

COSA News

Circles of Support and Accountability

Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies

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Building safer communities by providing circles of support and accountability for released sex offenders

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Circles

We have entered another growth phase. One new Circle started just before Christmas. Another is starting this month. With these new Circles we are back to ten active circles (one of our Core Members returned to prison on a violation this month). We have also had more referrals and inquiries. We are currently processing six potential Core Members. Volunteers are needed for the new circles that will be formed! We also need to add volunteers to several existing circles. We invite you to consider this opportunity to do your part to keep the community safe. Serving as a COSA volunteer can be an incredibly meaningful experience!

Volunteers Needed Immediately!*

For more information contact Jordan at 453-3472 or Clare Ann at 453-3448

COSA Volunteer Training

Our next volunteer training will be held

March 27-28

Fri., Mar. 27 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Sat., Mar. 28 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

The training will be held at Fresno Pacific University

*Volunteers can begin serving prior to completing the volunteer training

The Power of Community

In the past couple months we have had an incredible success story unfold in COSA. It shows what can happen when the community works together. Here's the story:

Finding employment is a major challenge for all of the Core Members (ex-offenders) of COSA. It's hard enough for anyone to find a job these days. A felony conviction makes it even harder. When the felony conviction is for a sex offense, the task of finding work becomes still more difficult.

One Core Member has been in a COSA circle since April, 2008. A constant theme in his circle meetings has been his search for employment. There were leads and possibilities, but nothing worked out. For a short time he was selling steaks until parole decided that he could not have a job that required him to go door-to-door. The Core Member's search for employment was frustrating and depressing. His lack of income made being homeless a real possibility for him when the time would come that parole would no longer pay his rent.

Before he was incarcerated, the Core Member had worked as a truck driver, delivering silage to dairies. He was interested in getting a job driving truck again but it seemed impossible because he would have to go to truck driving school—which would cost thousands of dollars, get a license (which is not necessarily an easy task!), and then find a job. The Core Member's circle suggested that this might be a long-range goal—something he could do after he had worked at another job for awhile and saved some money.

The Power of Community cont. –

Then a friend of COSA entered the picture. This friend is a compassionate person who has a trucking company and believes in giving people a second chance. He said he wanted to work with our Core Member and suggested that the Core Member check out a truck driving school that he worked with on various occasions. The school agreed that the Core Member could start if he made a down-payment on the tuition. The Core Member's circle went into action to find money for the down-payment. Three churches made contributions—College Community Church Mennonite Brethren in Fresno, Mennonite Community Church in Fresno, and First Mennonite Church in Reedley. Several individuals contributed as well through the churches. The entire cost of truck driving school was covered, as well as fees for DMV, a medical exam (which a doctor gave at a reduced rate) and a drug test.

The Core Member started truck driving school and members of his circle made the trip from Fresno to a nearby community each day to take him to school. The friend of COSA brought him back to Fresno each day. After a week of school the Core Member went to DMV and passed all his tests on the first try! The friend agreed to give our Core Member a chance to work with his company.

Next came the challenge of relocating to another community to be closer to work. The friend arranged for the Core Member to live in a motor home on his brother's property. Circle members continued to provide transportation for him as he worked on getting the motor home cleaned up and ready to live in. Finally the move took place. The Core Member then met his trainer and others with whom he would be working. After the first day of driving with his trainer the trainer said, "This guy is one we should keep!"

Now the Core Member has been employed for a few weeks. He brought \$400 to a Circle meeting recently to begin paying back the "loan" he received from churches. A total of \$1200 was given to help him get his license. In the next few weeks the Core Member intends to pay back the balance to the churches.

This experience has given the Core Member hope along with an opportunity for a new start. Many people worked together to bring about this miracle. What no one could have accomplished alone became possible as the community worked together. This is COSA at its best!

COSA in the Community

Fresno's new mayor, Ashley Swearengin, introduced "Operation Monitor" on her first day in office earlier this month. Operation Monitor would put GPS monitors on sex offenders in Fresno after they are released from parole. Studies and experience show that GPS monitors on sex offenders do not necessarily decrease the risk of re-offense. In fact, placing monitors on individuals who have already completed parole could be counterproductive as they destabilize compliant offenders.

COSA has been one of several voices raising questions about the proposed policy. Clare Ann and friend of COSA Alicia Hinton both spoke at the City Council meeting on January 13. The city is waiting for an opinion from the California Attorney General as to the legality of the proposed policy. Meanwhile there have been conversations with City Council members and others regarding the issue. It was scheduled to come back to the Council January 27, but will likely be postponed.

Coming out of the conversations about Operation Monitor is renewed interest in the formation of a Fresno Sex Offender Management Board. This Board, modeled after the California Sex Offender Management Board would study the relevant issues and make recommendations to keep the community safe based on evidence-based practices.

COSA Funding

We continue look at funding options for the future. It is extremely unlikely, given the current condition of the California budget, that further funding will come from the state at this point. It is ironic that many agencies and individuals around the state point to COSA as a model program for working with sex offenders to keep the community safe, yet funding for such a program is elusive. We are committed to continue the important work that COSA is doing. Conversations are underway regarding partnerships and fund-raising possibilities. More information will be available in the coming months. Donations are welcome now through Fresno Pacific University (designated for the Center for Peacemaking/COSA) as we continue to develop our plan for the future. Contact Clare Ann for more information.



Together we can make a difference!