

COSA News

Circles of Support and Accountability

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

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Circles

There are three Circles meeting now. Each has its own unique personality. Core members and volunteers alike are finding the Circles to be exciting. Here are a few of the things that keep us all coming back—

One core member expressed gratitude to his Circle saying he found it hard to accept that people would take time out of their schedules to meet with him. "Never," he said, "in all my sixty-six years, has anyone reached out to help me like you have." He described how he had thought that he did not need people and, in fact, felt safer staying away from people. He has now realized, however, that his previous offending was rooted in his need to be valued and accepted by other people. With that realization, he now says that he knows he does need people in his life. He needs people who are friends he can trust, people who will challenge him and who are there to help him when necessary.

Another Circle discussed having an opening and closing ritual. They asked the core member to think about something that would be meaningful for him. He came back the next week with two scriptures—one for opening and one for closing the Circle meeting. For opening the meeting he suggested Philippians 3:12-14: *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* The scripture he selected for closing the meeting is Psalm 119:133: *Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.*

Building More Circles . . .

We continue to work with referrals from parole. Hopefully we will soon be able to receive referrals from mental health personnel in the prison too so we can begin our intake/screening process before an inmate is released on parole. We anticipate starting one more Circle and hopefully two before the end of the year.

Volunteers Needed!

We continue to need more volunteers. If we can form two Circles yet this year, we will need 8-10 volunteers. If you would like to volunteer, know someone who would like to volunteer, or would like more information, contact Clare Ann at 453-3448 or email her at clareann@fresno.edu. Clare Ann can also put you in touch with current volunteers who are eager to share about their experience.

Orientation and Volunteer Training

Orientation provides an introduction to the COSA program. Volunteer Training is for volunteers and for persons who might consider being volunteers. If you have attended an Orientation in the past, consider coming to our Volunteer Training. Our next Volunteer Training is scheduled for Feb. 1-2.

Growing Interest in COSA

Clare Ann attended two conferences in November—the *Association for Treatment of Sexual Abusers* and the *White House Summit on Prison Re-Entry*. At both conferences speakers mentioned COSA as a significant and successful program to work with sex offenders.

COSA Facts

The common assumption is that sexual offenders re-offend at a higher rate than other criminals. In reality the opposite is true. In an analysis of 61 studies, the average sex offense recidivism rate was 18.9% for rapists and 12.7% for child molesters over a four to five year period. This compares to one-half to two-thirds of all formerly incarcerated persons returning to prison.