

A New EMO Program: Circles of Support and Accountability

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is excited to bring a new program to Multnomah County: Circles of Support and Accountability. Communities have the power to prevent abuse and crime, by helping high-risk sex offenders return from prison safely.

About the Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) follow a **restorative justice model**, with the goal of healing both individuals and a community after violent crime. The hope of CoSA is simple yet profound: **No More Victims**. Restorative justice works alongside the treatment and supervision sex offenders are already provided, by offering practice in pro-social relationship building.

Here's how the Circle works: an individual sex offender (the *core member*) is surrounded by an *inner circle* of community volunteers, who meet weekly as a group through the first year of the core member's release from prison. This inner circle is supported in turn by an *outer circle* of professionals, including the Circle coordinator. Core members are selected for the best match with the program, and participate voluntarily.



Volunteers in the CoSA inner circle are provided with extensive training about sex offenders and safety. These community volunteers model healthy relationships and socialization for the core member. Volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, but with a shared commitment to the Circle; they start by together writing a covenant to guide their gatherings. They offer the ministry of friendship. This friendship doesn't keep secrets, and it allows time for trust to deepen. CoSA volunteers understand the value of boundaries in relationships, and model this with one another and the core member.

Why Circles matter: Sex offenders face numerous unique challenges upon their release from prison, such as finding housing and employment, with a serious criminal record; in addition, their social connections have often been severed, by their offenses and by the length of incarceration. But isolation and secrecy can increase the offender's likelihood of reoffending. CoSA aims to decrease that isolation, to help core members establish healthy relationships and find a source of hope to work toward.

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON — CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Program Coordinator Rev. Audrey deCoursey ■ Mead Building, 3rd Floor ■ 421 SW 5th Avenue ■ Portland, Oregon 97204
phone (503) 988-8580 ■ *email* cosa@emoregon.org ■ *website* www.emoregon.org

Citizens are understandably concerned when a high-risk sex offender is released into a neighborhood. The vision of CoSA is that a community has the power to take part in the process of healing after the rupture of a sex offense. Sex offenses are not just private matters, and communities can play a role in decreasing future victimization.

CoSA is a program that started twenty years ago in Ontario, Canada, and has since been replicated in cities across Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States. We are excited to bring the Circles to Multnomah County, because they work: studies have shown recidivism rates decline by over 70%, and core members report gratitude for the social support they might never have found otherwise. Circles are a powerful tool for our community response to the fact of sex offending in our midst, to help reduce harm and prevent crime. Together, we can work for a future with ***no more victims***.

Resources

Copy and paste these links to learn more about Circles of Support and Accountability worldwide

- Circles Trainer Dr. Andrew McWhinnie <http://www.andrewmcwhinnieconsulting.com>
- Circles Trainer Dr. Robin Wilson <http://www.robinjwilson.com/circles.shtml>
- CoSA in Durham, North Carolina <http://www.durhamcosa.org/>
- CoSA in the United Kingdom <http://www.circles-uk.org.uk/>
- "Courageous Communities" http://www.iirp.edu/article_detail.php?article_id=523
- "Does 'befriending' sex offenders stop new crimes?" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8611279.stm

Volunteer

Circles of Support and Accountability are possible only because of community volunteers committed to reducing harm and helping prevent future victimization. Join one of our Circles and make a meaningful difference in your community today.

Support Restorative Justice

- **Congregations and Individuals** can help support restorative justice, the movement that drives Circles of Support and Accountability. Join our growing network of restorative justice advocates in Oregon.
- **Bring a speaker** to your faith community.
- **Advocate** for public policy that restores justice for whole communities.

Please contact our Program Coordinator to volunteer or get more information about the Circles, at (503) 988-8580 or adecoursey@emoregon.org.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN OREGON

No More Victims