

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

March, 2009

Vol. 3, No. 2

Circles

Ten seems to be the magic number. We start new circles. We close circles. But it seems the number of active circles continues to stay around ten. Right now we have eleven, but one may be closing soon. Two new circles are in the process of being formed. We'll see if we can break the ten barrier! A number of other parolees have expressed interest in being part of a circle. Some do not meet our criteria of high risk/high need and we have become more selective as we identify new Core Members. With our goal of building a safer community, we want to make sure our valuable and limited resources—volunteers—are used where most needed.

Speaking of volunteers—we are always looking for new volunteers. If you are interested in more information, contact Jordan at 453-3472 or Clare Ann at 453-3448.

COSA News

The COSA family is saddened by the death of Michael Menefee, one of our Core Members, on March 7. Mike's story was featured in our January newsletter. See Jordan's article on remembering Mike later in this newsletter.

Two students in the MFA program in documentary film making at Stanford University made a film on COSA as their semester project. It was filmed in February. Two of our Core Members, along with Clare Ann and Alicia Hinton, former volunteer, were featured. Clare Ann and Jordan attended the screening at Stanford on March 17. They were pleased with the results and received positive feedback from others attending the screening. We are honored to be recognized as a program that works successfully at sex offender management and reintegration into the community.

COSA Funding

We continue to look at funding options. Conversations are being held with several churches in an effort to develop partnerships that can include some funding. Other partnerships are also being explored. We are waiting for the Second Chance Act Mentoring Grants to be announced in early May and are hopeful that we may be eligible to apply for a grant. 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.

Volunteers Needed

COSA Volunteer Training

Our next volunteer training will be held

May 29-30

Fri., May 29 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Sat., May 30 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

The training will be held at Fresno Pacific University

Remembering Mike . . .

This past January, in the COSA newsletter, there was a story profiling one of our core members, Mike Menefee. It was an inspirational story of how relationships in COSA can change lives and create hope. Things had been going very well for Mike these first few months of 2009. He had been blessed with a wonderful job, was able to finally buy a car for himself and Mike even gave money to COSA so other people could be helped as he was. On Saturday evening, March 7, Mike was in a tragic car accident and he was killed instantly. This news came as a complete and utter shock. It seemed no one in the circle believed it, or didn't want to. We met later that week as a circle to process the horrible tragedy together and discuss what would happen in the near future. We wanted to help Mike's family and friends as much as we could.

When we finally met, much of the discussion revolved around memories of Mike and the positive, fun times we had with him. As we sat together around the table, something was not right. Someone was missing and I think it finally hit some of us that Mike was really gone. It was necessary to be able to laugh at the good memories we had. Mike would have wanted it that way I think. Clare Ann, along with two other volunteers in the circle, had gone to see Mike's mother, Patti, on that Sunday. We wanted her to know we would help in any way we could. It ended up the circle was able to plan and put together a memorial service for Mike.

The day we met, in between discussions filled with laughter and with loss, we started making plans for Mike's memorial service. After many phone calls, emails and another visit to see Patti, the day finally came to honor Mike's life. We met at the Laton-Kingston Park on Saturday morning, March 21. The river that was completely dry the week before, filled with dust, dirt and sand only days before, was now filled with water, glistening in the sun amidst singing birds and the scattered trees. It was a beautiful sight and an appropriate location as Patti told us all Mike used to play in that river as a young boy.

The service was beautiful and quite intimate with some of Mike's family and friends, including Mike's circle and others connected to COSA. The most emotional moment of the service was the time designated for sharing memories of Mike. Several people walked to the podium in the pavilion to pay homage to our friend Mike. Through scripture, music, tears and memories, Mike's life was celebrated by those who loved and respected him. After the service and a light lunch, Patti had each person in attendance take a balloon down to the river, and in a gesture of letting him go, we all released the balloons to the sky. This image will stick with me for a long time. As the balloons were released, half of them surrendered to the heavy

breeze and were lifted to the sky, but the other half were pulled into the river. It was a fitting symbol of us letting Mike go, and watching him ride down the same stream he did as a child.

These are events one never wishes to experience, but it is a part of life. I am just thankful I was able to be part of this amazing circle, and family we call COSA. COSA does change lives, in many ways. We will never forget Mike and are so grateful for the time we were able to spend with him. I wrote a song for the memorial service and thought I would type out the lyrics here as a goodbye to Mike and a reflection on this whole experience (see below). Thank you all for being part of COSA. The time, energy and heart you put into this organization is what makes it so special and what keeps it going.

--Peace and Blessings,
Jordan Liechty Zickafoose

Song for Mike

I look up from my window outside and I see all the
green grass grow.
From there I can smell all the lilacs and white pear
trees
and it makes me miss my friend.
But spring will always come
after winter steals the golden sun.
And I want to fly, like a sparrow with a broken
wing.

I remember the days that we met at the church,
Where we'd sit and we'd talk about our lives.
The day that we took the picture when he smiled,
and we ate and drank coffee for an hour.
But now those times are gone,
And our friend has now moved on.
Why does life seem to end in the blink of an eye?
And now, he will fly like a sparrow with a broken
wing.

Soon we will meet all our loved ones who have
left.
Once again, we will all be side by side.
Until then we must remember all the times we
spent together
And we will laugh and we will cry at all the
thoughts.
But one cannot find peace by avoiding what they
feel and see.
We must all hold tight to those we love.
And now we all must fly through a dark and
lonesome night,
Like sparrows with a broken wing.

--Jordan Liechty Zickafoose