



# Circles East

No More Victims!

Circles of Support & Accountability  
(Eastern Region)

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## Introduction

**Period Covered:** 31 October 2009 – 4 May 2010

### **Author & brief history of Circles East**

I am Annabel Francis and I was employed by SOVA in October 2009 to be the Project Manager for a Circles of Support & Accountability Project, set up in the East of England and covering six Probation Areas: Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire & Essex. I was employed as a Probation Officer by Thames Valley Probation Area, where I worked for five years. I hold a degree in Criminology, a degree in Community Justice Studies and a Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Probation Studies. During my time as a Probation Officer I managed the cases of several high risk of harm sex offenders.

The concept of Circles was created in Canada. Their laws changed meaning that all sex offenders assessed as high risk had to stay in prison until their sentence end date because the statutory agencies were too worried about managing their risk in the community. However this meant that upon their release there was no support and no risk management in place at all. Circles were the idea of a Mennonite religious leader who formed a supportive group from his community to spend time with a highly feared and fearful released sex offender. This was a grass roots initiative. It was a natural occurrence and when it proved effective, other Circles set themselves up. Eventually other agencies became involved and a National Umbrella Organisation was set up.

The Quakers and the Home Office in the UK held talks about Circles prior to the moral panic about sex offenders, during which the tabloids went head to head with the Government regarding “naming and shaming”. The media appeared to encourage communities to identify and expel sex offenders. The media climate in Canada was similar and therefore there was determination to continue with setting up Circles in the face of this. In 2000 the Home Office agreed to fund two Circles Pilot Projects. In 2010 there are now 12 Circles Projects across the UK. Circles East is the tenth to be set up.

### **Aim of Project**

Circles East is dedicated to reducing the number of victims of sexual harm by working with the perpetrators of abuse. Circles East reinforces the humanity of the offender and supports them in their new lives, whilst holding them to account for the decisions they make.

Circles East is currently funded equally by Hertfordshire, Essex, Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Probation Trusts. These Probation Trusts make up the Eastern Region.

Circles recruit and train volunteers to form a ‘Circle of Support & Accountability’ around a high risk child sexual abuser. A Circle usually contains between 3 and 6 volunteers, with one Core Member (offender). A Circle will meet weekly for a formal meeting and will hold the Core Member to account for their actions during the previous week and encourage them to

continue with positive steps as outlined in their Sex Offender Treatment Programme's Better Lives Plan. Informal meetings will also take place following risk assessments. The purpose of the informal meetings will be to teach the Core Member how to socialise in an appropriate way and build trust with the volunteers. The volunteer's role in these meetings will be to model pro-social behaviour and to challenge unsuitable behaviour or language use by the Core Member. Throughout all meetings the volunteers will note, raise and openly discuss issues which they think may be evidence that the Core Member is planning to reoffend. All volunteers have an obligation pass on such information, with or without the Core Member's permission, to the relevant agencies involved with the Core Member, or the Project Manager.

A Circles motto is 'No More Victims'. If information raised by a Circle leads to the recall of a Core Member, before someone is hurt, then Circle can be proud that they protected the public from such harm. However, primarily the intended outcome is that the Circle will reduce the social isolation and emotional loneliness of the Core Member; known factors in reoffending. The Circle should assist the Core Member in venturing into their own friendships and into their own communities in a way which contributes positively and offer support for the first 12 months of the Core Member's better life.

### **Funding Sources**

Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk Probation Trusts have donated £20000 each, to fund this project for until 31 March 2011.

Hertfordshire Police Service has donated £3000 in April 2010.

### **Staffing**

I am currently the only salaried member of Circles East and I am the Project Manager.

### **Composition of Steering Group**

The Steering Group includes representation from across the Eastern Region and is multi-agency. However, it has been recognised that some areas and/or agencies are not involved so far and this is being rectified. Currently the following sit on the steering group:

Chair—Steve Johnson-Proctor, Chief Executive of Hertfordshire Probation Trust

Vice Chair – Sue Beaumont, Senior Probation Officer for Public Protection, Bedfordshire Probation.

Doug Hook, Contracts Manager, Hertfordshire Probation, Sue Tassell, MAPPA Manager for Hertfordshire, Tony Keen, MAPPA Lay Advisor for Hertfordshire, Phil Jarvis, Sex Offender Treatment Programme Manager for Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, Paul Coombes, Sex Offender Treatment Programme Manager for Essex, Gwyneth Boswell, Professor of Forensic Health Research Unit for the University of East Anglia, David Barlow, Director of Operations for SOVA Southern Region.

## Objectives and Targets

- ✓ To set up at least one Circle in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk by 31 March 2011.
- ✓ To deliver Two Day Circles Volunteer Training once every two months in the Eastern Region.

### Target Dates:

One Circle in each county of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire & Norfolk by July 2010

One Circle in each county of Essex, Cambridgeshire & Suffolk by March 2011.

Previous training completed and an estimation of future training dates:

13 & 14 February 2010 – Essex (insufficient volunteers for a Circle)

9 & 10 April 2010 – Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire

4 & 5 June 2010 – Norfolk

August 2010 – Suffolk

October 2010 – Cambridgeshire

November 2010 – Essex

Initial targets of 3 Circles by 31 January 2010 and another 3 Circles by March 2010 were retracted. These were changed as the project Manager was in post in October 2009 rather than the supposed April 2009.

## **Achievement of Period**

### **Summary of achievements**

To date Circles East has the foundations of three Circles set up, two in Hertfordshire and one in Bedfordshire. An additional Circle has been set up due to an overwhelming interest in their project following the Two Day Circles Volunteer Training. These Circles will be officially running following their disclosure meetings, currently being arranged.

Circles East currently has 35 volunteers. 20 of whom have completed the Two Day Volunteer Training.

Two Day Circles Volunteer training has been booked for 4 & 5 June 2010 in Norwich, Norfolk. I have received 5 applications forms from volunteers wishing to attend this training. I have spoken with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation volunteers, who are currently running a Circle in Norwich. 3 of them wish to join a new Circle in June 2010, and all of them are keen to attend the training in order for prospective volunteers to ask them questions about their experiences in Circles.

# Volunteers

## Work and Processes

### Selection of volunteers

1. Complete Application Form
2. Telephone interview with Project Manager
3. Receive two satisfactory references
4. Attend two day training
5. Receive satisfactory enhanced CRB
6. One to one interview with Project Manager
7. Send letter inviting someone to be a volunteer

### Volunteer Responsibilities

- To work within SOVA/Circles UK/National Probation Service arrangements.
- To commit to a 12 month volunteering period
- To provide support, both emotional & practical to the Core Member.
- To work within the SOVA/Circles UK Code of Conduct.
- To attend the two day Sex Offender Awareness Training.
- Be willing to travel locally (expenses reimbursed).

### Volunteer Specification

- Be over 21 years of age.
- Be committed.
- Demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills, a non judgemental attitude and adopt a constructive approach at all times.
- To be empathic.
- To hold a belief in restorative justice.
- To be able to manage a problem.
- Be able to lead a balanced lifestyle
- To be able to maintain strong boundaries.
- To respect the confidentiality of the Core Member and other volunteers.
- Not to express any views or use any language which is racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory. To not be aggressive or violent at any time.
- To work as part of a team.
- An ability to accept guidance and support from the Circles Co-ordinator and other SOVA Circles East staff.

### Recruitment/Advertising

- **Hertfordshire**

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings

Meet with Hitchin Christian Centre

Contact all SOVA inactive volunteers with information about Circles East

Contact Women's Link – lesbian forum  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Advertise through NARPO

- [Bedfordshire](#)

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings  
Make contact with the head of Social Sciences at Bedfordshire University  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Make contact with the Council for Racial Equality for advice on how to promote this volunteering opportunity to BME groups.  
Contact Friends Together GLBT social group.  
Advertise through NARPO

- [Essex](#)

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings  
Contact all SOVA inactive volunteers with information about Circles East  
Make contact with the head of sociology at Essex University  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Advertise through NARPO

- [Norfolk](#)

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings  
Contact all SOVA inactive volunteers with information about Circles East  
Make contact with Buddhist Centre  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Sent letter to Fr James Walsh at Norfolk Churches Together  
Sent letter & leaflets to Norwich Synagogue  
Contact Norwich & Norfolk Race Equality Council for advice on how to diversity our volunteer base.  
Advertise through NARPO

- [Suffolk](#)

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Advertise through NARPO

- [Cambridgeshire](#)

Make contact with local Quaker Houses regarding attending Area Meetings  
Advertise through all Volunteer Centres  
Advertise through NARPO  
Criminal Record Check  
Potential volunteers are required to have been honest at the initial stage of application about any previous convictions. Any failure to disclose any offence

prior to the CRB check being completed will render them unsuitable as a Circles volunteer.

Any convictions or intelligence/allegations for sexual offences will render the volunteer unsuitable.

Any offences which have lead to sentences of custody or other Court Order will need to be discussed one to one prior to the training.

### Volunteer Training

No formal qualifications are required.

The potential Circles East volunteers will attend a two day training programme, totalling 16 hours (these can be run mid week or on weekends.)

The course provides an overview of:

- How abusers access their victims
- Treatment programmes
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
- Media and public attitudes
- What is a Circle?
- Roles and responsibilities
- Boundaries and well-being

### **How Volunteers are supervised**

It is the design of a Circle that all of the circle members will 'peer support' and assist each other through their time together in a Circle. The venues booked for Circles meetings will always be booked half an hour before the start of a meeting and a half an hour afterward for the volunteers to discuss their feelings and through with other Circle volunteers without the Core Member being present. In addition the Project Manager will contact each volunteer once every three months and have formal supervision.

Volunteers will be invited to specialised training as and when it is arranged in their area. This training may include Female Sex Offender Training, Motivational Interviewing Techniques and Pro-social Modelling Training.

### **Statistics and Performance**

Volunteer data:

- 33 volunteers
- 33 volunteers interviewed
- 20 volunteers completed two day Circles volunteer training
- 18 volunteers accepted to be Circles volunteers

Volunteer diversity:

- gender: 8 male, 25 female
- age: 14 under 30 years, 7 between 30-50 years, 12 over 50 years
- ethnicity: Norwegian 1, Chinese 2, White British 23, Black British 2, Greek Cypriot 2, British Indian 2, White Irish 1.
- employment status: p/t employed 6, unemployed 4, student 10, retired 8, f/t employed 5.

It has been my experience that Circles volunteer become involved for the following reasons:

1. Excellent experience of working with high risk offenders which is likely to benefit CV and/or job application forms for the Police, Probation Social Services, Prisons, Psychology posts etc.
2. The desire to protect the public from further sexual harm.
3. A regret at the isolation and suffering of sex offenders.
4. A personal encounter with sexual abuse and the desire to understand better what happened and start to explore why it happened.

### **Case Studies**

There are no Circles up and running at this time, however feedback from training events has been positive:

*“The delivery of training was excellent”* NV – attended Herts. & Beds training.  
*“Good knowledge from the facilitators who were able to answer any question”*  
– CM attended the Herts. & Beds training.

*“The role play was very helpful, it gave an insight into working with offenders”*  
NV – attended Herts. & Beds training.

*“I didn’t think the training would teach me anything new, but I was completely wrong. It opened my eyes to the extent of abuse, female abusers and how we need to understand these offenders”* – NB attended Essex training.

There are no photos from this project yet. Due to the sensitive nature of the work Circles East does, it may never be a suitable way to promote our work.

## Beneficiaries

### Work and Processes

Ideally the Core Member will meet at least two of the following criteria, however all referrals will be considered.

- ✓ Be MAPPA Level 2 or 3.
- ✓ Pose a high or very high risk of serious harm to children (on OASys)
- ✓ High or very high on Risk Matrix 2000
- ✓ Be socially isolated or emotionally lonely
- ✓ Be convicted of a contact sex offence against a child (previous conviction or index offence)

The Core Member will have to volunteer for this scheme and they should display motivation to change and a desire to create no more victims.

The Probation Officer completes a referral form and this is sent to the Project Manager with all relevant paperwork such as pre-sentence reports, Offender Assessment Systems and RM2000 assessments.

The Offender Manager meets with the volunteers of a Circle and makes full disclosure regarding the Core Member. The Offender Manager may be required to attend Circle review meetings which suitable.

The large number of referrals has had to be stemmed due limited resources. Currently this project only requires two or three referrals from each Probation Trust.

## Project Development

### List of people/agencies liaised with:

All East of England Probation Areas  
SOVA in Norfolk, Essex & Bedfordshire  
All Volunteers Centres in East of England  
National Association of Retired Police Officers in East of England  
Bedfordshire University  
University of Essex  
Quaker Area Meetings  
Police Public Protection Units in Hertfordshire, Norfolk & Bedfordshire  
All Women's Institutes in East of England  
Circles UK  
HMP Bure

### Feedback from partnership agencies & professionals

*"From a treatment provider perspective Circles East has been a most welcome development. It will provide a framework in which some of the valuable work undertaken in a treatment programme can be carried forward in a very real sense into the core member's life in the community. I am convinced that this will help create safer communities for the future"*

– Phil Jarvis, Sex Offender Treatment Programme Manager for Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire & Cambridgeshire.

*"Circles of Support & Accountability is a most powerful method of promoting social inclusion, community responsibility and public protection"*

– Andrew Bates, Forensic Psychologist.

*"It's been great to be involved with the Circles East steering group. The commitment of members is clear for all to see, the coordinator, Annabel Francis, has done wonders in managing such a vast area, engaging local volunteer and community groups as well as key agencies, like police and probation. We are all delighted that our first Circles will be starting in Herts. and Beds shortly. These will provide significant additional support and accountability for the offenders involved and can only help to improve community safety and confidence."*

- Steve Johnson-Proctor, Director of Operations [Hertfordshire Probation Trust] & Chair of the Circles East Steering Group.

*In awarding the Circles of Support and Accountability contract to SOVA, it is a further opportunity for SOVA to involve more members of the public in supporting offenders as they resettlement into the community. Setting up and overseeing Circles is a specialist area of work, requiring great skill, insight and sensitivity - it is a pleasure seeing new Circles being established by Annabel Francis in the region."*

– Doug Hook, Partnerships and Commissioning Manager for Hertfordshire Probation Trust.

## Objectives and Targets for Next Year

April 2010 – April 2011

- ✓ Secure further funding for Circles East
- ✓ Continue to run training frequently
- ✓ Set up another round of Circles in each of the Counties so they can boast two each.

## Conclusion

This initial seven months has been a really exciting time. The project already feels as though it is snow-balling in terms of volunteer interest, and we are still only known to three out of the six counties we cover! It is my greatest hope that further funding is secured in order to realise a three to five year vision of communities taking responsibility for the risky people who are released everyday into our lives. With support, positivity and bravery we can achieve our goal of **No More Victims**.