

Executive summary of the

## **Findings from a Feasibility Study on Circles ReBoot**

**A report written for Circles UK**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **Circles ReBoot**

Circles UK is a registered charity and the national body supporting the development, quality, coordination and effectiveness of Providers of Circles of Support and Accountability (*Circles*). A Circle is aimed at supporting the rehabilitation and societal reintegration of individuals convicted of a sexual offence: The individual (*Core Member*) is supported by a group of carefully selected and trained Volunteers to build on their strengths and protective factors against offending and to encourage positive changes in the Core Members' lives, and, in so doing, reduce the risks of reoffending. Each Circle is overseen by a dedicated Coordinator.

In 2020, Circles UK developed Circles ReBoot, a Circle format targeted specifically at individuals with a history of accessing online child sexual exploitation material ([Circles ReBoot – Circles UK \(circles-uk.org.uk\)](https://circles-uk.org.uk)). In line with the Risk Need Responsivity principles (Bonta & Andrews, 2007), Circles ReBoot is (a) shorter than a “traditional” Circle (12 sessions over a 6-month period) and (b) offers a more structured format, focused on achieving goals and fostering skills development. The aim is for Core Members and Volunteers to work through the sessions to enable Core Members to more healthily and prosocially deal with challenges they face in the community and pursue a proactively offence-free lifestyle. The programme methodology is based on a desistance approach, which advocates focusing on supporting the individual to identify and develop strengths that enable desistance from offending behaviour (e.g., Marshall & Marshall, 2012).

#### **Evaluation**

An initial pilot of Circles ReBoot was conducted between 2021-23 and sought to answer the following questions:

- Can the programme attract referrals and be delivered?
- To what extent does Circles ReBoot deliver its stated goals?
- What factors (personal, interpersonal, systemic, and situational) are associated with success?

This pilot evaluation involved 12 Circles ReBoot Circles delivered by Circles South West and Circles South East and was based on the RE-AIM model as a framework for evaluating its feasibility. The evaluation comprised three key activities:

- Interviews and focus groups with Core Members, Coordinators, and Volunteers about their experiences of Circles ReBoot;
- Analysis of data from interviews and Circles ReBoot materials regarding the Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance (RE-AIM) of the programme;

- Identification of areas of good practices and any barriers to success, and opportunities to embed outcomes from the interventions into real life.

## Outcomes

Key findings from the evaluation indicated that:

- The RE-AIM framework was an appropriate feasibility framework for this evaluation and resulted in an informative and rich data pool based on specifically targeted questions being explored.
- Overall, the evaluation demonstrated positive outcomes for Circles ReBoot in all domains, with the strongest evidence for Reach and Adoption. Effectiveness and Implementation were achieved and generated specific and tangible suggestions for further development and improvement. Maintenance was limited due to the timeframe of this evaluation but showed promising findings.
- Appropriate referrals were forthcoming from police and probation services using the Circles ReBoot inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Eleven of the 12 Circles ReBoot Circles ran to completion. The reasons one did not was due to logistical and practical issues on the part of the Provider.
- Core Members reported a range of positive experiences and did not identify any adverse consequences from their participation. Positive changes included increased sense of self-worth and self-efficacy, encouragement to seek positive opportunities and (re)connect socially, and greater reflection and self-awareness.
- Use of the structured and semi-structured session plans was generally well received, with different Core Members, and associated Volunteers, finding different sessions most helpful. This has led to some needs-led variations in the programme delivery.
- A common feedback theme for some combinations of Core Members and Volunteers was the need for them to spend more time getting to know each other before the structured work began.
- At the end of Circles ReBoot, there was similar feedback from Core Members and Volunteers about the 'cliff edge' ending, with associated suggestions of phasing out each Circle and/or to incorporate follow up sessions.
- There were different views on the integration and/or focus of the Core Members' offending behaviour and its context into the programme, and how this would best be done.
- While the programme content and focus on goal setting was generally well-received, some specific issues were identified with aspects of particular sessions, materials, or exercises, and with regards to the measurement of target variables.
- Participants were cautiously optimistic about the potential long-term impacts of the positive changes achieved during Circles ReBoot but emphasised the impact of the strengths and needs of individual Core Members, and the need for systematic follow-up evaluation.

*This is an abbreviated extract from the findings summary and recommendations section of the full report.*

The evaluation was based on the RE-AIM feasibility evaluation framework, which confirmed that the programme design and methodology are appropriate for the service user group, the materials are effective, and Circle Coordinators and volunteers confirmed that the semi-structured programme worked well.

Positive findings of the RE-AIM feasibility categories	Recommendations
<p><b>Reach:</b> Overall, Reach was achieved. Core Members overwhelmingly matched the intake criteria and additionally identified criteria of benefitting from structure, personal engagement and personal accountability. Core Members were able to identify personal strengths that would help create a more positive, offence free life. There was only one referral drop-off (which would have been the 12<sup>th</sup> pilot Circle). Police and Probation staff were enthusiastic about the programme.</p>	<p>Increase stakeholder awareness and review intake criteria. (Perhaps widening intake criteria to include the kinds of higher risk / more challenging cases that are of particular concern to potential police referrers without compromising the ability of Circles ReBoot to meet its objectives safely and effectively).</p>
<p><b>Effectiveness:</b> Overall, Effectiveness was assessed as positive, based on (a) Participants being able to identify the aim of ReBoot (with one exception), (b) Core Members deploying identified strengths into meeting prosocial goals whilst reducing harmful behaviours, (c) improving their coping mechanisms for possible future challenges, (d) reflecting on how to change their lifestyles in ways that would lead to a more satisfying and offence free future, and (e) seeking positive opportunities for change, such as engagement in hobbies, employment, and relationship development. All Core Members described their experience of ReBoot as being exclusively positive.</p>	<p>Review ReBoot materials to consider changing some details of delivery/training etc.</p>
<p><b>Adoption:</b> Overall, Adoption was assessed as good, in that a) the initial ReBoot training was regarded as useful and relevant, b) Core Members were able to successfully engage with the ReBoot process and contents, and c) to a slightly lesser degree all the sessions made sense and were easy to run.</p>	<p>Ensure training and support materials are reviewed and refreshed on an ongoing basis.</p>
<p><b>Implementation:</b> Overall, Implementation was achieved. There were some variations in delivery, based on the emerging needs of Core Members and the Volunteers' judgements and decisions in response to these. There were some negative views on the extent to which training prepared Volunteers for their involvement in ReBoot, but this was counterbalanced by the general view that Coordinators were generally readily available and could provide useful feedback, and guidance.</p>	<p>Specific suggestions for improvement of the training and delivery were provided.</p>
<p><b>Maintenance:</b> Overall, Maintenance was assessed as promising. The extent to which clear and tangible outcomes could be achieved was limited by the opportunities Core Members had to make significant changes within the timescales considered. However, positive themes were identified such as Core Members developing greater reflection and self-awareness, more confidence in social situations and more willingness to seek out positive opportunities for change. As with</p>	<p>No negative maintenance aspects were identified.</p>

<p>the Core Members, the Volunteers and Coordinators generally experienced Circles ReBoot as a positive experience, from which they had gained professional knowledge and skills.</p>	
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**Some quotes demonstrating the qualitative findings:**

**Comments by Core Members:**

*I've actually been going out into social situations, alone, [by] myself, and things like that which is incredible for me, who's been a self-isolating loner.*

*Only positive things have come out of it.*

*The last thing I was expecting to get out of it was confidence, which is something I haven't had my whole life and I'm actually really confident after this whole course*

**Comments by Volunteers:**

*Yeah, socially he improved quite a lot which was not necessarily something we were expecting ... towards the end of the process he had way more eye contact, he was talking more, even starting conversations with me yesterday which was ...a big, a big thing.*

*I think any time spent supporting a person who's isolated, and just opening up that bubble that they're in and putting some oxygen in there, is just such a powerful thing.*

**Comments by Coordinators:**

*His Probation Officer came along (to the review) and just said how he'd been transformed, how he made eye contact with everybody when he came into the Probation Office now as well as the Circle and how she thought he'd been a transformed character... physically his body language was more relaxed and comfortable and engaging, he brought Easter eggs for the Volunteers at the last meeting as a goodbye which was a very positive sign and socially adept, I'd describe it as just the clunkiness just seemed to go from him.*

*I think the really significant one for me was at the beginning in interview, he said 'there's no way I'm ever going to work, there's no way, I'm not capable of work, I don't want to work', blah, blah, blah and at the end he was actively looking for either voluntary or paid employment and I just thought that was fantastic really.*

**What has happened with Circle ReBoot since the end of the evaluation?**

Further ReBoot Circles are being delivered by Circles South West and Circles South East.

In consultation with the Coordinators who delivered the pilot Circles and onlinePROTECT, changes have been made to materials in accordance with the findings above.

- There is more emphasis in early sessions on the Circle getting to know each other.
- Two extra (optional) sessions were introduced. These sessions can be used flexibly according to what seem best for the Core Member. (Building relationships, preparing to end the Circle, having time out from the material).
- There is more explanation to Volunteers and Core Members about how offending behaviour would be addressed within the Circle.
- Work is being completed to refine the suitability criteria to allow slightly riskier and more complex individuals to complete the Circle alongside simplifying the assessment process to ensure both these processes are fully coherent with Circle delivery.
- A Quality Assurance framework has been put in place to ensure Circles ReBoot continues to be delivered consistently and according to the best practice identified in the evaluation.

## Our Thanks

Circles UK would like to thank Circles South West and Circles South East for agreeing to deliver the pilot ReBoot Circles and their ongoing commitment to improve and refine the model and materials.

We would also like to thank Hannah K. Bradshaw, Prof Derek Perkins and Dr Hannah L. Merdian for producing this Evaluation report and their ongoing advice.