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The Prison-Based Model of Circles of Support and Accountability and its Application in Transitioning to the Community

Rosie Kitson-Boyce

Introduction

In society today, those who commit sexual crimes are portrayed negatively and sensationally by the media, often provoking anger, fear and even hatred towards them from the general public (McAlinden, 2006). It is widely established within the literature that individuals who have been convicted of sexual offences face increased levels of stress, difficulties in finding employment and housing, and problems maintaining social and familial relationships (Tewksbury, 2012; Tewksbury & Connor, 2012; Tewksbury & Copes, 2013). These barriers to successful reintegration often lead to social isolation and prevent desistance from crime being achieved (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009).

Göbbels, Ward, and Willis (2012) expand on this further stating that, negative social capital, such as the loss of relationships, inability to gain employment or housing and stigmatisation (Lussier & Gress, 2014;

R. Kitson-Boyce (✉)
Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

Tewksbury, 2012), can be barriers to successful re-entry in to the community for those convicted of sexual offences. They point out that even ex-offenders who have worked hard to undergo significant identity changes do not always re-enter communities that reinforce these new non-offender identities. In addition, the lack of support those who commit sexual offences receive during this transitional period from prison to community makes the process difficult and uncertain (Elliott & Zajac, 2015).

This is concerning due to the early stages of release being a particularly sensitive period in terms of achieving this desistance (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010). Furthermore, when considering the wellbeing of offenders recently released from prison, Fox (2015) acknowledged how individuals can quickly become overwhelmed, particularly if they have served a long sentence in prison. Interestingly, Van den Berg, Beijersbergen, Nieuwbeerta, and Dirkzwager (2017) reported from their sample of Dutch offenders that there was no difference between those who were convicted of sexual offences and those convicted of all other offences, in terms of their level of loneliness whilst in prison. Upon release therefore, the differential negative treatment those convicted of sexual offences receive once in the community, could lead to even further feelings of overwhelm and maybe even shock.

One suggestion Göbbels et al. (2012) make to assist those convicted of sexual offences through the transition of re-entry is artificial mentoring. An artificial mentor they argue, is someone who can provide social modelling to the individual but also sustained and empathetic support to promote and encourage the motivation to maintain desistance. The volunteers who are involved in CoSA may be able to take on this role of a mentor. They can offer support to the Core Member, helping them maintain their non-offender identity but also encouraging them to build social networks outside of the CoSA, which verify the ex-offender's change in identity and behaviour. The CoSA model however, is a community one, meaning that support for the Core Member commences once they have been released into the community, sometimes with delays of several weeks (Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2015). This therefore requires the Core Members, who are normally experiencing a severe lack of social support, to still transition from prison to the community alone.

A prison-based model of CoSA however, can provide 'Through the Gate' support to those convicted of sexual offences as will now be considered in more detail.

Early Prison-Based CoSA

A project that has successfully implemented a continuum of support from prison to the community for individuals convicted of sexual offences, is MnCoSA in the US. In 2008, MnCoSA was implemented in Minnesota, US, involving individuals convicted of sexual offences who were due to be released from prison. As Duwe (2012) explains, MnCoSA developed from the promising results of Wilson, Picheca, and Prinzo's (2005) initial evaluation study, with the design and operation being very similar to that of the Canadian CoSA. One fundamental difference however, was that unlike in Canada whereby CoSA begins after the offender has been released from prison, MnCoSA was systematically designed to begin at least four weeks prior to the offender's release (Duwe, 2012). Offered through the Minnesota Department of Corrections, MnCoSA focuses upon the successful transition from prison to community for individuals convicted for sexual offences (MnCoSA, 2017). The volunteers meet with the Core Member approximately three times whilst in prison before the sessions move in to the community as the Core Member re-enters society (MnCoSA, 2017).

Duwe (2012) highlights the importance of the continuum of social support from prison to community and believes it to be a central factor in why MnCoSA has been successful in reintegrating those who commit sexual offences back in to the community (see the previous chapter for more detail on his RCT of MnCoSA). Indeed, Maguire and Raynor (2006) believe that for offenders to re-settle effectively on release, through care is needed involving the establishment of a close relationship with the offender while they are still in prison, which is then continued in release. It is believed that this relationship should be well-established, involve trust and a willingness to travel together on the path towards desistance (McNeill & Weaver, 2010).

When considering offenders, who are still residing in prison, Rocque, Biere, and MacKenzie (2011) have highlighted how increasing the attachment and improving social bonds to prosocial individuals results in a positive outcome. Within their study, attachment and social bonds were defined as a feeling of closeness to significant others, with their impact on the intention to conform being explored. For individuals who have committed sexual offences, achieving and developing an attachment or social bond with members of the community is difficult, particularly when family and friends may have cut ties due to the nature of their crime or restraining orders are in place preventing contact (Lussier & Gress, 2014). This therefore highlights a need for the prison-based model of CoSA.

It is important to consider however, that the volunteers involved in a prison-based model of CoSA will have met the old (criminal) self as well as the new desisting self. It is argued that to desist from crime successfully, offenders need to develop a new pro-social identity separate to their past self (Maruna, 2001). It is therefore possible that some potential Core Members will want to leave their past behind completely and not want to be involved with anyone who knew them during their past life. As Serin and Lloyd (2009) point out however, desistance from crime takes time, with the offender gradually committing themselves to prosocial lifestyles. They go on to explain that because of this there will be a transitional period whereby the offender and the ex-offender overlap. The MnCoSA, unlike the community model of CoSA, can provide social support to the Core Member through this transitional stage, thus in turn encouraging and motivating them to continue on their journey to desistance.

CoSA: The UK Prison-Based Model

In 2014, the first ever UK prison-based model of CoSA was established at HMP Whatton, a category-C treatment prison for individuals convicted of a sexual offence who are prepared to address their offending behaviour through participation in a treatment programme. This was the first time CoSA that began in the prison, before moving out in to the community, had been operationalised in the UK.

The CoSA prison-based model initiative was set up by the Safer Living Foundation (SLF); a charitable organisation involving employees from the prison, Nottingham Trent University, probation and police. There was a concern felt by the trustees of the SLF that some individuals serving sentences for sexual offences, particularly those who were elderly (55+) or who had intellectual disabilities (ID), were leaving prison without any family or community support. Individuals with ID who commit sexual offences have received a specific focus within the literature, with ID often being described as overrepresented amongst this group of offenders (Hayes, Shackell, Mottram, & Lancaster, 2007; Lambrick & Glaser, 2004). Indeed, Craig and Hutchinson (2005) calculated that the reconviction rate for ID offenders convicted of a sexual offence was 6.8 times at two years follow up, and 3.5 times at four years to that of non-ID offenders convicted of similar sexual offences. It must be acknowledged however, that the research on this group of individuals is extremely flawed, with methodological differences between the studies being so great that conclusions regarding the true prevalence of sexual offences by men with ID are difficult to state (Craig & Hutchinson, 2005; Lindsay, 2002). With regard to elderly individuals who commit sexual offences, the decrease in societal tolerance, along with a greater readiness for the police and prosecutors to pursue and secure more 'late-in-life' convictions for non-recent sexual offences has seen a growth in the amount of elderly individuals in prison for a sexual offence (Crawley & Sparks, 2005; Hart, 2008). For example, in 2006, Fazel, Sjöstedt, Långström and Grann reported that around half of all male offenders aged 60+ in England and Wales were serving custodial sentences for a sexual offence.

In addition to both groups being highly represented within prison settings, elderly and ID men are particularly vulnerable during the transition from prison to community (Crawley & Sparks, 2006; Cummins & Lau, 2003). For elderly offenders, the fear of isolation on release can be even greater, with many nursing homes and elderly care facilities reluctant to accept these individuals due to the type of offences they have committed (Hart, 2008). Individuals with ID are reported to have a lack of social networks and resultant lack of feelings of connectedness, both of which are required for successful community integration (Cummins & Lau, 2003). This, combined with a severe lack of social support on

release, means social isolation is almost inevitable for elderly and ID offenders. Loneliness and isolation, often caused by problematic or unsuccessful reintegration, can exacerbate the risk of reoffending for those convicted of sexual offences (Clarke, Brown, & Völlm, 2015; Fox, 2015). It was acknowledged therefore, that a continuum of support was needed for these individuals, through the transition from prison to community, thus leading to the establishment of the first UK prison-based model of CoSA.

This prison-based CoSA focuses on individuals convicted of a sexual offence with determinate prison sentences (i.e. a fixed release date) who were elderly (55+) or intellectually disabled (ID) and were deemed medium to very high static risk using the RM2000 risk assessment tool (Thornton et al., 2003). There is no universal definition of 'elderly', however within criminal justice literature, 'older' is defined as starting anywhere between 45 and 65 years (Bows & Westmarland, 2016). Most US research on offenders use 50 as the starting point for the 'older' category, which Howse (2003) suggests may be the point at which offenders begin to view themselves as 'old'. In the UK, 50 is also used in some cases as the age at which someone is classed as older, for example Evergreen 50+, a project to support older prisoners in England and Wales. Until recently, retirement age in the UK was 65 (Gov.uk, 2017). However, as Howse (2003) acknowledged in his report for the Prison Reform Trust, individuals residing in a prison setting tend to have a biological age of 10 years older than individuals in the community, due to their chronic health problems. Bows and Westmarland (2016) have more recently agreed, stating that the mental and physical health problems offenders in prison experience results in a more rapid onset of age related issues, compared to their counterparts outside prison. This provides an argument for a lower threshold for an 'elderly' category and indeed Age UK, the largest charity in the UK to work with older individuals including prisoners, have 55 as the starting age of their 'elderly' category. Based on these considerations, the prison-based model of CoSA determined 55 to be a suitable age at which individuals could be considered for a Core Member place. Individuals were also required to have little to no social support on release, due to the increased risk these individuals pose on release.

The CoSA in the UK prison-based model begin around three months prior to the Core Member's release from prison and continue with the Core Member for up to 12 months in the community. The volunteers visit the prison weekly for the CoSA meetings whilst the Core Member is still residing there and are therefore required to undergo criminal security checks before beginning their role. The CoSA meetings continue through the transitional period from prison to community, with the meetings continuing in the first week of the Core Member's release. Once in the community the CoSA meetings can take place at either the approved premises the Core Member is being housed at, the SLF offices at Nottingham Trent University, or in certain situations nearby Quaker rooms or the Core Members' own home.

Prison Model Evaluation

As has been outlined above, a prison-based model of CoSA provides potential positive benefits for those convicted of sexual offences in the UK. In particular, those who are categorised as elderly or ID and are facing release from prison with a severe lack of social support. It is crucial that any new process, such as the prison-based model being established in the UK, is evaluated from its commencement. As the previous chapter outlined, there have been substantial criticisms of the quantitative data reported from CoSA research. Clarke et al. (2015) have stated that, whilst good quality evaluations of recidivism are important, they do not capture the full extent of the impact participating in CoSA can have. This has led to a demand for qualitative studies involving the Core Members and volunteers taking part in CoSA (Bates, Williams, Wilson, & Wilson, 2014; Wilson, Bates, & Völlm, 2010).

A qualitative evaluation was therefore commenced at the same time the UK prison-based model of CoSA began, involving interviews with the Core Members to explore their personal experience of the prison-based model. The rest of this chapter will explore some of the key themes derived from the data in relation to the support the prison-based model of CoSA provided the Core Members during their transition from prison to community.

Demographics

The Core Member places on the prison-based model of CoSA were allocated according to a number of criteria. These are briefly outlined below, along with the main demographic details of the participants within this research.

Conviction for sexual offence. The first criterion was that the individual must have committed a sexual offence and currently be residing in the prison where the CoSA prison-based model was established. Offence histories of the participants were predominantly of contact sexual offences against children. The skew towards this offence history is relative to the general population at the prison the participants were recruited from.

Elderly or intellectually disabled. The second criterion was that these individuals must ideally either be elderly or be defined as having an intellectual disability. Using the IQ tests already carried out by the prison in order to determine treatment suitability, individuals were considered as a potential Core Member if they had an IQ of >80 or were over the age of 55 years. Using an IQ of below 80 ensured those with borderline ID were also considered for a place. However, for individuals whose IQ was in the borderline range, an Adaptive Functioning Checklist (AFC) (created by Dr Lorraine Smith at Nottingham Trent University) was also used to assess adaptive and social functioning. Forty percent of the participants included in the research were defined as having mild-borderline ID and 80% were 55 years of age or older (see Table 4.1).

Risk of reoffending. It was essential that the resources of the CoSA prison-based model were allocated to those who were most at risk of recidivism. The most widely used actuarial risk assessment tool in the English and Wales prison and probation services is the Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2000; Thornton et al., 2003). This risk assessment tool measures static risk of reoffending and is used to help inform decisions about appropriate treatment pathways and management of offenders in the community. As Barnett, Wakeling, and Howard (2010) state, the use of such assessment tools enables effective allocation of resources to

Table 4.1 Core Member participant information

Participant number	Participant age	Intellectual disability	Health issues	Risk level (RM2000)
1	60	Yes—mild	Yes—physical	Medium
2	60	No	Yes—physical	Medium
3	60	Yes—mild	Yes—physical	Very high
4	45	Borderline	No	Medium
5	58	No	Yes—mental	Medium
6	78	No	Yes—physical and mental	Medium
7	73	No	No	Very high
8	64	Yes—mild	No	High
9	52	No	No	Very high

those at a higher risk of reoffending and the same applies for the prison-based model of CoSA. Using the RM2000, 60 percent of the participants involved in the research were assessed as a medium risk of sexual reoffending, 10 percent were placed in the high risk category and 30 percent in the very high risk category (see Table 4.1).

Individuals who had been offered and accepted a Core Member place on a prison-based model CoSA (December 2014–August 2016) were approached regarding their participation in the research project. Those who consented were asked to participate in data collection at three time points during their CoSA prison-based model journey, as shown in Table 4.2.

As stated previously the prison-based model of CoSA in the UK is designed to begin approximately three months before the Core Members release from prison. This process is flexible however and varies with each individual CoSA, as can be seen in Table 4.3 below. There are several reasons for this, with the main one being that a referral for a potential Core Member with high need may not be received by the coordinator until later in their sentence. As is stated above however, in the US prison-model of CoSA, the volunteers meet with the Core Member only three times before their release. This still provides enough time for a social bond to at least have begun to be developed, thus providing additional support over the transitional period of release as is highlighted in the findings below.

Table 4.2 Time point of data collection with Core Members

Time point	Position in the CoSA prison-based model journey	N
1	Prior to the Core Member meeting the volunteers involved in their CoSA	9
2	After the prison sessions of the CoSA, just before release into the community	6
3	Once in the community but still taking part in the CoSA	7

Table 4.3 Planned and actual number of prison CoSA sessions

Participant number	Planned time for prison sessions	Actual number of prison sessions
1	2 months, 1 week	6
2	2 weeks	2
3	3 months, 2 weeks	7
4	1 month, 1 week	6
5	1 month	4
6	1 month	3
7	IPP sentence (parole date not confirmed)	IPP sentence (parole date not confirmed)
8	3 weeks	2
9	1 month, 2 weeks	6

Transition from Prison to Community

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of the Core Members throughout their journey on a prison-based model of CoSA. As stated previously, data was collected at three different time points to capture their transition from prison to community.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for data collection, to capture both the richness and complexity of the individuals' experience (Aresti et al., 2010). Semi-structured interviews involve a set of questions used by the researcher to guide the interview, rather than dictate it, meaning the participant is viewed as the expert on the topic

discussed (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In addition, due to the participants potentially having ID, the interview schedules were written in suitable language with a Felsch readability score of 2.9. This meant the questions posed could be understood by an individual with the reading ability of a seven year old and therefore suitable to be used with those who had borderline to mild ID.

Each interview lasted on average 1–1.5 hours. Questions for the Core Members explored their expectations and aspirations for the future. Example questions included: 'What do you think it will be like when you leave prison?', 'Who will be there to support/help you when you leave prison?', 'What were the good/bad things about being in a circle when you moved from prison to the community?'.

Analysis

The interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is concerned with a detailed examination of the individuals' subjective experience (Brocki & Wearden, 2006); in this case their experience of being involved in a prison-based model CoSA. Several themes were derived from the data regarding the support a prison-based model of CoSA could provide to the Core Members during their transition from prison to the community, as are highlighted in Table 4.4.

The following analysis will explore and unpack these themes in detail to provide a rich understanding of the participants' experiences on a

Table 4.4 Themes from the interview data with corresponding data collection time points

Theme	Time point (T)
Knowing they will have support	1
Building relationships	1, 2
Preparation	2
Immediate support	3
Barriers to successful reintegration	3

prison-based model of CoSA. For further discussion of the findings from the research project discussed here, see Kitson-Boyce, Blagden, Winder, and Dillon (2018a, 2018b).

Findings

Knowing They Will Have Support

The first theme was derived from the data collected prior to the CoSA starting in the prison (T1). The Core Members identified that, aside from the prison-based CoSA, they would have little to no support on release from prison.

> They (prison-based model coordinator) approached me yeah because I haven't got any erm support network out there at all, there's no family, friends or anything. (CM Participant 2, T1)

Here the Core Member is explaining how he is facing a life in the community with no friends or family to support him, a situation that is not uncommon for those convicted of sexual offences (Tewksbury & Copes, 2013). This is particularly concerning due to the research demonstrating loneliness and social isolation as risk factors of sexual reoffending (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Marshall, 2010). The Core Members involved in the prison-based model recognised that individuals with a severe lack of pro-social support on release from prison are prioritised for CoSA and were aware of the potential benefits being involved could offer.

> I realised that circles offers you something that some people get from their families but if you've no family err or not in contact with your family, you've not support out there. (CM participant 9, T1)

Here the Core Member explains how for him, a prison-based model CoSA would go some way to providing the support that others may receive from their families, both whilst in prison and once released back into the community. This is particularly important due to the role social support provided by family members can provide in reducing the likelihood of

future criminal behaviour on release from prison (Willis & Grace, 2008). For example, from their research into social ties, re-entry and recidivism, Berg and Huebner (2011) found that good quality ties to relatives, and the social support they provided was what motivated ex-offenders to reintegrate back into society successfully and live a pro-social life. As the Core Member acknowledged however, such support does not always have to be provided through family relations. Weaver and McNeill (2015) reported from their research that the social relations influential in supporting desistance could be friendship groups and faith communities, as well as families. It was the sense of solidarity and 'we-ness' that characterised these social relations that assisted the ex-offender in realising their pro social aspirations the most. With this in mind, it is possible that the social support offered through a prison-based model CoSA may be enough to encourage and promote desistance from Core Members.

As explained in the previous chapter (and Chap. 2), CoSA can provide benefits to communities through the reduction of potential future victims. In addition to this however, the findings demonstrate how the prison-based model CoSA can provide benefits to the Core Members also. Knowing they would have the support of the CoSA leads to improvement in their wellbeing, particularly due to the knowledge that this support will come from 'normal' members of the community.

> The support, knowing there was that amount of support out there for me, you know, just a like sad, lonely old git you know with nowhere to go, suddenly I don't need to bury my head in the sand, I know there's people there to support me, so from that point of view I feel a lot more confident. (CM Participant 5, T1)

> Because you know, they're volunteers, they come all this way to see a prisoner but they want to come and see you for a purpose…we talked a lot about it and it's wonderful. (CM Participant 7, T1)

As the last extract in particular highlights, having someone to talk to who is not a professional appears important to the Core Members. The volunteers are not paid to work with Core Members; they are there because they choose to be, resulting in their actions being perceived as

genuine. Indeed, research in to the perceptions of those who commit sexual offences have concluded that the publics' attitude is generally negative and punitive towards this group of offenders (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). It is unsurprising therefore that having 'normal' members of the community meet with them on a weekly basis with a non-judgemental attitude is viewed so positively for Core Members.

This theme is consistent with research on CoSA in general, whereby Core Members attribute the success of CoSA to the involvement of members of the community who are 'not doing it to get paid, it's something they wanna do' (Hanvey, Philpot, & Wilson, 2011, p. 105). Similarly, Thomas, Thompson, and Karstedt (2014, p. 194) reported, from their interviews with Core Members on a community CoSA, that having 'normal people' who were able to see past their offences was 'life-changing' for the individuals. This is an important finding; if the volunteers' actions and behaviours are perceived as genuine then they are more likely to be successful in reinforcing any emerging pro-social narratives that are essential for desistance to be achieved (King, 2013).

This acknowledgement and acceptance from the Core Members of the support the CoSA will offer them, along with the perceived genuineness of the volunteers' actions, enables rapport and subsequent relationships to be built, as will now be discussed.

Building Relationships

Even from the data derived from time point 1, it was evident that the prison sessions would be beneficial in providing time and space for relationships to be built between Core Members and volunteers, before the reality of re-entering the community set in. Prior to starting the prison-based model CoSA, all but one of the Core Members interviewed stated that they were nervous and wary of meeting the volunteers.

> Cause it feels like, how do I explain it, you're in a room like this and you feel a bit nervous cause I don't know them and they don't know them and I'll be a bit on edge, a bit thinking 'are you judging me or something. (CM Participant 4, T1)

The Core Member here describes being wary, nervous and on edge until he has had the time and opportunity to get to know his volunteers. Due to the Core Members currently being in prison, the highly sensational media representation of those who commit sexual offences and the anger and hatred felt towards them (McAlinden, 2006) is likely to be their view of the general public as a whole. As Nellis (2009) explains, the stereotype the media has created, of those who commit sexual offences completely overlooks those who are motivated to start new lives and desist from sexually reoffending. This leads to the question therefore of whether Core Members, particularly those who have high levels of paranoia or low levels of self-esteem, are more likely to make the step to meet the volunteers whilst they are still in the safety of a prison setting. Although more research is required to compare directly the prison-model with the community model, in the prison-based model at least, the Core Members viewed meeting the volunteers whilst they were still in their 'comfort zone' as a positive aspect to their experience. This meant rapport and relationships could be built, and any nervousness overcome, whilst they still felt in a 'safe' environment.

> Well I'm in comfortable surroundings, I've got used to this place, it's my comfort zone so it will be ideal for me, you know I can always retreat back in (to my cell), sort of thing so I've got my comfort zone, out there it could be a bit more difficult, a bit more erm cause it's going to be a whole shock to the system, I've been in prison now nearly 6 years, there's a lot changed out there, it's going to be quite a shock to the system going out on my own and no support apart from my probation officer. (CM Participant 2, T1)

Here, the Core Member is explaining how it would be more difficult to meet a group of volunteers and begin to form relationships with them on release from prison, particularly considering the institutionalisation he is likely to have experienced from being in prison for several years. Despite this demonstrating the benefit of the prison model, the nature of the establishment where this CoSA project is taking place cannot be overlooked. A prison sentence for someone convicted of a sexual offence is often characterised by stigmatisation, feelings of anxiety and fear of being 'ousted' as a 'sexual offender' (Schwaebe, 2005). Even when segregated

on a vulnerable offenders' wing, those convicted of sexual offences have reported physically frightening events, such as having insults and objects thrown at them, resulting in damaged self-esteem (Ievins, 2013). The prison in focus here however, is one of the largest sex offender treatment prisons in Europe, specialising in both rehabilitative programmes and sex offender treatment, and only housing those convicted of sexual offences. The prison has been described by offenders themselves as a place of acceptance, generating a feeling of safety they had never experienced before (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2016; Ievins, 2013). This feeling of being 'safe' and the reduction in anxiety has been documented as creating additional 'head space' for the offenders to reflect upon the self, work through problems and contemplate change. This leads to the question therefore of whether similar prison-based models of CoSA would work as beneficially under different circumstances. For example, in a prison whereby potential Core Members were held on a separate vulnerable prisoner's wing. Or indeed, whether the need for this type of project would be even greater.

By the time the Core Members were about to transition from prison and re-enter the community (T2) the dynamics of the CoSA had begun to settle.

> I: How do you feel about the meetings as they've been going on then, leading up to each meeting, how does it make you feel?
>
> P: it's making me feel, how can I explain it, a bit more relaxed and slowly I'm starting to build up that relationship and also that trust and that's how it's gotta be. (CM Participant 4, T2)

Here you can see how the prison sessions enabled relationships and trust to be built between the Core Member and their volunteers, overcoming the nervousness and anxiety they previously expressed during timepoint 1. By the time the CoSA moves into the community the Core Members feel more comfortable with the volunteers, enabling deeper discussions to take place. Research that has considered how probation officers are best able to assist ex-offenders in the desistance process highlights the importance of relationships involving this type of rapport (Barry, 2007). Ex-offenders are reported as being more receptive to direct

guidance from probation officers when relationships are formed through receptively listening to one another (McCulloch, 2005). This highlights the benefit of the Core Members having established relationships with the volunteers prior to release, as they are more likely to accept the support and guidance towards desistance once in the community.

In addition to building rapport, all those involved in the prison-based model CoSA had the opportunity to learn and practice how to work effectively with one another so that they could 'hit the ground running' in the community. This links specifically with the next theme of preparation; providing the Core Members with additional time to build relationships with the volunteers also enabled preparation for life on release to begin.

Preparation

The data derived from the second time point highlighted how, in relation to offence related behaviour specifically, the prison sessions were used by the volunteers to help prepare the Core Members for possible risky situations on release, and to discuss management strategies in relation to their restrictions. For some Core Members, this involved acting out role-plays for the potential risky situations, for example if they came across an injured child in the street and there was no one else around.

> It's like if a little gal got knocked over by a car obviously I would phone the police and let them deal with it, cause I wouldn't go up and touch her cause if I did that and then the police knew I'd just come out of prison for a sex offence well I'd be back in again wouldn't I so I'd phone the police or if there was somebody else walking by I'd tell them to get the police, I mean I'd stop well away. It's like one instance you know I take the dog on the park, what happens if the kids come up and stroke the dog and I said 'well you know, all I've got to say to the kids, is do not stroke the dog cause I don't want the dog to bite you' and I'll just carry on walking, you know and stuff like that and err I got it all right, it was stuff like that so you know that's one thing I've got out of it (the prison sessions of the CoSA). (CM Participant 1, T2)

Here the participant is highlighting how the prison sessions are help-ing to prepare for situations he may face on release. Integrated within his concerns for release is an anxiety regarding the stigmatisation he will face for being convicted of a sexual offence; the police would believe his actions to have a sexual motive. This issue of stigmatisation on release is explored in more detail in the final theme of this chapter.

> so like I knew my what I've got to and what I aint got to do but when I went back, I was thinking all the time and I said to them, I says well 'where I live', I says 'it's about half an hours walk up to the town' but up at the top of the town you've got outside toilets, ladies and gents and there's many a time I've passed there when I've gone shopping with my partner, daughter, many a times I've gone up town, had a cup of tea in a café and have a walk round the market and that and I've come out and I've told them that I've got a weak bladder, I've only got to drink what a cup of water and I'm running to the toilet and I went to these toilets, ladies and gents obviously I went in to the gents but I could hear kids, I could see little lads like that (shows how tall they were) and I've seen them day in, day out, day in, day out and they have these balloons, you can buy these balloons and you fill they up with water and they chuck them at each other and I turned round and I said 'well say for instance you know I've done me shopping and that and I said to me wife, wait there and I'm just going to the toilet', I said 'can I go to that toilet where the little lads are or do I have to wait outside and pee myself or if I want to have a sit down. (Core Member Participant 1, T2)

This extract illuminates how discussing the Core Members' licence conditions during the prison sessions ensured that they understood areas or situations they would be restricted from on release. This was a particular benefit to those Core Members assessed as having ID, due to their tendency to feign understanding. For example, individuals with ID may acquiesce when not understanding questions asked, due to both their cognitive impairment and also their desire to comply socially with the perceived demands of an authority figure (Shaw & Budd, 1982). In the case of the extract above, the participant (who was assessed as ID) had read that he could not use public toilets when they were occupied by children on release but did not fully understand the details of this.

The prison sessions enabled in depth discussions to ensure this was understood clearly including what he could do instead should the situation arise.

> Err explaining things to me in a different light, how I deal with like err somethings I don't grab and they're on about doing like role-plays, I don't mind doing that, they talk to me and everything so that's a good thing. (CM Participant 4, T2)

Here the Core Member is explaining how the volunteers helped him to understand information by explaining it in a different way. Individuals with ID often experience a range of cognitive deficits, which can affect the way they process information, for example, concentration on and comprehension of what is being said to individuals with ID is likely to be limited (Craig & Hutchinson, 2005). The volunteer training for the prison-based model of CoSA involves specific guidance for how to work most effectively with these individuals. For example, breaking information down into small chunks, reducing the speed of what is being said and the use of pictures and drawings to help explain complex concepts (Craig & Hutchinson, 2005). The above extract indicates that the guidance appears to have been taken on board by the volunteers and being used effectively in the prison sessions.

Some Core Members were even able to reach the point where they were comfortable in discussing the coping strategies they use to manage offence related thoughts and feelings, often learnt previously on Sex Offender Treatment Programmes.

> I took all my stuff from HSP and they read it and so on, it was lovely to disclose it. You know it makes you feel better, you don't hide anything inside yourself and you think 'ooh what will they think of me if I tell them what I've done' and so on but none of that, they were superb. (CM Participant 7, T2)

Here the Core Member highlights the benefits of disclosing his previous offence related thoughts and behaviour. It appears that the absence of judgement from volunteers, even after sharing his darkest thoughts, and

the behaviour that evolved from them, enables him to feel accepted rather than vilified as is so often the case in society today (McAlinden, 2006). Not only are the volunteers able to reinforce the Core member's use of coping strategies to successfully manage offence-related thoughts and behaviour, by offering acceptance and inclusion upon hearing this information they are in fact reinforcing this new pro-social identity also (Weaver & McNeill, 2015).

The preparation for and practicing of their new, pro social identity highlighted in this theme, encourages the Core Member to become accountable for their own thoughts and behaviour, even before they are released from prison. Both the additional support and encouraged accountability offered through the prison sessions can continue with the Core Member through the transitional period of release into the community, as is discussed in the following theme.

Immediate Support

The prison-based model of CoSA enables the Core Members involved to be supported through the transitional period of release, whereby they move from prison into the community. The Core Members discussed their appreciation for the support they received immediately on release, particularly for those re-settling in an area that is new to them.

> I mean **** (one of the volunteers) picked me up from prison so he bought me to the hostel so they had some hands on straight away. (Core Member Participant 6, T3)

> Participant: "Erm a good base, I think when you come out you need a base and if you're away, like me away from family and I think that's one of the important things, it has it's been a good consistent base to get me kind of kick started."
>   Interviewer: "How did it make you feel having those volunteers off the train?"
>   Participant: "It was good because we'd already met inside **** (prison) I think we met for 6 months inside before so it was good to have a couple of familiar faces… I think the bond needs to be there before you leave prison

because if it's not there, if you're not fully committed before you leave then there's always a chance that someone might just say no it's not working on the outside. You won't be committed unless you're bonded and you need that bond on the inside I think. (CM Participant 10, T3)

In the case of these participants, the volunteers were able to meet the Core Member on their first day of release from prison and go with them to their hostel. Due to the relationships already formed in the prison sessions, as have been described earlier, the Core Member felt comforted, by 'familiar faces', in a situation that could easily have created anxiety. Interestingly Core Member 10 describes the bond he had formed with the volunteers whilst in prison and how this gave him a base to 'kick start' him in to the crime-free life he hoped to achieve. Those convicted of sexual offences routinely find it difficult to form social bonds with members of the community (Lussier & Gress, 2014). The relationships developed within the prison-based model of CoSA however, enabled a sense of support and togetherness to be present immediately on release from prison. In turn, these social bonds are argued to have a positive impact on the individual's motivation to achieve desistance (Weaver & McNeill, 2015).

with the group yeah I found them very supportive, they were always there straight away swapping phone numbers and stuff like that and then they explained to me who was going to be on duty that weekend you know if anything happened I could get in touch with them and they're still doing that now. (Core Member Participant 2, T3)

Here the participant is highlighting how the volunteers met him immediately on release and explained how someone would be on call all weekend if he needed support; his first weekend in the community after 6 years in prison. Providing support immediately on release from prison is vital, due to an increased risk to individuals recently re-entering the community. For example, a fifth (21%) of suicides in the first year taking place during the first 28 days (Pratt, Piper, Appleby, Webb, & Shaw, 2006). As Tewksbury and Connor (2012) concluded from their research however, when positive, stable and pro-social relationships are provided

to those convicted of sexual offences, both while in prison and upon re-entering society, a sense of belonging is created and law-abiding conduct promoted.

Rather than focus on the additional support for the Core Members however, CoSA have been criticised in the literature for attempting, through the use of volunteers, to provide statutory supervision 'on the cheap' (Armstrong, Chistyakova, Mackenzie, & Malloch, 2008). From this perspective a prison-based model of CoSA would provide additional supervision during the early stages of release; a particularly sensitive period in terms of risk of reoffending (Aresti et al., 2010). This is strongly contested by CoSA organisations (Thomas, Thompson, & Karstedt, 2014). Although CoSA within the UK support risk management through the accountability element, they do not duplicate or seek to replace statutory supervision of those convicted of sexual offences released from prison. Instead, they aim to complement and work in addition to the supervision that already exists for these individuals in the community (McCartan, Kemshall, Westwood, MacKenzie & Pollard, 2014). McCartan (2015) supported this, stating that all those involved in CoSA internationally must remember that volunteers are indeed volunteers and not probation officers; the aim of CoSA is not solely risk management, support also reduces the risk of reoffending.

Barriers to Successful Reintegration

As outlined previously, those who commit sexual offences face considerable barriers to successful reintegration when released from prison. For the Core Members interviewed in this research, three main issues reported were: problems finding suitable housing, health concerns and perceived stigmatisation.

With regard to the first issue, all of the Core Members interviewed reported problems securing suitable (i.e. for mobility issues) and permanent (i.e. not an approved premises) housing on release from prison.

Oh I've been messed about with **** (housing association) from the word go. (Participant 2, T3)

P: "(Probation) not letting me look for accommodation when I've already proved I can hold tenancy for two years, I think it's just not justified stopping me doing that…."

I: "How long have you got left there?"

P: "I don't know, obviously I'm in their hands now. I can't look for places."

I: "Is it the same area, they're going to keep you in ****?"

P: "I really don't know, no body's interviewed me from **** or **** or you know, the only thing he's said is I can start looking for places after about 6 months in either **** or ****. (CM Participant 8, T3)

Here the Core Members are expressing their frustrations regarding their accommodation, creating feelings of restriction and of being unsettled. In addition, Willis and Grace (2008) have argued that factors such as low quality accommodation are specifically related to reoffending. In relation to this, Northcutt Bohmert, Duwe, and Hipple (2016) documented from their study on CoSA in the US that Core Members struggled to overcome the barriers to finding housing deemed suitable by the courts, which in some cases resulted in the Core Member returning to prison.

Although CoSA are not involved directly with housing organisations, the volunteers were able to provide the Core Members with a safe space to vent their frustrations. With regard to the effectiveness of CoSA Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2016) defined this type of 'friendship' and expressive support offered by the volunteers as critical in terms of CoSA success. Expressive support is harder for the Core Members to access without the support of the CoSA and as has been evidenced previously in this chapter, the participants valued having 'normal', non-professional individuals to talk to greatly.

In addition, the CoSA sessions provided an opportunity to discuss pro-active behaviour the Core Members can engage in, in order to ensure the processes ran as smoothly as possible.

My problem is that I got home last week from the taxi (after the circle meeting) and I've never been out the house since cause I can't, I live in a bungalow, great, no problems but I can't even get out my drive because I've got a rotator, both rotator cuffs but this one is shattered and I can't push (wheelchair) up hills so my thing is that I'm locked at home all the time. (CM Participant 6, T3)

The participant here is discussing the impact his mobility and housing issues have on his daily life. The location of the house he currently resides in, combined with his confinement to a manual wheelchair which he is unable to operate, means the CoSA sessions are the only time he leaves his house each week. As is reported within the literature, social isolation such as this, works against those convicted of sexual offences reintegrating successfully back into the community (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). However, it can be argued that CoSA are going some way to prevent complete isolation from society, as without the weekly CoSA sessions the Core Member may not have interacted with outside civilisation at all.

The third issue concerning participants once released from prison was their continuous anxiety and worry of the public's opinions of them.

> Because of the nature of my crime, I'm very nervous about meeting new people, going out on my own anywhere and when I'm on the tram they've got some of those disabled seats, so I'm sitting side wards and you know people behind me, I'm very nervous of it, even on the bus I sit on the sideways seats, I'm always looking out but meeting new people on the group (CoSA) as I have done it's slowly bringing me out of that sort of stage so I'm venturing out a bit more and not so much trusting people but just getting out and about. (CM Participant 2, T3)

In the first half of the extract participant 2 is talking about a perceived threat of physical violence he constantly experiences when out in the community, which creates feelings of anxiety. The Core Member's fears are not unfounded due to the media's representation of those who commit sexual offences as sexual predators who should be hated and loathed (McAlinden, 2006). Although acts of violence towards those convicted of sexual offences are relatively uncommon (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), the Core Members still have to deal with the fear of this stigmatisation. Being a Core Member on CoSA however, means they do not have to face it alone. In the second part of the extract, the Core Member is explaining how being part of CoSA has encouraged him to 'venture out' in the community more. Although he admits his trust of others has not increased, he is striving not to isolate himself.

> I suppose I'm under, I feel under pressure, I feel that I'm an outsider I
> suppose in how I feel…I don't feel that I'm relaxed, I can't relax, I don't
> know how…I feel I've lost my place like in the community. (Participant
> 6, T3)

Here the Core Member is describing how he now construes himself as an outsider in his old community with the new 'sex offender' identity overruling any previous identities. This is not uncommon for those who have committed sexual offences. For example, Mingus and Burchfield (2012) reported from their research with those who commit sexual offences that the 'sex offender' label is the most highly stigmatised label in modern societies such as the UK. They argued that the 'sex offender' status often becomes the master status above all other identities the person may have, such as a father or, in the case of this Core Member, a respected member of the local community. Within the literature, an internalisation of this stigmatisation towards ex-offenders is thought to predict both reconviction and re-imprisonment, even after controlling for the social problems they would face on re-entry in to the community (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). Although LeBel et al's. (2008) research involved offenders convicted of all offence types, it still provides concerning findings for those who have previously committed sexual offences but are attempting to now live a crime-free life in the community.

Despite this fear of stigmatisation some of the Core Members describe how being part of CoSA has encouraged them to open up emotionally to other people.

> Circles helped as well but just realising that I needed to be able to talk more
> or to be more open with people cause I used to kind of like there was a
> brick wall round me and when anybody got too close I would just, what-
> ever I needed to send them away I'd do it. (CM Participant 10, T3)

For this core member specifically, this is the first time they have ever taken the step to lower their emotional barriers, and being part of CoSA enables him to practice this before their Circle ends. This resonates with research on UK and Dutch CoSA, whereby Core Members developed

their openness to communication within the CoSA, which lead to a positive ripple effect in the quality of their relationships outside the CoSA (Höing, Bogaerts, & Vogelvang, 2013). Improving the psychological wellbeing is an important aspect of CoSA's success that should not be overlooked when considering the effectiveness of CoSA projects (see Chap. 3 for more discussion on this). Offering support in this way, to help the Core Members develop new social bonds with the wider community is reported to help counteract any feelings of disconnectedness that may be felt through perceived stigmatisation from society (McNeill, 2009). In addition, encouraging the Core Members to overcome potential social isolation and loneliness by forming relations with others will hopefully help to lower their risk of reoffending (Marshall, 2010). What is unclear however, is whether this, along with the additional benefits described previously, is enough to enable desistance to truly take place.

General Discussion

From the research findings discussed, it can be argued that being part of a prison-based model CoSA enables individuals to receive pro-social support from a network of non-professionals, that they would otherwise be without. The additional prison sessions, allowed time for relationships between the Core Member and volunteers to be built and therefore extra support to be provided before the point of release. The benefit of this, in addition to improving the Core Members' wellbeing, is that individuals who have committed offences are more likely to accept specific guidance regarding desistance from individuals they have already established a relationship with (McCulloch, 2005).

Another benefit highlighted in the data was the role the additional prison sessions played in enabling the Core Member to be as prepared as possible for release. This was with regard specifically to the restrictions involved in their licence conditions and some of the possible risky situations they may find themselves in, all of which encouraged the Core Member to be accountable for their thoughts and behaviours. It is important to note here that whilst some Core Members felt comfortable in discussing the details of their sex offender treatment experiences, includ-

ing any strategies they had developed to prevent reoffending in the future, this is not a necessary requirement. The sessions involved in CoSA of any type are unique and specific to the needs of the individual Core Members, and are not intended to replace sex offender treatment programmes in any way (Bates et al., 2014). In fact, Ward and Langlands (2009) warn against trying to combine or blend restorative justice practices such as CoSA with rehabilitative treatment, due them being complimentary but very different components of crime reduction, designed to deal with different tasks.

With regard to the Core Members' release from prison, being part of a prison-based model CoSA enabled support to be provided by the volunteers immediately on re-entry into community. This not only reduces anxiety for the Core Member, but also helps prevent them slipping back into old offending behaviour, during this heightened period of risk (Aresti et al., 2010). In addition, the CoSA sessions once in the community encouraged the Core Members to integrate with society, something they may not partake in otherwise due to health issues and the perceived stigmatisation of those around them.

Whilst the benefits to the additional sessions in the prison-based model have been documented, it is not clear whether these are in fact enough to ensure that desistance from crime is reached. As has been stated at several points throughout the chapter and argued in much more detail elsewhere (Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, & McPherson, 2004; Tewksbury & Copes, 2013; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009), those who are convicted of a sexual offence face many barriers to successful reintegration. As LeBel et al. (2008) have reported, social problems experienced after release from prison, such as employment, housing and relationship issues, have a large and significant impact on the probability of both reconviction and re-imprisonment. Further research is therefore required in order to determine whether the benefits of the additional prison sessions in this new model of CoSA were sufficient enough to enable the Core Member to overcome the barriers to reintegration and reintegrate successfully back into the community. Returning to the Core Members once their time with the prison-based model of CoSA had ended would enable the true effectiveness of the model to be considered,

with regard to how successful they had been in becoming a pro-social, active member of the community.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that a prison-based model of CoSA provides additional support to Core Members during their transition from prison to the community. Relationships can be established prior to release from prison, ensuring the CoSA 'hits the ground running' when reaching the community. In addition, preparing them for life as an ex-offender previously convicted of a sexual offence, ensures they are held accountable for their thoughts and behaviour. Further research is now required in order to establish how effective the benefits of a prison-based model of CoSA are in enabling individuals to overcome the barriers to successful reintegration.

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