

The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title: Evaluability Assessments of the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) Model, Site Report: COSA Fresno

Author(s): Ian A. Elliott, Ph.D., Gary Zajac, Ph.D., Courtney A. Meyer, M.A.

Document No.: 243835

Date Received: October 2013

Award Number: 2012-IJ-CX-0008

This report has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. To provide better customer service, NCJRS has made this Federally-funded grant report available electronically.

<p>Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.</p>

EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS OF THE CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY (COSA) MODEL

SITE REPORT: COSA FRESNO

July 31, 2013

Ian A. Elliott, Ph.D.

The Pennsylvania State University

Email: iae1@psu.edu; Tel: (814) 867-3295

Gary Zajac, Ph.D.

The Pennsylvania State University

Email: gxz3@psu.edu; Tel: (814) 867-3651

Courtney A. Meyer, MA

The Pennsylvania State University

Email: cam572@psu.edu; Tel: (814) 863-0786

Disclaimer: This project was supported by Award No. 2012-IJ-CX-0008, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
Circles of Support and Accountability.....	6
Evaluability assessment	7
COSA intended model.....	7
SITE INFORMATION	10
History and context.....	10
Aims, goals, and mission.....	11
Current capacity	11
IMPLEMENTATION	13
Phase 1: Establishing the COSA team and program.....	13
Phase 2a: Core Member enrolment.....	15
Phase 2b: Volunteer enrolment.....	16
Phase 3: Forging the Circle	17
Phase 4: Ongoing Circle support	18
Phase 5: Dissolution of the Circle.....	20
FINDINGS	21
Fidelity Score	21
Deviations from the intended model.....	21
Quality of data systems	22
Obstacles to evaluation.....	23
CONCLUSIONS.....	25
REFERENCES	27

ABSTRACT

According to the U.S. National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) at least 95% of state prisoners are released back to their communities after a period of incarceration. Both criminal justice agencies and the general public are often particularly conscious of the issue of sex offenders returning to the community because of the potentially negative biological and psychiatric outcomes for victims (e.g., Andersen, Tomada, Vincow, Valente, Polcari, & Teicher, 2008 ; Chen et al., 2010). Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) is a restorative justice-based community reentry program for high-risk sex offenders with little or no pro-social community support, originating from Ontario, Canada. There have been no rigorous large-scale outcome evaluations of COSA conducted to date. An evaluability assessment was conducted of COSA across five sites with the goal of assessing the readiness of COSA provision in the U.S. for rigorous evaluation. This report is a for COSA provision at one of those sites: COSA Fresno, California. The assessment aimed to clarify program intent, explore program reality, examine program data capacity, analyze program fidelity, and propose potential evaluation designs for future evaluation. A summarized ‘intended model’ is presented that sought to illustrate the espoused theory of COSA.

COSA Fresno is operated by the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies (CPACS) at the Fresno Pacific University, California. According to a 2008 CASOMB report, approximately 67,700 registered adult sex offenders lived in California's communities at that time, roughly 75% of whom have fully-completed their sentence and are not under any formal criminal justice supervision. COSA Fresno is based on the CSC model (CSC, 2002; 2003), adapted where necessary to operate within the context of sex offender reentry in California. COSA Fresno currently has 25 Circles in operation. At the time of the site visit

COSA Fresno was described as operating beyond capacity. COSA Fresno was awarded a fidelity score of 58%. COSA Fresno deviates from the intended model in a number of ways. Firstly, some Core Members have not completed their sentence in full and are returning to the community under a combination of COSA and formal parole supervision. Secondly, volunteer applicants' are not subjected to an official criminal records check and personal references are not checked. Data collection is limited to those gleaned from volunteer application forms and interviews, Circle meeting notes, and information collected during Core Member referral and intake.

There are two key obstacles to evaluation at COSA Fresno. The first is that there is concern for the financial viability of the site in the long-term. The second, related to the issue of limited capacity, is the potential sample size available. In conclusion, operations at COSA Fresno are impressive given the limited resources available. It is concluded, however, that only with significant investment in the site could these methodological issues and obstacles can be resolved in a short enough period of time for COSA Fresno to be considered equipped to contribute to rigorous experimental evaluation. If investment were possible, then it would be recommended that COSA Fresno be included in any evaluative activity related to the effectiveness of COSA in the U.S., either as a single site or as part of a multi-site evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC), during 2010 a total of 708,677 prisoners were released back from state and federal prisons into their communities. Both criminal justice agencies and the general public are often particularly conscious of the complex issue of sex offenders returning to their communities because of the potentially negative biological and psychiatric outcomes for victims (e.g., Andersen, Tomada, Vincow, Valente, Polcari, & Teicher, 2008 ; Chen et al., 2010).

Due to these negative outcomes, criminal justice responses to sex offender reentry have typically involved tightening supervision for sex offenders and the introduction of stringent legislation on registration, notification, and residency. Recent recidivism data from 73 studies and 35,522 offenders, however, demonstrate an observed overall sexual recidivism rate of 12.4%, with a 10-year rate of 16.6% (Helmus, Hanson, Thornton, Babchishin, & Harris, 2012). Despite low re-offense rates, many jurisdictions have adopted containment models for sex offender community management (English, 1998; 2004) - victim-focused, multi-agency approaches that combine case evaluation, risk assessment, sex offender treatment, and intense community surveillance.

Yet, amid the increases in criminal justice system's surveillance of sex offenders, there is a growing interest among both criminal justice practitioners and academics in developing restorative justice approaches. Restorative justice is a philosophy that aims to redirect society's punitive response to crime and increase public safety through reconciliatory action between offenders, victims, and the community (Sullivan & Tifft, 2005). It has been noted that interventions offered by non-correctional enterprises may be better positioned to respond to individual characteristics and circumstances when

providing offender treatment and management than correctional organizations (Wilson & Yates, 2009).

Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) is a restorative justice-based community reentry program for sex offenders deemed to be at the highest risk of reoffending and with little or no pro-social community support. According to the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) model (Correctional Services Canada, 2002; 2003), the mission statement of COSA is: "[to] substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting released individuals in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive, and accountable lives" (CSC, 2002: p. 12). An adaptation of the CSC model is described in further detail in a section below.

There have been no rigorous large-scale outcome evaluations of the COSA program conducted to date. Some small-scale outcome evaluations have been published (see Bates, Williams, Wilson, and Wilson, 2013; Duwe, 2013; Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo, & Cortoni, 2007; Wilson, Cortoni, & McWhinnie, 2009) that suggest COSA may be responsible for a reduction of 77% in sexual recidivism in COSA Core Members versus controls after an average follow-up time of 4 years. Given the varying quality of these studies, however, in terms of retroactive matching of experimental and control samples, imperfect methods for matching, the integrity of statistical analysis, and the lack of statistically significant experimental results, it could be argued that this figure should be considered only an

estimate of effectiveness. Thus further, rigorous evaluation of COSA is needed before it can truly be considered to be evidence-based practice.

Evaluability assessment

This report is part of a series of reports outlining a National Institute of Justice-funded evaluability assessment of the provision of COSA at various sites in the U.S. This report is one of five, with an accompanying cross-site report, for the five COSA sites evaluated as part of the evaluability assessment. The report examines program operations, data capacity, and program fidelity at Vermont COSA, and proposes evaluation designs and challenges. The goal of this evaluability assessment is to examine the readiness of those five COSA programs for rigorous evaluation. This assessment has five specific evaluation goals (from Wholey, 2004): (1) clarifying program intent by developing an intended COSA program model; (2) exploring program reality and COSA program operations in action on site; (3) examining program data capacity; (4) analyzing program fidelity and the congruence between intended program logic and actual program operations; and (5) proposing potential evaluation designs and challenges based on site readiness for further evaluation activities.

COSA intended model

The accompanying cross-site report describes an intended COSA model¹ created for the purpose of this evaluability assessment, based predominantly on the Correctional

¹ Henceforth referred to as the 'intended COSA model' or the 'intended model'.

Services Canada model² (CSC, 2002; 2003). The intended model consists of two concentric interpersonal circles surrounding a Core Member (an offender): (1) an inner circle of four to six professionally-facilitated community volunteers who act as a supportive community to whom the Core Member agrees to be accountable; and (2) an outer circle of professionals (e.g., therapists, probation, law enforcement) who provide expert guidance on areas including, but not limited to, offender behavior, offender management principles, the legal and criminal justice contexts.

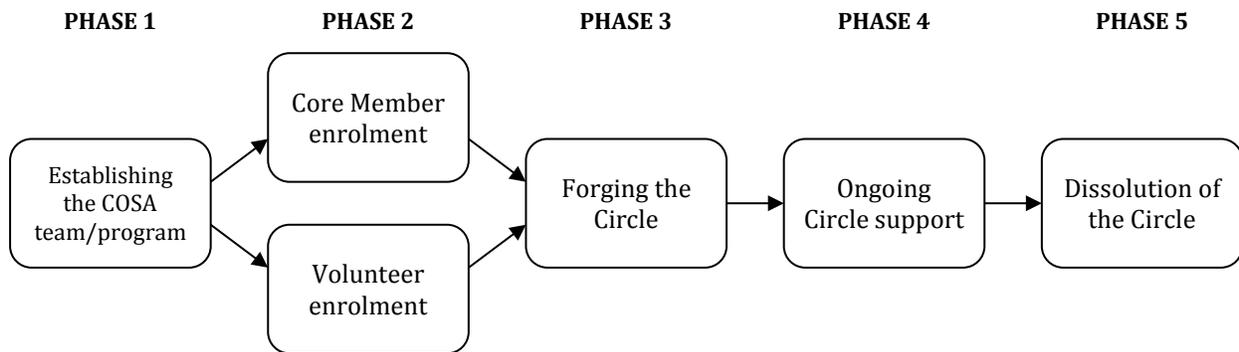
The intended model of COSA separates the elements of COSA into two components: (1) *people* - the various key players involved in the operation of COSA; and (2) *processes* - the operational procedures that take place from the conception of COSA to the dissolution of the first Circle. There are four groups of key players. The first group is the COSA project staff - the Advisory Group, the Program Director, and the Circle Coordinator. The second group is the service users - the Core Member and the volunteers. The third group is the specific criminal justice staff or organizations (the referrers) - the Department of Corrections (DOC), parole and probation, and local police forces. The fourth group is the community service providers, including survivor advocacy groups, lawyers, treatment providers/psychologists, social workers, healthcare professionals, educational professionals, and faith-based organizations.

The Program Director oversees the five phases of the COSA program development process (see Figure 1): (1) establishing the COSA team and program; (2a) Core Member enrolment and (2b) volunteer enrolment; (3) forging the Circle; (4) ongoing Circle support;

² Henceforth referred to as the 'CSC model'.

and (5) dissolution of the Circle. The following sections outline each of the phases of the model in turn.

Figure 1. The five phases of the COSA program development process.



Having summarized the intended model, the following sections of this report will: (a) describe the history and context of COSA provision at the site, outline it's aims, and report current capacity; (b) apply the five phases of COSA model development process model to implementation at the site; and (c) draw conclusions on the fidelity of the COSA program and make recommendations about capacity for evaluation at the site.

SITE INFORMATION

History and context

COSA Fresno is operated by the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies (CPACS) at the Fresno Pacific University, California. The CPACS is a regional hub for restorative justice programs in the region. The CPACS is a hub for restorative justice activity and provides victim-offender reconciliation programs to local Probation departments. For example, the CPACS also operates the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) that provides the local Probation department with alternative dispute resolution and has contracts with the Superior Court Of California for civil and probate matters to provide alternative dispute resolution for juvenile offenders.

According to a 2008 CASOMB report, approximately 67,700 registered adult sex offenders lived in California's communities at that time. Furthermore, a 2010 CASOMB report suggests that approximately 6,350 sex offenders were on state parole at that time, approximately 10,000 were on county probation, and the remainder were no longer under any formal criminal justice system supervision. These data suggest that roughly 75% of sex offenders are in the community in California have fully-completed their sentence and are not under any formal criminal justice supervision in the community. It is of note that of those 6,350 on active parole in the community, approximately 2,000 were listed as homeless.

In 2007, the COSA Fresno Program Director and a member of the Advisory Board traveled to Ontario, Canada to meet with Eileen Henderson, the Coordinator of the Ontario, Canada COSA program. Whilst there, they shadowed COSA facilitators and met a variety of

individuals linked with COSA in Canada. On their return to California they began developing a COSA program for the Fresno region. In December 2006, the CPACS successfully applied for a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) Reentry Initiative Grant. On receipt of the CDCR grant the Program Director embarked upon a training regimen and began the groundwork for developing Circles. COSA provision in Fresno, CA, began on February 2, 2007.

Aims, goals, and mission

COSA Fresno is based on the CSC model (CSC, 2002; 2003), adapted where necessary to operate within the context of sex offender reentry in California. The two guiding principles of COSA Fresno are 'no more victims' and 'no one is disposable'. COSA Fresno also adopts the CSC model principles: (1) we acknowledge the ongoing pain and need for healing for victims and offenders; (2) we believe that healing is possible for both victims and offenders; (3) the community bears the responsibility for the restoration of victims of sexual abuse and the safe reintegration of offenders; (4) the community has the capacity to create a safe community; (5) we each acknowledge our own personal responsibility to our fellow community partners; and (6) we seek to create community with offenders on responsible, safe, healthy and life-giving ways.

Current capacity

COSA Fresno reports that over the past six years they have formed approximately 45 Circles and currently has 25 Circles in operation (although two Core Members are currently

incapacitated). The Core Members include male, female, and transgender Parolees. At the time of the site visit COSA Fresno was described as operating beyond capacity. However, referrals continue to be received and the program continues to be able to form a Circle for a suitable potential Core Member when necessary.

IMPLEMENTATION

Phase 1: Establishing the COSA team and program

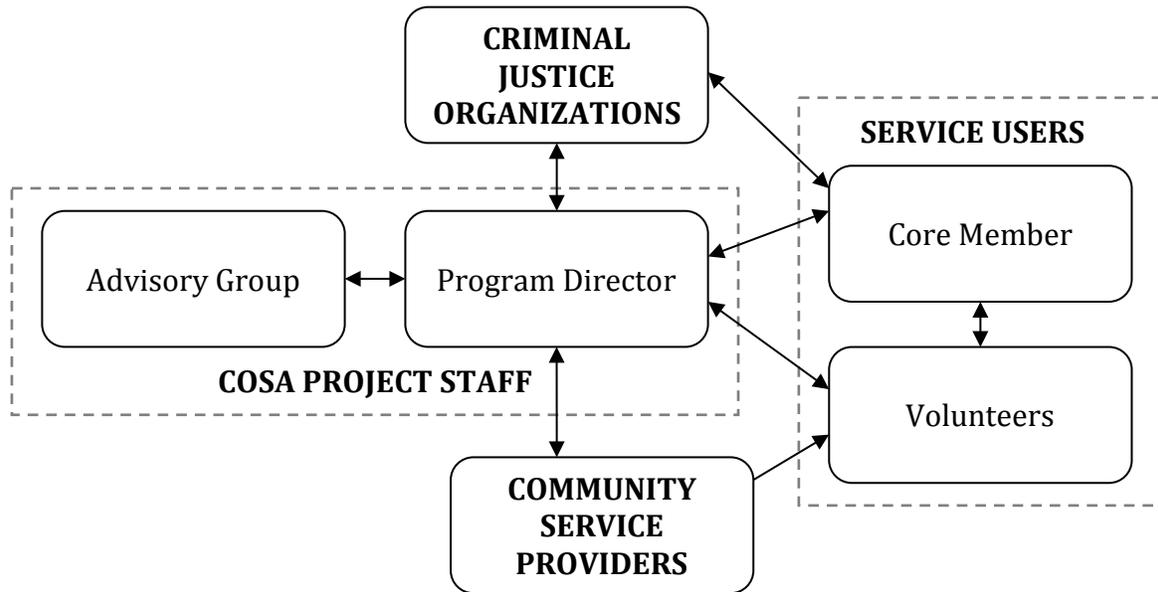
The COSA Fresno program is directed by the CPACS through the COSA Program Director (see Figure 2 for a schematic illustration of the management structure). The Program Director is employed by the CPACS part-time at three days a week to direct COSA implementation. The Program Director's responsibilities include reporting outcomes, updates and financial information to the Advisory Board, and receiving referrals, Core Member intake, the creation of an operations manual, outreach with criminal justice and other organizations, volunteer recruitment and training.. The Program Director also assumes the role of Circle Coordinator. Other staff assigned to COSA activity includes a CPACS Administrative Assistant for mailing, bookkeeping, and other administrative tasks and temporary unpaid student interns from Fresno Pacific University and Alliant University.

COSA Fresno has an Advisory Board comprised of a retired Parole Agent, a Federal Probation Agent, a victimologist, a criminal justice Professor from California State University Fresno, experienced volunteer representatives, a psychologist and sex offender treatment provider, representatives from the local Mennonite community, and representatives from alternative resolution programs. The Board meets every three months but attendance is not mandatory. There are no formal terms of membership.

The Program Director discusses and promotes COSA Fresno in the media. COSA Fresno also maintains a website that provides program information to the public. The program was featured on a PBS report and the video is presented on the website. Also a

group of Stanford University graduate students produced a documentary on COSA, elements of which are used in volunteer trainings and at professional conferences.

Figure 1. The COSA Fresno management structure.



COSA Fresno has working relationships with both the State Parole Office and several Federal Probation Agents. There are currently no links with the local Police force, but the Program Director has presented to the Sexual Abuse Felony Enforcement team for Fresno County that includes county law enforcement personnel working with sex offenders. The Program Director is also in contact with the CA Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB), a non-funding supporter of the program.

Phase 2a: Core Member enrolment

Referrals are received by the Program Director from the CDCR. COSA Fresno also takes referrals from mental health institutions, at the discretion of the Program Director. On receipt of a referral the Program Director initiates contact with the applicant via telephone. Access to applicants during incarceration is not currently permitted and the Program Director is often unaware of the applicants specific release date, and so most intake interviews occur immediately post-release, rather than before release. The intake interview includes an introduction to COSA, the support and accountability it provides, and the concept of the covenant. The Program Director also inquires about the applicant's offense history. Because COSA Fresno does not receive any official records for applicants from the CDCR, and only state Parole (not Federal Probation) can provide risk assessment scores for applicants, COSA Fresno has developed a telephone-based questionnaire to ask Parole Agents for verbal information about the applicant.

The Program Director then makes an initial decision regarding suitability for COSA. The Core Member selection criteria at COSA Fresno are taken directly from the CSC model (CSC, 2002; 2003). The criteria are: (1) high-risk sex offender; (2) high-needs (social, emotional, spiritual, physical); (3) little or no pro-social support in the community; (4) will parole to Fresno County; (5) motivated to successfully reenter community and live a responsible, productive, and accountable life; and (6) desire to voluntarily enter into a relationship with COSA, which will include support and accountability.

If both parties mutually agree that the applicant is suitable for COSA then a formal application form is completed. After receiving the application a second meeting is arranged. This meeting is used to assess the applicant's motivations and intentions, to complete a

Needs and Resources Assessment form to assess the applicant's short-term and long-term goals. Finally, a mutual agreement is made between the Program Director and the applicant to enroll the applicant as a Core Member and begin to forge a Circle.

Phase 2b: Volunteer enrolment

COSA Fresno recruits the majority of its volunteers from Alliant University, the faith community, or California State University Fresno. The Program Director solicits for volunteer applications via presentations at faith organizations, universities, and other organizations. The recruitment criteria state that applicants should: (1) be stable in the community; (2) be available to agree to a one year commitment; (3) demonstrate personal maturity; (4) have healthy personal boundaries; and (5) have a balance in lifestyle, experience, and viewpoint. COSA Fresno also seeks volunteers of a variety of ages and gender. Where possible, volunteers are matched to the needs of the Core Member in a bid to improve outcomes and Circle dynamics.

Applicants are required to attend an orientation session after which the volunteer is asked to complete an application form. Once this application form is received the applicant is invited to an interview with the Program Director. During this interview the Program Director inquires about the applicant's motivations for participating in COSA, their background experience, and their own experiences of victimization. Volunteer background checks are not carried out as they are expensive and are not legally mandated. References provided on the application form are not followed-up. The volunteer is then invited to attend core training.

Training is based directly on the CSC guidelines (CSC, 2002; 2003) and involves 10 hours of sessions over two days. Training is provided to all volunteers. COSA Fresno often needs to place volunteers as soon as possible, and in some instances volunteers have been placed on a circle before they have completed training. Training packs are provided to volunteers that includes all of the training materials. Five speakers provide the substantive material, covering: (1) the COSA mission, aims/objectives, operations; (2) an understanding of criminal justice procedures related to re-entry and parole; (3) information on sex offender behavior and treatment; (4) victim/survivor perspectives; and (5) the Core Member experience, the effects of institutionalization, and obstacles to re-entry. Training also includes an emphasis on skills such as decision-making, thinking errors, de-escalation and crisis management, and personal boundaries. Personal safety is also discussed in training, where volunteers complete a 'Healthy Boundaries Questionnaire'.

Phase 3: Forging the Circle

The first Circle meeting, scheduled by the Program Director, involves introductions for the Core Member and each of the volunteers before each member of the Circle describes their motivations and expectations. The draft covenant is distributed and discussed, and any agreed changes are made. Personal boundaries are established, and all Core Members are given access to at least one volunteer in their Circle via telephone. There are no restrictions on volunteers having one-to-one contact with Core Members. However, volunteers are encouraged to meet with Core Members in a public place. In the initial

meeting the Core Member also discusses their offense, their victim(s) and their offense patterns and areas of potential risk.

The second Circle meeting is typically used to discuss the content of the covenant, make changes, agree to the content, after which the covenant is signed and printed. The covenant sets out expectations of a one-year Circle duration. The covenant also outlines boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior for the Core Member. Each member of the Circle is provided with a copy of the Core Member's Conditions of Parole from the CDCR and the conditions are discussed. The Core Member receives a copy of the covenant and a copy is filed at the COSA Fresno office. Volunteers can request a copy of the covenant, but are expected to maintain confidentiality of the information within. The covenant is considered a living document and are re-read on a periodic basis and can be renewed in the instance where a Core Member returns to a Circle after a period away (e.g., after a jail sentence following a Parole violation).

Phase 4: Ongoing Circle support

Trusted volunteers are appointed to the position of Circle Facilitator as having a member of COSA staff in each Circle is not possible. The responsibilities of the Circle Facilitator are: (1) to coordinate the circle meeting schedule; (2) to facilitate conversation at circle meetings; (3) to complete circle meeting report forms and submit to COSA office; (4) to facilitate activities listed on the 'Circle Facilitator Guidelines' and complete the 'Circle Accomplishments' form; (5) to forward any changes in contact information to COSA office; and (6) to attend 4-monthly Circle Facilitator meetings.

Circles meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, depending on the progress of the Core Member, and are attended by the Core Member, volunteers, and the designated Circle Facilitator. All members of the Circle discuss their prior week, after which the Circle spends the majority of the time focusing on the needs and issues brought up by the Core Member. The Circle is encouraged to ensure that supportive discussion is balanced with adequate accountability. The Program Director seeks to attend meetings at least once a month for each Circle. Parole and Probation Agents have occasionally participated in some Circle meetings (with the consent of the Circle). After six months the Circle is encouraged to initiate conversations and activities that relate to victim empathy.

Core Members are expected to provide a valid reason for non-attendance. Attendance is taken very seriously and if there is a concern about Core Members regularly cancelling or arriving late to meetings then the Circle Facilitator and Program Manager will intervene. Circle meetings have been arranged without the Core Member, particularly in cases of very challenging Circles, but the Core Member is always informed of this. If behavior is deemed to have breached the covenant or the Core Member's conditions of release, then the Core Member is challenged on those behaviors. When concerns arise the first point of contact for volunteers is the Circle Facilitator, but that the Program Director would also be informed. If there was an immediate risk to public safety, the Circle would first encourage the Core Member to contact their Parole Agent. If the Core Member is unwilling to do so then the Circle contacts the Parole Agent.

Circles Facilitators keep records of the Core Member's goals and tracks their progress. The Core Member's short-term and long-term goal attainment is measured directly through a Circle Accomplishment form. Circles are evaluated after one year using a

'One Year Evaluation/Review' form, which covers the adequacy of the covenant, the levels of support, and the levels of accountability provided according to the Circle members.

Volunteer support is also provided with volunteers being encouraged to support one-another. Two annual events are held for Core Members and their Circles - a summer barbeque and 'Thanksmas' a non-denominational event held between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. COSA Fresno has also just started a monthly event called 'The Gathering'. These events are aimed to both increase retention of volunteers and also to aid Core Member in improving their social skills.

Phase 5: Dissolution of the Circle

Circle outcomes are decided on a case-by-case basis and include four broad outcomes. Firstly, the Circle can be dissolved in the event of re-arrest or parole violations and subsequent incarceration, although the Circle may go 'on hold' in circumstances of short-term Core Member incarceration. Secondly, a Circle can be dissolved if the Circle members decide that the Circle is in some way untenable, for example, if the Core Member is unwilling to abide by the expectations of the covenant. Thirdly, circles can be dissolved if the Core Member's basic needs have been met and there is no need for continued support. Circles are reviewed at the one-year mark and the Circle, the Circle Facilitator and the Program Director determine the future course of the Circle. Finally, a Circle can be dissolved if the Core Member become incapacitated in some way (i.e., is hospitalized, or passes away) or moves to an area not served by the program.

FINDINGS

Fidelity Score

COSA Fresno was awarded a fidelity score of 58%. Fidelity was assessed using a fidelity item measurement tool that examines 41 intended program elements across 10 fidelity categories, including management, model, operations, outcomes, staff, Core Members and volunteers. There were 100 items in total that could be endorsed. The fidelity score represents the percentage of these fidelity items that were observed in program reality.

There is no definitive consensus on what constitutes high program fidelity, but evidence suggests fidelity levels of 60% and greater (i.e., 60% match between program intent and program reality) are associated with strong outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006). Thus, programs with an implementation score approaching or exceeding 60% were considered to be well-implemented.

Deviations from the intended model

COSA Fresno deviates from the intended model in a number of ways. Firstly, some Core Members have not completed their sentence in full and are returning to the community under a combination of COSA and formal parole supervision. Others have completed their sentence and are returning to the community without formal supervision. Combining both 'fully-completed' and 'under supervision' offenders could represent a systematic divergence in the combination of criminal justice and community support provided to each type of Core Member. This mix of supervisory environments for Core Members becomes an issue for COSA Fresno either if it were to be evaluated as a single site

or if it were to contribute to a multi-site evaluation. For those under formal supervision, it could also make it difficult for evaluators to isolate and differentiate the relative effect of COSA from the effect of 'supervision as usual'.

Secondly, volunteer applicants' are not subjected to an official criminal records check and personal references are not checked. In the intended model, personal references are used as a method by which to ensure they have adequate stability in their community. The use of criminal records checks not only ensures that the project can follow-up on potential concerns about an applicant (it is assumed that a criminal record would not exclude an applicant), but may also have implications for program insurance and liability.

Thirdly, there appears to be some flexibility in elements of the implementation of the program, particularly (a) the number of volunteers being placed in a Circle and (b) volunteers being placed in Circles before they have completed the training. Both of these issues appear to result from a need to stretch limited resources in order to forge Circles. Such flexibility has implications for program integrity and would need to be addressed if the site were to be recommended for evaluation.

Quality of data systems

COSA Fresno has no documented policies and procedures on data management. Data collection is limited to those gleaned from volunteer application forms and interviews, Circle meeting notes, and information collected during Core Member intake. Relationships with referring agencies are not developed to the point where the availability of critical data could be confidently anticipated, and data is provided on an informal and intermittent

basis. Also, operational data are collected and stored in hard-copy form and not electronically.

The Program Director keeps records of developing, current, and prior Circles and their outcomes. Circle meeting data are collected and filed in the in the Program Director's office and transferred to an electronic database when resources are available. Good estimates of volunteer times are available, but actual hours spent by volunteers on COSA are not formally recorded. Outcome data is not formally delivered to either of these agencies; instead these data are delivered on a case-by-case basis when requested.

Obstacles to evaluation

There are two key obstacles to evaluation at COSA Fresno. The first is that there is concern for the financial viability of the site in the long-term. COSA Fresno is operating beyond capacity and resources are limited. There is concern whether COSA Fresno could cope with the loss of certain key staff members during an evaluation and continue to function. The Program Director currently takes on dual responsibility for operation of COSA and specific Circles as Circle Coordinator. Although this appears to be possible under current capacity it may need to be addressed as capacity increases.

The second obstacle is the potential sample size available. Although California is a densely populated area with a higher number sex offenders residing in the community compared to other states, the program may not be able to increase (or even maintain) its current capacity without investment. If experimental methods were to be recommended for evaluation then the demand for potential Core Members would be even greater in order to construct a control sample. If COSA Fresno was able to build only a small sample of

participants, combined with low rates of recidivism that would be expected in either the COSA and non-COSA groups, any evaluation would only be capable of detecting relatively large treatment effects, missing smaller effects, and thus potentially underestimating the value of COSA.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, operations at COSA Fresno are impressive given the limited resources available. The lack of policy and procedure limited COSA Fresno's fidelity score. There are some potential obstacles to successful evaluation. The combination of Core Members who are fully-completed with those who are under supervision introduces confounding variables, both within a single evaluation of the COSA Fresno or if it were to contribute to a multi-site evaluation.

COSA Fresno is also operating beyond capacity. This has implications for the program's ability to grow and to provide an adequate sample size for robust evaluation. It appears that COSA Fresno has reached a capacity where further development requires both: (a) investment to firm-up and sustain the program, and (b) more formalized operational delivery. Much development work is planned, in terms of better administration, better documentation, more nuanced recruitment, and further fundraising.

As St. Pierre (2004) noted, although studies based on large sample sizes yield the greater statistical power, it may be possible for smaller sample sizes to increase the precision of impact assessments in other ways, such as by controlling more carefully differences in baseline characteristics of participants that are related to the outcome. At present, the quality of data management is such that it could not confidently be asserted that COSA Fresno would be able to adequately identify, collect, and control those variables.

It is concluded that only with significant investment in the site, either by the program operators or by an external funding agency, could these methodological issues and obstacles can be resolved in a short enough period of time for COSA Fresno to be considered equipped to contribute to rigorous experimental evaluation. If investment

were possible, then it would be recommended that COSA Fresno be included in any evaluative activity related to the effectiveness of COSA in the U.S., either as a single site or as part of a multi-site evaluation.

REFERENCES

- Andersen, S. L., Tomada, A., Vincow, E. S., Valente, E., Polcari, A., & Teicher, M. H. (2008). Preliminary evidence for sensitive periods in the effect of childhood sexual abuse on regional brain development. *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, *20*, 292-301.
- Bates, A., Williams, D., Wilson, C., & Wilson, R. J. (2013). Circles South East: The first 10 years 2002-2012. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*. [Online ahead of print].
- California Sex Offender Management Board (2010). *Homelessness Among California's Registered Sex Offenders: An Update*. Sacramento, CA: California Sex Offender Management Board.
- California Sex Offender Management Board (2008). *An Assessment of Current Management Practices of Adult Sex Offenders in California*. Sacramento, CA: California Sex Offender Management Board.
- Chen, L. P., Murad, M. H., Paras, M.L., Colbenson, K.M., Sattler, A. L, Goranson, E. N., et al. (2010). Sexual abuse and lifetime diagnosis of psychiatric disorders: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, *85*, 618-629.
- Correctional Services Canada (2002). *Circles of Support and Accountability: A guide to training potential volunteers*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Correctional Services Canada. Available from http://www.cscscc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/cs_guide_final-eng.shtml

- Correctional Services Canada (2003). *Circles of Support and Accountability: Guide to Project Development*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Correctional Services Canada. Available from <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/chap/circ/proj-guid/index-eng.shtml>
- Durlak, J. A., & DuPre, E. P. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 41*, 327-350.
- Duwe, G. (2013). Can Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) work in the United States? Preliminary results from a randomized experiment in Minnesota. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 25*, 143-165.
- English, K. (1998). The Containment Approach: An aggressive strategy for the community management of adult sex offenders. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 4*, 218-235.
- English, K. (2004). The Containment Approach to Managing Sex Offenders. *Seton Hall Law Review, 34*. Available from <http://erepository.law.shu.edu/shlr/vol34/iss4/4>
- Helmus, L., Hanson, R. K., Thornton, D., Babchishin, K. M., & Harris, A. J. R. (2012). Absolute recidivism rates predicted by Static-99R and Static-2002R sex offender risk assessment tools vary across samples: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 39*, 1148-1171.
- Latessa, E. J., & Lowenkamp, C. (2006). What works in reducing recidivism? *University of St. Thomas Law Journal, 3*, 521-535.
- Sullivan, D., & Tifft, L. (2005). *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

- Wholey, J. S. (2004). Evaluability assessment. In J. S. Wholey, H. P. Hatry and K. E. Newcomer (Eds.). *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 241-260). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wilson, R. J., Cortoni, F., & McWhinnie. (2009). Circles of Support & Accountability: A Canadian national replication of outcome findings. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment*, *21*, 412-430.
- Wilson, R. J., McWhinnie, A. J., Picheca, J. E., Prinzo, M., & Cortoni, F. (2007). Circles of Support and Accountability: Engaging community volunteers in the management of high-risk sexual offenders. *The Howard Journal*, *46*, 1-15.
- Wilson, R. J., & Yates, P. M. (2009). Effective interventions and the Good Lives Model: Maximizing treatment gains for sexual offenders. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *14*, 157-161.