

Àmbit social i criminològic

# **Research grants 2012**

## **EXECUTIVE REPORT**

### **Needs assessment and design of the intervention for high risk sex offenders social reintegration**

#### **Adaptation of the Circles of Support and Accountability to the Penal Enforcement System of Catalonia**

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**Year 2013**

**Executive report of the adaptation study**

# **Needs assessment and design of the intervention for high risk sex offenders social reintegration**

**Adaptation of the Circles of Support and  
Accountability to the Penal Enforcement System  
of Catalonia**

CerclesCat Team

Barcelona, March 2013

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## **Introduction**

The program Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA or Circles), or “Cercles de Suport i Responsabilitat” in its translation Catalan, is an alternative for the prevention of the recidivism in sex offenders. It started in Canada, in the mid 90s, from a punctual initiative to receive Charlie, a high risk sex offender that was released after having served a 7 year conviction without having gone through probation or any other measure of transition from prison to the community. On demand of the penitentiary authorities, a shepherd of a Mennonite congregation gathered a group of volunteers in order to support Charlie in his process of reintegration and to prevent him from reoffending.

Subsequently, other similar experiences were implemented, all with good results, a fact that attracted the interest of the authorities and the academic community.

Currently, there is a COSA model defined and implementations of it not only in Canada, but also in the United States, United Kingdom, Holland and Belgium. Likewise, the assessments made in Canada, the United States and United Kingdom indicate that COSA are effective in reducing recidivism and, in turn, it is a cost saving in economic terms.

Summarizing, the intervention consists of a group of volunteers coordinated by a professional that accompany a high risk sex offender (Core Member or CM) in his process of social reintegration. The circle makes a triple function: providing support for the reintegration process, helping the CM with the difficulties that may appear during this process, maintaining the established treatment targets, and ensuring that the CM is kept accountable to the authorities and the community to avoid situations of risk of recidivism. In order to develop these functions there is a constant coordination between the circle, the responsible for treatment, and the supervision and control institutions (probation and police, mainly).

In this way, the COSA model reconciles the objectives for the public protection with those of restorative justice. It is a modality of intervention with sex offenders that improves the results of the treatment programs available and

develops a community model for risk management based on empirical evidence. And, in turn, it integrates professional intervention with social participation.

The Penal Enforcement System in Catalonia has a solid experience in the treatment of sex offenders, assessment and risk management, and community intervention. All this creates a suitable context in which the implementation of the Circles can improve the prevention of recidivism of high risk sex offenders.

The present work includes a review of the COSA model and its relationship with the risk management of sex offenders. First of all, we will consider the characteristics of the social context and criminal enforcement in Catalonia, and will analyze the main characteristics of the prison population susceptible to participate in Circles in order to assess the feasibility of adapting the model in our system. And, finally, we will propose an implementation project of the program.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1. Circles of Support and Accountability. The model and its expansion in Europe**

#### **1.1.1. Origins of COSA and its development in Europe**

It began in Canada as an initiative carried out by a local religious organization and today it still depends mostly on religious communities in coordination with the correctional service of Canada. After the success of the first experiences, the Solicitor General Office financed the expansion of other local projects.

Each project is guided and supervised by the Correctional Chaplaincy Services in Canada. In 2011, there were 200 Circles running in this country. Since 2010, a national project is getting underway with a duration of 5 years, which aims to fund 50 new circles per year and to carry out an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the program. This project is funded and coordinated by the Canada's National Crime Prevention Center.

Its strong links to faith organizations and values, and the profile of the subjects involved are among the special features of the Circles in Canada. The Core Member is usually a sex offender that has completely finished his sentence and any other linkage with the institutions of criminal enforcement.

In 2002, another faith organization, the Quakers, became interested in its implementation in the United Kingdom. They proposed to the government to finance the application of 3 pilot projects in England and Wales.

Two organizations were constituted in 2008 from these pilots and considering their good functioning, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) and the Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles Project (HTV Circles), for its implementation in the country. Also the same year, a national organization, known as Circles UK, which coordinates and provides support to the development of the local projects was founded with the support of the Department of Justice. At the end of 2012, there were 11 organizations that kept running 72 circles.

The Circles model in the United Kingdom has some differences compared with the operating in Canada. Firstly, its management is independent on religious

structures. Secondly, Circles UK is a charity organization that receives the support from the Ministry of Justice.

In 2009, the Center for Public Safety and Criminal Justice of the University of Avans University of Applied Sciences proposed to start a pilot project to the probation services of the Netherlands. They implement a project funded by the government with the support and guidance of Circles UK. At the end of 2011, there were 4 regional projects and 16 circles into operation, coordinated by Circles NL.

Circles NL with Circles UK, the probations services in Belgium, the Tilburg University and the European Organisation of Probation (CEP) obtained financing for 2010-2011 from the Daphne III the program of the European Union, in order to develop a European model of Circles and expand its implementation in Europe. Due to this program, the Circles implementation has started in Belgium.

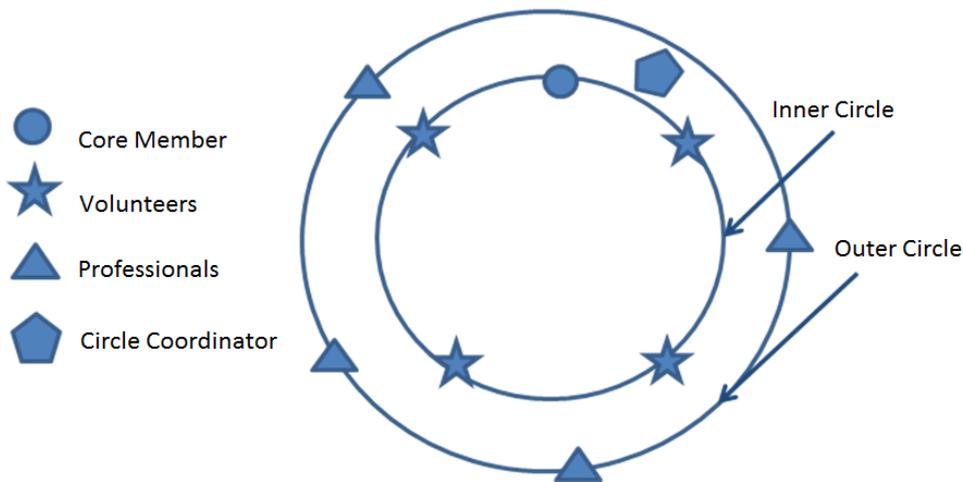
In 2013, the European Commission has granted a new subsidy in the framework of the Daphne III program, in order to promote the expansion of the Circles to other countries, the creation of an European network that coordinates the development of the model and application standards, and for the research and dissemination of the results. In the new European project, called Circles 4EU, six more countries have been added: Bulgaria, Latvia, Ireland, France, Hungary and Catalonia.

### **1.1.2. How does a Circle works?**

A circle is formed by a sex offender of medium or high risk, accompanied by a group of 3 to 6 volunteers who have been trained specifically for this task. The CM and the volunteers (inner Circle) meet on a regular frequency. Volunteers provide support modeling prosocial behaviors, offering emotional support and assisting him with practical needs. In turn, they help him to stay accountable to the community and the authorities by challenging his attitudes, beliefs and behaviors favorable to crime. Volunteers are assisted by an outer circle of

professionals. Communication between the inner and the outer circle is carried out through the Coordinator of the circle.

**Figure 1: The Circles model**



Source: European Handbook of COSA

Saunders and Wilson (2003) describe three mechanisms that contribute to the prevention of recidivism: support, monitoring and accountability, concepts related to the 'desistance as process' theory. According to this theory, the action of the circle is addressed to the building and strengthening human and social capital, and to the development of a positive narrative identity. In this way, the three mechanisms of action of the circle make possible the change in the dynamic risk factors and the development of new cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and social networks that promote integration.

#### **1.1.2.1. The Core Member**

Both in the Canadian as the European model, the participation in a circle is voluntary. The MC has to accept the two basic commitments: “No secrets” and “No more victims”. This implies a recognition, at least partial, of the offense and the desire to change to a prosocial lifestyle. In return he will receive the support

of members of the community to overcome the difficulties encountered in this process and he will be recognized as a valuable member of this community. In the case of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the Core Members are on parole while participating in a Circle, unlike what happens in Canada.

This means that, in spite of voluntariness, it is unavoidable that the process followed in the Circle, both positive and negative, affect the decisions about the penal measure. The following are the criteria that a sex offender must meet to be selected as a Core Member of a circle.

**Table 1. Selection criteria of de Core Member**

Admission criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voluntariness</li> <li>▪ Recognition of the offense</li> <li>▪ Motivation to change</li> <li>▪ Be willing to share information about the offense and personal risk factors</li> <li>▪ Posing a medium or high risk level</li> <li>▪ Having completed treatment in prison</li> <li>▪ Having a relapse prevention plan</li> <li>▪ Social support needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Antisocial Personality or Psychopathy</li> <li>▪ Total denial of the offense</li> <li>▪ Cognitive deficits that make impossible the compliance of the program</li> </ul>

**1.1.2.2. The volunteers**

Volunteers are the heart of the inner circle and the key of the COSA process. It is very important that they belong to the social environment close to the Core Member, since they are the representatives of their community and have to be connected with it. A specific professional or educational background is not necessary, but the reasons that lead them to participate in a circle must be taken into account, as well as having a good level of personal and social skills, among the following:

**Table 2. Personal skills of the volunteers**

<b>Attitudes, beliefs and qualities required in the volunteers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Communication skills: empathy and be able to listen without judging</li><li>▪ Ability to differentiate the individual from the behavior.</li><li>▪ Willingness to work as a team and initiative</li><li>▪ Ability to problem solve and management of emotions</li><li>▪ Balanced lifestyle</li><li>▪ Be able to maintain the boundaries in the relationship</li><li>▪ Willingness to engage with supervision and to comply with of the rules and procedures</li></ul>

In addition to these general characteristics, at the time of choosing the group of volunteers that will form a specific Circle, it is necessary that the group fits to the profile of the Core Member. In this sense, it is very important to have diversity with respect to age, sex, education, personal resources and skills, so they can adapt to the needs of the individual and at the same time offer a varied repertoire of role models and resources.

The procedure of selection of the volunteers is designed so that both the volunteers and those responsible for the project could decide if the applicant can adapt himself to the required role and if it will satisfy their interests. This is a process regulated in the Circles' "Code of Practice" and in the manual of procedures.

The selection process consists of the following phases:

1. Interview prior to the training. Objective: To assess the motivations to become a volunteer, provide basic information about the project and collect basic information about the applicant through an application form.
2. Training of 2 days. Objective: To allow volunteers to decide on their participation with enough information, as well as to continue with the selection process.

3. Delivery of supporting documentation of the identity and address of the volunteer, criminal records and completing new forms.
4. Interview with a coordinator. Objective: to provide further information on topics that may have been outstanding.
5. Checking of references and criminal records.

There is a seminar of initial training with a duration of two days that covers the following contents:

- Typology of sex offenders
- Basic Knowledge of the laws
- Attitudes to the media and the public
- Basic Concepts of circles
- Roles and responsibilities of volunteers
- Personal boundaries and coping strategies
- Communication and exchange of information
- Confidentiality
- Coordination with the resources

In addition to the initial training, one-day seminars are held regularly in which, with the collaboration of specialists relevant topics that will appear as the Circle develops and forms are covered.

The program provides with a protocol to ensure adequate supervision of volunteers by the coordinator, as well as to identify what is the support that they should receive.

In addition, volunteers receive financial compensation for all the expenses involved its activity (travels, activities with the CM, etc.), also a mobile phone for communications with the CM, coordinator and other members of the program; and an insurance.

### **1.1.2.3. The coordinator**

It is the professional who facilitates the communication between the inner and the outer Circle. In addition, the coordinator has the function of an intermediary

at the same time as he/she supervises and gives support to the process of the circle.

To carry out this task it is required, on the one hand, professional skills of leadership and teamwork, and on the other hand, experience in the intervention, assessment and risk management with sex offenders.

Its main functions are:

- Evaluating and selecting the sex offender to be part of a Circle.
- Participate in the training and selection of volunteers.
- Configure the group of volunteers that will form the inner Circle.
- Prepare all the practical aspects prior to the beginning of the circle.
- Organize and coordinate the first meetings between the volunteers without the MC, and attend the first meeting of the full circle. Subsequently, participate in some meetings and suggest interventions to the volunteers.
- Carry out quarterly assessments of the dynamic risk of the CM.
- Receive and gather any information from the meetings, contacts and activities.
- Take part in monthly meetings with the outer circle.
- Supervise and support the volunteers individually.

#### **1.1.2.4. *The outer Circle***

It is formed by professionals who supervise the CM in the community, apply the treatment and provide assistance in other needs. Generally, in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands it is formed by: the probation officer, the therapist, local police and other institutions or social service agencies.

At the beginning of the circle it is desirable that the professionals and volunteers keep meetings to know each other, and to clarify expectations and limits of respective roles. In addition, the outer circle works as an advisory council to the inner circle.

#### **1.1.2.5. *The process of a Circle***

In general each circle has a duration of eighteen months and during this time it goes through different phases. After the formation of the Circle, through the assessment and selection of the CM and the training and selection of volunteers, the process is started.

### **1.2. Cost-benefit analysis**

Although there are still few evaluations of the Circles model, the results obtained indicate that the implementation of COSA with medium or high risk sex offenders is effective in reducing recidivism.

Elliot and Beech (2012) obtained an average reduction of recidivism in sexual offences of 61% with an average follow-up period of 3,5 years. In terms of violent recidivism (sexual or non-sexual), the COSA program gets a 50% reduction with a follow-up period of 3,75 years. These authors have also studied the relationship of cost-benefit of the implementation of COSA, and calculated that every pound invested in the program would provide a net benefit of 18%. Duwe (2012) made this same calculation with an implementation of the program in Minnesota (USA), and obtained a cost reduction of 82%.

We can conclude that the Circles of Support and Accountability program has a high level of effectiveness in reducing recidivism while significantly reducing costs.

### **1.3. Tackling sexual crime in Catalonia**

#### **1.3.1. The legal context**

The Spanish penal code establishes prison sentences that, depending on the severity, can reach up to 15 years for the authors of crimes against sexual freedom. This severity in the criminal response to this type of crime has been exacerbated in the last penal code reform in 2010, which includes a new, non-

custodial sentence, called *supervised freedom* to be taken to comply after the prison sentence. Probation can last up to 10 years attending on the dangerousness of the offender. Among the measures contemplated, provision is: the obligation to be locatable, regular summons, the obligation to communicate the place of residence, prohibition of residing in certain places, or to perform certain activities that facilitate the opportunity to commit new crimes, the obligation to follow certain medical treatments, etc.

The inmates, depending on their evolution, on the time the execution of the sentence and their social environment, can fulfill the last part of the sentence in open regime. This regime allows the inmate leave daily from the prison to carry out the treatment, work or educational activities, and stay overnight at home during the weekends to prepare the return to life in freedom. Likewise, during this period the inmate can enjoy probation if the treatment team emits a favorable prognosis.

The Catalan Prison Regulations of 1996 (RD 190 / 9 February 1996) organize how the treatment will take place in prison. Among others, it provides the organization of specialized treatment programs for sex offenders in prisons and organizes the open regime as a means to continue the treatment in a community setting.

Very concisely, this is the legal structure that has enabled the General Direction of Correctional Services to organize in the past 20 years a wide range of devices for the social integration of sex offenders, and for the prevention of recidivism that will be described below (General Direction of Correctional Services, 2011).

### **1.3.2. Risk assessment. The RisCanvi protocol**

Prisons of Catalonia began developing a model based on the principles of Risk-Need- Responsivity (Andrews and Bonta, 2010) with the protocol of risk assessment called RisCanvi. From 2009, this tool, which has been adapted to the specific context of the Catalan prison population, assesses the risk of

violent recidivism of the offenders and, simultaneously, identifies the main risk factors (needs) that require to be addressed through intervention.

The instrument consists of two scales. The first, called *Screening*, consists of 10 items and serves to make quickly an assessment of those cases that clearly present low risk. The second, the *Full Scale*, evaluates the 43 most important risk factors. This protocol allows to detect those cases that require a more specific evaluation to detect risk of sexual recidivism, intimate partner violence, and psychopathy. In addition to the risk of **violent recidivism**, the RisCanvi assesses the risk for **self-directed violence**, **breach of sentence** and **institutional misconduct**.

### **1.3.3. The SAC program**

Since 1996, the Intervention Program for Sex Offenders (SAC) is applied in Catalan prisons. This form of intervention, based on the model of relapse prevention (Laws, 1989) includes group activities and individual monitoring in order to enhance the skills of the inmates to prevent new offences and its generalization to life in freedom. The effectiveness of this treatment model has been sufficiently demonstrated by the international research and also in the Catalan context (Redondo et al., 2005).

### **1.3.4. Intervention in the community**

In open regime and parole, sex offenders continue with the treatment under the supervision of a treatment team of the correctional services and are sometimes derived to specialized treatment centers in the community network. In addition, these teams monitor their behavior in the social environment and adjust the level of autonomy, depending on the risk they present in every moment and the advances that occur in their individual intervention plan.

### **1.3.5. Volunteering in penitentiary system**

For more than 20 years, numerous social organizations and volunteer groups collaborate with prisons in reintegration functions. At present, these collectives are articulated through the so-called *Table of Social Participation*. This experience provides a favorable climate for the development of a program as COSA.

## **2. Research**

### **2.1. Purposes and objectives**

This research work responds to the purpose of improving the intervention with sex offenders who are serving sentences in Catalonia through the adaptation of the COSA Model. To make possible this improvement, it is necessary to know thoroughly the functioning of the Circles in the different countries where it has been applied and the key components of the model. On the other hand, it is necessary to have an evaluation of our context and the target population that will allow us to make the necessary adjustments (both of the model and of our organization) to implement the program without affecting their integrity. The underlying assumption of the research is that sex offenders of Catalanian prisons have needs that can be addressed through the Circles of Support and Accountability, and that the prison organization is provided with the necessary conditions for its implementation.

Thus, the aims of this research are:

- a) To know what the Circles of Support and Accountability are and how they work
- b) To know the social, political and judicial context for the implementation of Circles
- c) To know the current penitentiary population of sex offenders susceptible to taking part in a Circle

- d) To identify the needs in the individual, familiar, social, economic, and employment areas of this population, as well as their risk factors and the conditions for the prevention of relapses
- e) To make a proposal to adapt the model circles in Catalonia

## **2.2. Methodology and Research Activities**

Taking into account the objectives of the research, selection of methods and techniques of research have been based on the principles of Action – Research (Smith, 1996, 2006).

This methodology has several implications about how the work has been carried and its scope:

- The aim is the improvement of a specific social reality and obtaining knowledge through practice.
- It is a continuous process, because every acquisition phase of conclusions is followed by one of proposals for action and improvement which will be reassessed to reach new conclusions.
- It is a participatory process, involving different stakeholders. The researchers are also involved in the action.
- The selection of methods and techniques is varied, incorporating qualitative techniques that gather information and evaluations of the actors involved in the action.
- 

According to the above, and as will be seen below, the information and conclusions presented here come from multiple actions such as: on-site visits to places where the program is applied, focus groups, literature review, interviews, participation in conferences, training, and involvement in a European project for the development of the model.

We have to mention that the research has a temporal dimension that starts before the time delimited by this report and continuing subsequent to its

delivery. To conclude, we have to emphasize that an essential part of the research is a proposal for adaptation of the COSA Model that will be implemented and will be reassessed.

### **2.2.1. Measures**

- a) Catalanian Computer Penitentiary System (SIPC) database and inmates records. We consulted them with the aim of gathering information about the basic variables to define the sample from which the interviews will be taken.
- b) Static-99 Scale (Hanson & Thornton, 2000). This risk assessment tool was used to determine the level of risk of sexual recidivism.
- c) Semi-structured interview. In order to collect qualitative information about sex offenders' needs (specially in all that refers to the return to the social context), the defense mechanisms included in the story of the offense, the strategies for the prevention of relapses and information that can be analyzed according to the Good Lives Model.
- d) Social support template. Summarized in a structured way all the information about relevant people in the social environment of the offender and the functions of social support that each of them play.
- e) Template of defense mechanisms. Covers the different types of defense mechanisms according to the different existing categories.

### **2.2.2. Study of the population**

#### **2.2.2.1. Sample**

The study population consists of people who have been sentenced by the commission of any crime of a sexual nature, be the main offense or not, who are serving their sentences according to the Computer System Catalan Prison in any degree of treatment at the time of the computer extraction of the data matrix (May 7, 2012).

Sexual offenses are considered all those under Title VIII of the current Penal Code, and that are classified as crimes against sexual freedom and indemnity, except for those crimes of corruption of minors, taking into account that these

crimes do not necessarily involve sexual contact between the offender and the victim. In addition, the offenses established under the old Penal Code which meet the same characteristics as the previous ones are also included. The total number of people who compose the population to study are 602 subjects.

#### **2.2.2.2. Variables**

The period of measurement of the variables has been the last admission to prison, that is to say, the following variables were studied taking into account the period from the date from which the person has entered for the last time in prison until the date fixed for the closure of the data extraction, the May 7 2012.

We have studied 29 variables that are the following:

- Regime classification degree
- Penitentiary center where serving sentence
- Inmate's parole file
- Date of the commencement of sentence
- Date of fulfillment of the  $\frac{1}{4}$  part of the sentence
- Date of fulfillment of the  $\frac{1}{2}$  part of the sentence
- Date of fulfillment of the  $\frac{2}{3}$  part of the sentence
- Date of fulfillment of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  part of the sentence
- Date of release
- Time remaining for release after gathering information for database
- Birth date
- Age
- Country of origin
- Nationality
- European Union foreigner or not
- Region of residence
- History of specific treatment
- Current achievement of specific treatment
- History of achievement of other treatment activities

- Current achievement of treatment activities
- Current achievement of complementary activities
- Mental health
- Prison permissions
- Loss of prison permissions
- Date of last risk assessment with RisCanvi
- Type of RisCanvi scale (Screening or Full Version)
- Validity of the last risk assessment with the RisCanvi
- Recommendation of use a specific risk assessment tool
- Types and levels of risk assessed with RisCanvi

### **2.2.3. Interview**

To select the sample of inmates to perform the qualitative interviews, and attending to the people selected for the implementation of COSA, these would have to be able to be hypothetical Core Members of a Circle of Support and Accountability, two basic requirements that they had to be met simultaneously were defined:

- Serving sentence in open regime, that is, in third degree of treatment or parole.
- Participation in the specific program *Sexual Aggression Control (SAC)* during the execution of the sentence in the entry to prison.

Out of the 601 people that composed the total of the available population, a total of 65 people met these two requirements. Nevertheless, the time elapsed between the extraction of the variables and the beginning of the period of interviews (approximately eight months) reduced significantly this number by different causes. Thus, of the 65 people who initially met the two requirements, finally it was possible to have a total of 34 people. These 34 subjects were evaluated with the risk assessment scale *Static 99-R* (Hanson and Thornton, 2000) in order to select the inmates with a medium or high risk, which is one of the criteria to be part of a circle and, therefore, susceptible of application of the

interview. Of the application of the Static 99-R, a total of 14 inmates posed a medium or high risk of sexual recidivism.

Finally, the definitive interview sample was 9 subjects. The main aspects that were asked to the possible MC were: criminal and penitentiary information, documentation, current housing, transportation, labor issues, education level, health, pending lawsuits, free time, concerns, defense mechanisms, relapse plans, opinion about COSA and support network. The entire interview is available at the research report.

#### **2.2.4. The focus group**

One of the fundamental steps to carry out the implementation of the European project Circles in our penal enforcement system is the assessment of the needs of the Catalan prison system in terms of the reintegration of high-risk sex offenders. This basic point forms the core of the present research project, but the actions that must be addressed to enable the implementation of this European project in our country go much further and the CerclesCat team has been working on it for years to achieve it.

This would explain why some actions carried out by the CerclesCat team are not within the year of validity of the present research (2012). An example would be the decision of sending a member of our team to the UK with the aim of learning in-situ the Circles UK experience. The purpose of that visit was to be documented as much as possible about the project Circles UK to adapt it to the reality of Catalonia. With the objective of organizing all the questions that we wanted to raise in the United Kingdom, we convened a focus group represented by twenty-one experts from different social and legal areas with an important role in the implementation of a project of these characteristics here in Catalonia. The relationship of these experts and the institutional levels that they represent are the following:

- 15 experts in the field of justice
- 2 experts in the health area
- 1 expert of the internal affair area

- 1 expert of the social welfare field
- 2 from academic world

We wanted to count on their contribution to the project with the exposure of suggestions, questions, criticism, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the project, etc. We wanted to analyze all the necessary steps to ensure the implementation of Circles in our country, with the biggest guarantees of success that we had at our disposal.

With this group of experts two work sessions were carried out. The first meeting took place in April 2011. This was divided into two parts. First, the team presented the project and then, participants were divided into 3 subgroups to treat the different blocks of discussion and themes that the research team considered essential. Among all, we highlight the following: society's perception with respect to the research, public opinion, collateral damage, opinion from the point of view of the professionals of different areas (politicians, judges, police, volunteers, prison staff), obstacles arising from the expert point of view, methodology to use, profile of the volunteer (profession, age, sex, commitment, dedication time), profile of the inmate sample, etc.

At the end of the session, each subgroup presented its findings to all the target group. The synthesis of this group of professionals allowed us to make the visit to Circles UK with a total of forty questions to answer.

The second meeting was held in October 2011 and was also divided into two parts. The first part of the session was aimed to present, by part of the research team, a report with the contents of the visit to Circles UK, responding to all the questions raised at the previous meeting. During the second part of the meeting, another question was set out to the group: ***How can this project be adapted to our reality?***

The questions were considered with the following script:

1. How to implement the project. Actions necessary to implement the first pilot Circles.

2. What structure should the project have?
3. Profile of the core member.
4. Where to find volunteers?
5. Sustainability and economic financing of circles.

Subsequently a comprehensive questionnaire was sent to each expert to respond to many of the treated aspects.

### **3. Research results**

Models of intervention with sex offenders are evolving toward a different perspective, which emphasizes the importance of the programs that are organized in the community, as well as the social and personal settings in which the individual's life will take place when released. Having solved individual, social, housing and employment needs are considered as decisive factors to achieve the successful reintegration into the community. The Circles of Support and Accountability program have the necessary components to make this model operate.

#### **3.1. The perception of the legal and social agents (analysis of the responses of the focus groups)**

When one asked to significant representatives of the professional and community network about the Circles program and the possibilities of applying it to the penal enforcement system in Catalonia, they recognize its value to reinforce the prevention of a recidivism system and its viability in our context. They emphasize the structural basis with which the system is provided that has been developed in recent years: a consolidated treatment program, a prison context that makes possible the treatment and reintegration, and a tradition of collaboration with social entities and volunteers for prison activity.

As *pros* points of the implementation of circles we found:

- The good results in other countries for the reduction of recidivism of sex offenses
- Contributions for the existing intervention, especially because it forces to adapt and update the current procedures
- The emphasis in the offender, on its responsibility for its reintegration process and in the adaptation of the intervention to the individual needs of each case
- The application of circles is a reinforcement of the community aspect of the prison intervention with this group of inmates

The *cons* points that the experts considered were:

- The current shortage of resources, as a result of the economic crisis in Catalonia
- The difficulty of having a favorable social response for the reintegration of this type of offender due to the social rejection that sexual offenses cause and the risk that the offenders might pose.
- The resistance of many professionals in the system to work in accordance with objectives, procedures and common service standards. This tendency to follow individual criteria means a difficulty to implement new projects for working with complex teams formed by professionals, volunteers and community entities.
- It is necessary to take care for the selection of the staff of circles and not fall into the temptation to take obedient people, without self-critical spirit
- It is necessary to be careful of not abusing the volunteer staff, avoiding assigning functions that are specific to professionals.

The Circles model, as it has been applied in other countries cannot be transferred directly to our context. As the Circles are implemented in Catalonia, it is necessary to adapt the protocols and its organization to our structure of penal enforcement, taking into account the legal and institutional particularities of our system: the culture of volunteerism in Catalonia, the

model of inter-agency coordination and the social entities, the structures for collaboration between correctional services, police, local institutions of social services and entities of the third sector.

Finally, the experts make a series of recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of the circles of support and Accountability:

- Ensure the stable financing of the program once the economic support of the European project is finished.
- Staggered dissemination of the project, as it progresses in the implementation and it is possible to present positive information of its evolution, emphasizing as objectives the complementarity between the offender reintegration and the prevention of recidivism
- Careful preparation for the selection and training of volunteers, the selection of inmates and the preparation and definition of the roles of the professionals who have to lead the program.

### **3.2. Current sex offenders population in Catalonia**

From the analysis of the population of sex offenders in Catalanian prisons, we can conclude that there is a sufficient sample that can benefit from this type of intervention. At the time of the data collection, there were 602 subjects for this type of crime in prisons. The 60% of the total sample and 75% of those who are in open regime or parole have made the SAC treatment program, specific for sex offenders. A total of 86 inmates are in regime of semi-liberty, third grade or parole, and it is estimated that 14% of those who are in open regime present a medium or high risk of violent recidivism.

On the one hand, the 75% of the sample have their residence in the regions of Barcelona. This fact must be taken into account at the time of concentrating the resources during the pilot phase of the project. From the study of a sample of the population that could benefit from the circles program, it is stated that sex

offenders have spent a long period of time in prison in ordinary regime before obtaining the classification in third degree (approximately a minimum of 6 years). The individuals interviewed considered moving from the classification in ordinary regime to the classification of the third degree (open regime) a particularly difficult process. As they stated, this is the moment when they feel more isolated, disoriented and with more need for social support.

On the other hand, the interviewees expressed having the basic needs of reintegration covered (housing, transport, food, etc.) with the exception of the employment that is the most important difficulty they face today, the lack use of resources offered by the network, and finally and very important, all of them count on a good level of social support.

There may be two reasons that explain the above results: on the one hand, the fact of having a time elapsed in partially freedom situation has allowed them to have the time and opportunities to develop support networks and find solutions to the most basic needs, or may well mean that those individuals who obtain the classification of open regime (third degree) are those that have a more powerful social network.

If on May 7, 2012 (closing date of the collection of the sample) the Circles model had been started, three of six interviewed subjects would have accepted and signed voluntarily its inclusion in a Circle. Nevertheless, it is desirable that this commitment to the Circles program circles will perform at the time of access to the open regime, or, if it is possible, through consultation with the prison treatment team a few days before gaining access to the third degree. So it seems that the Circle model would not be as necessary once the offender has spent some months in open regime.

It also difficult for them to identify risk situations. This can be a future problem if they overestimate the chances of reintegration because they are not enough alert and not applied optimally relapse prevention guidelines. All of those interviewed understood the main functions of support making circles. Nevertheless, they do not emphasize so much the function of accountability or

supervision. This might indicate that they might have resistances on these two concepts.

The group of subjects interviewed is a small sample in order to be able to draw generalized conclusions. Two methodological aspects should be taken into account for a possible extension of this research: on the one hand, to shorten the time between the dates on which the collection of the data occurs and conducting the interviews, since there is a risk that some subjects are out of the sample. On the other hand and taking into account the obtained answers, in relation to the profile of subjects selected as target for the study population, it would be convenient to evaluate subjects that have favorable conditions for obtaining the open regime but have not yet initiated the compliance in this regime, or have just started. This would make possible to evaluate subjects with a higher level of difficulty for their reintegration and during the most complicated stage of this process.

The current model of treatment of the correctional services offers a solid structure in order to develop programs such as circles, due to the consolidation of the specific treatment, the risk assessment, the structure of open regime and parole, and the tradition of social participation and volunteerism.

As an outstanding aspect, it is necessary to emphasize that the risk assessment does not have a universal coverage for the whole population yet, since only 50 % of the evaluations are in force. On the other hand, the fact that many of the inmates interviewed are unable to present their relapse prevention plan and underestimate their risk of recidivism, deserves further exploration and reflection. Perhaps this is a part of the treatment that needs to be strengthened, and, certainly, the support that a Circle can offer in the natural environment to maintain the goals of treatment can significantly contribute to this improvement. In any case, the small amount of subjects interviewed obliges us to be cautious in our conclusions. The inmates who participate in future circles are likely to present resistances to recognize and share with others their risk factors and that the part of accountability and transparency of the program is the main difficulty for them to accept. This will probably be one of the main obstacles that

will have to be provided in future implementation of CerclesCat. Both volunteers and professionals will have to be prepared to handle these resistances.

#### **4. The CerclesCat Project**

In this chapter we will describe how the Circles of Support and Accountability will work in Catalonia and how these will be implemented. The CerclesCat configuration is the result of adapting the international experience and standards of the European network Circles 4EU to the reality of the penal enforcement system of Catalonia. The configuration of the program presented here is that provided for the pilot implementation of 3 circles as it is expected to be applied in Catalonia following the guide of the project Circles 4EU. These 3 pilots will be carried out during 18 months with 3 circles, at the end of which their functioning will be evaluated and the necessary adaptations for its implementation will be made for a comprehensive and definitive form.

##### **4.1. Target population and selection criteria**

It is estimated that there are currently 178 inmates in the Catalanian prisons convicted for sexual offenses that pose a high or moderate risk of recurrence and that present a high level of needs in terms of human and social capital. The selection criteria to be considered as Core Member are as follows:

- Sex offenders in the reintegration process
- Posing a moderate or high risk of sexual recidivism
- Presenting a high level of human and social capital needs
- Having participated in the specific treatment program for sex offenders in prison that will have continuity in open regime
- Recognition of the offense and motivation to change
- Voluntariness
- Absence of exclusion factors (psychopathy or anti-social profile, cognitive deficits that prevent the following of the program)

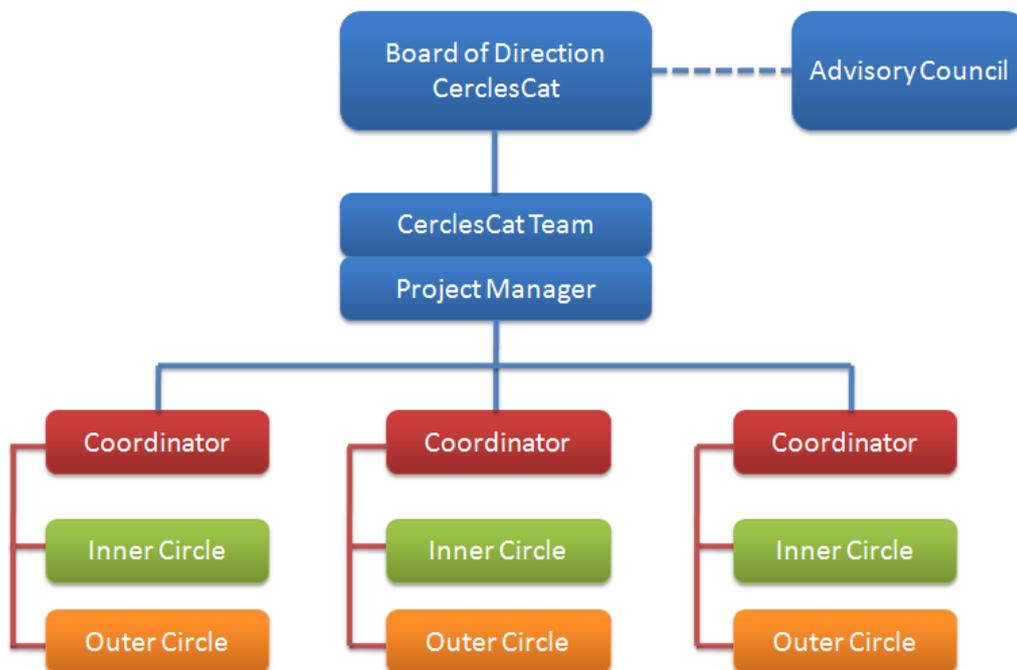
## 4.2. Program structure

In a first moment of deployment of the program, the goal is to make a pilot implementation with 3 subjects counting with the support and supervision of the European project Circles 4EU. Nevertheless, there will be a selection of 9 cases to anticipate possible casualties at the beginning of the implementation and to enable the evaluation of the program, as it will be seen later.

In Europe, the implementation of COSA has the support of an organizational structure that organizes the tasks and staff, maintains quality standards and is held responsible by the public and the media. This structure, both in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, is differentiated into two levels: national, and regional or local projects. In the case of Catalonia, taking into account the dimensions of our system and that the project is in a start-up phase, a more compact structure without the need to differentiate between the two levels aforementioned is more desirable.

The proposed structure would be as follows:

**Figure 2. CerclesCat Structure**



Both in the *European Handbook of COSA* (2011) as in the documentation provided by Circles UK there is a forecast of the material needs for the implementation of the circles. During the pilot phase, the funding is ensured thanks to the Circles 4EU project and the use of some resources from the Department of Justice. This two-year pilot phase should serve to make an estimate of the need materials adjusted to our context and to establish a stable model for sustainability of the project, after having evaluated its application in Catalonia.

A list of the resources that are needed to start and keep the program running is presented below:

1. Salaries of the 3 coordinators
2. Local and small expenses
3. Structure of management and administrative support
4. Information and dissemination campaigns
5. Material and instruments
6. Training

The operations and activities that are organized in the program to achieve the objectives are:

- a) Protocols and standards
- b) Selection and training of the coordinators
- c) Recruitment, training and selection of volunteers
- d) Assessment and selection of the Core Member
- e) Activities of the Circle

One of the objectives of the project coordinated by Circles 4EU is carry out an evaluation of the program that is common to all countries that apply it and to integrate all the results. To carry out this task the Group of Advanced Studies in Violence (GEAV) from the University of Barcelona participates as a partner. The design of the evaluation of our program will be developed with this research group. Among others, this design will collect the results obtained after the end of the pilot project with those subjects who have participated as Core Member, and will be compared with the same indicators for those who meet the selection criteria but who have not participated (waiting list).

To obtain the results of the program, variables related to the following areas will be evaluated:

- Housing
- Work
- Occupation of time
- Economic autonomy
- Health
- Drugs and alcohol abuse
- Interpersonal relations
- Social support network
- Level of dynamic risk and significant variables
- Breaches of the conditions of supervision in third grade or probation
- Offenses

### **4.3. Implementation of the program**

The following is the planning of the activities necessary for the implementation of the Circle program and its timing. The duration of the European project Circles 4EU that supports this implementation which started on 15 January 2013 and will finish on 31 January 2014 has been taken as temporary reference.

At the end of this period, the carried out pilot project will be evaluated and its continuity will be planned. One of the results of this evaluation will be the cost analysis and the design of a plan for sustainability and stable funding.

This schedule has been updated and completed at November 2013 in an Implementation Plan provided together with this study.

**Table 3. CerclesCat Implementation Planning**

<i>Project: CerclesCat</i>			2013				2014			
Actions	Start date	Final date	1T	2T	3T	4T	1T	2T	3T	4T
<b>Design of the Program</b>			x	x						
Feasibility study and implementation design	01/2012	01/06/13	x	x						
Elaboration of Protocols and forms	15/04/13	01/06/13		x						
Volunteers' selection and initial training Manual	15/04/13	01/06/13		x						
<b>CerclesCat Structure Establishment</b>			x	x						
Agreement with contributor entities	01/05/13	01/06/13		x						
CerclesCat structure aproovement from DGSP	25/03/13	28/03/13	x							
<b>Coordinators</b>				x						
Training and selection of the coordinators	Nov 11	08/02/13	x							
Hiring coordinators	15/04/13	01/05/13		x						
Update training of the coordinators	08/04/13	15/05/13		x						
<b>Budget</b>			x	x						x
Estimate costs	01/02/13	30/04/13	x	x						
Obtaining the budget	15/02/13	31/12/14	x							x
<b>Presentation of CerclesCat project to Stakeholders</b>						x				
<b>Attraction, selection and training of volunteers</b>				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Attraction campaign	01/05/13	30/06/13		x						
Collection of applications	01/07/13	01/09/13			x					
Initial interviews	01/09/13	15/09/13			x					
Two-day seminar	01/09/13	22/09/13			x					

<b>Project: CerclesCat</b>			<b>2013</b>				<b>2014</b>			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Start date</b>	<b>Final date</b>	<b>1T</b>	<b>2T</b>	<b>3T</b>	<b>4T</b>	<b>1T</b>	<b>2T</b>	<b>3T</b>	<b>4T</b>
Agreement interview	23/09/13	29/09/13			X					
References and criminal records	16/09/13	23/09/13				X				
Selection of Circles' volunteers	07/10/13	11/10/13				X				
Participation agreement, documentation and insurance	07/10/13	18/10/13				X				
Design of a Permanent Training Plan	01/02/14	28/02/14					X			
Permanent training seminars	01/03/13	31/10/13					X	X	X	X
<b>Assessment and selection of 3 CM</b>				X	X					
Providing information to the prison treatment team and request of CM	01/06/13	15/06/13		X						
Assessment of the CM	17/06/13	31/07/13		X	X					
Selection of 3 CM and 6 participants for the assessment or waiting list	02/09/13	23/09/13			X					
<b>Start up 3 pilot Circles</b>				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Establish an outer Circle	23/09/13	11/10/13			X	X				
Obtaining premises for meetings and preparation of infrastructure	23/09/13	18/10/13			X					
Purchase materials	01/05/13	01/07/13		X						
Start meetings	21/10/13					X				
Operation of the pilots	21/10/13	30/11/14				X	X	X	X	X
<b>Evaluation of the program</b>				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Evaluation design and assessment	01/05/13	31/12/14		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

#### **4.4. Conclusions and proposals for the adaptation of the Circles project in Catalonia**

Evidence from other countries suggests that the implementation of circles of support and accountability, in conjunction with other interventions, is effective to reduce recidivism of sex offenders of medium or high risk. In addition, from a cost-benefit point of view, this is a profitable program. The economic cost of implementing and maintaining a circle is lower in comparison with the cost that the recidivism of a subject that has not participated in circles and reoffends represents.

Catalonia is provided with a good basic structure to start a program of these characteristics: a consolidated treatment program, a system for risk assessment and risk management, a penitentiary structure for the supervision in the community of this type of criminals, and a good tradition of collaboration between the penal enforcement system, social entities and volunteer organizations.

In terms of potential demand, of the 602 sex offenders that were included the time of the research, 14% (86) were at this moment in open regime or parole. Among these, it is estimated that 13% have a medium or high risk of violent recidivism and 26% have risk of other violent behaviors or breach of sentence. The experience of recent years shows that, despite this risk, the conditions of the open regime or parole supervision are an effective system to contain this risk while they are under the control of the correctional services.

But, as we have seen, once the punishable finished the sentence, the components of reintegration and social control that are part of the core of the Circles model improve the opportunities of long-term relapse prevention. On the other hand, the fact of reinforcing the supervision and the support in semi-liberty might facilitate the gradual access to the release from prison of other inmates who fail due to a lack of social support or personal resources. Thus, when assessing quantitatively the impact of the program, we should consider the social benefits of the relapse prevention in a not too large group of criminals

with potential for reoffending in serious crimes. We should keep in mind the cumulative effect of these benefits for the consolidation of the program over the years.

The implementation of the Circles program involves, in addition to other added values for the system of criminal enforcement in Catalonia, an impulse to the development of the model of semi-liberty that has been built over the last three decades.

Likewise, it gives continuity to the treatment that begins in prisons in ordinary regime and that finishes with the offender integrated progressively to its social environment. The knowledge acquired in the SAC program is put to the test during the interaction between the subject and its environment. But, in addition, this intervention is reinforced by the support of the volunteers who establish links with the offender and are privileged observers of his interaction with the environment.

On the other hand, Circles is a specialized intervention to reconstruct the social support network of people who have spent many years in prison. Its objective is making the offender establish links with other people and participates in activities that fulfill the function of supporting, while the community exercises the social control of all individuals who are part of it.

A nuclear aspect of the Circles model which has been observed in those countries where it is carried out is that it is done with the coordination between the penal enforcement institution (prison service, probation...) and many others.

The role of social institutions of the third sector is central, arriving in cases such as the United Kingdom, to become providers of circles. The community emphasis of this model also forces to strengthen cooperation between the Administration agencies who often work separately, giving rise to a way of working in which the individual is at the center of all activities. Thus, the role of health, social welfare services or the police in the reintegration and supervision merges in the same direction. The University provides with an approach of applied research, with the necessary conditions for quality control in the

management of the program and makes possible the evaluation requirement for its development with guarantees of efficiency and effectiveness.

All of these new aspects of enrichment of the community elements of the prison model were consolidated, they could be generalized for the intervention with other criminal profiles.

Finally, the participation in the European project Circles 4EU gives the opportunity to compare the model of Penal Enforcement of Catalonia with other countries in our environment that face similar difficulties and challenges in a learning process and with the common vocation to be guided by common standards of quality in the provision of public service.

From the experience of other countries and the results of this research, some learning can already be applied in the implementation of the program. We have a clear structure of procedures and protocols that have already been verified in previous applications of the model. But, in addition, there have been important conclusions to be taken into account.

The importance of having a clear structure which is responsible for the management of the Circles is evident, ensuring their suitability to the model through the training of professionals and coordination between the different sectors involved. This structure has to centralize the representation of the program in the risk management of sex offenders towards the media and the professional and institutional sectors. This will enable the Circles to integrate with the rest of proceedings of the correctional services and the information to reach properly the public opinion. In the case of Catalonia, it has opted for a structure in which the leadership and control of the program correspond to the organs of rehabilitation of Correctional Services but with a strong involvement of social entities that already collaborate with other projects, as well as with representative members of the different professional sectors and community through an Advisory Council.

The dissemination of the implementation of this initiative is a key factor. The social reaction that causes this type of crime requires having special caution when reporting on the type of intervention it is, what their purposes are, the results we can expect and the resources invested. We must have a plan of communication that conveys this has been taken as temporary reference information in a clear and realistic way to the public opinion, without the distortions that can occur due to an incomplete or sensationalized transmission by the media. It is necessary to rely on the fact that formal communication channels are not the only way to inform the society about the Circles of Support and Responsibility.

Finally, it is important to remember that this is an Action-Research project. After this first phase of assessment and evaluation, an action phase to obtain new results and conclusions will immediately follow, from which it will continue enriching the deployment of this community model of crime prevention based on the principles of restorative justice. The Circles 4EU project will finish at the end of 2014 and we hope to have enough experience to progress in this line.

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Funded by  
the Daphne Program  
of the European Union