained and ready to allocate to partners requiring additional support.

## **Developing Service**

- Adapted Circles
- Young Person Service

In June we will deliver the first Volunteer Training for the Young Persons Service. Over the last two years we have been working towards the development of a service for young people exploring what would be the most appropriate service to provide for young people aged 10-17. We produced a briefing paper outlining our thoughts on how this model may be developed and resourced working closely with agencies who work with young people who have committed sexually abusive behaviour.

We have also been working on a new Adapted Model exploring Circles and Mentoring for individuals who have committed sexually abusive behaviours and have been diagnosed with Intellectual Disabilities and/Autism. Although in the past we have provided services for this specific group it has been important for us to explore whether we can improve on the service we provide and whether we are fully meeting the complex needs of this specific group of individuals. We have engaged in consultation with experts in this field and we are now working to secure resources to launch a pilot project from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

## **Volunteer Training and Development**

We have just completed the new Volunteer Resource Pack which will be available online to our volunteers through the charities website. The pack is designed to supply volunteers with a tool kit so that they can access exercises and guidance to assist them in their work with the core member focusing in specific areas such as relationships, disclosure, self-esteem, employment and education. There is also an information section within the pack which provides agencies contact details that may be of assistance.

We continue to deliver an annual training programme for volunteers ensuring they remain up to date with new developments in theory and practice and are equipped with the skills and knowledge they require to effectively engage with the core members. Additionally to this our volunteers are required to annually attend an Advanced Training Day. This is to ensure that they do not become complacent in their volunteer work or begin to let their boundaries slip allowing them to be manipulated or collude with the core member. We are now in the process of launching an online advanced training programme to make the process more convenient for volunteers whilst ensuring we are adhering to our responsibilities that they are safe to remain working core members in the community.

## **Dissemination of Good Practice**

Our ten years of operations has provided us with a wealth of experience and knowledge and it is essential that we continue to share this with Circles UK and other Circle Projects. We continue to make available our ideas and models to the national

organisation and are clear that we are happy to cooperate wherever possible in supporting development nationally. We will be making the Volunteer Resource Pack available to other projects so volunteers can have access to the materials and we are working in partnership with Circles UK over the development of the Adapted Circle Pilot. Additionally we will be providing training and resources to any Circle Project wishing to deliver the Adult Mentoring Service as part of their core service.

### How do we mark the success of the project?

We have sustained a low reconviction rate with only three core members who have received a Circle being convicted for a new non-contact sexual offence post Circles. There have been no new contact sexual offences over the last ten years.

We are an award winning project having had our work recognised through receiving:

- The Queens Award for Voluntary Contribution 2010
- Special Merit Award, Howard League Community Programme Award 2006
- Winner for Outstanding Contribution to Engaging Communities, The Justice Award 2006
- Thames Valley Criminal Justice Award 2006
- Prize-winner The Lord Longford Award 2004

Most importantly for us was The Queens Award as this recognised the commitment and valuable work undertaken by our volunteers.



*(Longstanding volunteers Jo and James receive the Queen's Award for voluntary service on behalf of Circles volunteers. The Award was presented by HRH Duke of Gloucester)*

In 2010 the project was inspected by Circles UK as part of the Membership Renewal Process and we passed with a 100% pass rate illustrating that we had met all 43 national standards.

Circles South East has produced and published two evaluation studies in addition to the production of the first UK Ten Year Evaluation Study. The studies provide evidence of good practice and illustrate the success of the project and effectiveness of Circles. The 2010 Study, “Ever Increasing Circles” (published in the Journal of Sexual Aggression) evaluated 60 Circles from 2002-2009. It detailed the following results which illustrate the achievements of the Circles we have managed:

‘70% increase in offender emotional well-being, 61% increased pro-social attitudes and behaviours, 50% increased engagement with age appropriate activities, 50% offenders improved links with families and increased support networks, 50% offenders supported to access education and employment, 28 % received advice on financial problems, 28% assistance with housing difficulties.’

We continue to challenge ourselves as a team and we continue to move forward with our new ideas. We hope that we will be able to continue to sustain the support we have been so lucky to secure over the last ten years. We have a strong belief that as a charity we cannot remain static in our practice. We need to review our work regularly ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of the community, the core members and our partnership agencies. Most importantly we need to remain focused on our mission to reduce reoffending, to protect local communities and ensure that we remember the victim’s voice throughout the work we undertake.

**Rebekah Saunders**

**Chief Executive**



## Part 2 • Those Without Whom...

*Without the support of all our funders we would not be here.*

### A Funder's View

The Henry Smith Charity has funded Circles South East since 2009. We are a largely generalist funder, covering most areas of health and welfare, with a special (but not specialist) interest in the criminal justice sector. The work of Circles South East made a strong impression in a number of ways. It reflected a model with some track record of impact and effectiveness; it was concerned with an unpopular but very needy group of beneficiaries; the charity had established itself as a beacon in its field, constantly extending the model and its reach; and we were very impressed by the leadership and excellence of the people involved. The Trustees also particularly liked the way in which the model used volunteers as a central rather than peripheral element.

All these impressions have been borne out during the term of our grants. The model has been varied through the introduction of mentors; and extended to new groups of beneficiary such as the learning disabled. It continues to be a beacon, with a restless drive to deepen its impact and broaden its reach. The results so far have been extraordinarily good - better than we could have hoped. And behind the simple statistics of participation and a desistance from re-offending are the stories of lives changed, lives protected, lives enhanced - for ex-offenders, their families; and the children and young people who might otherwise have been victims, with all the trauma that would have involved over many many years.

Both the work and the model also reflect a profound insight which has too often been forgotten in our modern approaches which revolve so often around correcting the weaknesses and deficits of the individual (a clinical approach). That insight is that people are fundamentally social creatures, and that we live within and through our friendships and relationships with those around us. We account not just to ourselves but to the "others" within our lives. Where those relationships have been broken, or simply do not exist, people are the more vulnerable to darker temptations. The "Circle" creates a ring of relationships which enables both support and accountability; a means of enacting positive relationships, with people who are not professionals (albeit professionally overseen) but there of their own free will and in their own free time. It engenders trust, and trust helps engender honesty. It recreates community where there is none. It helps core members learn and practise a different way of being social, and thus a different way of being themselves.

The "Circles" model is already being extended elsewhere. We are currently funding work with non-sex offenders who need help to cope socially when they are released. We also fund therapeutic communities which reflect a similar philosophy. It is a philosophy which is likely to be increasingly relevant as public and professional provision recedes. It is a light which can lighten many darknesses.

**Richard Hopgood**

**3 May 2012**



## Core Member's View

*As in previous reports we feel it is important that the voice of the Core Member is heard. It takes some courage to face members of the public who know all about the crimes they have committed, and to say "help me never to do this again. Here firstly we have P, who was in a Circle, and secondly S, who participated in our Mentoring Programme. Notable in the testimony of S was his antipathy towards his Public Protection Officer. We often act as "intermediaries" in cases like this, and the issues regarding S's relationship with his PPO - are now satisfactorily resolved.*

## Letter to the Circles Team

Dear All

For someone like me to admit to being a bit lost for words must be quite an unusual "pill" for you to swallow. However, the truth is although I can think of many nouns, there are just not enough adjectives and even verbs in our language to describe the correct way to thank you for what you have done in my case. French or Italian may be a better way to tackle it, but they are both pretty non-starters – I don't speak either very well.

May I be serious and tell you that when Carrie accepted me into Circles I was quite excited as I was not aware of just what would happen. However, much as I liked you all, after our first meeting my thoughts were "Oh God! Not another group of people who want to delve into my past". It's not something to be proud of and I thought I had put down the "Book of Revelations" ages ago! However, after the first couple of meetings my thoughts changed rapidly as it was obvious that if you were to help me out of the "rut" into which I was gradually and comfortably sinking, you would require all past details.

Unfortunately although I had no financial problems, I am retired and because of the usual license restrictions on travel and association with certain people, I was becoming lethargic and not just a little lonely.

To cut a long story short, you all rallied round and became true friends who proved that they were not just "doing a job" but who really cared. As you know, I have now found some voluntary occupations, one of which is similar to my previous full time work which I missed greatly. This was all thanks to you, my friends, as I would never have been able to conjure up the impetus or the courage myself.

Now I am under no supervision, am no longer on Probation and under license conditions may I thank you all for your love, care and patience and you, Carrie, for showing the faith to take me on in the first place. As far as the old and vital "chestnut" of re-offending is concerned, I will constantly strive to never betray your trust. On that you have my word.

Bless you and love to you all (in the nicest possible way). For obvious reasons I will just sign this P so feel free to show it to any future clients (if you so wish)

- P



### **E-mail to the Circles Team**

For over 25 years the person living my life has been a lie and the toll of such a life is heavy and one I never asked for or appreciated.

But since meeting up with Keith and then my mentor I have been able to start actually living my life for the first time.

Here were two people not only aware of who I was and the mistakes I had made but were unafraid to be seen with me, forcing me through kindness and coercion to face parts of my life that I never really had before and making me see that I still have something positive to contribute to society and that I am more than my crime as dictated by society sees me, I have done things that I would never have had the guts to do with the help and gentle persuasive tactics of them both.

After constantly being advised to carry on with my life and rebuild it as much as possible I found that the Public Protection Unit (Police) would put as many obstacles as legally appropriate and sometimes overly so in front of me, these obstacles would have set me back before to give in and give up, but with the simple power of friendship and trust I was encouraged to face those obstacles and overcome them, leading me to the happiest and most productive period of my life, I may still be unemployed and some would say unemployable but I am involved in my community in a way that makes me happy and makes those around me happy and I now know if something goes wrong that I have friends willing to support me every step of the way.

I had severe doubts about the usefulness of the circles program and am not embarrassed to admit that I was completely wrong.

Thank you for giving me the chance to really be me for the first time.

-S



## A Circles Volunteer's Experience

I first heard about Circles South East whilst I was working within the Probation Service. However it wasn't until I returned to education that I applied for a voluntary role.

My reasons for getting involved with the charity stem from my forensic background and interests. My background includes working within the Probation Service and the involvement in forensic mental health research, including investigating treatment progress in personality disordered patients in high security surroundings. Having worked within the community with offenders I feel quite passionate about supporting resettlement into the community, as this time can often be the most isolating and risky.

In terms of the process of becoming a volunteer, firstly I completed an application form to express my interest in the charity. After a few months, I was invited to attend the initial two day training programme. This training was very useful in providing an introduction to the charity, information on the role of volunteers and some theoretical background to working with sex offenders. The training was followed by a follow up informal interview with one of the Circle Co-ordinators. As well as the practicalities to joining the volunteer programme, any anxieties or questions about the role were addressed in this interview.

I have been in my first Circle for about 9 months. It has been a very interesting Circle because the focus has been very much on social interaction and reintegration. Our core member has also been very instrumental in building his life up following his release and has achieved a number of his goals in a short amount of time.

On a personal level some aspects of being in a Circle that have been challenging. Initially I struggled with the more relaxed social environment of the Circle due to my work experience. However, being in a group with fellow volunteer's helped with this.

The Circle can also sometimes be challenging on an emotional level. Being in a Circle can evoke a variety of emotions from week to week due to the nature of some of the discussions, for example discussions around past offending behaviours and attitudes. I have been surprised at times by some of the emotions I have experienced, but found it useful to recognise these and use my support network to understand and manage them.

Overall, my experience as a volunteer with Circles South East has been very positive and rewarding. Specifically, my Circle has given me confidence that core members with previous entrenched patterns of offending can progress and change to live an offending free life. The fact that our core member also looks forward to the sessions and values them reinforces the rewards of volunteering. I feel very strongly that the work Circles promotes is paramount in public protection and safe reintegration of core members into the community.



**Leila Niknejad**  
**Circles Volunteer**

*We have a number of qualified counsellors working with us offering a free service which we view as an important and intrinsic part of what we do. Traditionally we have been able to provide this to offenders who have become “stuck” in treatment when their own traumatisation becomes unearthed during the treatment process or, as “Anon” mentions below, as part of the route into or out of other Circles services. As can be seen from his testimony, significant issues are dealt with. More recently we have been able to offer the service to the survivors of sexual or domestic abuse, taking referrals from Rape Crisis, Victim Support and others. Given the argument that resources are far too concentrated on the perpetrators of abuse, it feels absolutely right that we provide this as well.*

## **Counselling Service**

Prison, the Sex Offenders Treatment programme and the support of a Circle can guide most of our clients to a safe place where the normal constraints are in place. Some however are unable to make this progress because they have unresolved issues from the abuse they experienced themselves. These are the people with whom I work as a counsellor.

In theory clients are sent to me before they join a Circle. We work through their abuse experiences and then they join a Circle. In fact out of the eleven men I have worked with only two, so far, have followed that pattern. Two others started in a Circle and then saw the need for counselling on their own abuse. Two had reached the point at the end of the counselling where they felt that they did not need a Circle. Three are still working with me, one committed suicide and one re-offended.

So is there any common pattern? There is but there are exceptions. Two of them had experiences which knocked them off balance and removed their natural restraints. In one case it was the death of his mother and when he understood this he was able to move on. The other is the young man who is back in prison. He had an appalling upbringing in which the one bright spot was falling in love at 14 with a girl who then died from leukaemia. He went on to offend with others but it was clear that he had never got over his love for this girl and it did not come as a great surprise that I learned that he had abused a girl of the same age.

For the others there is an underlying thread of guilt. Paradoxical guilt. Even if they hated being abused, and not all of them did, they still feel responsible for it having happened. Often that will have been fostered by the abuser – an easy task if they were clever enough to see that the victim thought they were being made someone special. Maybe too there will have been a carry-over from their infancy when if they failed to gain enough of their mother’s attention they felt that they must be doing something wrong – the beginnings of the guilt that later engulfed them and their natural restraints.

So how can guilt be worked with? Telling clients that their guilt is irrational and unnecessary gets nowhere. Two approaches have been useful for me. Sometimes it works well to have them speak to their “small child” who suffered the abuse, perhaps imagined in another chair in the room; others have preferred to write it down and that works well too. But for others it is a much longer process the core of which is that they are helped to feel good about themselves by seeing that they are being valued by their counsellor. This is the essential therapeutic tool. It may take a very long time or it may be enough for them to suddenly find that someone is listening and not criticising them. Anything from three sessions to two hundred may be required. What I cannot do is hasten the process.

**Anon.**

## External Trainer's View

### Circles of Support and Accountability: The Role of the Volunteer

It has been my privilege and pleasure over the last few years, along with Clark Baim, to offer training to volunteers and staff members from Circles of Support and Accountability, covering topics such as motivational ways of working with core members, the development of rapport, and attachment theory and its practical application. Clark and I have always looked forward very much to training days with Circles volunteers, and, whilst we have also worked with thousands of talented and motivated professionals, we have frequently remarked to each other that, "there's something a bit different about working with a group of volunteers."

When Dominic Williams asked me to put pen to paper (or, more accurately, fingers to keyboard) to explore this notion, he gave me the impetus to consider more clearly this fascinating question of what exactly is it which is so unique about volunteers, who choose to freely give of their time, effort and skills without the expectation of financial reward. The issue of "who should provide services" is particularly current, and it's important to note that there is always going to be a vital role for the committed professional. The scope of this brief piece is to share a few reflections on the uniqueness of the volunteer role.

My first recollection is of a training day in Reading, when I was taken ill with a sickness bug. I was determined to carry on regardless, carrying out my professional role, despite the turmoil in my stomach. However, a female volunteer (to whom I am very grateful!) approached me discreetly, and gently said, "My dear, we can all see that you are clearly ill. You need to go home now." Her genuine, human to human interaction cut through my professional mask. I allowed myself to acknowledge my vulnerability, and I went home, leaving the training group in Clark's safe hands. (Thanks also to Ron Macrae, for driving me to the station, and then stepping in to offer his role play skills in my absence!) In many years of training professionals, I've never been told to go home before, but she was right! I wonder how many Core Members have also benefited from such profoundly authentic and humane interactions?

My second thought concerns the nature of that which is freely given, in contrast with that which is exchanged for a monetary reward. The social researcher, Professor Richard Titmuss, was a staunch advocate of the unique contribution of the volunteer. In 1970, he published "The Gift Relationship", a comparative study of the systems of blood donation in the United States and the UK. The American system was largely profit-based, with donors being offered a financial incentive in return for their blood. The British system relied on volunteer donors, whose only external incentive was the promise of the iconic custard cream and cup of tea. Professor Titmuss showed that the UK blood supply was more regular and reliable, of a higher quality, and better able to respond to sudden emergencies. His conclusion was that placing a financial value on the donation of blood interrupted the altruistic motivation to meet the needs of society, and led to the recruitment of donors who most needed the money, who, as a group, tended to have a higher ratio of blood borne infections than the average population. In his introduction, he wrote:

*"Altruism in giving to a stranger does not begin and end with blood donations. It may touch every aspect of life, and affect the whole fabric of values. ... If the bonds of community giving are broken, the result is not a state of value neutralism. The vacuum is likely to be filled by hostility and social conflict."*

So, what is the relevance of this major work of social policy in relation to the role of the volunteer for Circles of Support and Accountability? As a former Probation Officer, I can recall several clients discussing with me their experiences of working with members of their Circle. I have a clear recollection of one man in particular telling me that the volunteers in his Circle had started talking to him about the highly sensitive issue of his potential future contact with his children; a topic which I had attempted to raise with him several times. It was clear that, whereas he had largely ignored my pearls of wisdom, he had genuinely paid attention when his Circle members began to raise the subject with him. I asked him what the difference was, and he said, "I listen to them more, because they aren't being paid to spend time with me." He certainly placed a higher value on the human connection that was freely given, as opposed to that which was exchanged for a monetary reward.

My final thought concerns the choice to donate one's time and skills in order to work collaboratively with those who have committed sexual offences, as opposed to many of the other, more socially acceptable forms of volunteering. Circles volunteers choose to stand alongside members of a group who represent some of the most marginalised and stigmatised people within society. It is my view that all sexually abusive acts deny the victim(s) aspects of their fundamental humanity and dignity. Volunteering to be part of a Circle of Support and Accountability is a way of freely extending that same humanity and dignity to a person who has, at one time, denied it to another. As such, it is an act of profound grace, without financial reward, and it's that which makes Circles volunteers different.

### References:

Titmuss R. M. (1979) *The gift relationship: from human blood to social policy*, London, Allen and Unwin

**Lydia Guthrie**

**Co-Director - Change Point ([www.changepointlearning.com](http://www.changepointlearning.com))**





## **Circles in a Wider Context**

History, they say, is written by the winners. A decade ago some predicted that the challenging and controversial, community-based model of Circles of Support and Accountability could never work. While ten years of Circles might appear to some too brief a span from which to draw any conclusions, it certainly provides a timely point to stand back and view the field. What then is the impact on the wider national and indeed international criminal justice context since those first, hesitant Circles provided by the pioneers at HTV Circles and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation? Circles UK, as the national umbrella charity responsible for ensuring all local Circles Projects work to national standards of service delivery, and providing a national identity for the service, is perhaps reasonably placed to provide a birds-eye view of the wider ripples.

Since those first two pioneering Projects, another ten local services have now come into being, with a geographical spread, which though not comprehensive, does at least legitimize our presentation as 'across England and Wales'. Given the shrinkage in funds available to statutory and voluntary sector funders alike since the banking crisis of 2008, such growth speaks volumes as to the rising appreciation of Circles and their cost-effective means for reducing sexual reoffending. However, perhaps as much as the growing evidence of the model's ability to reduce sexual reoffending, it is the eminently humane, community-affirming heart of the service, where local people provide vigilance and support, rather than vigilantism and hostility that has attracted further take-up recently in the Netherlands, Belgium, Scotland, and Spain. There are also hopes for developments in Latvia, Bulgaria and Ireland. The model developed by the pilots, standardised and developed by Circles UK and enriched by the cross-fertilisation of more local Projects forms the foundations to Circles establishment by many more European states, enabled by a recently produced 'European Circles Handbook'. A European network of Circles providers and agencies is planned, with all the possibilities that this would signify to influence the more effective rehabilitation of sex offenders across other European countries. Information and presentations on Circles are increasingly requested and Circles staff in the past three years have spoken at major criminal justice events across England and Wales, as well as in Ireland, Latvia, Stockholm, the Netherlands, Oslo, and Toronto, Canada (which it must be said, given our origins, had something of a feel of 'coals to Newcastle' about it.)

Circles UK is now regularly approached by hopeful film-makers, but such requests have to be managed with extreme caution given the sensitivities involved. Six Projects have now engaged in local television and / or radio presentations on their work, and alongside the first book on Circles, produced in 2011, research and academic studies increasingly refer to the model and are including chapters by Circles staff, able to draw on a growing body of local experience and data. (see [www.circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.circles-uk.org.uk) for the materials indicated above)

While the past may well only be recorded by 'the winners' the story of Circles in England and Wales since 2012 has another attraction; there simply are no losers!

**Stephen Hanvey**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Circles UK**



## Inside a Circle

*The following is a transcript of an interview with a relatively new Kent Circle conducted by our Coordinator there Ian Mill. It provides insight into the sense of collective purpose of the group, together with their sense of ownership of the Project. "Harry" is the Core Member.*

**Can someone tell me what happens in a Circle meeting?**

**Andrew** - Well we meet up with the core member. It's an extra level of support for the core member, for Harry, that as he says if he lets us down it feels like another thing, another body of support that he feels he'll let down. Not only that obviously it's more to help him get back on the good path, obviously. We help you with the work and more general cleaning teeth etc.

**You help him clean his teeth?**

**Martin** - It's an offer of support and encouragement throughout the whole thing, the whole process of reintegration into society, its so that we can all understand, what we're all saying together and the core member can understand what's required of him from each one of us and we all have different input different ideas, hence the meetings every week like this. We all come up with something different every time.

**I think people would be interested to know what actually goes on in a Circle meeting, what they would see if they were a fly on the wall?**

**Martin** - I think one of the first things they would realise very, very quickly is that there is a fair sense of humour involved in what we do, as well as quite a lot of discipline. We like to keep it as light as possible but we understand the situation behind it all. Like there must be the minimum requirements of the core member. He must be able to interact with us and one of the best ways of doing that is to make it quite amusing in places but the underlying seriousness is always there. I think that somebody looking through the door would think "this isn't what I was expecting, this is different".

**So perhaps like a conversation you would have if you were out with a group of friends?**

**Martin** - Yeah, yeah and you were just focussing on one person.

**Why did you volunteer for Circles?**

**Vicki** - I volunteered because I did a Law and Criminology degree and you sort of touch upon working with ex-offenders and this gives you a lot of experience and also its nice doing the volunteering because you know that you're helping our not only the core member but also making the community a safer place.

**Martin** - My reasons totally different. I volunteered because I'm selfish. I enjoy helping people and it gives me a great deal of pleasure to help people, so it makes me feel good. It's like an ego trip in some ways. I'll be honest with you, it is because I get a lot of pleasure out of it. It's like my family grew up, left home and I had no one, if you like, who would rely on me to guide them, to help them. I've a lot of experience but I haven't got any of the skills from courses on law or forensics or anything like that which a lot of other people go

through. I've just got 50 odd years of experience of my life and I can use that to help quite a lot.

**So do you think you need any courses to do this or is this the sort of thing that anyone can do?**

**Martin** - All that's required to do this is a basic understanding of what the Circle stands for. What it stands for, the basic procedures within a Circle and what's expected of us. These things are all covered in the Circles training.

**What about you Harry?**

**Harry** - As I am the core Member I volunteered because, one thing because my Probation Officer asked me "would you like to join Circles". She explained what Circles was to me so Jackie sent off the forms to Ian and he saw me at the Hostel. When he explained it I thought "okay, this is going to be quite hard" because I don't like being in a big group of people and being with some total strangers, but later on when I got through, and obviously as a core Member I can actually pull out at any time I want. They give me all the support I need and give me advice, whether I take it or not is another matter (laughter from the group), but they are here to help me, with this, through this, and they're here to put me on the straight road. They don't want me to go back into prison, I don't want to. So they're here to help me and others as Vicki said. It's always a challenge and I do like coming here and talking to the members.

**You talked about some concerns you had before the Circle started. Were there any other concerns that you had?**

**Harry** - One. Working with Martin again. Last time he was my mentor on probation and I hugely let him down. So when Ian said he was putting Martin in the Circle I said okay, I wasn't too happy with it but I thought you know what, I've messed up with Martin before, let's work at it again and this time everything changed.

**Have you got any concerns now?**

**Harry** - No I've got no concerns. I enjoy coming here. If I have any problems I can let them know or they give me support, so no concerns. I can't think of any downsides. Sometimes I find it a little bit hard to talk and as Martin has stated I don't explain myself very well.

**Martin** - But you're working on that, you're working with that.

**Harry** - Yeah but I'm still trying my best to explain it in a little bit more detail.

**So what do you look forward to most about these weekly meetings?**

**Harry** - One thing, I enjoy talking, getting me out of the house cause obviously with my Mum I see here every week. It also gets me out the hostel and if I have any concerns I can just erase it and they can try and give me support and advice.

**What were your concerns as a volunteer?**

**Rosie** - I suppose the biggest one would be if the Core Member were to re-offend while you're working with them, but that was really the only concern

and hopefully we're going the right way.

**Harry** - I never want to do that. As in one of Cliff Richards songs it says no more children living in fear and I don't want no more children living in fear from me, but I can't control what other people want to do, but I can control what I do.

**Rosie** - I think what's good as well, which I did not realise before we started, it we provide something that probation etc just don't have time to do. We give quite practical advice such as a cleaning your teeth rota, tidying your bedroom rota. Things like that, that other people may miss. Because we talk though your week in depth we can pick out the things other people may not have time to do.

**Martin** - It's just another layer of support. As you say probation do not have a lot of time to do these things. In fact if you go back a long time with Probation they used to go out and visit people. They used to do all that kind of thing, but they've got more and more involved in the technical side, writing things down with a computer and you got this limit and that limit. Volunteers I think are invaluable in this kind of situation.

**Rosie** - I think as well we are not tied by targets we've got to meet, things like that which other organisations have got to meet.

### **So why do Circles work then?**

**Martin** - I think it has to start with a minimal amount of trust between all of us. You've got to accept a little bit of trust and work up from there. I think that's one of the reasons it works because we all come in, because we all trust each other, even though we don't know each other, we come in for a common purpose we're all here together for a similar thing.

**Andrew** - And we've all volunteered and the main thing is the core members volunteered themselves.

### **Martin talked about trust, but what about confidentiality?**

**Harry** - Confidentiality is quite important I find because if I have a huge problem then they can say if it can't stay confidential, like I threatened to hurt someone, well then they would have to say like I can't keep this confidential, we'll have to tell someone. But if you don't say things like that, I think it's okay.

**Martin** - It's putting boundaries in.

### **What's the best thing about a Circle for you?**

**Andrew** - It's one of those aims that no one can really argue with can they, I mean there's just so much right with it, so much good going for it and the fact it's on the right path, in that it believes in rehabilitation rather than punishment. You do need punishment but rehabilitation is lacking from the system.

### **How does Circles compare with other volunteering that you do?**

**Andrew** - With the other work I do I am on my own so it's very different. [In Circles] We sit down and you have to work alongside people that are very different to you and get along. That's very important and it is brilliant. I still find that as one of the main strengths that we have different people coming at it from four angles.

**Rosie** - I think as well you learn a lot about yourselves by working in a team like this because until you see how other people work you don't realise that actually you're either quite soft or you're quite aggressive. Some people like to challenge more than others and things like that.

**Did any of you know each other before Circles?**

**Martin** - No. Some of us met in training and some of us in the first meeting just before we met Harry

**Harry** - I only knew one person before becoming the core member.

**Martin** - With other stuff I have done particularly with Probation I think there is only one person who was involved in these offences who would look the part and that's in years and years of mentoring and he was the exception to the rule. Everybody's normal.



**What was it like when you met Harry for the first time after I had told you about his history?**

**Vicki** - It's always quite daunting, when you hear about everything they've done. You just want to start the first meeting with no prejudice, until you've actually spoken to them. So like when you go into the first ever meeting it is quite scary [for the volunteer] as I'm sure it is for the core member. So it I think once the first meetings over is fine because everyone gets a bit more relaxed but before you go in you just got to remember to keep an open mind and remember that they're just another person.

**Martin** - The idea is we are not here to judge. That's been done, were not here to judge anyone.

**Rosie** - I think that when we're first given the offences, it's all you can imagine of this person, that's all you can see, so as soon as you come in the room that's all that's in your head but by the time you leave you recognise that is a person and they have lots of needs that you can help with. The offences don't go to the back of your mind, but they're not the focus.

**Martin** - I think one of the things as well, you soon learn when you take on membership of a Circle, you soon realise that everybody you're dealing with on the offender side of things are normal people, in general just normal people. Have the same sort of needs, need to have somewhere to live, need food, need money, that kind of thing. You soon learn that there's no real difference in what their requirements are, it's just that there's something inside that's a little bit different to everybody else in certain respects, in the offending side of things.

**Rosie** - I think stereotypes go out of the window.

**Martin** - They do yeah.

**Rosie** - You realise you could have actually have met this person already.

**Would you recommend Circles then?**

**All in unison** - Yes.

**Any doubts what so ever?**

**All in unison** - No.

**Martin** - I think there are some people it wouldn't suit. I think there are core members who would see this incredibly intrusive and would not want to engage at all. Also I see there are other Circle members who have a different idea about what the Circle is about. They come in, do the excellent training and they have their own ideas. They come to the first meeting, meet with the core member and all of a sudden their ideas are blown out of the window. They can't adjust to what the Circle requires because every Circle is different, every Circle requires a different thing.

**Martin** - It's just a very fulfilling way to fill your time

**Vicki** - If you're bored sign up!

*Now there's some advice!*





## Part 3 • Developments

### Volunteer Training and Development

Circles South East has always strived to offer our volunteers the very best training, and the last year has been no different. We have delivered a variety of events that have covered a diverse and interesting range of topics. Alongside our annual training programme we offer volunteers the opportunity to complete the OCN (Open College Network) Award in Circles of Support and Accountability (level 2) which is equivalent to a NVQ2 or GCSE. We hope in the future to provide further awards opportunities for volunteers recognising their increasing skills and experience.

The initial two day training has been revamped again, this time to include input on our mentoring scheme. The programme still retains

- Attitudes and Beliefs to Sexual Offending and Related Issues
- A Presentation on Circles
- Roles and Responsibilities of Circle Volunteers
- Personal Boundaries and Self Care
- Sex Offender Treatment
- Community Relapse Prevention/Better Lives

The training uses a mixture of presentations and case studies, which takes account of individual learning styles.

Since April 2011 we have run seven events on our annual volunteer training programme outlined below;

#### The Wheel of Life

Looking at the Good Lives Model which underpins the Community Relapse Prevention Better Lives Programme. Participants came away with a better understanding of the eight primary goods that make up the wheel of life and how to assist their core members achieve their goods. The day was co-facilitated by Ron Macrae (Circles South East) and Hayley Wright, Hampshire Probation Service SOGP)

#### Towards Excellence Workshop Day

The scene was set by Dr Dawn Fisher's keynote speech on self compassion, empathy and mindfulness. Volunteers broke out into four workshops which covered Working with Women who Sexually Abuse (Linda Ricks TVSOGP Manager), Working with Intellectual Disability (Tanya Tancred, Kent Probation Senior Forensic Psychologist) Non Offending Partner Work (Chris Wilson, Circles UK) and Mindfulness (Lydia Guthrie, of Change Point and National SOGP trainer). The day was a huge success and well attended.





*(Circles Volunteers at our "Towards Excellence" training day)*

## **Mental Health and Mental Illness**

Duncan McFarland, a Circles volunteer who also works for Oxfordshire MIND delivered an inspiring day's training covering a range of issues which were useful for Circles volunteers. Duncan covered Therapy and recovery, in theory and in practice. CBT; Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT); Types of mental illness and medication, and the Wellness Recovery Action Plan tool. Looking at the similarities and differences between these approaches, and at how a basic understanding of them might be useful for volunteers who work with core members with mental health problems.

## **Motivating the Core Member to Achieve Human Goods: Recognising Change and Promoting Progress**

Facilitated by Clark Baim and Lydia Guthrie, both lead national trainers for the National Probation Service SOGP. The training centred on developing motivational interviewing techniques and promoting the core member's progress towards a 'Better Life'.

## **Autism Awareness Training**

The workshop was an introduction to working with those on the Autistic Spectrum, providing volunteers with practical tips on how to engage effectively with this group and many of the skills are transferable to working with learning disability. Facilitated by the Hampshire Autistic Society.

## **Debt Advice**

The training provided volunteers with a comprehensive booklet covering budgeting and debt advice, including templates of a financial statement and standard letters for negotiating repayment of debts. It also gave information about specialist free debt advice available to core members. Facilitated by Deb Macrae, BSc Psyc, Post Graduate Diploma Housing, MIMA (Cert) (Member of the Institute of Money Advice).

## **Attachment Theory and Sexual Abuse**

This training event introduced Circles volunteers to key concepts in the field of attachment theory and gave volunteers the knowledge to apply this theory to working with their core member's. The course used presentation and participatory work to explore how attachment theory can inform a deeper understanding of the core member

and the methods that may help them to better understand themselves and change their behaviour. Clark Baim and Lydia Guthrie, both lead national trainers for the National Probation Service SOGP

### **Training Programme 2012-13**

Our volunteers have a lot to look forward to in the coming year as we have in place a new programme with specialist trainers to deliver the following;

- Working with Personality Disordered Offenders
- Working with Intellectual Disabilities
- Supporting Offenders into Employment and Education
- Understanding Risk Assessment
- Child Protection Training
- Understanding Consequences for Victims

### **Volunteer Resource Pack**

The Volunteer Resource Pack was completed at the end of March 2012 and we are now in the process of ensuring volunteers can access the information through a members only section on the website. The resource pack was assembled to aid our volunteers in the work they do with the core members. It includes useful information and a toolkit of practical exercises volunteers can complete with the core members. The resource is split into two sections, one which gives information on;

- Sexual Offenders and the Law
- MAPPA
- Disclosure
- Understanding Denial
- Debt Advice
- Benefits
- Housing
- Education
- Employment
- Additional Support Services
- Available funding opportunities for core members

The second section concentrates on skills practice and exercises volunteers can assist the core members to complete;

- Building self esteem and confidence
- Developing self-compassion and empathy
- Motivational exercises
- Problem solving
- Support networks
- Getting to know you exercises
- Challenging the core members behaviour
- Goal setting to achieve “human goods”
- Questioning styles

We will be adding to the volunteer resource pack as new research emerges and in particular with relation to developing materials to use with core members with intellectual disabilities.

Our aim is to provide a comprehensive training provision that will equip our volunteers with a range of skills and experience to support the work of Circles South East. We remain careful to equip volunteers with the skills and tools they require to undertake their role as a volunteer and be in a position to engage the core member effectively. The challenge is to ensure that all training and materials provided to volunteers are appropriate and relevant which is why our project regularly reviews the training and development needs of our volunteers.

**Ron Macrae**

**Thames Valley Circles Co-ordinator**



*Our Mentoring Programme evolved out of informal contact arrangements with Core Members whose Circle had finished, or who lived in areas where we had very few Volunteers available. The Programme became formalised when Keith Ringsell was appointed Coordinator in 2008. There is a more comprehensive breakdown of mentoring data set out in the 10 Year Evaluation.*



## **The Mentoring Programme**

Circles South East introduced a mentoring service for clients at the end of 2008 when an outreach worker was recruited to oversee the development and management of the programme. From the outset, it was decided that the programme would be set up and operated in accordance with guidance provided by The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF), a strategic partner of the Office of the Third Sector working with government to influence policy and practice in the field of mentoring and befriending. In 2010, the service received accreditation from MBF with the award of their Approved Provider Standard.

For the purpose of this programme, mentoring is defined as a one-to-one non-judgemental relationship, in which a volunteer commits to support and encourage an individual, who having been convicted of a sexual crime, now wishes to lead an 'offence free' life in the community.

Once accepted onto the programme, they are twinned with a trained Volunteer drawn from the local community. The Core Member and Volunteer then sign a written agreement which lasts for up to twelve months, committing them both to work together in order to achieve specific goals within a set period of time. To be successful, this requires that they develop a trusting relationship during which the Core Member feels able to disclose details of their offending history and personal circumstances. It is made clear from the outset, that whilst confidentiality will be maintained, information will be shared with partner agencies. This supports the risk management plan set under the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) as a means of strengthening public protection.

Where possible, goals are selected which compliment the work completed within the Sex Offender Treatment Programme, Better Lives module, which asserts that an individual commits offences because they lack the opportunities and or capabilities to achieve desired goals in personally fulfilling and socially acceptably ways. Using the 'Wheel of Life' model, individuals are encouraged to identify specific improvements that they can make to their lives which will reduce their risk of re-offending and at the same time, recognise their achievements in living safely as part of a community.

The Coordinator maintains close contact with both the Core Member and Volunteer in order to monitor progress and to deal with any issues that may arise. Regular reviews are carried out both in the form of a review of process and individual personal reviews. This is seen as important in order to properly support the volunteer who is meeting alone with the Core Member. Contact with the Coordinator provides the opportunity for issues to be discussed and where necessary, relevant information passed to statutory partners.

The mentoring process is operated broadly in accordance with Circles Policies and Procedures in order to ensure safe working and clarity for volunteers, some of whom also volunteer within a Circle.

Since the introduction of the service there have been 31 Core Members all males, with an age range of between 18 to 69 years. Sentence length has ranged from Community Supervision to 14 years imprisonment with the average contact with a Volunteer Mentor, lasting 11 months.

Of these 31 Core Members, two have been convicted of further sexual offending, one whilst on the programme and the other 4 months after completion.

Successes for the Core Members have included restoring relationships with close family members, starting new relationships, securing employment, finding accommodation, volunteering, studying at University and pursuing fulfilling hobbies.

Outcome Analysis reveals that Core Members believe that inclusion on the programme has significantly helped them to reduce their risk of reoffending. This is reflected in the fact that MAPP levels of managements have been lowered in the majority of cases, thereby reducing the time that police and probation feel they need to commit to monitor the individual in the community.

### **Feedback from partner agencies on the Mentoring Programme:**

Rachael Watt - Offender Manager Thames Valley Probation Service

“It has been really good to see him become less socially isolated and more involved in the community. He has really benefitted from the support you have offered and really made some positive changes.”

PC Mike Jarvis - Hampshire Police

“This is my first experience of Circles mentoring and it has been a positive one. From a police perspective, I believe that it is good to have as many layers of “supervision” as possible. The relationship between Police Offender Managers and offenders is often difficult and the fact that the offenders can talk to another party, not in authority, should be encouraged.”

PC Jim Abram - Thames Valley Police

“I found that you had gleaned much information from him, which I had been unable to do. In sharing this information, you have allowed me to give the Core Member reason to believe we should work together in the future.”

Hannah Gowney-Hedges - Offender Manager Thames Valley Probation Service

“On completion of i-SOTP, it was identified in his final treatment report that, amongst other things, to reduce risk of re-offending in future, he would benefit from maintaining and expanding his social circle; engaging in meaningful leisure activities, particularly ones which involve socialising with others; identifying how he can use his social network for support when experiencing low moods and talking openly about thoughts, feelings and concerns and avoid isolating himself from others. Through

the support of Circles, he has been encouraged to work towards these goals and this has helped keep him motivated. It has also been part of his support network and he informed me that he found his mentor easy to talk to. I have no doubt that involvement with Circles has helped him to work on reducing his risk of harm and re-offending through helping him set and achieve the goals identified."

**Keith Ringsell**

**Circles South East Mentoring Coordinator**





## **'Adapted Circles': Developing a model of best practice for Core Members with an intellectual disability and/or Autism**

Over the last ten years, Circles South East has received a significant number of referrals for sexual offenders who have been diagnosed with either an Intellectual Disability (ID) and/or Autism. Whilst a large proportion of these referrals have received support from Circles South East through both Circles and Mentoring, there has been a growing awareness of the need to better equip staff and volunteers with training and knowledge in order to deliver a model of best practice.

Over recent months a piece of work has been commenced in order to ascertain whether or not there is a need to develop a 'specialist' service for these specific client groups, and if so, to consider how such a service may need to differ from our existing model of service delivery.

An initial analysis of referrals to Circles South East was undertaken. All referrals made between January 2009 and May 2011 were included in the analysis, totalling exactly 100 referrals. Of these referrals, 10% had a formal diagnosis of either Intellectual Disability (8%) or Autism (2%). Specific characteristics of this group were compared with ten randomly selected referrals who did not have a formal diagnosis in order to establish whether or not there were any significant differences between the two groups.

The findings of this analysis were as follows. The average age of referrals with ID/Autism was 35, compared with an average age of 45 for the comparison group. With regards to previous convictions, despite being younger, the ID/Autism group were more heavily convicted, with 60% having previous convictions for sexual offences, and 40% having previous convictions for other (non-sexual) offences. This compares with 40% having previous convictions for sexual offences, and 30% for non-sexual offences in the comparison group.

Despite being more heavily convicted, those in the ID/Autism group were much less likely to be sentenced to a term of imprisonment, with just 30% being sentenced to custody, compared with 80% of the comparison group. The ID/Autism group were also much less likely to have completed a recognised sex offender treatment programme, with just 50% completing some form of recognised treatment programme, compared to 90% of the comparison group.

Although this is quite a simplistic snapshot of our recent referrals, it would appear that there are a number of characteristics which make the ID/Autism group different to that of the general sexual offending population. On average they appear to be a significantly younger group, who are more heavily convicted both in terms of sexual and non-sexual offences. They are more likely to remain in the community whilst serving their sentences, and also much less likely to have completed a treatment programme.

Staff have established close working ties with professionals from organisations working with people with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism. These include the Hampshire Autistic Society, and SOTSEC-ID (Sex Offender Treatment South East Collaborative – Intellectual Disabilities), representatives of which attended a consultation day in May 2012. Consultation has proved to be a vital step in moving towards developing a model of best practice, which will not only better meet the needs of those being referred to the service, but which will seek to complement and reinforce learning gained through attendance on the SOTSEC-ID programme.

Some of the key adaptations to the existing Circle model will include:

- A widening of our referral criteria to include, for example, non-contact offenders
- An earlier model of intervention designed to support individuals whilst they are completing the SOTSEC-ID programme where necessary
- Extending the lifespan of a Circle to take account of a slower pace of development and learning
- Additional training for both Circle Co-ordinators and volunteers wishing to work with individuals with ID/autism
- The development of multi-agency working with health professionals and others involved in the Core Member's care planning
- Adapting all written materials into an 'easy read' format
- The establishment of a specific steering group to guide the initial pilot project

This model remains in the development stages at present. However, our target, subject to securing the necessary funding, is to commence an 'Adapted Circles' pilot programme in April 2013 in conjunction with Circles UK. This is a significant and exciting development for Circles South East, which we anticipate over time will make a positive contribution to the safe management and successful integration of sexual abusers with ID/autism into our local communities.

**Becky Saunders**

**Chief Executive**

**&**

**Carrie Webb**

**Circle Co-ordinator (Hampshire)**



*The services outlined below all come under our HTVC logo. HTVC is essentially the same team as Circles South East though the specialist nature of the work requires a separate brand.*



## Non-Offending Partner Programme

HTVC's Non-Offending Partner Programme launched in January of this year following on from the success of last year's pilot. The programme aims to assist in the reduction of risk to children where a parent has decided to start or remain in a relationship with a convicted sexual offender or someone whose behaviour current or historic has given rise to concerns about children's safety.

A significant number of convicted sex offenders will either return to their families or move into a new relationship where children are living. Under such circumstances the Non-Offending Partner plays a vital role in terms of child protection. HTVC's services seek to enhance the ability of these partners to protect their children whilst providing support through an extremely confusing and difficult time.

The programme consists of a range of assessment and support services the heart of which is the 'Breaking the Cycle' programme. This group work programme has been designed to complement and enhance the Child Protection process and to provide the referring agency with a report detailing the Non-Offending Partner's ability to protect. The foundations of the programme lie in the accredited Thames Valley Non-Offending Partner Programme but 'Breaking the Cycle' also incorporates more recent developments in Sex Offender Treatment notably Better Lives (Fisher 08) and the Good Lives Model (Ward 07).

'Breaking the Cycle' is based on three principles the achievement of which will result in greater and long-term protection.

- Awareness - increasing participants' attentiveness and ability to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse in children.
- Information – teaching participants about how sexual abusers operate; their motivations, justifications and grooming techniques.
- Support – helping partners to develop their own appropriate social support network outside the family and reducing social isolation by offering fully-trained volunteer support where necessary

For many Non-Offending Partners a decision to remain in a relationship with a convicted sex offender is met by misunderstanding and judgement by friends and family leading to feelings of social isolation. The group identifies women in such situations and where support networks are lacking or inadequate HTVC provide volunteer mentors to work on a 1-2-1 basis with the family providing practical and emotional support and monitoring child protection issues.

The first volunteer training event for Mentors took place in February covering a range of topics including: The Sexual Offender: Typologies and Treatment Methods, 'Breaking the Cycle' programme, the Child Protection Process and Safeguarding Children. The eight volunteers selected upon completion of the training are all motivated and excited to be taking part in this new service.

Both the Breaking the Cycle Programme and volunteer training events take place regularly.

HTVC recognises the importance of working with Non-Offending Partners for a number of reasons. It is crucial that these women gain an understanding of sexual offending specifically the offending of their own partner to help them make informed decisions about their relationships and better protect their children. In addition women who choose to remain in such relationships play a vital role not only in terms of child protection but also in terms of contributing to their partner's relapse prevention plan and helping them to sustain offence-free lives.

**Beccy Scott**

**Non-Offending Partner Programme Coordinator**



# Services for Young People with Sexually Harmful Behaviours

## Rationale

In 2011 the NSPCC established that in the year 2009 – 2010 Police in England and Wales recorded 23,000 sexual offences against children. A quarter of the suspects in these cases were other children. Research (e.g. Beckett 2006) indicates that 35% of these abusive acts by young people occur within the family (sibling abuse), 50% were extra-familial, and 15% within both. These are alarming statistics, particularly as we can assume that many incidents go unreported, or may be dismissed as being make-believe.

Factors identified as being likely to have led to this behaviour in young people, and predict repeats include:

- Deviant sexual arousal
- Offence – supportive beliefs
- High stress environments
- Problematic child-parent relationships
- Impulsivity
- Negative peer association
- Environments which support opportunities to behave in such a way again

(Worling and Langstrom 2003, Worling 2012)

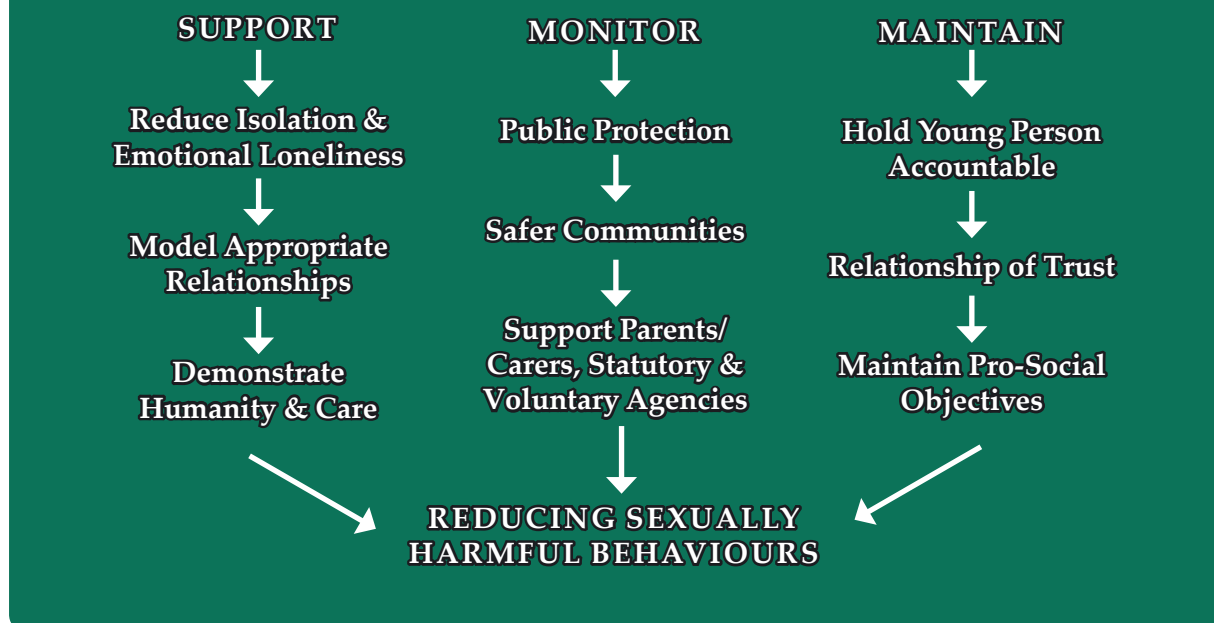
Practitioners working with adult perpetrators will recognise many of these themes and of course practitioners working with young people displaying sexually harmful behaviour want to avoid this becoming a more entrenched adult offence pattern. What differs from most adult sexual abusers is that children and adolescents are still developing, both physically and psychologically, so that well-targeted interventions can be extremely effective in terms of halting recidivistic attitudes and behaviour. Steinberg's (2010) observation that "the brain changes characteristic of adolescence are among the most dramatic and important to occur within the human lifespan" is helpful in terms of understanding why early intervention can be so effective.

## HTVC Youth Services

In conjunction with SWAAY and Oxon and Bucks CAHBS we have now developed services for young people displaying sexually harmful behaviours. Trained and supervised volunteers work alongside parents/guardians and where relevant Youth Offending Teams, Social Services, Police, Health and Education to help address the issues behind harmful behaviours. In particular we have found our method to be especially effective in reducing social isolation, loneliness and impulsivity, leading to feelings of belonging to communities, and increased investment in avoiding anti-social behaviour. We work according to three key principles outlined in the following figure:



# The Three Key Principles



(Based on Saunders and Wilson 2002)

## The Volunteers

Potential volunteers approach HTVC with an initial enquiry, and following a telephone interview are invited to attend a two-day training course which covers the following areas:

- Overview of the stages of development
- Impact of trauma
- Safeguarding children (level 2)
- Overview of treatment methods/interventions
- Sexual offending typologies
- Exercises relating to attitudes towards sexual abuse, case studies modelling situations that can arise and skills practise involving communication skills with young people
- Personal boundaries and self-care
- The Youth Justice framework
- Volunteer roles and responsibilities

The two-day training programme is designed to raise awareness of the issues relating to adolescent and in some cases pre-adolescent sexual abuse and to begin to equip potential volunteers for HTVC work. There are exercises included in the course that allow the facilitators to assess a potential volunteer's attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to the overall subject, and their ability to maintain personal boundaries and confidentiality. At the end of the training volunteers receive a copy of the Volunteer Policies and Procedures, which they must sign, and to which they must agree to adhere.

### Allocation to HTVC Youth Services

Referrals are assessed and where considered suitable are allocated to volunteers. Volunteers are briefed regarding the risk and need relevant to the young person they have been assigned, together with any background detail on a need-to-know-basis. It is important that volunteers feel a part of the overall package of intervention that is in place for each case - and, as such, will have contact details of the relevant professionals. Wherever possible, professionals will assist in the volunteer briefing process, helping to ensure that all services' roles are aligned.

The number of volunteers allocated to any given case will depend on risk level, the nature and complexity of the case and the amount of time and commitment required. Essentially the service operates in a similar fashion to our Circles and Mentoring services for adults, in that the majority of contact will be between the young person and the volunteer(s), with the Coordinator providing regular communications to professionals and parents/guardians regarding progress and/or concerns. The process will be reviewed periodically so that the service is matching the needs of the young person and remains relevant to the overall intervention package.

In terms of what we have to offer, we would argue that the "magic ingredient" alluded to elsewhere in the 10 Year Report is the volunteers' willingness to engage in someone's life at a difficult time suspending judgement of that person but holding them accountable for their behaviour.



# Assessment, Training and Consultancy Services

Working in the field of sexual abuse can be unnerving for professionals new to it., largely due to fear of the consequences if something goes wrong. Staff can feel de-skilled when confronted with the challenges involved in the work, and an overwhelming sense of responsibility for decision-making. With this in mind Circles South East (now under HTVC) has always provided training and consultancy for teams wishing to engage with the work, but feeling they lack the necessary skills and support to work effectively and safely. To date we have provided training and consultancy to Social Services Departments, Housing Associations, Universities, Youth Offending teams, Police and Probation services and to voluntary organisations. Topics covered include:

- Working with sexual offenders
- Treatment methods
- Risk assessment
- Working with denial
- Looking after yourself and your team
- Listening skills
- Masculinity and sexual offending
- Strength- based approaches to working with sexual offenders (Better Lives)

HTVC consultancy is bespoke and can range from a responsive telephone service to a complete supervision package including forum meetings, co-working and training sessions. Our staff will come to meet with teams, assess need and draw up a proposal as a starting point for negotiations as to how to meet teams' needs and requirements.

Similarly HTVC staff are able to undertake risk assessments concerning men and women who may or may not have been convicted of sexual offences, but whose behaviour has caused sufficient concern for agencies such as Social Services to become involved. Full risk assessments reports are provided as a part of this service.

**Dom Williams**

**Circles South East Senior Coordinator**

## Part 4 • Evaluation

### CIRCLES SOUTH-EAST: THE FIRST TEN YEARS 2002-2012

Andrew Bates, Rebekah Saunders, Dominic Williams, Chris Wilson and Dr Robin Wilson

#### INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

Citizens and policymakers alike share common concerns regarding the presence of sexual offenders in our communities. Indeed, it is not uncommon for many persons to espouse particularly strong negative feelings and attitudes regarding sexual offenders and their potential placement in any individual community. Some (e.g., Silverman & Wilson, 2002) have identified these sentiments and, in some cases, subsequent actions as a “moral panic”.

In an attempt to address these concerns, governments have enacted legislation to identify and control offenders in the community, with the goal being to manage risk for harm. Examples of such legislation include sexual offender registration and notification, specialized probation orders, residency restrictions, and electronic monitoring (e.g., GPS). While such measures enjoy popularity with law enforcement agencies and the community-at-large, researchers (e.g., Levenson & D’Amora, 2007) have questioned whether they actually achieve the goal they were created to meet—lower rates of reoffending. Further, others (e.g., Willis & Grace, 2008, 2009) have questioned whether such measures may actually increase danger to the community by leading to offender instability upon release.

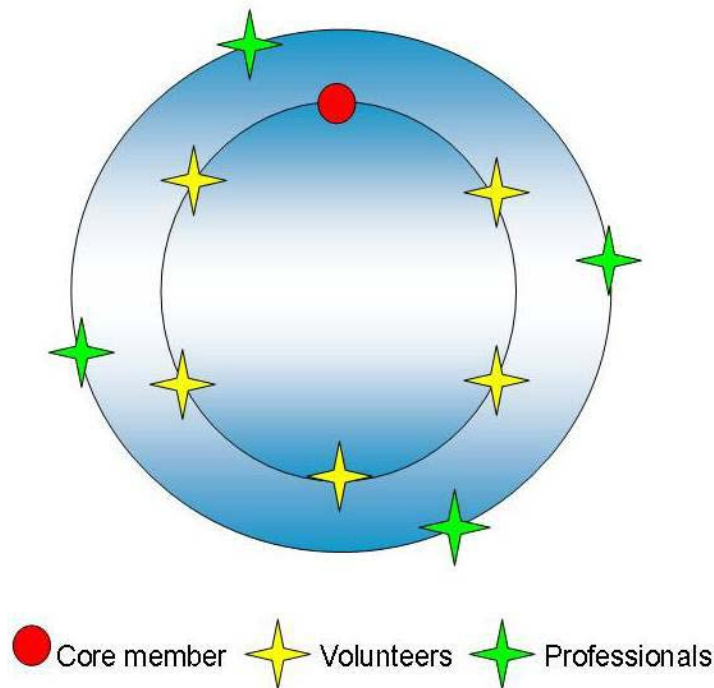
In general, the focus of most legislative attempts at sexual offender risk management is to increase offender accountability. However, the general criminological literature is clear in demonstrating that persons experiencing behavioural problems are more likely to show positive growth and a lessening of symptomatology with the application of human service (e.g., psychological programming, pro-social support and guidance, access to social service programs—see Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Simply put, contemporary approaches to sexual offender risk management have been all about *accountability*, but with very little focus on *support*. We contend that a successful risk management scheme must attend to both of these critical elements.

#### Circles in Canada

It was 1994 when Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) was first established in Canada in response to the high profile release of a repeat child sexual abuser to an unaccepting community. Subsequent development and management of Circles in Canada by the Mennonite Central Committee was always enhanced by the presence of a longitudinal evaluation that used a matched control group (Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007).

The Circles model consists of two concentric circles of participants (see Figure 1, below). The inner circle is comprised of a released offender (known as a Core Member) and 4-6 community volunteers. These participants meet regularly to address the risk and reintegration issues presented by the core member. From time to time, issues arise requiring expert consultation (e.g., probation/parole violations, indications of imminent risk to reoffend, mental health problems). This is when the outer circle—

comprised of persons such as psychologists, probation and parole officers, social service workers, law enforcement personnel, etc.—becomes important. In essence, while the inner circle provides support and accountability for the core member, the outer circle functions in a markedly similar fashion for the inner circle.



**Figure 1:** Graphic representation of Circles model (Wilson & Picheca, 2005)

Two Canadian studies have focused on the relative rates of reoffending between core members and matched comparison subjects who were not afforded participation in a Circle (see Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007; Wilson, Cortoni, & McWhinnie, 2009a). In the first study, a group of 60 high risk sexual offenders involved in Circles (core members from the original pilot project in South-Central Ontario in Canada) were matched to 60 high risk sexual offenders who did not become involved in Circles (matched comparison subjects), with an average follow-up time of 4.5 years. Offenders were matched on risk, type of release, date of release to the community, and prior involvement in sexual offender treatment. Results showed that the core members demonstrated a **70%** reduction in *sexual* recidivism in contrast to the matched comparison group (5% vs. 16.7%), a **57%** reduction in *all types of violent* recidivism (including sexual—15% vs. 35%), and an overall reduction of **35%** in *all types of recidivism* (including violent and sexual—28.3% vs. 43.4%). In the three instances in which a core member committed a new sexual offense, a harm reduction (Marlatt, 1998) effect was observed—the offenses for which they were convicted were categorically less severe and invasive than the offenses for which they had previously been convicted. The effect was not observed in the matched comparison group.

The second study consisted of a Canadian national replication of the study from the pilot project (see Wilson et al., 2009a). The same basic methodology was used—comparing core members to matched comparison subjects. Participants for this study were drawn from Circles projects across Canada, but not including members of the pilot project. In total, the reoffending of 44 core members was evaluated against 44 matched



comparison subjects, with an average follow-up time of approximately three years. Similar to the first study, dramatic reductions in rates of reoffending were observed. Specifically, there was an 83% reduction in *sexual* recidivism (2.3% vs. 13.7%), a 73% reduction in *all types of violent* recidivism (including sexual—9.1% vs. 34.1%), and an overall reduction of 70% in *all types* of recidivism (including sexual and violent—11.4% vs. 38.6%) in comparison to the matched offenders.

## Circles in the UK

In June 2000, the Religious Society of Friends invited five Circles dignitaries from Canada to share their experiences of the model and to provide information as to how Circles might be implemented in the UK. During that consultation, meetings were held with stakeholders associated with such organizations as the Religious Society of Friends, the Home Office, Her Majesty's Prison Service (including a visit to Grendon Prison to meet with administration, treatment providers, and inmates), the Parole Board, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, and the National Organization for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (NOTA). These meetings helped establish a collective of persons and agencies interested in exploring innovative approaches to sexual offenders leaving prison and re-entering the community. Further, in modelling aspects of UK Circles development and implementation on the Canadian model, a foundation for robust and valid measurement as to the potential success of such projects was laid.

In 2001, Home Office funding was agreed to establish three projects over an initial three year period. These three projects were to be the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, Thames Valley and Hampshire, the latter two projects combining into one project in 2006, known as HTV Circles. It had always been the intention of the Home Office to ensure that evaluation was to be part of the pilot's remit. Discussions on tendering the work to Universities finally concluded that the evaluation of this work should be undertaken by the Home Office's own Research and Development Department. The Home Office did produce an early qualitative study focussing upon the first six Circles set up by the Lucy Faithfull and Thames Valley Projects but both the numbers and time frame allowed for nothing more than a descriptive account. Nothing further from the Home Office was forthcoming and by 2006, it was clear that the responsibility for demonstrating the validity of Circles as an appropriate and worthwhile intervention was to fall to the pilot projects themselves. The need for evaluation was crucial. The recent implementation of the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) had required the development of Circle's practice to be based within a 'Theoretical Framework' (Saunders & Wilson, 2003) that was appropriate to the new structure of risk management. Statutory agencies charged with the risk management of sexual offenders were interested in the implementation of Circles but needed evidence that investment in such an intervention was worthwhile.

In 2004, an evaluation of the first eight Circles established in the Thames Valley area was undertaken. Core members were assessed using the 'socio-affective' questionnaires taken from the accredited treatment programmes psychometrics, 'indicating attitudinal changes in a positive direction, which were maintained over time' (Bates 2005). Eighteen months later, Thames Valley Circles produced an evaluation (Bates, Saunders, & Wilson, 2007) examining 16 Circles over a four-year operational period, the focus of which was to be problematic behaviours recorded by the Circle. Nine out of the total 16 core members displayed high risk behaviours which were subsequently reported to the police by their Circle volunteers. Of those nine, four core members were recalled to prison on licence, while the remaining five were managed through MAPPA, continuing with their Circle and living in the community. For those

recalled to prison their volunteers continued to have contact with them and when released, three returned to their Circle. For these core members the experience of being held to account but not abandoned was a profound experience. Recalls of this nature were viewed by the evaluation as a success, with no further reconvictions, no further victims and public protection enhanced.

A further Circles evaluation undertaken in 2009 (Bates, Macrae, Williams, & Webb, 2011) included, for the first time, those Circles created in Hampshire and was to include a sample population of 60 core members. This study recorded the first HTV Circles sexual reconviction. The evaluation's focus was to change from recidivism to outcomes and used the National Offender Management Service's seven OaSYS pathways towards the reduction of re-offending (Howard, 1996) to identify how Circles were contributing towards that goal. This was to be the first Circles evaluation that recognised and acknowledged the developments and changes in the national accredited treatment programmes. This acknowledgement was important in so far as Circles was proving to be the practical embodiment, post treatment, of strength based interventions and practice which use the theoretical models such as Good Lives (Ward & Stewart, 2003) and desistance theory (Laws & Ward, 2011; McNeill, 2010).

What was absent until now from any of the previous Thames Valley or HTV Circles evaluations was a comparison group. As further expansion into Kent renames the project Circles South East, this 2012 evaluation sees for the first time in the UK a comparison group for which the outcomes of sex offenders requesting and receiving a Circle can be compared with those who requested but did not receive a Circle.

### **Desistance Theory and its Relationship to Circles of Support and Accountability**

The importance of strength based theories in relation to reducing offending behaviour and managing risk has now begun to significantly impact upon practice. A number of criminologists (e.g., Laws & Ward, 2011; McNeill, 2010) have been developing theory as to why some offenders desist from offending, that is, why and how do they stop, and how do they "stay stopped"? There are striking similarities between this collective "Desistance Theory" and the Circles model. These similarities occur chiefly in three areas:

- **Wanting to change** – There are times in most offenders' lives when, for whatever reasons, they want to cease offending – "...desisters are aware that they are changing and indeed positively wish to change" (McNeill 2010) "desistance involves...a measureable, reflective and more self-conscious break with patterns of offending" (Farrall & Maruna, 2004). A core member coming to a Circle does so voluntarily and so, with some rare exceptions (e.g. those who are being wilfully manipulative in accessing Circles for their own gains), is making a statement to themselves and others that they wish to desist. They may not know how, particularly as some of the underlying causal factors can be complex and entrenched, but the combined efforts of treatment providers, Circles, and other relevant agencies can help to unearth these issues and put strategies into practice. While the commitment to 'wanting to change' may vary across time for the offender, a significant role of the Circle is to maintain this motivation and commitment by means of support, encouragement, and continuing to hold the core member accountable.
- **Individual treatment** – Desistance theorists argue that effective interventions should be moulded to the individual risk and needs of each offender "...desistance is an inherently individualised and subjective process, approaches to supervision must accommodate and exploit issues of identity and diversity. There are therefore

important limitations for one-size-fits-all approaches to rehabilitation” (McNeill, lecture 2011). “What Works” research in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2010) led to the establishment of accredited offending behaviour programmes, including sex offender treatment programmes. Programmes such as these assist offenders towards a better understanding of their behaviour, to therefore take greater responsibility, and to assemble strategies that help them to avoid any repeat. However, Circles do not operate as a manual based ‘programme’ and each service offered by the Circle project, whether it be Counselling, Mentoring or a Circle, is bespoke and responsive, tailored to the individual requirements that the core member brings. Obviously, not every offender emerging from the treatment process wants or needs additional support and monitoring. However, those who do receive a service unique to their case, reinforcing individuality and therefore valuing them as a person while helping them to avoid future harmful behaviours.

- **Community Acknowledgement** – Offenders who desist are more likely to maintain an offence-free life if communities acknowledge and reward the change through inclusion. Maruna and McNeill (2007) describe a “two-way process... (in which) offenders’ efforts to contribute (to society) should be reciprocated by communities and society through recognition of those efforts and reinforcement of them. This would suggest the need, therefore, to build communities that are desistance-supportive, acting as partners in the process of sponsoring, supporting and sustaining rehabilitation.” (Maruna and McNeill 2007) Nowhere can this be more relevant than in the case of those convicted of sexual offences, whose loneliness and social isolation (often causal to the original offending behaviour) is often amplified by societal vilification (and, ultimately, destabilization of the sort we referred to in the introduction. Circles services are essentially small, desistance-friendly communities, rewarding desistance with a qualified welcome and eventually safe inclusion. This in itself may be the most important aspect of what makes the model so effective.

### Circles South East Practice

In order to provide a more accurate picture of the potential benefits provided by Circles South East a breakdown of services, time spent on specific tasks etc, together with information provided to professionals has been collated.

Each Circle meeting with a core member lasts approximately one and a half hours. An average Circle meets formally every week for the first six months, then fortnightly for three months, and monthly for the final three months of the annual cycle. It should be noted that depending on the risk and need of the core member frequency of Circle meetings and contact could be higher over a longer period of time. There are also informal “social” meetings between volunteers and the core member increasing the amount of face to face contact with additional time spent on the phone.

Regular weekly meetings will take place with the Mentoring service with a gradual reduction of contact over a period of 12 months

The Counselling service offers a number of free hour long slots per week across Hampshire and Thames Valley. This service is continuing to grow both in the number of counsellors available and through the widening of referrals that are accepted (partners and survivors of sexual abuse). Typically offenders are referred to counselling if their own experience of abuse is blocking their progress through treatment, particularly the Victim Empathy element. The slots are permanently full with a waiting list.

In terms of contact with agencies and information sharing each Circle will generate a professional summary every month by the Circle coordinator. This is the very least, if increased risk is observed communication is immediate. Professionals also receive monthly Operations reports and as each Circle closes an End of Circle report is produced. These documents provide a wealth of intelligence which assists in the overall risk management of the offender.

A typical example of the service provided to a Probation Trust is eight Circles, six mentoring cases, and two clients for counselling per year. This breaks down as follows:

- 680 hours of direct Circles contact with core members
- 396 hours of mentoring contact
- 90 hours of professional counselling
- 168 professional summaries provided to Police and Probation cases managers
- 12 Operations Reports provided to contract managers
- 8 End of Circle Reports
- 6 End of Mentoring Report

## **The 10 Year Evaluation**

### **CIRCLES**

Since November 2002, Circles South East has established 100 Circles. This study examines 71 of those Circles because, at the point of the study, 18 Circles had recently been set up and running for less than six months and were therefore excluded from follow-up analysis. A further 10 core members were in a Circle for less than 90 days. Consistent with Circles research conducted elsewhere (see Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007; Wilson, Cortoni, & McWhinnie, 2009) a '90-day rule' was agreed upon whereby any core member who had been in a Circle for less than 90 days would not be considered to have been able to benefit from the process and would thus be excluded from the group under analysis. Within this '90-day' group, there were five core members who were recalled to prison for breach of licence conditions and a further four who decided to withdraw from the process. In a further case a core member's mental health deteriorated to a degree whereby continuation of the Circle became unfeasible.

The longest post-Circle period at large in the community for any Circles South East core member is 114 months (9 years 6 months) and 27 cases have been followed up for a period in excess of 5 years, thereby allowing for comparison to be made against expected reconviction rates based upon Risk Matrix 2000 research (Hanson & Thornton, 2000; Kingston D., Yates, P, Firestone, P. Babchishin, K & Bradford, J. 2008), the actuarial risk assessment scale used by the Ministry of Justice and National Offender Management Service (NOMS) agencies in the UK.



**Overall, the reconviction data for Circles South East remains very positive – the key finding being that no Circles South East core member has been convicted of any contact sexual offence taking place since they had been in a Circle.**

This study includes a description of demographic details and an analysis of the behavioural outcomes of the core members with whom Circles South East has worked since its inception. Formal reconviction data accessed from the UK Police National Computer (PNC) were also been accessed for 71 sexual offenders who were referred to Circles South East and found suitable to take part but, for various reasons, did not receive a Circle. For the first time in the UK this allows for a comparison (if not strictly a randomised control trial) group whereby the behavioural and reconviction outcomes of sex offenders receiving a Circle can be compared with a similar group who did not.

The study also provides information on core members who have received mentoring service provided by Circles South East. Further, this study explores the backgrounds, motivations, and experiences of the 172 volunteers who are currently active from among the 320 who have been registered and worked with for the project over the span of its existence.

### **The Length of a Circle**

Across the 71 cases examined in the current study the average time the Circle lasted was 15.9 months. A Circle is defined as being in existence while it is receiving formal supervision from a professional coordinator and fulfils the requirement to provide minutes of each Circle meeting. The longest Circle had lasted 63 months (this is a Circle based within a church congregation but which still receives formal albeit it only less regular supervision from a Circle coordinator) and the shortest four months. At the time of the study, 12 of the Circles were ongoing, in addition to the 18 which had been running for less than six months.

### **Length of Follow-up Period**

The average length of time following the commencing of the Circle for each core member to the present time was 52.57 months (4 years 4 months), with a range between 7 and 114 months across the 71 cases.

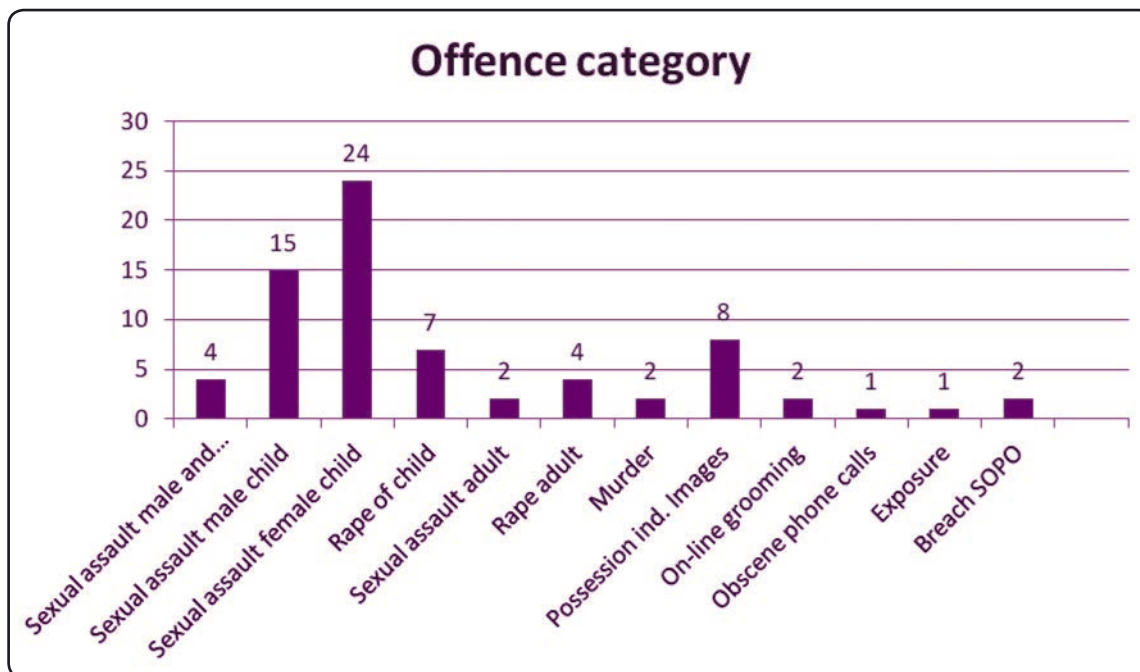
### **Age of Core Members**

The average age of the 71 core members was 47.75 years at the start of the Circle, with a range from 19 years to 75 years.

### **Offence Categories**

The following graph shows the index offence of which the Circles South East core members had been convicted. It will be noted that the vast majority of these offences are contact sexual offences (58 out of 71, 80.5%), the majority committed against children (50 out of 58, 86.2%). This information shows the very serious nature of the offences committed by the core members and the associated high levels of risk that they presented in the community.





**Graph 1: Offence category**

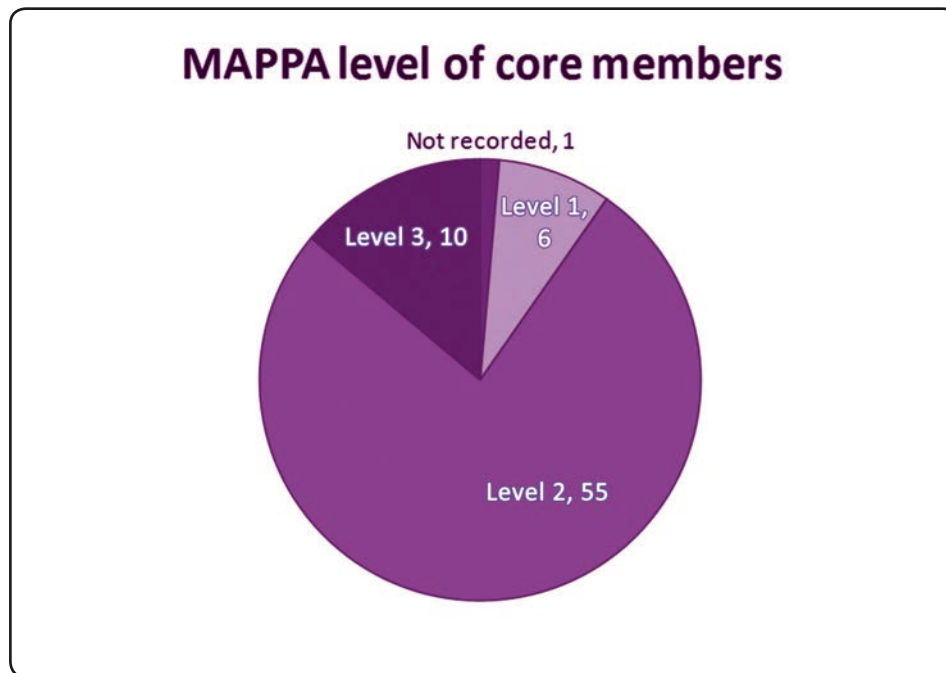
### Sentences Served by Core Members

The graph below refers to the sentence served by core members. 14 core members had served community sentences (19% of the total). All other core members had served custodial sentences the length of which are given in years. The lengthy custodial sentences served by the majority of core members again indicate the serious nature of their offending which Circles South East was seeking to address.



**Graph 2: Sentence served by core member**

## MAPPA Levels of Core Members



**Graph 3:** MAPPA levels of core members

All of the Circles South East core members were registered sex offenders and as such fell under the auspices of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). MAPPA cases are registered at different levels, which are signified thus:

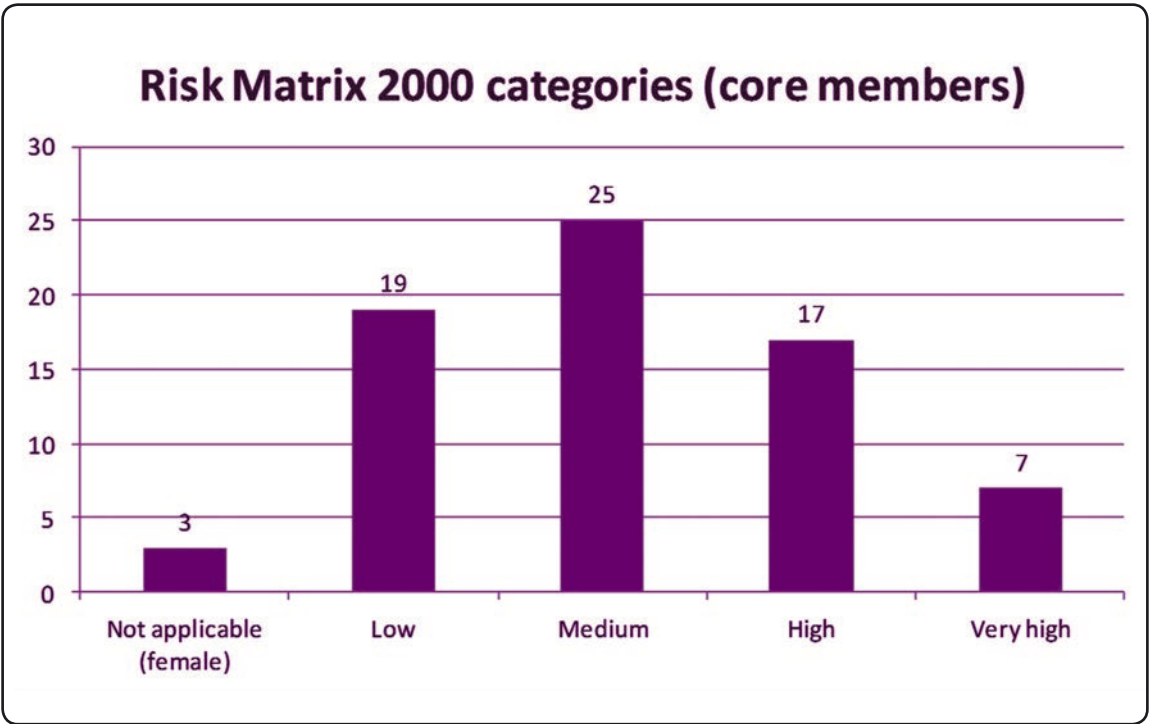
- Level 1** Single agency management, generally not assessed as high risk of harm on the probation/prison Offender Assessment System (OaSYS)
- Level 2** Active multi-agency management of the case, assessed as high risk of harm on OaSYS.
- Level 3** Very high or imminent risk of harm, requiring enhanced multi-agency risk management which is endorsed by senior managers

The figure above shows the MAPPA levels at point of entry into the Circle of the Circles South East core members. 55 were registered as level two MAPPA cases (assessed as high risk of harm on OaSYS), 10 were Level 3 and six were Level 1. It is of interest to note that even of these six Level 1 cases two were assessed as high risk of harm to children on OaSYS and a further two were assessed as high risk of reconviction on RM2000 (see next section). Again, this finding indicates the level of risk represented by the core members and the challenges these risks presented to criminal justice and community agencies.

Risk Matrix 2000

Risk Matrix 2000 is an actuarial risk assessment model used widely in the UK by Probation, Prison and Police agencies to predict likelihood of sexual or violent reconviction. It is valid with male offenders who are aged 18 or over and who have been convicted of a sexual offence since they were aged 16. RM2000 places an offender into one of four categories by using factors relating to their age and number of previous convictions as well as so-called ‘aggravating factors’ to do with relationship history, history of targeting of male victims, stranger victims and incidence of non-contact sex offending. RM2000 predicts risk of reconviction but does not specify the kind of reconviction e.g. it does not predict the level of potential harm to the victim of any future behaviour or the kind of sexual reconviction which might occur. OaSYS risk of harm assessments was not routinely recorded for Circles South East core members in the period of the current study until relatively recently. Predicted reconviction rates according to RM2000 risk status are as follows:

RM2000 Risk Levels			
Reconviction rates over:	5 years	10 years	15 years
Low	3%	6%	7%
Medium	13%	16%	19%
High	26%	31%	36%
Very High	50%	55%	59%



Graph 4: Risk Matrix categories (core members)

Twenty-seven Circles South East core members had been at large in the community for at least five years at the time of this study, meaning that the 5-year sexual reconviction rate could be calculated for this group. The 27 cases fell into the following risk categories on RM2000: (Risk Matrix is not designed for females therefore for the table below N=25)

Risk category	Number of core members	Expected reconvictions
Low	5	3% of 5 (0.15)
Medium	6	13% of 6 (0.8)
High	9	26% of 9 (2.3)
Very high	5	50% of 5 (2.5)
N/A (female)	2	–

**Total expected sexual reconvictions for this group = 5.75**

**Actual sexual reconvictions for this group = 2**

The following calculation of statistical significance was applied to this finding:

	Reconvicted	Not Reconvicted
Expected	5.75 (21.3%)	21.25
Observed	2 (7.4%)	25

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\text{the sum of } (o - e)^2}{e}$$

$$\chi^2 = 2.45 + 0.66 = 3.11, \text{ df} = 1, p < .08$$

Thus, Chi-squared analysis between the observed and expected frequencies of sexual reconviction suggests that the results are *almost* statistically significant (statistical significance could be achieved at  $p < .05$ ). With a small increase (one core member reaching five years with no reconviction) in sample size this is likely to become a statistically significant finding.

It should be noted that if convictions for physical violence are included (as outlined below under Control Comparison Reconviction data) rather than just sexual reconvictions then the Circles core member group achieve a statistically significant lower rate of conviction than the control group.

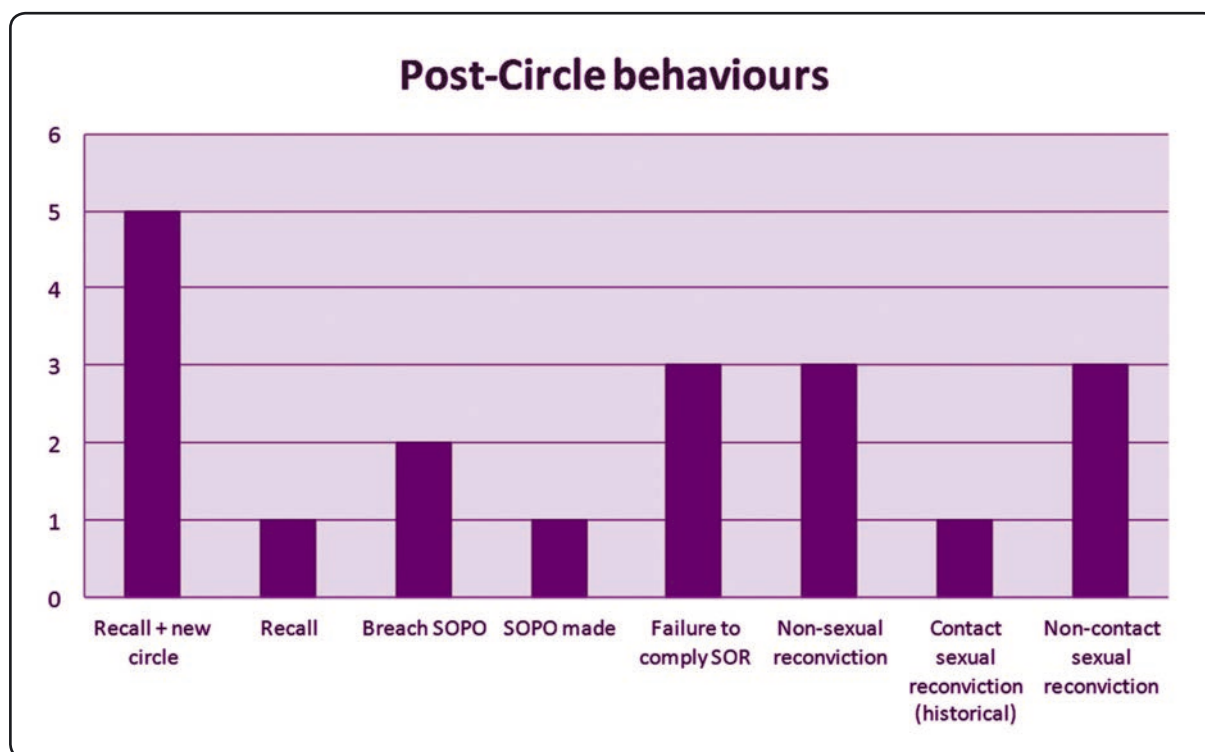
### Post-Circle Behaviours

The following information was drawn from Circles South East case files, as well as from a search of information held on the Police National Computer (PNC), which was made on April 2, 2012 for the purposes of this study.

### Key findings:

- Of the 71 core members under analysis, 54 had no kind of behaviour involving a legal sanction identified post-Circle.
- No Circles South East core member has been reconvicted for a contact sexual offence since being in a Circle.

Post-Circles behaviours, where recorded, are summarised in the following graph. Some core members fell into more than one category.



**Graph 5:** Post Circle behaviour

### Recall to Prison

Four core members were recalled to prison due to breach of licence conditions, but were subsequently placed in a further Circle on re-release from prison. All of these were among the earlier core members to work with Circles South East (all in the first 28 cases, running up until May 2007). Since that time, there has only been one recall of a core member who was in a Circle for more than 90 days. This core member had been in his Circle for 16 months and had engaged well in general with his volunteers. He was recalled due to concerns about his relationship with a vulnerable woman who had young children, and because he had taken voluntary work which required him to deliver food to schools (although he never did this alone). This was the second time this particular individual had been recalled (the previous occasion was prior to the Circle commencing) and the Circle shifted from a supporting role to a monitoring role as the core member's behaviour became increasingly risky. He was still in prison at the time of the study.



## Imposition or Breach of Sex Offence Prevention Order (SOPO)

One core member was made subject to a SOPO due to concerns about his behaviour which arose while he was in the Circle. Two core members had been convicted for a breach of their SOPO. In one case this came about due to the core member having a child in his home while he was still in a Circle. The Circle had been involved in reporting this incident to the police, leading to the breach of SOPO conviction. The other breach of SOPO occurred more than two years after the core member's Circle had ended and there is no further information available on the behaviour involved. Breach of SOPO is a criminal conviction, but does not involve the creation of a further victim and is thus not classed as a further sexual offence.

## Failure to Comply with Sex Offender Register Requirements (SOR)

Four core members were recorded on the PNC with convictions for failing to comply with the Sex Offender Register (SOR). Being on the SOR requires that registrants report to the police any change of address or if they are to be away from their home address for three days or more. Failure to comply with the SOR is a criminal conviction, but does not involve the creation of a further victim and is thus not classed as a further sexual offence.

## Non-sexual Reconvictions

Three core members were identified as having non-sexual reconvictions – one for Driving with Excess Alcohol, one for making False Representation, and another for Burglary. In the latter incident, there was possibly a sexual motive as there was a lone female occupant of the house from which the core member had stolen a bottle of wine.

## Sexual Reconvictions

Four sexual reconvictions were identified for core members who are described in detail as follows:

- One core member was convicted of Possession of Indecent Images of Children. This conviction happened over four years after the end of his Circle, in which he had been involved for 20 months. This man had prior convictions for a sustained series of contact offences against two female children for which he had served a six-year custodial sentence. He had continued to actively and consistently voice paedophilic attitudes and beliefs since his conviction, including throughout his time in sex offender treatment and the Circle. Despite his receiving a sexual conviction post-Circle, there is evidence of a harm reduction effect, in that his risk of harm to children was actually reduced as he was not convicted of a further contact offence and he did not personally victimise a child.
- One core member was further convicted of Making Indecent Phone Calls, a practice he had unfortunately been committing at a very high rate over many years throughout sex offender treatment and whilst being a core member for a year. This man also had a previous conviction for a contact sexual offence against a female child. Again, it should be noted that the reconviction was not for a contact offence, although individuals (mainly helpline operators such as Samaritans staff, whom he offended against) were personally victimised by his behaviour. As such, this is another instance in which a harm reduction effect may be argued.

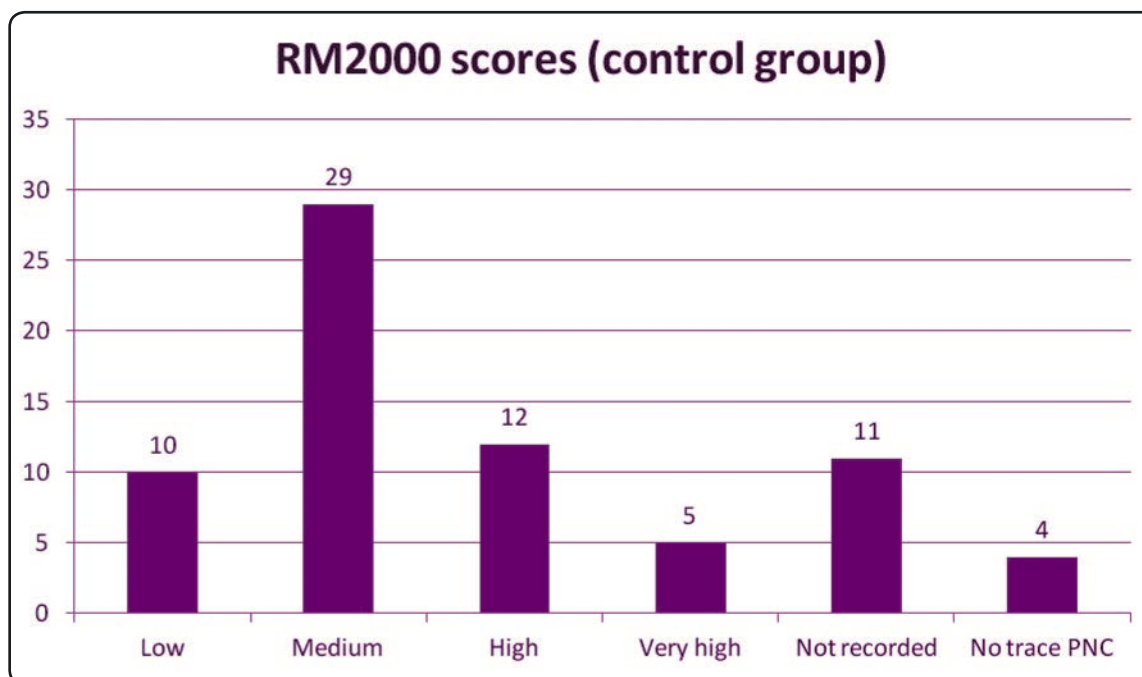
- One core member was convicted of Indecent Assault of a male child aged less than 14 years, but this was a historical offence which predated his being in a Circle. Consequently, this is not considered a sexual reoffense for purposes of this study.
- One core member was convicted of Meeting with a Female Child following Grooming approximately 14 months after he was removed from his Circle against COSA advice after only six months because he moved out of the area to a location where Circles were not available. The core member's original offences were Possession of Indecent Images of Children.

None of the above reconvictions was a contact sex offence, other than the historical conviction which pre-dated the Circles activity with the core member. In two cases, the fact that there had been serious previous contact sexual offences committed against children supports and argument that the Circles involvement contributed towards harm reduction, even though there was a sexual reconviction. Where calculations are available to be made using RM2000 research, the incidence of any sexual conviction in the Circles South East group is less than would be predicted (i.e., 2 as opposed to 5.75).

### Control Group Data

Further to the above analysis, a group of convicted sexual offenders who were referred to Circles South East but who, for a variety of reasons, did not receive the service were also followed up using the PNC. Records of this group were kept by Circles South East only from February 2005 onwards. The complete list of unsuccessful referrals consisted of 149 cases, but many of these were not suitable for comparison with the Circles South East core member group. In some cases, this was because the unsuccessful referral had still not yet been released from prison, while in others they were not processed because they displayed evident lack of motivation to engage with Circles (the referral probably coming from another source, such as the offender manager or the local MAPPA). For the purpose of this study this full list was thus reduced to a revised total of 71 cases, which could then be compared with the Circles South East core member group. As far as Circles South East records could ascertain, these were cases that were assessed as suitable for a Circle, but the (potential) core member withdrew his application prior to Circle commencing. The average follow-up period for the comparison group was 55.04 months, slightly longer than the average follow-up period of the core member group of 52.57 months.

The RM2000 scores of this control group were taken from Thames Valley Police ViSOR (violent and sexual offender register) database and the results are displayed in the following graph.



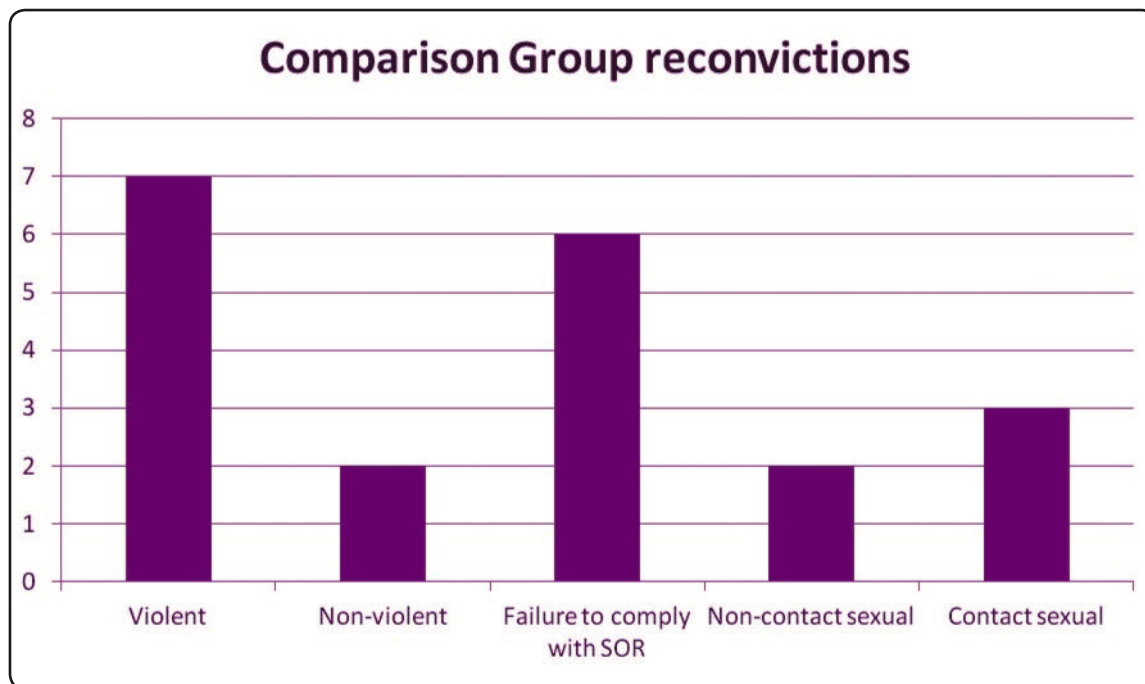
**Graph 6:** Risk Matrix scores - control group

Analysis of this data shows a favourable comparison between the core member group and the control group with the former having *higher* RM2000 scores and yet a lower level of significant reconvictions. Using a calculation giving points according to each risk score (e.g. low = 1 point, very high = 4 points), the two groups scored as follows:

Points	Cms	Rm2000 Score	Control	Points
19	19	low	10	10
50	25	med	29	58
51	17	high	12	36
28	7	very high	5	20
0	0	no trace pnc	4	0
0	3	NK	11	0
<b>148</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>124</b>

We see that the overall risk score for the core members group is 148 compared to the Control groups 124, indicating a HIGHER expected level of risk for the core members.

On the following graph only the most serious **formal reconviction information available on the PNC** is presented for the control group. There are no data available on recall activity and some offenders were reconvicted for multiple offences crossing over categories described below.



**Graph 7: Comparison group reconvictions**

We note from the graph above that seven members of the comparison group were reconvicted for violent offences. These included Wounding with intent to cause Grievous Bodily Harm, several instances of Battery, and Damage to Property. No Circles South East core member was reconvicted of a violent offence. The rate of failure to comply with the sex offender register was double the rate for Circles South East core members and we also note the presence of three contact sexual reconvictions in the comparison group, including Rape, Sexual Assault of a Female under 13, and Sexual Assault of a Male under 16. No Circles South East core member was convicted for a new contact sexual offence.

	CSE core members	Comparison group
<b>Contact sexual or violent reconviction</b>	0	10
<b>Non-contact sexual reconviction</b>	3	2
<b>Failure to comply with Sex Offender Register</b>	3	6
<b>Breach of SOPO</b>	2	0

A calculation of was applied to this outcome relating to **contact sexual or violent reconviction** which confirms that the groups are statistically significantly different ( $X^2 = 10.75$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## MENTORING

As well as running Circles of Support and Accountability, Circles South East has also offered a Mentoring service since July 2008, whereby a single volunteer offers advice, assistance, and social support to a convicted sexual offender in the community also known as a core member. Historically, the mentoring scheme evolved from an ongoing informal contact between a core member and a volunteer after a Circle had finished, or where the project had only a single volunteer available in a location where a potential core member lived. The scheme became formalised when a Mentoring coordinator was appointed in 2008, with the service later gaining Approved Provider Status from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation.

With the appointment of a coordinator the Circles South East Mentoring scheme became better defined and a programme was devised underpinned by the 'Better Lives Wheel of Life' model (Ward & Laws, 2010). As the numbers of volunteers increased the assessment process was refined and the coordinators began to allocate a Mentoring service to those who posed a low risk of harm to the public, largely involving non-contact offences (hence the high number of Internet offenders present in the offences graph below). The assessment process was refined further, so it became clearer about which of services potential core members will be suited to.

It is worth noting that at this time the statutory agencies insisted that their funding towards the project was to be used for those sexual offenders who had been assessed as causing high risk of harm and would benefit from a Circle. This reflected their own internal agenda of reducing resources for those convicted of non contact offences. It was against this backdrop that the following rationale was developed to try and assess which core members would be suitable for Mentoring, rather than using the more resource intense model of a Circle. The following key points were identified as a measure of whether Mentoring would be suitable:

- Dynamic risk is as important as the static measurement
- High risk of harm can also be managed through a mentoring relationship
- Dynamic risk needs to be relatively stable so that goals can be identified and 'Better Lives' work can begin
- A core member would find a group of volunteers overwhelming (e.g., someone on the Autism spectrum)
- A lone volunteer would be safe working with a particular core member.

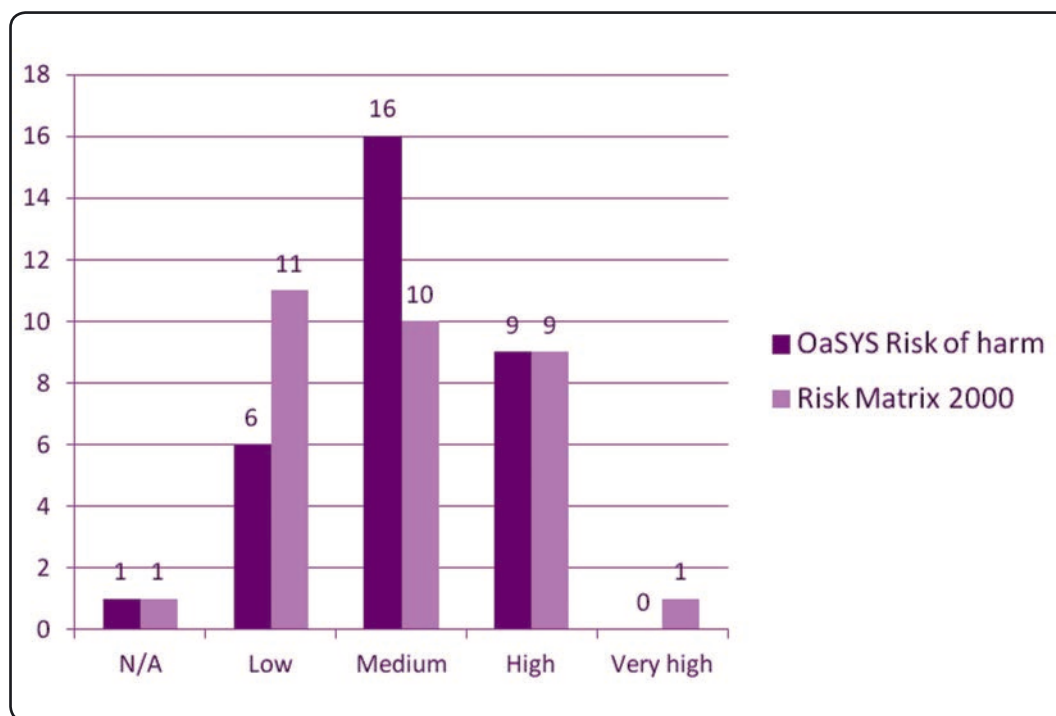
### **The Following is a Summary of Key Statistics of Mentoring Cases:**

- Between July 2008 and April 2012 there has been 32 core members working with 24 Mentors.
- The recommended period for Mentoring is 12 months, although two cases received a service for more than 13 months.
- The majority of Mentoring took place in the Thames Valley area (71.8% of cases), with Hampshire cases making up the remaining 28.2% of the total.
- Fifty percent of Mentoring cases had a Sex Offence Prevention Order (SOPO) made against the core member at the time their Mentoring started.



Risk Matrix 2000 risk assessment scores and OaSYS risk of harm assessments were recorded for all cases at the start of their Mentoring. These are shown in Graph 5 below.

### Risk Assessments for Mentoring Cases



**Graph 8:** Risk assessments for mentoring cases

#### **OaSYS risk of serious harm assessments are defined as follows:**

'Serious harm' is defined as physical or psychological damage from which it would be difficult or impossible for the victim to recover.

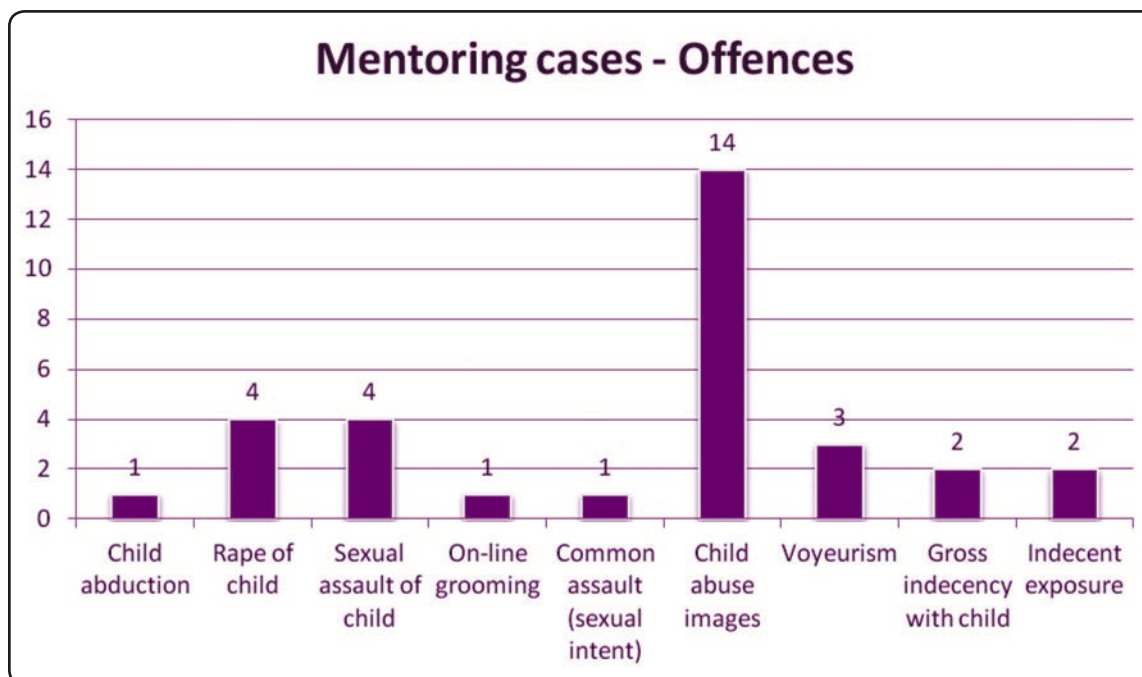
Low risk = unlikely to happen

Medium risk = unlikely to happen unless there is a change in the offender's circumstances

High risk = could happen at any time

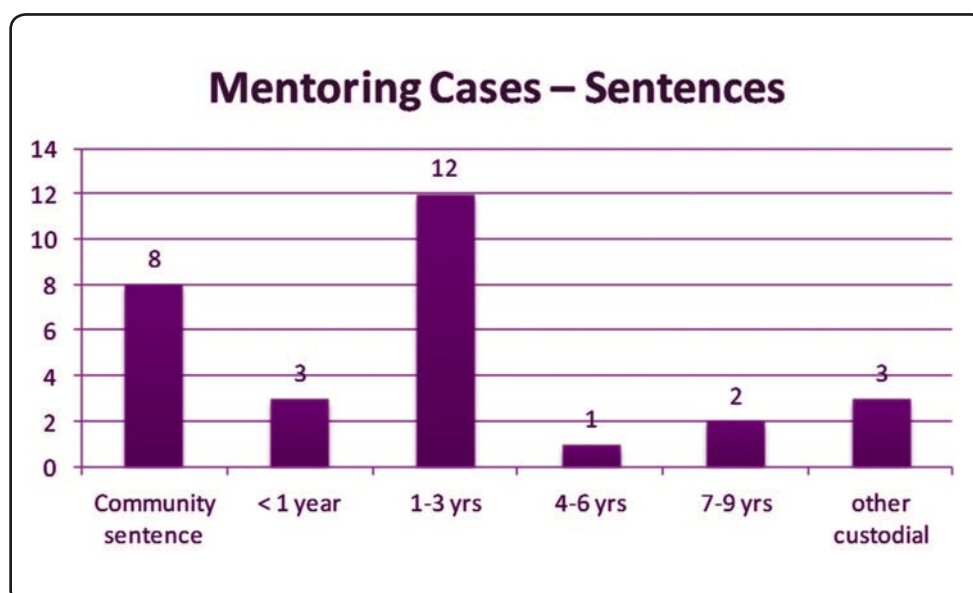
Very high risk = is more likely than not to happen and likely imminently.

OaSYS risk of serious harm assessments have not been routinely recorded for Circles so no comparison can be made with the Mentoring group. However, we note a difference in the spread of Risk Matrix 2000 assessments for Mentoring cases, with the highest percentage of cases being classified as a low risk of reconviction (34%); although, a significant number are also at medium risk (31%) or high risk (28%) of reconviction. This finding disputes the idea that Mentoring cases are all low risk as, in fact, the spread across low, medium, and high is quite even, with around a third of cases falling into each category. However, core members tended to be allocated a Mentor if their level of social need was assessed as lower than that of a Circles core member. In mentoring core members, OaSYS risk of serious harm assessments follow an evenly distributed pattern with the majority of cases (50%) scored as medium risk of serious harm, with 19% low risk and 28% high.



**Graph 9:** Mentoring cases – offences

The graph above shows that the most common offence committed by Mentoring Core Members was Downloading Indecent Images of Children from the internet. Overall, we see that 20/32 (62.5%) Mentoring core members had committed non-contact sex offences, although 12/32 had committed contact sexual offences, primarily against children. The graph below further reinforces the seriousness of many mentoring core member's offences, as we note a majority of custodial sentences (75%), with six having served sentences of four years or more.



**Graph 10:** (Mentoring cases – sentences)

## Mentoring Cases – Outcomes

Two Mentoring core members have been reconvicted for non-contact sexual offences. Both were assessed as high risk of harm on OaSYS, but were allocated to Mentoring rather than Circles due to volunteer availability and health and safety issues (risk to adult women). Details of the cases are:

- Case 1** Two years imprisonment for On-Line Grooming of a Child This conviction occurred after the Core Member had successfully completed his time in a Mentoring relationship and the Mentor had assisted him in achieving housing, employment. As such, the identified goals were met.
- Case 2** Two years imprisonment for Inciting a Child to Commit Sexual Behaviour and On-Line Grooming

## VOLUNTEERS

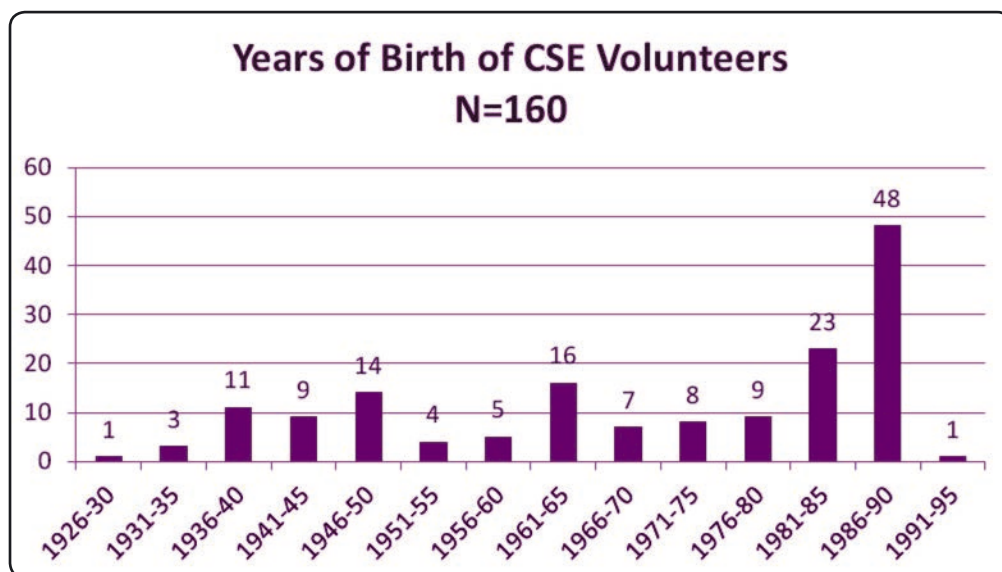
This study examines information about and given by volunteers in order to describe and pay tribute to the phenomenon wherein such individuals work with sex offenders in the community to such positive effect. The following descriptive data was gathered from files held by Circles South East on 160 active volunteers.

### Gender

Female volunteers	Male
118 (73.75%)	42 (26.25%)

### Age of Volunteers

The following graph shows the years of birth (grouped into 5-year periods across the x axis) of all Circles South East volunteers (N=160)



Graph 11: Years of Birth of CSE volunteers

There is a clear peak in the number of volunteers born between 1986 and 1990 (e.g., aged 22 to 26 at the time of study). This group were mainly students at the time of their volunteering. Elsewhere, however, we note a wide range of ages in Circles South East volunteers from the oldest born in 1930 to the youngest recruited in 2012 who was born in 1991 (the lower age limit for Circles South East volunteers is 21).

### Occupation of Volunteers

The graph below shows the occupations of Circles South East volunteers broken down into basic groupings. It is of interest to see the wide variation of employment backgrounds.



**Graph 12:** Occupation of volunteers

Again, the largest category of volunteers is recorded as being students (primarily, where specified, of psychology and criminology). 'Caring professions' are classed as those who work in health or social services settings outside of the criminal justice system. The previous occupation of those volunteers who are now retired is represented above if it is known.

To illustrate the rich diversity of Circles South East volunteers, the following is a non-exhaustive list of occupations which make up the 'other' category (20.6% of the total).

- Chemist
- IT consultant
- Sales manager
- Warehouse worker
- Business analyst
- Oil industry executive
- Company director
- Retail
- Accountant
- Builder
- Farmer
- Accountant
- Banker
- Hairdresser
- Photographer
- Funeral director
- Engineer
- Radiographer

## Stated Motivations Behind Volunteering

When completing the original application paperwork in order to work with Circles South East, volunteers were asked to give their motivation to volunteer according to seven different categories, which are summarised thus:

1. Due to religious beliefs informing their social and volunteering activities
2. Supportive of the constructive, humane societal principles upon which Circles is based
3. Professional interest arising from area of current employment or preferred future employment
4. Issues to do with personal experience as a survivor of sexual abuse
5. The child protection aspect of Circles
6. The desire to create safer communities in general
7. Personal interest in this aspect of social/criminal justice work

The graph below shows the number of times each category was endorsed by a volunteer. Each motivational area is clearly not exclusive and some volunteers recorded more than one motivation.

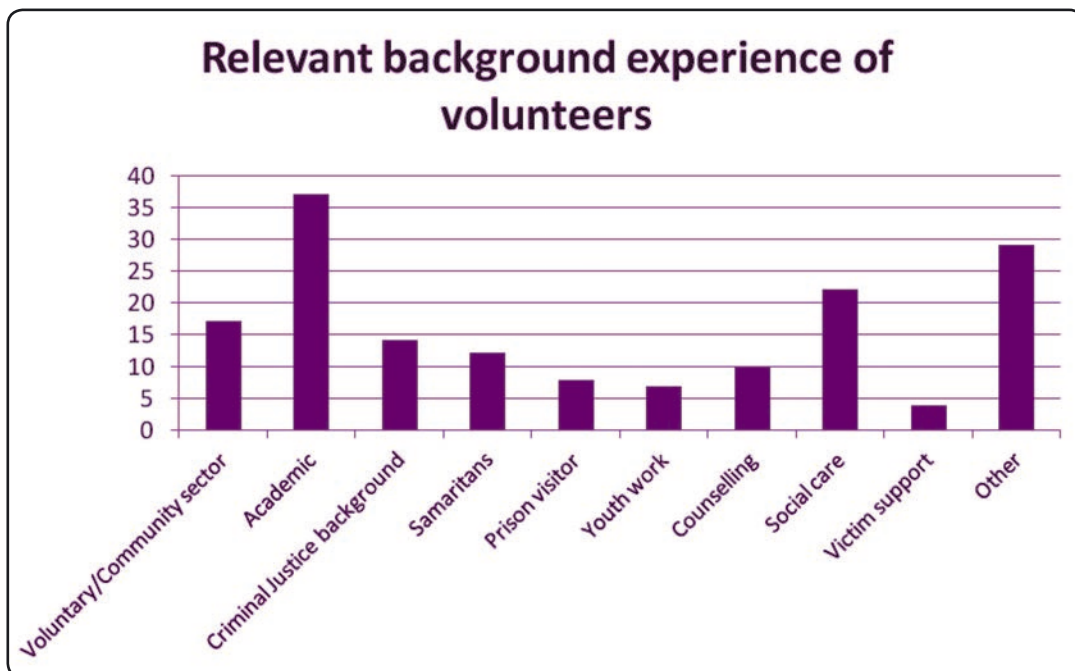


**Graph 13:** Motivation to volunteer



Also requested in the application paperwork is information about the relevant background experiences of those applying to become Circles South East volunteers. This is summarised in the graph below where information is presented for a larger number of 160 volunteers who have been registered with Circles South East. Again we see a range of academic, voluntary and professional backgrounds which inform the practice of Circles South East volunteers. Additional areas of experience identified by volunteers in their applications within the 'Other' category on the graph below are:

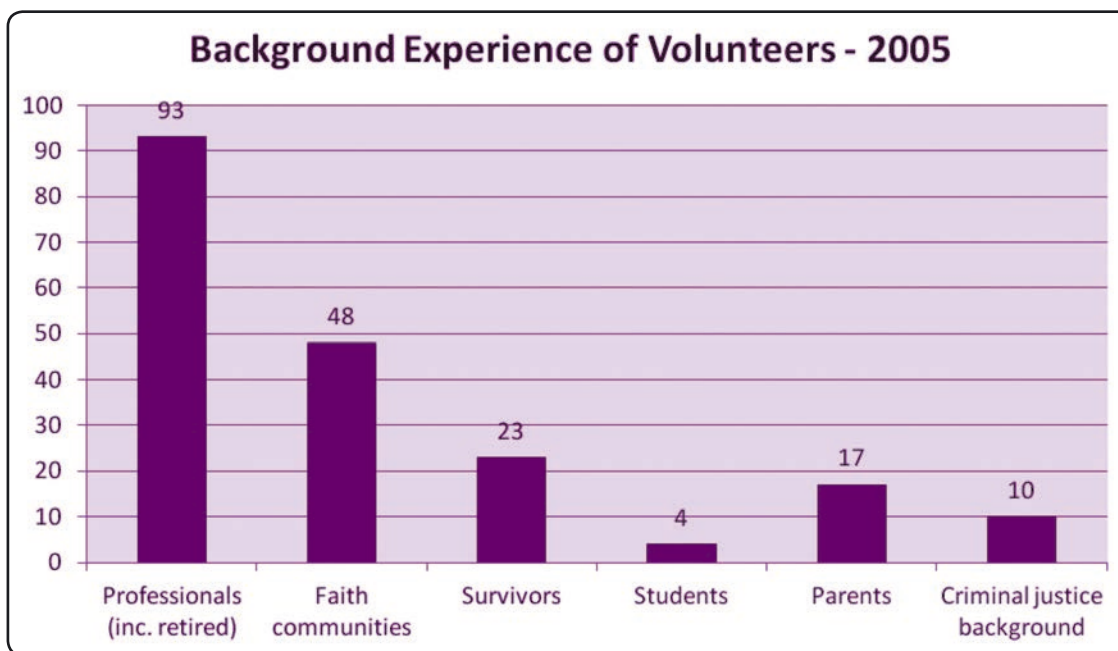
- Magistrate
- Voluntary service overseas
- Housing key-worker
- Human rights activist
- Philosophy student
- Law student
- Media
- Law
- Education
- Work with children
- Chaplaincy



**Graph 14:** Relevant Background experience volunteers

Again, we see the dominance of relevant academic areas of study, but also the strong presence of other areas of voluntary and social support activities (e.g., Samaritans and prison visiting as well as those who have applied such practice within a faith context).

The information presented in the previous two graphs compares interestingly with that contained on the graph below, reproduced from the second Thames Valley Circles report in 2005 (QPSW 2005). This reported on the stated backgrounds and motivational factors as a percentage of the volunteers who had worked with TV COSA at that time.



**Graph 15:** Background experience of volunteers 2005

Of particular note is an increase in volunteers who are students – from just 2% in 2005 to 30% today. This can be ascribed to a number of factors:

- Initial recruitment was undertaken via presentations to faith groups, etc.
- Current recruitment is done almost entirely via the Internet.
- In 2005, the Project deliberately targeted universities, undertaking a variety of lectures and presentations.
- There is now a culture of internship throughout academia and potential volunteers are coming forward with volunteering specifically in mind.
- High unemployment rates among young graduates are leading to people seeking voluntary experience to enhance their curriculum vitae.

None of the above necessarily affects the quality of the work undertaken by volunteers, but diversity is clearly an issue that has required attention. As such more recruitment is being done via presentation again, particularly to more mature groups such as the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age etc.

## Volunteer Questionnaire

For the purposes of this 10-year study the 160 volunteers were sent a questionnaire asking three questions.

1. What inspired you to become a volunteer for Circles South East?
2. What benefit do you think Circles South East has upon core members?
3. Why do you continue to volunteer for Circles South East?

Forty questionnaires were returned for analysis within the required timeframe. This low response rate may well indicate that Circles South East volunteers are busy people who have only limited time that they can spend on their volunteering activities, which may not extend to responding to questionnaires or other administrative requests. However, key themes emerging from the survey were;

- Nine said that their primary purpose in working with Circles South East was to reduce sexual victimisation by working constructively with convicted sexual offenders.
- Nine volunteers said they thought that increasing the self-esteem of core members would be likely to increase their likelihood of not seeking gratification by sexually reoffending
- Nine said that they were motivated by seeking relevant experience in a criminal justice field as they had ambitions to work in this area in the future.
- Eight said that there were inspired to work with Circles South East because they came from a relevant professional background
- Four said they came to hear about and were motivated to work with Circles South East because of their Quaker beliefs
- Three said that they wanted to do something constructive about the issue of sexual abuse in society to counteract the 'anxiety and hysteria' which they thought was perpetuated by various sectors of the media. One respondent commented on the perceived hypocrisy whereby sexual offenders are often vilified with no hope for redemption while gangsters who terrorise and murder others are not subject to such shame and are sometimes even 'lionised'.
- Four specifically mentioned the needs for core members to have a stake in society (what is known as 'social capital') in order to be functioning human beings
- Three said that they were not asked to volunteer for Circles activities as much as they would have liked.
- Three were motivated by the good training schedule offered to Circles South East volunteers
- Two said that they believe offenders have the capacity to change

- One mentioned the significance of doing such work on a voluntary basis and not being paid for it as a factor which increases the credibility of volunteers in the eyes of the core members.
- One said that experiences as a survivor of sexual abuse had motivated her to engage with Circles South East
- One said they thought it was important to reflect reality to core members in order to reduce their feelings of being hard-done-by.
- One said that working in a group of volunteers was very positive as it meant that the work was non-collusive.

The following are extracts from the minutes and reports produced from Circle and Mentoring activity. These extracts have been included to give an insight into the many difficult issues volunteers are dealing with. Contributions come either from the minutes of meetings, or questionnaires returned by volunteers following completion of the formal part of contact:

**Core member Andrew has a history of serious sexual assaults against both male and female children. Current offences were two breaches of a Sex Offender Prevention Order (SOPO). Also a formal diagnosis for Personality Disorder was significant in this MAPPA level 3 Case.**

**The following extract is from the minutes provided by a member of the Circle following individual contact with the core member (the *italics* are the editor's)**

"He told me that he is thinking of getting a computer to help him get a job...There are obvious risks attached to Andrew having use of a computer and the Internet in privacy. Although he has never used the Internet to look at indecent images of children in the past, this is largely due to the fact that he hasn't ever used the Internet. He recognised that this may be a risk, and he has spoken with the Public Protection Unit about it...*[they can't stop him because he's no longer on license, and they suggested filtering software]*...I wonder if they are talking about Securus...which costs £15 per month. It's a positive sign that he is willing to have this. My only concern would be whether he could afford it and when it came down to it, whether he would be willing to pay."

**The following sentence is from an 'End of Circle Questionnaire';**

**"What was rewarding about this Circle?"**

"Feeling that I may have played a small part in changing someone's life for the better and that change may prevent another victim"

**Core Member Barry has an extensive history of sexual assaults committed against female adults and children, these are victims both known to him and relative strangers. The health and safety of the volunteers is therefore a significant feature of this Circle.**

### **The following extract is from the minutes of a Circle meeting:**

“Barry said he had seen a lady on the bus ten days ago, on his way to town. Barry said she smiled at him several times. The lady got off the bus and Barry said he thought that was the end of it until he walked into a shop and the lady worked in there as a shop assistant. Barry said he thought, “BINGO!” However, Barry was pleased to say she showed no interest in him whatsoever. The group advised him she was just a friendly lady. Barry said this was a potentially dodgy situation...”

**Core Member Colin has convictions for Downloading Indecent Images. He was part of the Mentoring scheme. Loneliness and social isolation were the significant issue for Colin and his treatment programme was addressing his sexual interests and other relevant factors.**

### **The following extract is from the volunteer’s minutes following individual contact;**

“We talked about the chance of his going to Uni. Apparently he knows of a course for a Motor Sports degree which his parents talked him out of years ago. Don’t know if it still exists and he’s going to look into it....Do you think it’s a possibility that he can go to University? Would he have to disclose if he applied? How realistic is this idea do you think? We really did look at the negative side and talked about a) being rejected; b) failing; c) having to work to support a grant; d) difficulties still existing in trying to socialise. He’s going to look up courses before next week.”

The above extracts give a snapshot of the work undertaken by Circle volunteers; however it is the themes and patterns identified through a deeper analysis which will help to inform future policy and practice. Extensive interviews with four volunteers (one of whom was a volunteer with Circles South East) conducted for the Hanvey, Philpot, and Wilson (2011) publication can also be used to identify similar key themes related to a volunteer’s desire to engage in Circle work, as is shown below;

### **Volunteer Profiles:**

- Retired head teacher/male/white European
- Retired nurse/female/white European
- Graduate/female/Asian
- Business and financial analyst/female/white European

### **Motivation**

All four of the volunteers had a background in working / studying / previous volunteering in the criminal justice system. As a collective, they all expressed the opinion that offenders were more than the sum total of their offending behaviour; expressing a belief that labelling did nothing to help make society safer while believing this to be specifically true in relation to sex offenders and the media. All expressed the opinion that their own lives had been blessed with good fortune and that they therefore felt an obligation to give something back.



The expression of 'goodness' relating to the human spirit was expressed both from faith and secular perspectives, with a general belief in an offender's ability to change. There was a collective acknowledgement that it was circumstances that determined who did and who did not offend: "It could be anyone" (Hanvey, Philpot, and Wilson 2011, page 126) and this translated into a common desire to apply an approach that was restorative in practice, thereby enhancing the well-being of the community. That said, all four volunteers commented upon the difficulty relating to the task asked of them. Aware of manipulation and deception by their core member, all agreed that appropriate adult modelling and facilitation of a safe and successful reintegration into the wider community was the measure of their achievement.

All four volunteers stated that part of their motivation for being involved in Circles was to give back to society/community. One was using volunteering in Circles as a way of gaining admission to a forensic Master's degree, while the remaining three all had previous volunteering experience within the criminal justice system. There was a general belief that the Circle was a powerful vehicle for change and that change came about in the core members through the opportunity to build trusting relationships that would then empower and create a sense of self-worth. The unpaid nature of the task was seen to be important, as was the transparency facilitated by the initial Circle contract – resulting in no hidden agendas: "There's a contract: We say look, if we think you're engaging in risky behaviour, we will report that – that's the deal. Our purpose is "No More Victims" (Hanvey et al 2011, page 119).

### **Feeling Part of a Team**

All four testimonies referenced the importance of unity experienced in the Circle – being part of a team – volunteers supporting one and another – different perspectives – able to cross reference and therefore gain a greater insight that helps analyse those issues presented by the core member. Diversity and difference between volunteers was also highlighted; particularly, when volunteers bring with them differing perspectives, life experiences, strengths, and weaknesses that ultimately make the Circle stronger. "I think two of my fellow volunteers are quite cynical, which is a very good balance actually in a Circle – that works very well". (Hanvey et al, 2011, page 128).

### **Survivor Issues**

One of the Volunteer disclosed that she is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and raised a number of insightful issues pertaining to the subject. Another volunteer's testimony reflected upon two separate Circles he had volunteered with, both of which contained fellow volunteers who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. His description of their Circle experience – resulting in two very different conclusions – provides insight not only related to process and outcome, but also with regard to both the positive and negative impact Circles can have upon those survivors working within them. These descriptive accounts highlight the complexities of such issues and the need for future examination in order to address both the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the Circle.

As is evident from the themes and patterns identified above, volunteers are the life-blood of Circles and it is they who make each Circle unique. The volunteers working in a Circle provide detailed minutes of all Circle meetings and the activities undertaken by core members, in order to record their work so it may be reviewed by the professionally trained Circles South East coordinators. It is then passed on (with the full knowledge of all concerned) to all the relevant professionals responsible for the core member's risk management. However, the work of each Circle is guided primarily

by the volunteers themselves who apply common-sense, practical advice and support to the core member. This appears to be the particular strength of the process, the fact that they are 'volunteers' appears to be a powerful motivational force. They give their time freely and engage in meaningful human relationships appears to inspire the core member not only to continue their involvement with the volunteers over months and even years, but to motivate them to repay the faith that has been placed in them by (in the large majority of cases) not reoffending.

### **Deselection of Volunteers**

From the 320 volunteers who completed training with Circles South-East and assigned to a core member, a total of six were formally deselected. The reason for Deselection was as follows;

- Displaying inappropriate attitudes
- Not adhering to Volunteer Policies and Procedures
- Reliability and commitment
- Inappropriate behaviour towards other volunteers
- A survivor of sexual abuse who was not yet ready to work in a Circle
- A volunteer trying to meet their own personal needs from the Circle

## **DISCUSSION**

Attempting to evaluate the impact of any Circles programme is a complicated and rigorous task. Although there is a National Code of Practice (Circles UK 2009) to which compliance is important, Circles is not an accredited intervention obeying specific rules of 'treatment integrity', whereby every planned engagement with an offender is closely monitored by professionals to ensure that it runs in precisely the same way every time. Indeed, each Circle is a unique entity in which a group of trained volunteers meet with a core member, to maintain them on their path towards avoiding further offending. The approach and style of work in each Circle differs according to the core member and his/her needs, which may change over time.

Any kind of intervention targeting sexual offending is notoriously difficult to evaluate (Friendship & Thornton, 2001) because the baseline for sexual offender reconviction is low relative to other offending behaviours. Further, data suggest that reconviction might happen over much longer periods of time (see Hanson & Thornton, 2000; Helmus, 2009). Around 15% of sexual offenders are reconvicted in their lifetime for a sexual offence, but lengthy follow-up periods are required before any meaningful information about a lack of reconviction might be gathered. It should also be noted that the distribution of perceived risk relating to the possibility of sexual reoffending is positively skewed, meaning that there are many more offenders in the lower ranges of risk than there are in the higher ranges (see Helmus, 2009). As a model helpful in the sexual offender's re-entry into the community, Circles has traditionally been applied to those sexual offenders in the higher ranges of risk to reoffend.

In this study we included analyses of reconvictions for violent and other offences, as these may occur with a higher frequency than sexual reconvictions, allowing for better shorter-term data gathering. Circles South East has always sought to be as open and honest as possible in seeking to identify and examine any incidence of offending behaviour that takes place after Circles contact, and to learn from such occurrences.

The 71 Circles described and analysed in this study, lasting on average 15.9 months each, represent a very great amount of time and energy spent by volunteers in supporting the core member. This includes many hours attending Circles meetings, attending professional review meetings with co-ordinators, and myriad additional social activities. To seek to summarise all of this work by volunteers simply by describing the eventual behavioural outcome of the core member (e.g., whether or not they were reconvicted, and of what offence) seems inadequate. A previous study of Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles (Bates et al., 2010) described the positive achievements made by core members during their time in a Circle according to various aspects of their life as categorised in the Offender Assessment System (OaSYS) 'pathways' towards and away from offending, as utilised by the Probation and Prison Services. This was problematic as it was difficult to evidence the progress a core member made on any particular pathway as being wholly a result of the input of Circles. Furthermore, it is difficult to define when a core member has achieved any positive outcome in their life as opposed to having *not* achieved a negative outcome (e.g., recall to prison or reconviction), which can be quite easily and categorically defined.

Similarly, the long-term failure of a core member to refrain from re-offending may not relate entirely to the quality of support and accountability provided by a Circle (which might be very high), but may be primarily to the level of motivation that core member had to desist from offending and the opportunities available to him/her to access a balanced, self-determined lifestyle. The Circle alone cannot be the sole factor in a core member's life; other key issues will come into play in determining any behavioural outcome. This is especially true over the long periods of time such as are discussed in this study. Circles of Support and Accountability (and, indeed, most criminological interventions) occur within the complexities of 'real-world' community situations and are not laboratory experiments where particular actions taken upon a human being can be isolated, included, or left out of various versions of similar interventions.

Above all, Circles is a societal response to a social and psychological problem – that problem being the fact that some people choose for whatever reason to sexually abuse and thereby victimise and harm others for the purpose of their own gratification. Circles is an example of a way in which society, represented by members of the public who become volunteers, has taken steps to go beyond the dependence of state-provided interventions to reduce acts of sexual abuse (including changes in the law and the practice of criminal justice agencies such as the Police, Prison and Probation Services). In this way Circles is a remarkable example of public-spirited individuals giving their time in order to attempt to address what is considered in some contexts to be the scourge of our age. Circles, both in the South East area and nationally, are now empowering members of the public to learn about and respond to the behaviours of known sexual offenders living in our communities. Through its training and practice Circles have become a very significant factor in crime prevention and public protection. In the face of a moral panic about sexual abuse, much of which has been propagated by the media, Circles continues to receive constructive and responsible media support (for instance, 'All in the Mind', BBC Radio 4 broadcast, July 2010), and has enabled concerned members of the public to be better informed about those issues relating to sexual abuse and engage in something practical to address the issue.

## CONCLUSION

As this study demonstrates, theoretical models relating to the treatment and risk management of those who commit sexual offences have changed radically over the past 10 years. Desistance theory, the Good Lives Model, and other goal focused approaches have begun to impact upon the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Bonta, 1996), which focussed upon clinical factors to the exclusion of environmental context. Circles have always provided the environmental context for the clinical framework, but we are now able to embody the theoretical theories of strength based practice, while facilitating the management of the core member's dynamic risk.

Circles have always appeared to prove effective in their practice. The theoretical framework (Saunders & Wilson 2003) that underpins all Circle work remains constant, allowing for the successful transition of new theoretical models to be implemented into practice. The concept of the Circle model remains a simple one; restoration through meaningful and honest human relationships facilitates a unique dynamic that provides an investment for the core member to lead an offence-free future. Regardless of the context, country, system, or structure in which Circles are implemented, it would appear that the magic ingredient of meaningful human relationships remains the same. It works because members of the community who through a desire to engage in constructive and creative ways of reducing sexual re-offending, give of their time and selves.

Flexibility to tailor a support structure appropriate to the risk and need of a core member remains important, however providing a bespoke service within an organisational culture of contracts, targets, and payment by results is challenging and has the potential for funding to impact upon practice in a negative way. Adaptations and developments relating to the Circle model are particularly important in ensuring that Circles remains relevant and useful to risk management practice e.g. Circles for younger people, for those suffering Intellectual Disabilities and Autism and using the Circles model in total institutions prior to release or discharge. It therefore remains vital that all projects delivering a Circle's service continue to review and revise practice, ensuring the continued growth of the movement. Projects delivering a service should avoid remaining static and aim to pursue opportunities that allow for the widening of services. Developments are necessary to effectively secure the financial support required for the long-term sustainability of projects.

The statistic of 172 volunteers actively working in Circles South-East is significant when compared to the same national number of 600, demonstrating the importance of Circles South East's contribution to the overall national picture. Over the past 10 years, 320 members of the public in the South East area have participated in the initial two-day volunteer training.

Changes in the demographics of volunteers over the past 10 years require further investigation. The first cohort of volunteers (QPSW, 2005) demonstrated that significant numbers (25%) of survivors were volunteering and a wide selection of professional 93% were engaging, while students (2%) remained significantly low. However, as noted in the study, post graduate students (now 30%) represent a rapidly growing segment of our volunteer base. This increase of students volunteering over recent years reflects changes in recruitment strategies. When the pilot project commenced, recruitment was active and face-to-face within many and various communities located throughout Thames Valley and Hampshire. In 2009, there was a distinct policy change relating to the recruitment of volunteers, whereby the project used the website "Do-it-Org" to advertise volunteering opportunities. This resulted in fully booked training events,



often with waiting lists; however, this strategy also resulted in a decrease in diversity amongst the volunteer population. This illustrates that it is important to ensure that any recruitment strategy uses a wide range of possible methods. In our view, there is no replacement for active face-to-face recruitment.

Circles South East has developed the Mentoring service so that as a project it can be flexible in meeting the needs of the core member and referring agency. Consideration of health and safety issues, volunteer availability, as well as the specific needs and the risk presented by the core member allows for a responsive service and the appropriate allocation of resources. Although an overview of the projects Mentoring service was provided within this study, future work will be required to evaluate this service. The issue that two out of 35 core members involved in the Mentoring service were reconvicted for a new non-contact sexual offence is significantly higher when compared to the Circles reconviction data. An insight and understanding is needed upon which a criterion for suitability in relation to the Mentoring service can be implemented.

There is also further research that can be undertaken in order to continue to gain a deeper understanding of how volunteers engage core members so effectively. The challenge will be to secure additional funding so that this can be pursued. It would also be beneficial to tap into the national (and, perhaps, international) data being gathered by other Circles projects, so that this information can be collated centrally and continue to inform practice and development.

Additionally, a further study is required to explore the amount of data recorded within the Circle minutes. The minutes offer a wealth of process information and qualitative data. These minutes are used to monitor the work of the Circles and all relevant information is shared with professionals. However, the information contained within these documents would allow the exploration of the work undertaken within Circles through the perspective of the volunteers, accessing minutes and volunteer questionnaires, to track the progress of the Circle.

The other area requiring further consideration is the training of volunteers. Circles South East has worked hard to provide an annual training programme for volunteers, ensuring that volunteers remain informed about current theory and practice and have a skills set and knowledge base to work with the core member effectively. Evaluation forms for training events are reviewed and used to identify what training has been helpful (or not) for volunteers. Coordinators discuss at group reviews the needs of volunteers and ask them to identify any additional support that would assist them. It would also be helpful to understand and evaluate how any additional training over and above the basic two-day programme is enhancing the work of the volunteers. Through reviewing the evaluation forms completed after every training event, undertaking regular questionnaires with volunteers and possibly setting up a controlled comparison group, a full study could be undertaken to investigate whether the efforts and investment Circle projects are making in the training and development of volunteers impacts upon the quality and outcome of the Circles objective.

All the paid staff working for Circles South East have a professional criminal justice background and experience of working with those who have perpetrated sexually harmful behaviour. Every member of the staff team has experienced Circles as an affirmation of positive change for those whom certain sections of society believe are beyond redemption.

## An International Post-Script

While Circles has grown in size and scope in the United Kingdom, the movement has continued to spread around the globe. In many ways, the UK has provided leadership through its Circles-UK charity and the hard and diligent work of Circles folk throughout England and Wales (with continued interest in Scotland and Ireland). We are aware that there is now a European Circles consortium which includes delegates from the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Spain, Latvia, and other interested countries, in addition to Circles in the UK. In Canada, the birthplace of Circles, projects are now found in virtually every major city centre (a total of 16 projects coast to coast). In the United States, the Office of Justice Programs of the Department of Justice is providing funding for a number of Circles of Support and Accountability based projects, including evaluation studies, project start-ups, and training and technical assistance. Elsewhere, Australia, China, Japan, and New Zealand are just a few of the other international jurisdictions interested in innovative approaches to the safe and humane reintegration of sexual offenders.





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## Figures and Graphs

**Figure 1:** Graphic representation of Circles model (Wilson & Picheca, 2005)

**Graph 1:** Offence category

**Graph 2:** Sentence served by core member

**Graph 3:** MAPPA levels of core members

**Graph 4:** Risk Matrix categories (core members)

**Graph 5:** Post Circle behaviour

**Graph 6:** Risk Matrix scores - control group

**Graph 7:** Comparison group reconvictions

**Graph 8:** Risk assessments for mentoring cases

**Graph 9:** Mentoring cases – offences

**Graph 10:** (Mentoring cases – sentences)

**Graph 11:** Years of Birth of CSE volunteers

**Graph 12:** Occupation of volunteers

**Graph 13:** Motivation to volunteer

**Graph 14:** Relevant Background experience volunteers

**Graph 15:** Background experience of volunteers 2005



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## **Circles South East is a project for Safer Integration of Sex Offenders into the Community**

### **MISSION STATEMENT:**

**To substantially reduce the risk of future sexual abuse by assisting and supporting offenders who are committed to not re-offending. To assist them in the task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive and accountable lives.**

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