

# 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've broken the "ten barrier"—for now at least! We currently have 12 active Circles. Recently we did some counting. We've formed 18 Circles since July 2007. Three core members have been re-incarcerated for parole violations. NO Core Members have reoffended. That's good news!

On the volunteer front—we currently have 37 active volunteers. Some serve in more than one circle. We recently had a training with five new volunteers or potential volunteers. Several others have expressed interest. But—we always need more volunteers. The next COSA volunteer training will be October 16-17. If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information, contact Jordan at 453-3472 or Clare Ann at 453-3448.

### COSA News

*Workshop at CCOSO:* COSA presented a workshop on the California Coalition on Sexual Offending Annual Training Conference in Torrance, CA in May. Participants from the therapeutic, legal, and corrections communities were enthusiastic about COSA. Our workshop included presentations by a core member and a volunteer. Clare Ann gave an overview of COSA. Stan Friesen, the volunteer, talked about why he is a volunteer and shared some reflections on restorative justice, healing, and community. (See some of his presentation below). John, the Core Member told about what COSA means to him and how COSA helps support him in his commitment to create no more victims.

*Evaluation:* Dr. Bernadette Muscat from CSUF is interviewing volunteers, core members, and parole agents to learn about the effectiveness of COSA in

these first two years of its existence. Results will be available in early fall.

*COSA Program Assistant—Jordan Zickafoose:* Jordan joined the COSA team last August as a Mennonite Voluntary Service volunteer. He has made a great contribution to COSA. His initial term was one year. Jordan has agreed to stay in Fresno a second year. We are excited to have him continue his work with COSA! This coming year we will be sharing him with Mennonite Community Church where he works with the CARE Project and Food Pantry.

For your calendar . . .

**Volunteers, Core Members, Friends of  
COSA**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual COSA Anniversary  
Celebration and BBQ**

Saturday, August 22

4:00 – 7:00 pm

Mennonite Community Church  
Olive & Willow, Fresno

*Watch for more information*

### COSA Funding

This month marks the end of our grant funding from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. We continue to look at various funding options and work at developing partnerships with churches that can include some funding. We submitted an application for a Second Chance Act Mentoring Grant. Awards will be announced in September. In the meantime, we will be cutting back to a barebones budget. *cont. on next page*

## **COSA Funding cont.**

At this point some support for COSA will be provided by the *Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies* and *Mennonite Community Church*. *West Coast Mennonite Central Committee* has previously provided some grant funding. These contributions cover Jordan's Mennonite Voluntary Service stipend and leave \$1500/month for all other COSA expenses.

Individuals are invited to donate to COSA through Fresno Pacific University (designated for the Center for Peacemaking/COSA). Consider making COSA a part of your regular charitable giving. Checks can be sent to the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, 1717 S. Chestnut Ave. #2202, Fresno, CA 93702.

### **Why I Am a COSA Volunteer**

*Rev. J. Stanley Friesen, Ph.D*

I was a reluctant volunteer, but not because I needed to be convinced that COSA was a worthy project, serving a great need in our community by coming along side persons who are basically rejected and shunned by society. I was not sure that I wanted to be involved with a group of persons who had sexually molested children and minors. This seemed like a task for persons with special training in psychology and sexual addiction. I had recently retired as a pastor and I was volunteering at FIRM (Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries) in a low-cost housing program. I had all I could handle. But, I couldn't say an absolute "no" to Clare Ann's invitation, so I attended an orientation in which there were to be several prospective volunteers and discovered that I was the only one who showed up! I began to be aware of the difficulty of the task Clare Ann was facing to even get the COSA program started. So the first motivation was just to help Clare Ann get the project off the ground!

I attended a COSA training in which professionals from the probation department, a therapist, and criminology professors from CSUF and Fresno Pacific University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies addressed the group. Here I became aware, first, of the great diversity of persons from the Fresno community who were present to be oriented and trained. There were graduate students from San Joaquin College and Law and the Center for Peacemaking, which was not surprising. But there was also a librarian, some students from the local seminary, a hospice chaplain, a retired policeman who is also a musician, a social worker, and a couple of us pastor types. Several of the women volunteers were survivors themselves of childhood sexual abuse. These were ordinary citizens of our community with no particular expertise regarding sexual offenders! The second observation that became increasingly clear to me was the restrictive

boundaries and isolation that society has placed and enforced around these offenders, which is often more rigorous than for other categories of offenders, both in the prison system and on parole.

While I appreciate the need and the efforts to keep our society safe, I live by a deep theological conviction that restrictive and isolationist regulations, without opportunities for experiencing healthy personal interchange in small group settings, do not offer much hope for personal growth, accountability, and responsibility. These are areas of character development and healing that can be nurtured best by interaction with persons of integrity who are committed to mutually transparent dialogue and accountability. This is why I joined COSA. My wife, who is a marriage and family therapist and counselor educator, was given a motto by a friend and fellow therapist which says it all quite simply: "Friends are the best therapy!"

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Stan's presentation at the workshop also included some reflections on restorative justice and three principles that grow out of restorative justice: *Respect*, *Relationships*, and *Responsibility*. Below is some of what he shared. Stan had stories to illustrate each of these points.

*Respect:* When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," it was a call to an act of the will; not an appeal to our emotions or affections. It was a call to treat even those who oppose all we stand for with respect and the dignity of a person created in the image of God. Respect is close to trust. It must be earned, but it often requires someone to take the initial risk of giving another person respect and trust. When trust is honored and kept, trust grows and relationships are welded together. Trust betrayed and exploited destroys the foundations of community and relationships. Trust and respect are offered as a gift by the community to the offender in order that it might be reciprocated. Trust and respect grow best in a small community of mutual accountability, not in isolation watching TV.

*Relationships:* The genius of a COSA circle is that it is voluntary, for both volunteers and the core member. Secondly, it offers an opportunity for participants in the circle to be vulnerable and personal in their interactions and relationships. The circle provides a safe place of growth, where mutual trust and responsibility are nurtured. The small community formed by the COSA circle is both the journey and the destination—both the means and the end. Each one of us who are part of the circle is in the process of growing and being healed as we share together.

*Responsibility:* Being part of a community nurtures accountability and responsibility.