

# 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

We are entering another growth phase after being on a plateau with our circles for several months. We still have nine active circles, but that will be changing in the next few weeks. We have received new referrals and are in the process of forming several new circles. Our goal is to have twelve circles by the end of the year. That means more volunteers are needed!

One of the rewards of COSA is hearing Core Members express gratitude for their circles. We recently did a one-year evaluation of one of the circles. The Core Member talked about how COSA motivated him and kept him focused on what he needs to be doing. He talked about how important it is for him to have positive role models.

Another Core Member commented, "Parole doesn't have any idea how helpful you guys are." This Core Member has said on several occasions that he doesn't know where he'd be without the support of COSA. Recently he shared that it is really helpful for him to spend time with "regular people who don't break the law" and to learn that they, too, have things that they struggle with in life. "It's good to know that I'm not the only one who has problems" he said.

### In the COSA Office. . .

We've moved! The renovations were completed in October and COSA has moved its office two houses down the street. We're in Townsend 10 at 4894 E. Townsend. We have two rooms, so Jordan and Clare Ann each have separate offices. We're very happy with our new space. Stop by and see us sometime.

### Sharing the COSA Vision and Experience

Clare Ann attended the annual conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) in Atlanta in October. She presented two workshops. One was entitled *Teamwork in Reentry: Parole, Counseling, and Circles of Support and Accountability*. The other was *Reintegration of high risk sex offenders through COSA: the California experience*. Both workshops were well-received. There is significant interest in COSA among sex offender treatment professionals.

### *"Thanksmas" Celebration*

*COSA Core Members, Volunteers, &  
Friends (adults only)*

*Saturday, December 13*

*5:00 – 7:00 p.m.*

*Mennonite Community Church*

*Olive & Willow, Fresno*

Bring a salad or dessert. Main dish will be provided.

*Come with a story, poem, picture or reflection to share that expresses something for which you are thankful*

*RSVP Jordan 453-3472*

### **COSA Volunteer training**

Our next volunteer training will be held

January 16-17

Fri., Jan 16 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Sat., Jan. 17 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

The training will be held at Fresno Pacific University.  
For more information call Jordan at 453-3472.

### **COSA Funding**

We continue to exploring funding options for COSA after the grant from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation ends in June 2009. Grants that are currently available for reentry work are not available for work with sex offenders. We are looking at possibilities of contracting and of partnering with other organizations. We will also likely be inviting donations through Fresno Pacific University. Donations are welcome now as we continue to develop our plan for the future. Contact Clare Ann for more information.

### **Reflections from a Core Member . . .**

The following two pieces were written by Darcy, one of our Core Members. They give a glimpse into what many of our Core Members experience. His statement, "In lonely places, simple acts of kindness have given me hope," describes what happens over and over again with our Core Members.

#### **What COSA means to me**

*I saw a stranger today at the bus stop. He was an elderly gentleman, black, well-spoken, yet not too clean. His clothes were nice, yet unkempt. He wasn't the most handsome, but far from ugly.*

*As I sat and waited, I watched him gather his belongings. He stepped behind a very dense and beautifully kept hedge on the side of a Blockbuster video store. As he emerged again without his belongings, I knew this was where the man was living.*

*It struck me, for I was on the nice side of town, at a bus stop on a very busy avenue. "How could this man be living 'here?'" I thought to myself. "Why hadn't the police run him off or someone complained to the store management?" It went unsaid in my mind that he didn't belong here, after all the homeless live in the downtown area by the rescue mission. This seemed to be the unconscious inspiration of my shock.*

*I must have felt a little guilt for my judgments for I began to feel sorry for the man. I said hello and asked him how he was doing. In no time at all we were having a very open conversation. He shared of his being homeless, and that he had hopes to soon get his disability so he could afford a place of his own.*

*I found I felt very comfortable with this stranger. He asked for nothing yet gave **me** hope. I left on my bus praying for my new friend, wishing I could do more to help him.*

*As I think of what COSA has meant to me, my story is the perfect picture. Like my new homeless friend, I am learning to be OK right where I am. I have found new friends. As I have seen that they truly care about me, I have found a safe place to open up and share what I am facing. In lonely places, simple acts of kindness have given me hope.*

*What does it mean to me: Can One Simply Accept*

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*It's not so much what you know.  
But that you're my friend,  
With whom I grow.*

*It's not your insight or authority.  
But you're my friend,  
First priority.*

*It's not one above and one below.  
But that you're my friend,  
That, time will show.*

*It's that safe place where I can share,  
Because you're my friend,  
My heart's despair.*

*It's one who comes alongside.  
Because you're my friend,  
Does not deride.*

*It's the ones who see themselves in me,  
Though our lives appear so differently.  
With no advice encouraging to see,  
It's just the way that love should be.*

*This is what COSA means to me.  
Friends that learn,  
Because now they see.*

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Happy  
Thanksgiving!

