Circles of Support and Accountability has proliferated internationally since the model’s original inception in Canada in 1994. CoSA projects now exist in 10 or more countries, with an international symposium recently attended by 28 nations. Over its tenure, CoSA has been subject to a variety of evaluations conducted in countries including Canada, USA, UK, and the Netherlands, to name a few. The methodologies have included qualitative research, cost benefit analyses, matched-sample quantitative studies, and one randomized controlled trial. However, there has yet to be an international approach to examining the impact of circles. This session will bring together qualitative data from four different countries (Canada, USA, New Zealand and UK) focusing on stakeholder, volunteer, and core member perceptions of CoSA to examine the similarities and differences across countries and models, to see if there is a common base line in terms of impact and attitude.

Circles of Support in the UK

Kieran McCartan, Ph.D.
David Thompson, Ph.D. Student

The current paper will be based upon two qualitative studies examining the impact of CoSA in supporting and reintegrating Core Members. The paper will discuss the outcome of interviews with Core Members (50), stakeholders (32) and volunteers (32) conducted across England during the last 24 months (n = 112). The studies, based upon the participants interactions with circles, looked to determine whether the intervention had a positive impact upon the Core Members reintegration back into society and if so why. The data indicates that CoSA is viewed to positively support sexual offender reintegration and desistence, but that there are different and often conflicting views of the process, structure and capability of CoSA to do this across the three participant groups.
Goals of the Paper:
1. Participants will receive updated research about CoSA from the UK, highlighting the similarities and differences in the model to other areas.
2. Participants will learn about stakeholder, core member and volunteer perspectives on CoSA in the UK, highlighting the similarities and differences internationally.
3. Participants will learn about good practice from CoSA projects internationally and how they relate to their own countries.

Circles of Support in the USA and New Zealand

Kathryn J. Fox, Ph.D.

This paper is based upon qualitative data from CoSA programs in Vermont and New Zealand. The different structural conditions in which each program operates will be explained, as well as the similarities in functions. The data combine to demonstrate the dynamics within CoSAs and how the reintegration process into conventional life promotes a more enduring state of desistance among core members. The research is based upon interviews with about 30 core members and more than 60 volunteers, as well as correctional staff and reentry coordinators. An in-depth analysis of CoSA participants’ experiences demonstrates how CoSA works. The implications for promoting desistance are explored as well.

Goals of the Paper:
1. Participants will receive updated research about CoSA from the USA and NZ, highlighting the similarities and differences in the model to other areas.
2. Participants will learn about stakeholder, core member and volunteer perspectives on CoSA in the USA and NZ, highlighting the similarities and differences internationally.
3. Participants will learn about good practice from CoSA projects internationally and how they relate to their own countries.
This paper will report the qualitative data from the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Canadian National Evaluation report released in January, 2015. The national evaluation was uniquely focused on the dynamics of CoSA processes, rather than the impact on recidivism reported elsewhere (e.g. Wilson, et al, 2009). There are 16 CoSA “sites” in Canada, providing service to well over 200 sexual offenders known as core members. All sites participated in the evaluation. Data used in this report were derived from site records, monthly and quarterly indicator reports, program files, training materials, extant literature, site profiles, circle volunteer and community service provider surveys, and interviews with site coordinators, circle volunteers, core members, and regional chaplains. Volunteer journals were kept and used to gain insight into the dynamics of individual circles and volunteer experiences. Observations drawn from case studies of three CoSA sites in British Colombia, Saskatchewan and Ontario, strengthened the evaluation by enhancing understanding of local contexts and of individual experiences. Nine individual core member case study subjects (three from each of the case study sites) were interviewed on three separate occasions. For the first time in any jurisdiction, CoSA staff received specialized training on the use of an empirically validated criminogenic needs (risk) assessment tool called the STABLE-2007, as a means of gauging changes in risk profiles of their core members, and in developing circle response plans to any observed changes.

Goals of the Paper:
1. Participants will receive updated research about CoSA from Canada, highlighting the similarities and differences in the model to other areas.
2. Participants will learn about stakeholder, core member and volunteer perspectives on CoSA in Canada, highlighting the similarities and differences internationally.
3. Participants will get learn about good practice from CoSA projects internationally and how they relate to their own countries.