

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

F-04

Restorative Justice or Dangerous Liaisons? Survivors Who Support Sex Offenders

Nadia Wager, PhD, CPsychol, AFBPsS, FHEA
Huddersfield University
Chris Wilson, MSc(Econ) CQSW
Cardiff University School of Social Science

This workshop will explore the restorative justice potential for survivors of sexual violence volunteering for Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA).

This workshop is designed to accommodate any person who is working in the field of sexual violence and is designed to challenge and question previously held professional notions of victimisation and survivorship. This is a workshop designed to disseminate the findings of a piece of research commissioned by the United Kingdom's Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioners Office. The objective of this research was to test whether there was evidence of any restorative processes occurring for those survivors of sexual violence who volunteer to support sex offenders released from prison and living in the community. A presentation of the research findings will be made followed by a discussion related to the possible implications for policy and practice, both for volunteers working in CoSA and professionals working in the wider field of risk management. Safe, experiential exercises will be used to facilitate participants exploring their own perceptions of victimisation, survivorship. The workshop will also use a powerpoint presentation and video presentation.

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is now known as one of the most successful restorative based reintegrative schemes for convicted sex offenders, reducing criminogenic factors through the development of social capital. It achieves this by placing trained volunteers around the offender who then meet on a regular basis, both as a group and as individuals creating a community of care that is both supportive and accountable. Originating in Canada, the concept was adapted in the United Kingdom and funded by the British government in 2002 to complement and work in close partnership with the relevant criminal justice agencies. The success of CoSA led to the European Commission funding its development in a further eight European countries. CoSA offers a unique opportunity to reduce further sexual offending by known high risk sexual offenders leaving prison and reintegrating back into the community.

In recognition, that in the United Kingdom, approximately 20 percent of CoSA volunteers are themselves survivors of sexual violence, the restorative potential for survivors warranted further exploration. Initial work was undertaken to explore the attitudes and

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

practices among those professionals engaged or associated with the supervision and management of both the CoSA and its constituent parts towards volunteers who disclosed a personal experience of primary or secondary victimisation. The results of which were varied and at times unexpected. This work was then extended whereby volunteers, including those who were survivors were interviewed about their motivations and experiences of volunteering for CoSA. The purpose of this was to test whether those who were survivors were subject to any experiences synonymous with the process of surrogate restorative justice.

The initial findings, published by Routledge as a chapter in 'Restorative Responses to Sexual Violence' ed Marie Keenan & Estelle Zinsstag 2017, highlight a number of issues that challenge the perceptions of survivors' vulnerability and enduring pathology. It does this through the identification of strategies adopted by some survivors that enable them to transition from victim to survivor, and the techniques they develop that allow them to acquire and maintain an inner strength, which in turn enables them to have the resolve to volunteer for CoSA.

The workshop will not only be used to present and discuss the findings of this initial study but will ask of participants to explore their own perceptions of victimisation, survivorship and the importance of enhancing and helping to facilitate post-traumatic growth that is both a permitted expression, and utilised in direct work with sex offenders.

Learning Goals:

- To provide workshop participants with an informed perspective / opinion on the role and use of restorative justice within the work of sexual violence. Professional opinion on the use of restorative work in the area of interpersonal violence remains divided and contentious. It is the intention of this workshop to evidence the growing body of research and practice (including that of the presenters) in relation to this issue to facilitate an informed and positive debate as to what restorative practices can and can't achieve in relation to sexual violence.
- To provide workshop participants with a better understand of the restorative potential for survivors who work with those convicted of sexual offences.
- To challenge the perspective that pathologizes victims of sexual violence

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Dr Nadia Wager is a 'Reader in Forensic Psychology' at the University of Huddersfield. She is also an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and a Chartered Psychologist, having been awarded a PhD from Brunel University in 2002. Nadia is an active applied researcher who engages with community partners in evaluation, training and research activities. Her main focus is on victimisation (both as primary victims and secondary victims) and the application of restorative justice practices to serious crimes such as sexual and domestic violence, and modern-day slavery.

Her current projects include:

1. An evaluation of restorative justice services for victims of serious crimes
2. Evaluation of the Independent Trauma Advisors in responding to modern-day slavery in the Thames Valley area
3. Justice and healing from sexual victimisation in the context of the acquittal of the defendant or the discontinuation of the case by the police or crown prosecution service

Chris Wilson qualified as a Social worker in 1983 and was awarded a Master's degree in 1990. A member of the design team for the accredited Thames Valley Sex Offender Group Work Programme, he subsequently worked as a national trainer in the programmes implementation. Appointed in 2002 as Project Manager for the UK government funded Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) Pilot Project, Chris was instrumental in adapting the Canadian CoSA model to a British context and also helped develop the CoSA model across Europe, funded by the European Commission. He is currently a PhD researcher at Cardiff University, investigating 'restorative practice in CoSA', funded by the Economic & Science Research Council.