

Circles of Support and Accountability

(COSA)

THE Belfast Experience



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Origins of the COSA Model

The Mennonite community response to a high risk ex-offender entering the community and seeking help.

Support given on the basis of leading an offence free life.

Accountability and Support

The COSA Model is underpinned by a restorative justice approach which focuses on ways of repairing harm and damage.

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The Mennonite response emerged from an actual living community.



Organic Reality

2002 – 2003 Extern embarked on Circles Work.

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It was a systemic response seeking to provide a sense of community, to give an experience of a community dynamic.

Systemic Reality

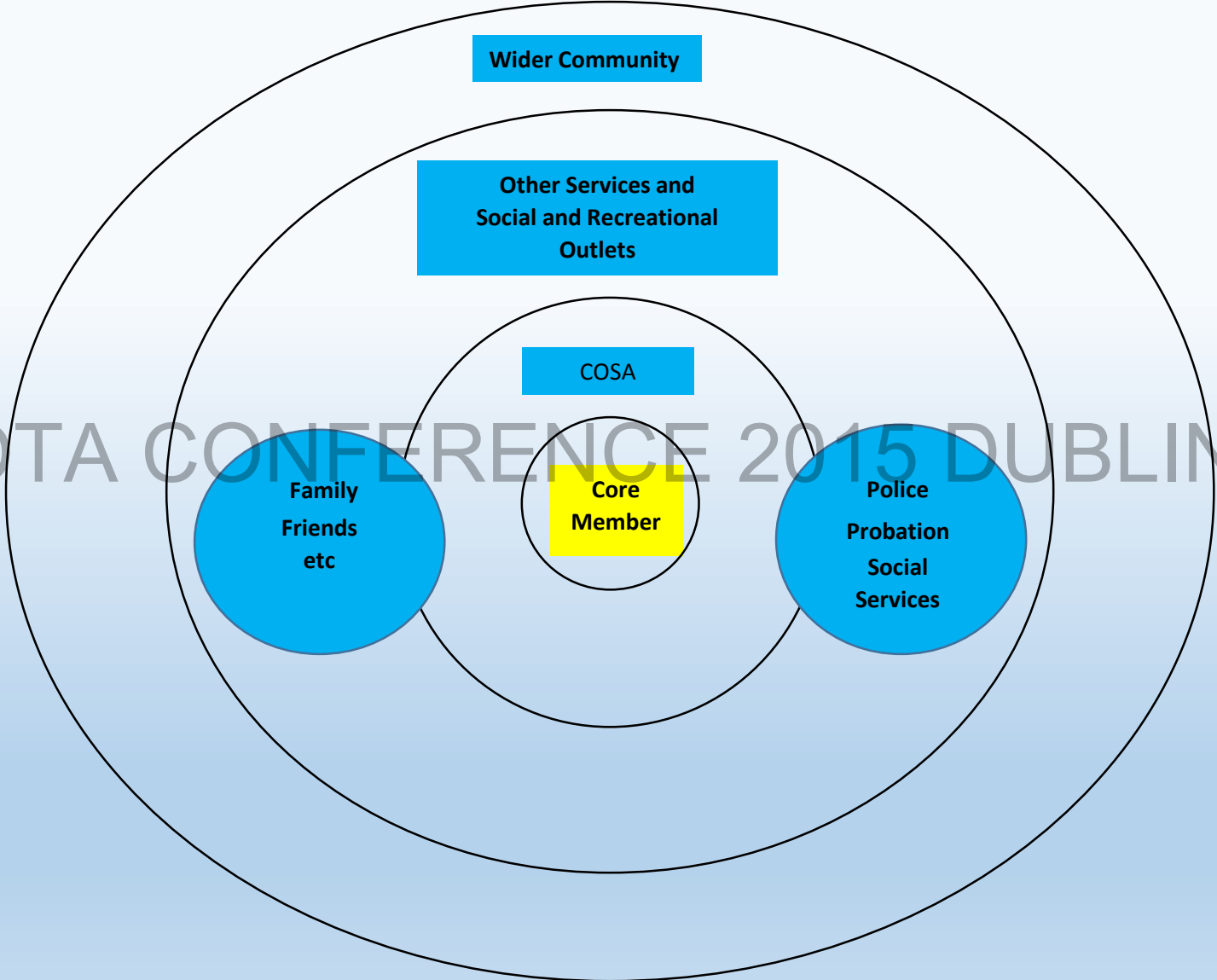
The circle seeks to help the client (core member) return to the community and lead a positive, responsible and offence free life.

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Key Interface:-

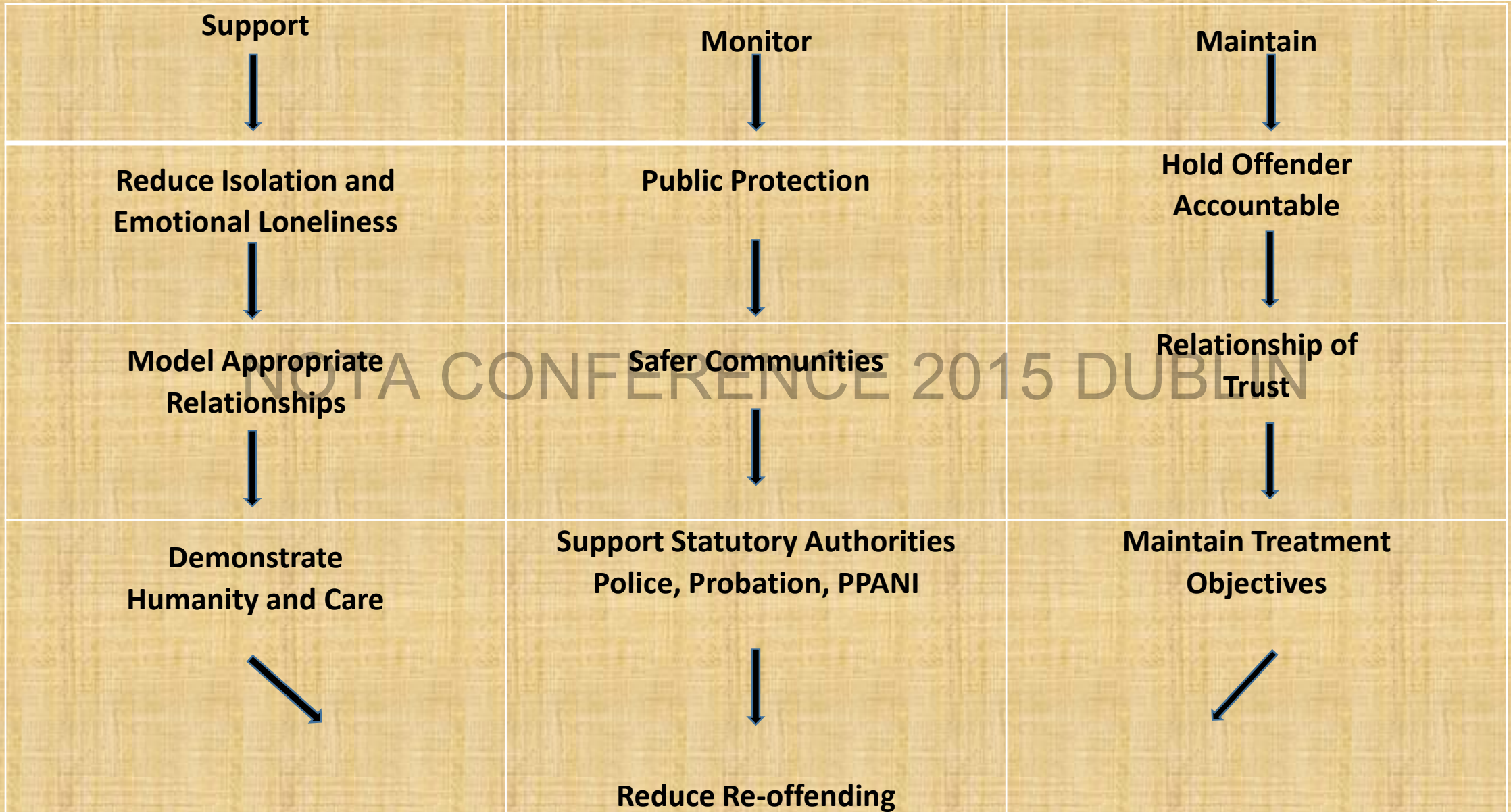
Systemic - Organic

COSA MODEL



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3 Key Principles



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What is the social space to which circles speak to?

Historical Perspective – Belfast



19th Century – Industrialisation



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Massive increase in population and the formation of communities



Identification of social problems



Social Gospel, social Christianity, Practical Christianity Narratives



Establishment of Missions



Late 19th century – early 20th century



Police Court Missionaries

Within community – of the community?

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‘Yes and No’



Movement in the direction of Social Mobility and Social
Distancing

Northern Ireland

Probation Act (Northern Ireland) 1950



‘Befriend, assist and advise’.



Early, probation focus had a community dimension



Movement in the direction of specialisation



Programmatic Interventions



Specialisation

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Treatment – Punishment



A Non-Treatment Paradigm
(Bottoms and McWilliam, 1979)



Probation – A Generic helping service?
(Ken Pease, 1999)



‘The Limits of The Sovereign State’
(Garland, 1996)

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Criminology of the self - Criminology of the other



New Labour



‘Tough on crime tough on the causes of crime’



Social Exclusion Unit (2002)



Causation – Factors

Generic consideration brought to bear within treatment



The need... “to address any or all the significant systems for an individual and by so doing maximise the chances of therapeutic change and maintenance”.

(Vivian Byrne, The Journal of Sexual Aggression, Vol. 10, 2004)

Strength based approaches and the promotion of the Good Live Model, a holistic way forward, ... “obliges us to focus on the enhancement of offenders’ capabilities in order to improve the quality of their lives, and, by so doing, reduce their chances of committing further offences”...

(Ward et al, The Journal of Sexual Aggression, Vol.10, 2004).



The Revival of Interest in Relationships



The importance of the therapeutic relationship

Walji et al, 'Experiences off engaging in psychotherapeutic interventions for sexual offending behaviour: A meta-synthesis', Journal of Sexual Aggression, Vol.20, No 3, 2014)



Mentoring, pro-social modelling, motivational work...



The need to overcome restricted social space



Treatment – non-treatment

A contextual Mapping

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Key Interfaces

- **State – Civil Society**
- **Specialist – generic**
- **Systemic - organic**

Community Integration



Belfast – Northern Ireland



Conflict Historic and Contemporary



Recent conflict 1970s onwards



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Negative community Impact



Self-defining communities



Polarisation and sectarianism



Insularity v emancipatory



Extern's COSA



Funding from Esmee Fairbairn



Covered training and operational costs



No funding for a co-ordinator post



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Adaptation of COSA Model



Linked to Extern's Floating Support Project



Floating Support funded by Supporting People/N.I.H.E



Floating Support – A social work team working with adult ex-offenders



Focus on medium to high risks and complex needs



High percentage of floating support caseload, clients with sex offending histories



Circle Core members selected from Floating Support Caseload



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Circles formed involving Floating Support keyworker, Core member
and 4+ circle volunteer



5 circles established and functioning 2003 to 2007

<u>Circle</u>	<u>Commenced</u>	<u>Ended</u>
1st Circle	February 2003	April 2007
2nd Circle	April 2003	December 2004
3rd Circle	March 2004	May 2005
4th Circle	October 2005	January 2007
5th Circle	November 2005	May 2007

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What the Circles Did



- They helped core members develop coping strategies
- They helped core members find suitable accommodation. In some instances it also meant helping to deal with poor living conditions and finding better accommodation
- They helped with education and employment issues
- They addressed self-care
- They addressed finances, budgeting
- They address practical and social skills
- They accompanied core members to appointments
- They were involved with the core member in social activities
- Feedback to the Floating Support Project
- Feedback to Extern's partner agencies



Volunteer Involvement



30 volunteers over the lifespan of the COSA initiative



30 volunteers – 19 females and 11 males



The age range of volunteers

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In their 20s – 15

In their 30s – 7

In their 40s – 6

In their – 50s – 2



As a volunteer left a circle a new volunteer was introduced which was made possible by a rolling training programme



In this way circles were replenished and maintained combining continuity and development

**Extern's Second COSA Initiative
(2013)**



Funding – Criminal Asset Recovery Money



Small amount for circle for Life Sentenced Client, no core post funded



Timespan of Circle – 4 months



Circle timespan – September 2013 – December 2013



Circle composition, core member, 4 volunteers and floating support manager



Significant impact albeit within the limits imposed



Involvement short but intensive



Helped core member deal more constructively with the issues he presented with



Reduction in conflict with statutory services



Foundations laid for constructive work in the future

Overview of the Implementation of the COSA Model



Circles Stages



1. Recruitment of Volunteers



Who are we looking for?



The Systemic – Organic issue again



The recruitment process



2. Training



Extern policies and services



Issues and responses to clients with sex offending histories



The COSA Model and Restorative Justice

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Circle guidelines, volunteer roles and tasks, personal boundaries



The agency and interagency contexts



The Criminal Justice System – statutory services...



- Victim Awareness and the Impact of sexual abuse on victims



- Individual Focus

3. Selection of Core Members

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4. Allocation of volunteers and core member to a circle



5. Forming the circle



6. Circle Operational



7. Ongoing supervision and support for volunteers

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8. Further training and booster sessions

9. Endings and closures

