

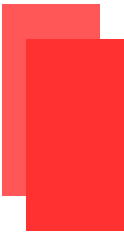


OTTAWA / d'OTTAWA

Circles of Support & Accountability
Cercles de soutien et de responsabilité – CSR

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Table of Contents



INTRODUCTION	3
<hr/>	
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE	4
<hr/>	
BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ADVISORY GROUP	5
<hr/>	
DIRECTOR’S REPORT	6
<hr/>	
OFFICIAL SUPPORTERS	9
<hr/>	
FINANCIAL REPORT	10
<hr/>	
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	11
<hr/>	
CORE MEMBER TESTIMONIAL	12
<hr/>	
VOLUNTEER TESTIMONIAL	13
<hr/>	
CONTACT INFORMATION	14
<hr/>	

Land Acknowledgement

CoSA Ottawa is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people. We are grateful for this privilege. We invite everyone to familiarize themselves with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.



Introduction

Letter of Support for CoSA Ottawa

William Staubi, CoSA Ottawa Supporter

When I was working in the Correctional Service of Canada people tended to see my support for the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) as an extension of my various jobs in Restorative Justice, Human Rights, or as some off shoot of my time in both the community and a prison working directly with offenders. Since that work tended to bring me into contact with like-minded others who had a complex context for the issues, explaining my support or encouraging theirs tended to be quick and easy and readily accepted.

But after I retired in 2010, my interactions changed. I moved away from the correctional environment and into social groups that reflected my interests. And once there, answering the question of “why?” started changing. Misinformation, fear, differing concepts of justice and punishment, and various forms of discomfort with the very idea of working with sex offenders made it hard for people to be open to the reasons why I felt COSA is an effective and safe means of responding to the challenges of sex offenders living openly in the community. These conversations are neither quick, easy, nor readily accepted.

COSA operates in the liminal zone between providing public safety and an anxious public. The easy road would have been to quietly turn my attention to other issues. There is no end to the list of other things that need support. But COSA remains dear to my heart because it works!

If changing a sex offender’s behaviour could be done with a book, a video, or even their own sincere desire to change we would see that in the recidivism numbers. The very real human interaction between the COSA volunteers and the clients is pivotal to shifting the client’s understanding of themselves and connecting them to a caring community invested in their success. The work of the volunteers creates a tangible accountability to other people rather than just a formal accountability to a nebulous “society” that often sends conflicting messages about reintegrating while putting up real obstacles to actually doing that.

I’ve been a part of a hard-working formal structure that tries sincerely under challenging constraints to help sex offenders reintegrate. Sex offending is the result of complex factors in the offender’s life. But many of the current tools for responding to the challenges are limited in the duration with which they can work with clients or only come into play once a problem has arisen. It takes a multi-dimensional approach to equip the client with skills to change and the confidence to reach out for help when they need it.

COSA is a critical aspect of that multi-dimensional approach. And that is why I support COSA, it is necessary and it is one of the right tools for the job of transforming sex offenders and delivering enduring public safety. We need more COSA; COSA needs more stable funding and volunteers. Whatever we do individually to support COSA pays off to us collectively. Choosing COSA is choosing to have a healthier and safer local community and broader society. And that is a choice I am happy to make, and I hope more and more Ottawans and Canadians will join me in making that choice.

William Staubi

President's Message

Despite our ongoing challenges, CoSA-Ottawa has had one of our most productive years. We welcomed Kathleen Weedmark as the new Program Director, we held our 5th Gala 'It takes a Village', we launched our documentary 'Facing Our Messy Lives' and enhanced our training and social programs. There are so many people to thank who were essential to make this happen.

The Gala was made possible through a lot of planning. Thank you Gala Planning Committee, headed by Susan Love. We thank Dru Allen as our auctioneer and we must acknowledge his incredible effort in finding the lion's share of the auction items. We appreciated Adrian Harewood's brilliant talk on what CoSA means to him and his role as the Emcee, and our incredible keynote speaker Catherine Mckenney's remarks. At the end of the day, it is the ongoing support of all those who attended which made the evening such a success (yes, I am talking to you Lego Lady). As Kathleen said, "the energy in the room was amazing."

A Circle is an interspace of active listening and discerning of the (at times conflicting) emotions where healing and transformation happen as part of the reintegration process. We are grateful to Geoff Bowie for his artistic skills in capturing the essence of our Program, to the courageous Core Members who participated in the filming; and, of course, our dedicated volunteers.

Thank you to my Board of Director colleagues and all those who help with our Sustainability Working Group. Our hard work to identify more funding continues. Our gratitude goes to all of you who have also financially contributed to CoSA-Ottawa over the years, particularly Ontario Trillium Foundation, United Way of Ottawa, the Ottawa Community Foundation, St-John's Anglican Church and Department of Justice (for the documentary).

To all of you who support CoSA-Ottawa, be it as volunteers, sister organizations, or members, I would like to acknowledge your uncommon decency in facilitating our overarching mandate of No More Victims, in other words, that of protecting our children. You are our enablers for a safe and a more inclusive community. Our thanks to St-John's for their ongoing support.

In closing, it has been such a pleasure to collaborate with Kathleen Weedmark. She is a passionate and dedicated person who sees the good in everyone and a little room for improvement in everything. You will be missed. Welcome to Michaela De Curtis, as our new Program Director, we look forward to the coming year with you at the helm.

Lyse Morin, President, Board of Directors

Board of Directors

Lyse Morin, President

Dillon Brady, Vice-President

John Daley, Treasurer

Diana McGlinchey, Secretary

David Swan, Indigenous Liaison

Anne-Marie McElroy, Director

Chuck Daly, Director, Restorative Justice Practitioner

Advisory Group

Bob Cormier, Former Board Member

Dasa Farthing, Former Board Member

David Swan, Indigenous Liaison

Director's Report

I am pleased to present the Director's report for CoSA Ottawa. This year has been one of growth, challenge, and reflection as we continue to deliver critical supports to individuals reintegrating into society. As we look back on the achievements and lessons of the past year, we are filled with pride and anticipation for the future.

Throughout the past year, CoSA Ottawa has made significant strides in enhancing our programs, fostering community engagement, and promoting the well-being of our members and volunteers. Below are the key highlights of our program.

5th Annual Gala – It Takes a Village!

Our 5th Annual Gala, held on April 26, 2024, was a great success, with strong attendance from CoSA supporters, community partners, esteemed guests, and volunteers. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed their time and energy to make this event a memorable one. Thanks to the generosity of our attendees, the event raised over \$27,000 through ticket sales, auction and raffle items, and donations. This incredible support will help us continue our vital work in the community. We at CoSA cannot express enough how grateful we are to all the individuals and organizations who made this event possible. It truly takes a village, and we are humbled by the outpouring of support that helped make our 5th Gala such a success.

Launched the “Facing Our Messy Lives” Documentary

This year, we unveiled this powerful documentary, which showcases the challenges and triumphs of individuals navigating complex lives. Geoff Bowie, a recognized Canadian Film Director showed unwavering commitment to the creation of this film and we are deeply grateful for his contributions. The documentary premiered on May 16, 2024, with a hybrid screening held at Carleton University. This event allowed both in-person and virtual audiences to participate and to experience the film and engage in a lively panel discussion. Thank you to the Panel members who explored the themes of the documentary and furthered the conversation about its impact. As part of our ongoing efforts to extend the reach of the documentary, we have been presenting it to local colleges and universities, and we continue to distribute the film to interested individuals and organizations. Our goal is to spark meaningful dialogue and inspire a deeper understanding of the complex experiences portrayed in the film.

Implementation of Maintenance Circles

We have introduced Maintenance Circles, a new initiative designed to sustain the progress of our core members after 18 months to two years of program participation. Based on Core Member assessment, Circles gradually reduce the frequency of meetings and one-on-one sessions, sometimes limiting the number of volunteers to two per circle. The Maintenance Circles offer continued support, enabling participants to maintain their personal growth while also allowing for more flexibility as they become more established in the community. This initiative has been instrumental in fostering long-term engagement and strengthening the sense of community among participants. Although Maintenance Circle participants meet less frequently, they continue to engage regularly in other CoSA activities, ensuring ongoing connection and involvement.

Social Gatherings for Core Members, Volunteers, and Staff

To further enhance socialization and skill-building, we organized regular social gatherings that brought together core members, volunteers, and staff. These gatherings provided opportunities to strengthen

relationships, exchange ideas, and promote a sense of belonging. Activities included outdoor events, and board games designed to encourage physical well-being and provide a relaxed atmosphere for collaboration and connection. Looking forward, we are using core member and volunteer feedback to identify different activities for everyone to enjoy.

Walking Group Initiative

Our walking group, which walks weekly, has become a key initiative for promoting physical and mental health. This program supported by the Parole Office allows core members, volunteers, and staff to engage in regular exercise while fostering meaningful conversations and socializing. Walking together has provided an inclusive and enjoyable environment for all participants to connect and support one another.

Discussion Series

Post the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance at our Discussion Series saw a decline. To boost participation, we reached out to core members for feedback to understand their interests better. Based on their input, we hosted discussions on key topics such as 161 Orders, Trauma, Healthy Lifestyles, and Social Activities. These sessions were made possible through the generous support of community partners who often donate their time to lead these discussions without compensation. Looking ahead, we will continue to gather feedback from both core members and volunteers to ensure our sessions are relevant and engaging. By staying connected to their needs, we aim to offer programs that support reintegration efforts and foster a vibrant, supportive community.

Revamped Volunteer Training Program

In response to the increasing demand for additional volunteers, we have introduced recorded sessions delivered by community experts, providing us with the flexibility to offer training more frequently. While volunteers will still receive the same number of training sessions, they will now be spread over a longer period (5-6 months). These updates have resulted in a higher frequency of training sessions, enabling us to train more volunteers in less time. This approach ensures that our volunteers are well-prepared to serve our community and contribute to the success of our program. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to continuously evaluating the effectiveness of our training program.

Through regular conversations and surveys with our volunteers, we are actively assessing training needs and gathering valuable feedback. This ongoing input helps us refine the program, ensuring our volunteers are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to make a lasting impact. In 2025 we will add training sessions with community partners on services available to core members to facilitate referrals and strengthen our community.

Number of Circles

This past year, 5 circles successfully transitioned to maintenance status. In addition, we welcomed 3 new circles and 5 more were started by the end of 2024. Currently we have 15 active circles with 4 new circles scheduled to begin in 2025 and continue to receive new referrals regularly. Last year, we had 1 individual charged with a new offence and no breaches of conditions. We continue to serve a wide range of core members, including 1 core member designated a dangerous offender, individuals in the community under a long-term supervision order, and those on probation and parole.

Looking ahead, I am excited to continue my journey with CoSA Ottawa. After 6 years of volunteering, I am thrilled to step into the role of Program Director and contribute to the growth and success of the organization in new ways. In 2025. We will continue to explore innovative ways to streamline our processes

processes while maintaining our current programming. One key initiative is the implementation of a new Volunteer Management System, designed to simplify the volunteer recruitment process. As we continue our journey, I would like to express my gratitude to our staff, board members, volunteers, donors, community partners especially St-John's, and the entire community for your unwavering support. Your dedication and collaboration are what make our work possible.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Kathleen Weedmark for her exceptional leadership, kindness, and unwavering support during her time with CoSA Ottawa. Kathleen's contributions have been truly impactful, bringing positive change to the program and making a lasting difference for both current and future core members and volunteers. Her dedication and hard work have left an enduring legacy at CoSA, and we are incredibly grateful for everything she has done.

Together, we look forward to another year of positive change and growth. Thank you for being a part of CoSA Ottawa's success.

Michaela De Curtis, Program Director



Official Supporters

We are honoured to recognize the following distinguished community members who lend their name in support of CoSA Ottawa.

Drury Allen: Criminologist, Former Senior Federal Corrections Official

Andrejs Berzins: Former Chief Crown Attorney of Ottawa

Lorraine Berzins: Former Community Chair of Justice, Church Council on Justice & Corrections

Charles Bordeleau: Former Chief, Ottawa Police Service

Robert Cormier: Psychologist, Member Ontario Review Board; Former CoSA Ottawa Board Member

John Edwards: Former Commissioner, Correctional Service Canada; Past President, John Howard Society Ottawa

Phil Firestone: Psychologist

James Foord: Defence Lawyer

Rick Goodwin: Managing Director, Men & Healing

Joel Harden: MPP, Ottawa Centre

Susan Haines: Executive Director, National Associations Active in Criminal Justice; Former Circle Volunteer

Diane Holmes: Former City of Ottawa Councillor

Heidi Illingworth: Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services

Kimberly Mann: Former Executive Director, Collaborative Justice Program; Co-Chair, Ottawa Restorative Justice Network

Liam Marshall: Psychologist, Rockwood Psychotherapy & Consulting

Lisa Murphy: Forensic Psychometrist, Royal Ottawa; Former Circle Volunteer

James Scott: United Church Minister; Community Mediator

Geris Serran: Clinical/Forensic Psychologist

Jill Skinner: Former Deputy Chief, Ottawa Police Service

Donna Watson-Elliot: Manager Victim Crisis Unit, Ottawa Police Service

Thank you to our Supporters - we are forever grateful for your continued support and belief in us!

Financial Report

We are deeply grateful for the generous funding we've received this year. Our heartfelt thanks go to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their two-year commitment and to the Ottawa Community Foundation for their one-year grant. We also extend our appreciation to everyone who has contributed to CoSA Ottawa.

Our 5th Gala raised over \$27,000, a success made possible by the support of our volunteers, the gala planning committee, our supporters, and all those who generously donated.

Last year's Ottawa Race Weekend event raised just over \$6,000, and we are excited to participate again in May! If you'd like to join our team and be part of this fundraising effort, please let us know.

Thanks to funding from Justice Canada, we were able to hold a screening of our documentary, *Facing Our Messy Lives*, which was attended both in person at Carleton University and virtually. The documentary continues to serve as an invaluable tool for raising awareness of CoSA Ottawa. Over the past year, we have used it in outreach presentations to local educational institutions and beyond.

We are also grateful to be working with Thomas Allgoewer, our contracted fundraiser with over 20 years of experience. Thomas has been instrumental in identifying new funding sources and submitting applications to help ensure our financial stability.

Our Sustainability Working Group, composed of staff, board members, volunteers, and stakeholders, continues to explore ways to strengthen the organization's long-term sustainability. In the coming months, we will shift the focus of these groups to more directly address our specific organizational needs.

We want to express our heartfelt appreciation for the incredible personal support we've received from St. John's parishioners. Our partnership with St. John's Church, which provides us with a welcoming space for circle meetings and social gatherings, remains a cornerstone of our success. Their hospitality and generosity are invaluable to us.

We are pleased to report that the audit for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, CoSA Ottawa had a clean audit opinion, the audited financials presented on page 11 are credible and fairly presented.

At this time, CoSA Ottawa has enough assets to fund CoSA for about one year. We are hopeful for positive outcomes from a couple of recent grant applications, which would enable us to continue delivering critical services to our core members and further develop the skills of our volunteers.

John Daley, Treasurer, Board of Directors

Audited Financial Statements

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2024

Current Assets	2024	2023
Cash	\$ 50,523	\$ 73,610
Short term investments	102,281	-
Accounts receivable	5,595	71,347
Prepaid expenses	3,538	2,255
	161,937	147,212
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	5,529	5,388
Deferred revenue	9,526	50
	15,055	5,438
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	146,882	141,774
	\$ 161,937	\$ 147,212

Statement of Operations and Changes in Net Assets

Revenue	2024	2023
Grants	\$ 105,600	\$ 64,592
Donations and fundraising	40,038	125,298
Other revenue	5,344	429
Expenses		
Personnel	85,819	98,929
Program costs	22,832	6,330
Professional fees	20,641	13,128
Office rent	13,934	16,874
Administrative	2,615	21,565
	145,841	156,826
Excess revenue over expenses	5,108	33,493
Net assets, beginning of year	141,774	108,281
Net assets, end of year	146,882	141,774

Statement of Cashflow

Cash flows for (used in) operating activities	2024	2023
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$ 5,108	\$ 33,493
Changes in non-cash working capital components		
Accounts receivable	65,752	(45,297)
Prepaid expenses	(1,283)	1,959
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	141	243
Deferred revenue	9,476	(12,992)
	79,194	(22,594)
Investing activities		
Sale of short-term investments	-	50,000
Purchase of short-term investments	(102,281)	-
	(102,281)	50,000
Increase (decrease) in cash	(23,087)	27,406
Cash, beginning of year	73,610	46,204
Cash, end of year	\$ 50,523	\$ 73,610

Core Member Testimonial

Before I was in CoSA, it was kind of stressful. Last time I got out of prison, I had no support. I didn't know who to go talk to. Now, I have my volunteers. I know for a period of time I wasn't doing the greatest but then I was able to talk with my volunteers and turn everything around. If I have a problem, they're willing to listen and come up with solutions.

If I didn't have CoSA, I'd be back in jail because I don't have that many people to talk to. I have the halfway house staff, my psychologist and my parole officer, but I find that I don't have the same relationship with them that I have with my CoSA volunteers. To me, I see the staff, the psychologist and the parole officer, as professionals and I don't yet feel comfortable talking with them. I see the volunteers as pretty much my close friends and I can talk to them about anything and they won't judge me. I'm sure the staff at the (halfway) house would help me if I was able to talk with them, but I haven't been able to build a solid bond yet. The volunteers have been able to build trust with me by showing interest in helping me, and sharing stories about their own lives with me.

But they also challenge me. Almost every circle meeting, we discuss what I should do - my budget, being healthier, etc. Even when we meet individually, they ask what's going on; they push me to do things in a positive way, where I see the importance of doing the things they suggest. But they don't do it in an authoritative way, they do it as a friend that's concerned about me. They follow up each week with what's been going on, like how my goals are going. We go for walks, celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, they help me budget my money. They're also helping me with quitting smoking by suggesting other ways to preoccupy myself.

The CoSA Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners are pretty much a family event, where we get together, socialize, have a meal; even joke with each other. Even when we meet for the monthly discussion sessions, we get together and learn new skills. It's pretty much a gathering where you can feel comfortable, no one is there to judge you for what you've done, they don't look at you weird and not want to associate with you because of what you've done in the past. They are accepting and open-minded.

I've been out for two years with CoSA's support and it's helped me be crime free.

CoSA Ottawa Core Member



Volunteer Testimonial

In our modern world of increasing technology, it is easy to believe that everything can be reduced to a digital formula of 0's and 1's. But people are not easily characterized in such a binary fashion. There are not just tall people or short people, young people or old people or even 'good' people or 'bad' people. Life is rarely that simple: each of us is unique and complex, and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, including when we stumble in life and hurt others. For these reasons I am drawn to COSA, as it believes that every person is indispensable and deserving of a second chance. In COSA, by balancing support with accountability, we utilize a compassionate yet realistic approach to assist those who have committed sexual offences to safely and successfully reintegrate back into society.

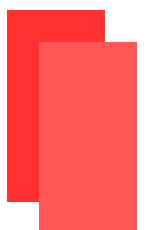
Prior to my retirement, I had interactions with tens of thousands of individuals from all walks of life. During those forty years I learned much about the struggles of being human, and in doing so I matured. By encouraging me to push my comfort zone, COSA helps me continue that journey of growth by getting to know people who have struggled with inner tensions I have not had and who have faced adversity that I have not faced. Each encounter I have with COSA core members is an opportunity not just to teach them and help them, but to learn and be helped by them as well.

So, my involvement with COSA serves a dual purpose: to help protect our society and at the same time help me, and our society as a whole, to grow in compassion and generosity by fostering healthy reintegration of those who are determined not to reoffend. On a daily basis I have been inspired by core members' resilience, courage and desire to become valued members of society.

Through COSA, I have found my relationships with people who have committed sexual offences to be ones of mutual respect and caring. I appreciate their humility and their gratitude for life's deepest blessings: freedom, shelter, nutrition, meaningful work, and most of all healthy relationships. It might benefit all of us to pare life down to these essentials.

I have been a volunteer with COSA for five years and plan to continue for many more. I would highly recommend volunteering with COSA to help society, to support those who are determined not to offend again, and especially as a way to avoid the binary thinking about our fellow human beings that can limit both their growth and our own.

CoSA Ottawa Volunteer





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