



Circles of Support and Accountability



## Core Member Applicant Brochure

**No More Victims  
No One is Disposable**

**Vision:**

*Safe and Inclusive Communities*

### **What is Circles of Support and Accountability?**

CoSA is a community-based reintegration program that assists people who have been incarcerated for committing sexual offenses, to safely re-enter the community upon release from prison.

### **Where did CoSA start & where is it now?**

CoSA began in 1994, in Hamilton, Ontario when a repeat offender named Charlie was released at the end of his prison sentence to the community with no supervision or support. Harry Nigh, a Mennonite pastor, sought the help of his parishioners, forming a circle of support for Charlie.

Charlie, who was classified a high risk to reoffend, remained with CoSA for 12 years until his natural passing. He never re-offended.

CoSA now operates in over 30 cities in Canada, and based on its success, CoSA has spread to other countries such as the United States, England, The Netherlands, Latvia and South Korea.

### **CoSA-Ottawa**

CoSA has been operating in Ottawa since 2002 and has worked with over 60 core members and several hundred volunteers. On average, 15 core members and 50 volunteers each year participate in CoSA in Ottawa, supported by CoSA staff and a Board of Directors and Advisors. CoSA-Ottawa runs out of downtown church; however, it operates in a non-religious manner. All are welcome!

Visit us on [Facebook](#)



### **You, the Core Member**

We refer to the individuals who participate in CoSA as *Core Members*.

Core Member applicants must:

- Have served a prison sentence for sexual offense(s) and admit to it
- Be motivated to have an offense-free life
- Join CoSA voluntarily
- Commit to being open and honest with your volunteers and CoSA staff
- Commit to being in CoSA for one year (renewable)
- Understand that if you re-offend or breach your conditions, CoSA volunteers and staff have a duty to report it

### **How do you become a Core Member?**

Start by sending us a letter of interest introducing yourself and telling us why you are interested in CoSA. Once you have made that first step, we will arrange to meet you (in person or by phone). You will be required to complete an application form and consent to CoSA staff talking with your case management team and/or treatment providers. You will be notified if your application is accepted.

### **What does Support & Accountability mean?**

**Support:** helping with practical needs (housing, employment, financial assistance, applying for ID, finding a doctor, accompanying to appointments, identifying goals), offering emotional support, celebrating successes...

**Accountability:** helping you achieve your goals, challenging thoughts/attitudes that may lead to reoffending or breaching legal conditions.

### **Who will you be working with?**

As a CoSA Core Member, you will be assigned a team of three or four volunteers who will meet regularly with you as a group and individually to help with your reintegration process. Staff will also be involved.

### **Who are CoSA Volunteers?**

Our volunteers come from all walks of life and range in age from 21 to retired. They are men and women, (extra)ordinary people who believe they can make a difference in their community by dedicating their time and energy. Volunteers are trained and screened, and, just like our Core Members, make a one-year commitment to participate in CoSA.

### **Meetings:**

**Circle meetings** (held in a private space to ensure confidentiality)

- The signing of the Covenant
- 'Sharing your story' - telling your volunteers about yourself, your current circumstances, including your offense history
- Discussing ongoing challenges and successes, upcoming plans, reviewing goals, etc.
- Complete a Self Management Plan, identifying risk factors, triggers, coping strategies

**One-on-One Meetings** (held in a public space – coffee shop, outdoors, attending appointments)

- Designed to get acquainted, learn about each other – over time, this builds trust

### **Housekeeping meetings**

- Held **without** the core member to discuss any concerns, strategize ways to better help you if you get off-track, address challenges with circle dynamics, etc.

### **Emergency meetings**

- Held **with** the core member at a time of crisis (breach of legal conditions, suicide threat, etc.) to discuss concerns and course of action

### **Special Events**

- Monthly Discussion Series – facilitated discussions about issues relevant to our Core Members' reintegration process (eg: Disclosing your Past, Socializing, Family Ties, Social Skills, etc.) and fun stuff too!
- Holiday (potluck) dinners – Thanksgiving, Christmas
- Annual BBQ

### What can you expect from your volunteers?

You can expect your volunteers to attend and actively participate in the weekly circle meetings. You can also expect them to be available for weekly individual meetings with you. Your volunteers will also be available by phone (or email, if you are permitted) should you be in crisis or need unexpected support.

They will also hold you accountable. This means that they will call you out on things, if they feel that it is needed. Remember - accountability is a form of support, to help you stay on-track.

Although not mandatory, your volunteers will attend CoSA special events when their schedule permits.

If a volunteer cannot attend a Circle meeting or will be away for an extended period of time, you can expect them to tell you directly ahead of time.

Upon meeting with your volunteers, you will receive a list with their name, phone number, and birth-date – we like to celebrate milestones!

You can expect your volunteers to be sources of support, to listen without judging, to help you access resources in the community, help you weigh options when choosing a course of action, and generally be there for you in your journey.

Volunteers are non-judgmental. They have chosen to volunteer with CoSA knowing that they will be working with someone with a criminal history and that the work will sometimes be challenging.

You will work as a team, **keeping no secrets** from the volunteers. The volunteers, in turn, promise to maintain confidentiality. This means that what is discussed between you and your volunteers, stays within CoSA. However, they also know they have a duty to report any breaches of legal conditions or re-offenses.

Volunteers make a commitment of one year to you and CoSA and may choose to renew after that year. If you decide to renew, and a volunteer leaves the circle, the vacancy will be filled by a new volunteer.

### What can you expect from CoSA staff?

CoSA staff will:

- Communicate and meet with you (if possible) prior to your release
- Attend court, police station, etc. with you, if required
- Work with you using a strength-based perspective – positive approach, life and social skills
- Help you understand your legal conditions (LTSO; 810/Peace Bond; 161 Order)
- Attend Circle meetings (on occasion) to support your volunteers to help you in any way you need
- Support and hold you accountable to be the best you can!

### What will volunteers & staff expect from you?

- Attend group and 1on1 meetings with your volunteers; be an active participant
- No secrets
- Attend and engage in treatment in the community if it has been recommended by professional(s); and consent to CoSA staff communicating w/ these professionals
- Abide by your legal conditions
- The goal is independence – the volunteers and staff will help you become independent and establish yourself in the community. We want you to have a good life where you won't need CoSA anymore!

### What other Core Members say about CoSA.

*Without a Circle, I may have...*

*...had difficulty adjusting.*

*...had difficulty with relationships.*

*...had difficulty finding a job.*

*...become isolated and lonely.*

*...turned to drugs, alcohol and poor associations.*

*...re-offended and gone back to prison.*

### Other things to consider or remember:

It's normal to expect a period of adjustment; some time to get used to your volunteers; and they, to you. Just remember, they chose to volunteer with CoSA because they believe that people, who are committed to turning their life around and never hurting anyone again, deserve a chance to develop a meaningful life - and that people **can** change. This may not be easy at times, but we hope you'll find that it's worthwhile. Ask for clarification, seek help, reach out to your volunteers and CoSA staff.

### Does it work?

Research indicates that sexual re-offending rates for people who participate in CoSA are 70% to 80% lower than for those who do not have a Circle<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>[Research and Partners \(cosacanada.com\)](http://Research and Partners (cosacanada.com))

### Why does CoSA Work?

Although there is a minimum requirement for volunteers and Core Members to be involved in the program of one year, CoSA is about relationships that are ongoing. On a continuum, CoSA is more about being in relationships than it is about therapeutic interventions. Modeling is a major focus of what occurs in a Circle and, in that sense, what is "caught" is more significant than what is "taught."

It has been observed that the most powerful aspect of a Circle is the sense of belonging that occurs both for the Core Member and for the volunteers. It is possibly because of this belonging, and the degree of attachment that is formed, that CoSA has such a profound impact.

***We hope you will choose CoSA  
to be part of your new life!***

### Contact Info

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[www.cosacanada.ca](http://www.cosacanada.ca) (list of CoSA sites)

### A few Community Resources

- **Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre**, Dr. Fedoroff (Director, Sexual Behaviours Clinic) (613) 722-6521 x 6360  
[Paul.Fedoroff@theroyal.ca](mailto:Paul.Fedoroff@theroyal.ca)  
1145 Carling Ave, Ottawa, ON K1Z 7K4
- **John Howard Ottawa**, Main Office  
550 Old St Patrick St, Ottawa, K1N 8R3  
Tina Matchett Bianco, Director of Adult Justice Services (613) 789-7418  
[TMatchettBianco@ottawa.johnhoward.ca](mailto:TMatchettBianco@ottawa.johnhoward.ca)
- **Social Housing Registry of Ottawa**  
2197 Riverside Drive, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Ottawa, K1H 1A9  
(613) 526-2088 <http://www.housingregistry.ca/>



*The true meaning of life is to plant  
trees, under whose shade you  
do not expect to sit.  
Nelson Henderson*