

Theory of Change

If individuals who have been convicted of or are at risk of offending sexually are offered support and the opportunity to be accountable to and engaged in community, the risk of re-offense and re-victimization is significantly reduced.



Mennonite
Central
Committee

The Value of Proactive Approaches to Community Safety: A Social Return on Investment Approach

Social Return on Investment Results

Circles of Support and Accountability of MCCO (Circles) creates substantial financial and social value by creating opportunities to both engage in community and develop mutually responsible relationships for people who have or are at risk of offending sexually (core members). This research demonstrates that for every dollar invested in Circles, more than \$6 of value is created:

- Value to the community—reduced likelihood of reoffending and fewer victims of sexual assault
- Value to government—cost reallocation resulting from fewer people using judicial and health care services
- Value to core members—reduced presence of risk factors associated with sexual offense including loneliness, isolation and mental illness.

Although it runs counter to conventional wisdom, the most successful way to achieve success and see fewer victims of sexual assault is to directly engage people who have or are at risk of offending sexually in an intentional community. Communities must offer opportunity and guidance to develop pro-social behaviours, to increase social connection, to decrease depression and isolation, and to be accountable for their choices.

Participation in Circles leads to a 70% decrease in sexual and non-sexual re-offenseⁱⁱⁱ.

Background Information

At the core of community safety is a sense of mutual responsibility and respect for one's neighbours. When harm or injustice occurs in a community, it breaks down one's sense of mutual responsibility, trust and respect, fragments relationships, and challenges or completely destroys one's sense of safety. Understandably, a community's response to harm is often to protect the victim by ostracizing the perpetrator. Though we may feel that we are protecting ourselves, our need to ostracize the perpetrators of harm causes a further deterioration of relationship, decreases mutual responsibility and accountability, and leads to a further erosion of community safety—exactly the opposite of what we intend^v.

Circles rebuilds the conditions for community safety by first, creating mutually responsible, supportive circles around people who have offended or are at risk of offending sexually and second, by developing an intentional community of connected circles and individuals who participate in Circles events and activities. Originally, Circles of MCCO was the demonstration site of Canada's first Circles of Support and Accountability program funded through Correctional Services of Canada (CSC). Since that time, a number of similar projects have been developed across the country. Though these programs perform a number of similar activities, they have also developed distinct activities that serve the needs of each site's particular members. Since its inception, Circles has grown to respond to a wider variety of needs as they have been identified by community participants.

Circles of Support and Accountability of MCC Ontario is part of a larger Restorative Justice program which aims to address harm in community by holding offenders accountable and providing an opportunity for those impacted by crime to have their needs addressed.

What is a Circle?

A circle is made up of community volunteers and agency staff people who arrange to meet with, telephone and develop relationship with a core member and to assist as they safely integrate into community life. Once a core member has begun to find their feet within the community, support from individual circles adapts to meet the diverse needs of each core member. Circles then becomes a place where core members can participate in activities that initially reduce isolation and idleness and, as time goes on, allow people the opportunity to develop positive, healthy relationships and to discover and use their personal gifts and abilities to contribute to society in a meaningful way.



Reducing the Risk of Offense

People who have offended or are at risk of offending sexually are assessed for risk using a number of psychological assessment tools designed to predict the likelihood of re-offense. Interviews with volunteers and core members found that the MCCO initiative significantly reduces a number of risk factors, including isolation, loneliness, mental ill-health and idleness, by offering opportunities to engage in community in a safe environment, thus reducing the number of future victims of sexual violence and enhancing community safety. Opportunities to engage in community offered by Circles include:

- One-to-one & group meetings
- Telephone calls
- Shared meals
- Fellowship Gatherings
- Games Day
- Boundaries Workshop
- Bible Study
- Creative Exchange
- Celebration events
- Training Sessions
- Retreats
- Memorial Services

The approach to community safety of the Circles of MCCO flows

from the “good lives model” of addressing risk of re-offense. This model suggests that individuals who have offended sexually can be guided in setting healthy life goals that will help them to achieve a fulfilling and well-balanced life. Circles must also support people in achieving their goals by allowing for open dialogue and focusing on a person’s strengths instead of on their weaknesses and risk factors^{iv}.

According to interviews with core members, the key to success is providing a wide range of opportunities to engage in intentional community. The larger the variety of activities, the more likely it is that core members will find two or three activities that appeal to them and the less likely people will feel that they are being forced to participate in something they don’t enjoy. Core members must willingly accept and participate in mutually responsible and accountable relationship; however, the level and path of participation required varies based on the needs of each core member.

Participant Profile

No two core members are alike—each comes to Circles with their own story, risk factors and diverse needsⁱⁱ. All core members do, however, have one thing in common: they do not want to reoffend and return to prison, which means they need to change the way they respond to challenges and change the way they approach meeting their personal needs.

The men and women who participate in Circles range from those who have been incarcerated for many years to those who have never been convicted of an offense, but have been deemed to possess the risk factors associated with sexual offending. Typically, people become participants when they are referred by the Federal or Provincial correctional system because they have been assessed as at risk of offending or re-offending.

This research has focused specifically on 120 male participants in three locations: Kitchener, Hamilton and Toronto. Most have been convicted of offending sexually and have served time in prison. Many have been the victims of sexual and emotional abuse themselves. Some participants have been released from prison at the end of their sentence into a community with which they have no previous connections. This situation means they have little or no access or previous knowledge of community supports and services and are left feeling isolated and alone—a situation proven to increase risk to both the person who has been released and the broader communityⁱⁱⁱ.

The Social Value of Proactively Preventing Harm

Every dollar invested in Circles of MCCO results in a social return of at least \$6 to society. This value includes less pain and suffering in the community, government cost reallocation, increased spiritual health of volunteers and staff, and increased well-being for core members.

Social value is created for the community by reducing the number of potential victims of sexual assault. Social value is also created for volunteers who report enhanced spiritual health and well-being resulting from using Circles as an opportunity to put their values into action and walk alongside people who are marginalized.

Social value is experienced by core members and their families as they develop the tools to create healthier, more sustainable family relationships. This does not mean that every core member becomes a daily participant in family life. It does mean, however, that there is opportunity to begin to establish family connections that are safe and healthy for all family members. Furthermore, Circles tends to become a surrogate family for the core member. The presence of these relationships creates space for a core member's nuclear and extended families to be involved in the core member's life without assuming major responsibility for assisting to manage their behavior, which results in decreased stress on family relationships and individual family members.

Circles has been found to significantly reduce repeat sexual offenses as well as other non-sexual offenses that lead to a return to prison^{iv}. This is of substantial financial value to government. The lowest estimated cost of prison in Ontario is approximately \$164/day, the cost of a day in a federal institution is much higher, and the average cost of a court case is over \$1,500. Circles of MCCO leads to a 70% reduction in the number of returns to prison over a two-year period which leads to significant cost savings to the government over time.

A large body of research indicates that people who have been incarcerated face a greater risk of experiencing homelessness upon release from prison. Circles reduces homelessness by assisting participants in finding a clean and safe home, by coaching participants as they learn to communicate and interact with landlords and neighbours and by assisting them to develop the skills of caring for oneself. This same body of research also indicates that homelessness costs the government money. The cost to the health care system associated with a person experiencing transient homelessness is approximately \$72,000 a yearⁱ. By reducing homelessness, Circles significantly reduces government expenditures by decreasing use of health and social services.

The stability and intentional community fostered through the development of authentic, trusting relationships help core members to experience increased mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health—conditions that are linked to reduced risk scores and thus, reduced risk of re-offense and fewer victims of sexual assault in the communityⁱⁱⁱ.

SOCIAL VALUE CREATED BY CIRCLES of MCCO						
SROI Indicator	Year 1 Value	Year 2 Value	Year 3 Value	Year 4 Value	Year 5 Value	Notes
GOVERNMENT COST REALLOCATION						
Fewer Days in Prison	\$540,744	\$487,751	\$443,133	\$454,211	\$465,566	Less Stress on Prisons
Less use of court system	\$12,762					Less Stress on Judicial System
Less use of Victims Services	\$12,072					Less use of Victim's Services
Less use of Trauma Services	\$2,380					Less use of Trauma Services
Less Homelessness	\$547,677	\$280,684	\$230,161	\$188,732	\$174,105	Less use of health care services
VALUE TO THE COMMUNITY						
Fewer Victims			\$591,500			Pain and suffering, the result of trauma, often last the entirety of one's life
Increased Spiritual Health	\$115,440	\$106,493	\$98,240	\$90,627	\$83,603	Value of monthly sessions of spiritual direction, a service which also results in increased spiritual health
Increased knowledge of successful models to create community safety	\$43,350	\$39,990	\$36,891	\$34,032	\$31,395	Value of comparable training available in the community
VALUE TO CORE MEMBERS						
Improved Mental Health	\$63,180	\$32,380	\$26,551	\$21,772	\$20,085	90% of core members reported experiencing less depression, isolation and loneliness
Improved Spiritual Health	\$51,480	\$42,214	\$34,615	\$31,932	\$29,458	Core members report increased connection to religion or spirituality
Increased likelihood of accessing employment	\$60,762	\$31,141	\$25,535	\$20,939	\$19,316	33% of interviewees reported assistance with finding work
Stronger, healthier family relationships	\$866,527	\$666,143	\$546,237	\$475,909	\$439,026	Core members report less stress on family as circles also take on role of family
Opportunity to make meaningful contributions to society	\$28,454	\$23,333	\$19,133	\$15,689	\$9,649	Using gifts and talents in Circles related activities
SROI Summary						
Social Value Created per year	\$2,936,328	\$1,710,128	\$1,460,497	\$1,333,843	\$1,272,203	TOTAL
Interest Rate	2.5% annualized ¹					
Discount Rate	22% ²					
Present Value	\$2,406,826	\$1,148,971	\$804,306	\$602,096	\$470,714	\$5,432,714
Total Investment						\$796,326 ³
SROI Ratio						6.8

¹ Present value is calculated using an annualized interest of 2.5% - the current rate offered for a 5 year GIC over \$500,000.

² A discount rate of 22% is applied to the calculations in order to ensure the social value reported is a lower bound estimate of the true value of Circles.

³ Investment includes monetary support from Correctional Service of Canada, The National Crime Prevention Centre, and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. Volunteer time, valued at \$12 an hour, is included as a social investment of more than \$230,000 – almost 20,000 hours a year.

Achieving Results

Circles of MCCO achieves results by focusing on the diverse needs of every individual who participates in Circles. Staff and volunteers focus on the “Good Lives Model” of setting goals and focusing on the strengths of a person instead of constantly focusing on deficiencies—a practice which can cause a core member to become overwhelmed, frustrated and to give upⁱⁱⁱ.

At Circles core members are able to find safe places to talk about their own humanity and the supports they need in order to manage their behaviour and reduce their risk of reoffending. This is not a linear process but a dynamic progression towards healing and restoration.

Enhanced personal well-being through membership in authentic, mutually responsible and intentional community is a critical component of increasing safety for both the broader community and the core members themselves. An assessment of risk of offense and re-offense always takes into account one’s level of isolation, connection to community, access to social supports, antisocial behaviour, self-management strategies and difficulty cooperating with supervisionⁱⁱⁱ. Circles significantly reduces a number of these risk factors by inviting core members into both

circle relationships and wider, intentional community where they can participate and contribute at their own pace without the risk of being harassed or having to hide who they are. This is where many core members learn the positive, pro-social behaviours necessary to live safely within the community.

Circles further addresses risk levels by supporting and accompanying core members as they navigate their relationships with police and parole officers. Staff also work to connect core members to local services, help to identify and create safe places to plug in to community and encourage core members to become more social. In addition, Circles works in partnership with police officers, correctional officers and other community partners towards the shared goal of community safety.



At Circles I can vent my frustrations and then they confront me with a new and different reality.

- Core Member

Conclusion

This research has shown that for every dollar invested in creating mutually responsible relationships and positive, intentional community, Circles of MCCO creates at least \$6 of social return. Trust, authenticity and the opportunity to engage and develop a wider set of community relationships lead those who participate in Circles to a place where they can be accountable for their actions, manage their behaviour to reduce risk and focus on healthy goals and relationships to create a successful life.

Community safety is a dynamic state of being that requires both proactive and reactive approaches in order to be maintained. When a crime has been committed, community members respond through investigation, arrest and a judicial process—this is not something Circles has set out to change. Instead, the group endeavours to enhance community safety

by proactively responding to individuals who have offended or are at risk of offending sexually. Circles activities are proven to be a safe, healthy and effective response to the diverse needs of individuals who are committed to living safely in the community.

Together the activities of Circles prevent future harm and reduce the number of individuals, families and communities that will experience the trauma of sexual assault. And that is the most important return of all.

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April 2013

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Circles of Support and Accountability of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario is supported by Correctional Service of Canada, the National Crime Prevention Centre and the generosity of private donors.