



## Core Member Brochure



**No More Victims  
No One is Disposable**

### What is Circles of Support and Accountability?

CoSA is a community-based reintegration program that assists people who have been incarcerated for committing sexual offences, to safely re-enter the community after they are released from prison.

### The Mission Statement of CoSA is:

To substantially reduce the risk of future victimization of community members by assisting, supporting and holding accountable those who have served time for sex offences, in their task of integrating in the community and leading responsible and productive lives.

### Where did CoSA start & where is it now?

CoSA began in 1994, in Hamilton, Ontario when a repeat offender named Charlie was being released at the end of his prison sentence to the community with no supervision or support. A Mennonite pastor, by the name of Harry Nigh, sought the help of his church's parishioners and they formed a circle of support for Charlie. Charlie, who was classified at very high risk to reoffend, stayed with CoSA for 12 years until his death. He never re-offended.

CoSA now operates in 16 Canadian cities, and based on the success in Canada, CoSA has spread to other countries such as the United States, England, The Netherlands, Latvia and Korea.

### What is CoSA-Ottawa?

In Ottawa, CoSA has been officially operating since 2002 and has worked with over 50 core members and 200 volunteers. Currently, twelve core members and 50 volunteers are participating in CoSA in Ottawa, supported by the program coordinator, Susan Love, and a 9-member Board of Directors.

Although we are fortunate to be able to use the space at St John's Church, CoSA-Ottawa operates in a non-religious manner. All are welcome!

### You, the Core Member

We refer to the individuals who participate in CoSA as Core Members. As a Core Member, you:

- Have served a prison sentence for sexual offence(s)
- Are motivated to have an offence-free life
- Join CoSA voluntarily
- Commit to being open and honest with your volunteers and CoSA staff
- Commit to being in a circle for one year (renewable)
- Understand that if you re-offend or breach your conditions, CoSA volunteers and staff must report your infraction

### How do you become a Core Member?

Start by sending us a letter of interest. Once you have made that first step, we will arrange for a meeting (in person or by phone). You will be required to complete an application form and consent to CoSA staff talking with your case management team and/or treatment providers. You will be notified if your application is accepted.

### What does Support & Accountability mean?

**Support:** helping with practical needs (housing, employment, financial assistance, applying for ID, sourcing a doctor, accompanying to appointments, identifying goals), emotional support, celebrating successes...

**Accountability:** helping you achieve your goals, challenging any thoughts/attitudes that may lead to reoffending or breaching legal conditions

### Who will I be working with?

As a CoSA Core Member, you will be assigned a team of 3 or 4 volunteers who will meet regularly with you as a group and individually to help with your reintegration process.

### Who are CoSA Volunteers?

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and range in age from 21 to retired. They are regular community members who believe they

can make a difference in their communities by dedicating their time and energy. Volunteers are trained and screened, and, just like our core members, make a one-year commitment to participate in a circle.

### Meetings:

*Circle meetings* (held in a private space to ensure confidentiality)

- The signing of the Covenant
- 'Sharing your story' - telling your volunteers about yourself, how you got to where you are, including your offence history.
- Discussing challenges and successes of the past week, plans for upcoming week, review goals, etc.
- Complete a Self Management Plan, identifying risk factors, triggers, coping strategies, targeted goals

*One-on-One Meetings* (held in a public space – coffee shop, walking, attending appointments)

- Designed to get to know each other, learn about you – over time, this builds trust

### Housekeeping meetings

- Held *without* the core member to discuss any concerns, strategize ways to better help you if you're getting off-track; challenges with circle dynamics, etc

### Emergency meetings

- Held *with* the core member at a time of crisis (breach of legal conditions, suicide threat, etc) to discuss concern and course of action

### Special Events

- Holiday (potluck) dinners – Thanksgiving, Christmas
- Annual BBQ
- Monthly Discussion Series – facilitated discussions about issues relevant to our Core Members' reintegration process (making friends, disclosing your past, socializing, family ties, etc) and fun stuff too!

### What can I expect from my volunteers?

You can expect your volunteers to attend and actively participate in the weekly circle meetings. You can also expect them to be available for weekly individual meetings with you. Your volunteers will also be available by phone (or email when permitted) should you be in crisis or need unexpected support.

They will also hold you accountable. This means that they will call you out on things, if they feel that it is needed. We tell the volunteers that accountability is a form of support.

Although not mandatory, you can expect that your volunteers will attend CoSA special events when their schedule permits.

If a volunteer cannot attend a meeting, or will be away for an extended period of time, you can expect them to tell you directly ahead of time.

Upon meeting with your volunteers, you will receive a list with their name, phone number, email (when permitted) and birth-date – we like to celebrate milestones!

You can expect each of your volunteers to be sources of support, to listen without judging, to help you access different resources in the community, help you weigh options when choosing a course of action, and generally be there for you in your journey.

Volunteers are non-judgmental. They have chosen to volunteer with CoSA knowing that they will be working with someone with a criminal history and that the work will sometimes be challenging.

You will work as a team, holding no secrets from the volunteers. The volunteers in turn promise to maintain confidentiality. This means that what is discussed between you and your volunteers, stays within CoSA. However they also know they have a duty to report any breaches of legal conditions or re-offences.

Volunteers make a commitment of one year to CoSA and may choose to renew after that year. Some circles operate for one year; others for

five or six years or longer, depending on the core member's need. If the Core Member renews, and a volunteer leaves the circle, the vacancy will be filled by a new volunteer.

### What can you expect from CoSA staff?

The coordinator will:

- Communicate and meet with you (when permitted) prior to your release
- Attend court, police station with you, if required
- Work with you using a strength-based perspective – positive approach, life skills, social skills
- Help you understand your legal conditions (LTSO; 810/Peace Bond; 161 Order)
- Attend Circle meetings (on occasion) to support your volunteers to help you in any way you need
- Support and hold you accountable to be the best you can!

### What will volunteers and staff expect from you?

- No secrets
- Be an active participant in your meetings
- Attend treatment in the community if it has been recommended and deemed beneficial
- Abide by your legal conditions
- The goal is independence – the volunteers and staff are here to help you become independent and to establish yourself in the community. We want you to have a good life where you won't need CoSA anymore!

### What do other Core Members say about CoSA?

*Without a Circle, I may have...*

- ...had difficulty adjusting.*
- ...had difficulty with relationships.*
- ...had difficulty finding a job.*
- ...become isolated and lonely.*
- ...turned to drugs, alcohol and poor associations.*
- ...re-offended and gone back to prison.*

### Other things to consider or remember:

It's normal to expect a period of adjustment; some time to get used to your volunteers. Just remember, they chose to volunteer with CoSA because they believe that people, who are committed to turning their life around and never hurting anyone again, deserve a chance to develop a meaningful life - and that people **can** change. This may not be easy at times but we hope you'll find that it's worthwhile. Ask for clarification, ask for help; reach out to your volunteers and CoSA staff.

### Does it work?

Research indicates that sexual re-offending rates for people who participate in CoSA are 80% lower than for those who do not have a Circle<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, R., Cortoni, F. & McWhinnie, A. *Circles of Support & Accountability: A Canadian National Replication of Outcome Findings*, 2009. Available on-line at: <http://www.robinwilson.com/circles.shtml>

### Why does CoSA Work?

Although there is a minimum requirement for volunteers and Core members to be involved in the program of one year, CoSA is about relationships that are ongoing. On a continuum, CoSA is more about being family than it is about therapeutic interventions. Modeling is a major focus of what occurs in a Circle and, in that sense, what is "caught" is more significant than what is "taught."

It has been observed that the most powerful aspect of a Circle is the sense of belonging that occurs both for the Core Member and for the volunteers. It is possibly because of this belonging, or the degree of attachment that is formed, that CoSA has such a profound impact.

***We hope you will choose CoSA  
to be part of your new life!***

### Contact Info

#### Susan Love

Program Coordinator, CoSA-Ottawa  
240 Catherine St, Suite 204  
Ottawa, ON K2P 2G8  
Tel: 613 288-2284  
[slove@cosa-ottawa.ca](mailto:slove@cosa-ottawa.ca)  
[www.cosa-ottawa.ca](http://www.cosa-ottawa.ca)

#### David Byrne

CoSA Canada, Chair, Board of Directors  
[www.cosacanada.com](http://www.cosacanada.com)

### Community Resources

- Sexual Behaviours Clinic, Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre, Dr. Fedoroff  
[Paul.Fedoroff@rohcg.on.ca](mailto:Paul.Fedoroff@rohcg.on.ca)  
(613) 722-6521 x 6360  
1145 Carling Ave, Ottawa, ON K1Z 7K4
- John Howard Ottawa, Main Office  
550 Old St Patrick St, Ottawa, K1N 8R3  
Tina Matchett Bianco  
[TMatchettBianco@ottawa.johnhoward.ca](mailto:TMatchettBianco@ottawa.johnhoward.ca)  
(613) 789-7418
- Good Lives Program (for victims/perpetrators of sexual abuse), Jeff Hickman  
[jhickman@ottawa.johnhoward.ca](mailto:jhickman@ottawa.johnhoward.ca)  
(613) 852-7086
- Social Housing Registry of Ottawa  
2197 Riverside Drive, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Ottawa, K1H 1A9  
(613) 526-2088  
<http://www.housingregistry.ca/>



*The true meaning of life is to plant  
trees, under whose shade you  
do not expect to sit.  
Nelson Henderson*