UK National Evaluation of Big Lottery Funded Circles of Support and Accountability

Evaluation Report: March 2020

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Context of Report

This report presents selected results of the national evaluation of 188 Big Lottery (BL) funded Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles). All data received up to 01 February 2020 that has been processed and inputted are included in the present report. This report focuses on addressing the evaluation needs of the Big Lottery. Further findings will be presented in additional research outputs once all Circles have completed in August 2020.

Aims of the Evaluation

The aims of the evaluation were:

- To understand the impact and success of Circles in risk management and re-integration of individuals convicted of a sexual offence released into the community, through a BL funded Circle.
- To explore putative changes in knowledge and experience of Circle volunteers during their Circle
- To ensure the required outcomes of the BL funding are addressed, where these are research/evaluation related.
- To ensure robust evaluation data are analysed and disseminated, contributing to the evidence base for Circles and to inform future funding bids.

This evaluation assesses and documents the impact of the 188 BL funded Circles. The evaluation contributes through its process evaluation to 'best practice' in delivering Circles. The evaluation comprised four main studies, which together capture and report a range of key deliverables for Circles.

Executive Summary

This report details the results of four studies, which together constitute the main part of the national evaluation of the BL funded Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles).

This report examines whether there are changes in the risk of sexual reoffending by Core Members, whether Core Members involved in Circles benefitted in terms of their emotional wellbeing, and in practical terms of stable improvements in accommodation, employment or unpaid work, being involved in hobbies (and purposeful activities) and more social interactions and relationships. The report also provides some analysis of the differences between Circles that complete successfully and those that do not. Finally, this report explores any benefits to the volunteers (in terms of gaining transferable skills) from being involved in Circles training and the Circles themselves.

The data set out in this report includes all cleaned and processed data available as at 1 February 2020. Additional data are continually being added to the complex datasets and will be reported in the PhD associated with this evaluation. There have been some time lags in commencing the 188 BL funded Circles of Support and Accountability. The reasons for the delays in commencing all 188 Circles include local variations in securing access to referrals, recruiting volunteers and finding venues to host Circles meetings. This was particularly the case for those regions where Circles had never been delivered before. This evaluation report consequently includes data from the majority of BL funded Circles; a brief final update will be provided when > 95% of Circles have completed. This is estimated as being September 2020.

Study one reports changes in Dynamic Risk Review scores for Core Members throughout the duration of Circles. Impressively, Core Members demonstrated an 18% reduction in dynamic risk scores over the course of their Circles. Analysis of reintegration (protective) factors also demonstrated significant improvements across a range of variables, including the number of stable, emotional relationships, employment and purposeful activities and hobbies.

Study two examined putative changes in the emotional wellbeing of Core Members over time. Emotional wellbeing is a protective factor that contributes to desistance from sexual offending, making it a crucial factor to analyse in the evaluation. The results demonstrated that, at the commencement of a Circles, Core Members had significantly poorer emotional wellbeing than the average person. However, emotional wellbeing of Core Members improved significantly throughout the duration of Circles. The data demonstrate an 18% increase in wellbeing scores, with 67% of the Core Members demonstrating significant improvements in wellbeing by the end of their Circles. These results provide support for the positive impact of Circles on Core Members wellbeing.

Circles may end for a variety of reasons: ending may be planned or unplanned, they may result in further contact between the Core Member and the criminal justice system, they may be a result of volunteer or Core Member dropout, or because of a Core Member no longer feeling the need for additional support and/or not having the time to meet volunteers as they have gained employment. End of Circle Reports to date (n=87) demonstrated that 59% of all completions ended in successful

reintegration of the Core Member with a planned ending; 18% resulted in Core Member drop out; 7% resulted in Core Member recall; 13% resulted in Core Member re-arrest and; 3% of Circles ended due to volunteer dropout. The relatively high number of unsuccessful outcomes currently indicated is undoubtedly a reflection of the shorter timescales involved in 'adverse' Circles endings. The full dataset will be available in August 2020 and it is anticipated to highlight a much smaller proportion of Circles with unsuccessful endings. In terms of reported impact of Circles on the Core Member, 52% of Core Members had increases in confidence, 45% had increases in self-esteem, 32% felt more positive about life and 56% were less isolated than before the Circles. In study 3b, a number of case studies are presented to offer a richer picture of how Circles benefit service users. These findings are important since social isolation is associated with a greater risk of sexual reoffending, whilst having hope, feeling more positive about one's future and a sense of agency (reflected through a great self-confidence) can act as protective factors against recidivism (see De Vries Robbé, Mann, Maruna, & Thornton, 2015).

The number of volunteers recruited and trained by the Providers comprised 778 volunteers as at 1 February 2020. The total number of hours committed by volunteers to BL Circles were 35,976 (this includes direct and indirect time contributed, including attending volunteer induction training, which was mandatory for all Circles volunteers). This is a substantive number of people and volunteer hours invested in Circles and demonstrates the possibility of Circles having a wider impact for local citizens and communities in terms of increasing local skills and employability. In addition, the findings from comparisons of pre- and post-training questionnaires indicate that Circles volunteer training meets its intended aims. There were disappointingly few questionnaires completed by volunteers post-Circle, with challenges collecting non-anonymised data 12 months after the initial questionnaire (exacerbated by changes to data protection regulations in the middle of data collection). These challenges should be addressed in future evaluations to ensure a rich dataset that can reflect changes in individuals over the course of volunteering on a Circle.

This report provides an overview of evaluation results for the Big Lottery, as specified by the funder and Circles UK.

Introduction

The basis of the Circles model was initially established in Canada in 1994, in response to community concerns over the imminent release of a high-risk individual with a conviction for a sexual offence within a small community (see Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo & Cortoni, 2007). The individual, Charlie Taylor, was due to be released following the completion of a seven-year custodial sentence for his offence. Media reporting surrounding Charlie's release led to a high level of fear and panic in the community, with community demands for twenty-four-hour surveillance. Despite this level of community fear, there was no support from criminal justice agencies in place to assist Charlie's reintegration into the community. To reduce Charlie's risk and provide some form of support, Charlie's prison psychologist contacted the Reverend Harry Nigh, a pastor at a local congregation in Charlie's hometown, where he was due to be released. Reverend Nigh agreed, along with some of his congregation, to support Charlie. Together they developed what is now termed a Circle of Support and Accountability (Circles; Wilson et al., 2007). Over time, and with the support of his Circles, Charlie continued to live an offence-free life for eleven years and six months until his death on Christmas day, 2005 (Wilson et al., 2007).

Shortly after the release of Charlie, another high-risk individual with convictions for sexual offences, Wray Budreo, was due to be released from prison. Reverend Hugh Kirkegaard, a community corrections chaplain, who was aware of the early success Reverend Nigh had achieved with Charlie, thought it would be worth trying the same intervention with Wray. Reverend Kirkegaard brought together members of an Anglican congregation to support Wray in the community. This second support circle was further supported by a detective from the Toronto police department. Detective Wendy Leaver initially became involved through fear of Wray's risk, and concerns over the congregation's inexperience to manage and support such a high-risk individual as Wray. However, over time, Detective Leaver became increasingly supportive of the intervention and its subsequent success (Wilson, McWhinnie & Wilson, 2008). Like Charlie, Wray lived his life offence-free for almost thirteen years prior to his death in 2007 (Wilson et al., 2008). Following the initial success of these two interventions, Reverend Kirkegaard and a group of supporters approached the Solicitor General in Canada to seek funding for developing this support initiative further. Although the government held no legal responsibility for prison leavers, the Solicitor General was convinced of the intervention and provided initial funding for the development of the project. The project came to be known as Circles of Support and Accountability and over time, spread across Canadian communities and further afield into American cities and beyond.

Circles in the UK

In 2000, Canadian innovators of Circles travelled to the United Kingdom to meet with the Quaker Society, who were interested in hearing about how Circles worked and exploring how Circles could potentially be established in the United Kingdom. Throughout the consultation period, meetings were held with wider agencies and stakeholders, all of whom were interested in the potential to support individuals convicted of sexual offences leaving prison. Interested parties included the Home Office, Her Majesty's Prison Service, treatment providers and the Lucy Faithful Foundation

(Bates et al., 2013). The Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) that are part of the UK's monitoring system for people who have committed serious violent and/or sexual offences, required that implementation of the Circles model in the United Kingdom be based within a grounded theoretical framework, suitable for the innovative risk management process (Saunders & Wilson, 2003), along with evidence that the intervention would be effective and worthwhile (Bates et al., 2013).

In 2001, two pilot project Providers (Lucy Faithful Foundation and Hampshire and Thames Valley) were funded by the UK Home Office over a three-year period. Hampshire and Thames Valley later merged, and shortly after expanded to include Kent, whereby they became known as Circles South East (Bates et al., 2013). The initial success of the pilot Providers led to the development of further providers across the UK. In June 2008, the UK government founded the charity Circles UK, which is the umbrella organisation under which all UK Circles' Providers are monitored and quality assured (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2016). In 2019, Circles were delivered in 12 Providers across England and Wales (http://www.circles-uk.org.uk). Circles UK sees Circles as closely aligned to the criminal justice service, with an outer circle (see figure 1) comprising individuals from MAPPA, and with Core Members continuing to be monitored by probation (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2016).

Figure 1 Graphic representation of Circles model (from Bates, Williams, Wilson & Wilson, 2013).

The Effectiveness of Circles

The earliest Circles research in the United Kingdom was carried out following the development of the two pilot projects. Bates et al. (2012) carried out a descriptive study using the case files of the first 60 Circles, run in Hampshire and Thames Valley. The study found that 70% of Core Members showed improvements in emotional wellbeing; 61% developed pro-social attitudes and behaviours because of participating in a Circle; 50% had improved work and/or education prospects, whilst another 50% improved their social network. Furthermore, Circle discussions which focused upon offences were found to induce more victim empathy, better problem-solving tactics, and improved social skills of Core Members.

Bates et al. (2012) presented three case studies to illustrate the effectiveness of the Circle intervention. The first case study described a Core Member who had been involved in a Circle which had ended because the Circle had achieved its aims. However, the Core Member went on to display risky behavior and later admitted to grooming a child with the intention of sexually abusing the child in the future. The Core Member was placed on another Circle for which success was reported. It could be argued that the success of the second Circle has been used to mask the failure of the first. If the first Circle had succeeded in its aims; assuming one of which was to prevent the risk of reoffence, the Core Member would not have presented with such risky behaviour. However, the honesty the Core Member presented in discussing his behaviour with his first Circle may be viewed as an achievement. Through the supportive function of Circles, the Core Member felt able to discuss his behaviour and admit to his prior intentions. Without the support of the Circle, it is likely that the Core Member may have gone on to commit a contact offence, thus the Circle evidently adverted an escalation to a contact offence, despite reoffending in the form of grooming a child. This example illustrates how Circle outcomes can be quite complex and demonstrate that when evaluating the success of Circles, transparency is vital. Prior research into Circles explored Core Members' experiences and identified the meaning of success to Core Members (Thomas, Thompson & Karstedt, 2014). Core Members noted improvements in their confidence, greater stability in life and a more future-focused outlook (Thomas et al, 2014).

In 2008, the Minnesota department of corrections instigated a preliminary evaluation of Circles. Between 2008 and 2011, 62 individuals were selected for inclusion in a randomised control trial (RCT) to evaluate the Minnesota project. Duwe (2012) was able to ethically randomise 62 participants due to the number of potential Core Members greatly outnumbering the number of volunteers available (that is, not every potential Core Member could be offered a Circle). Results of the study indicated that the Circles group had lower rates of recidivism than those in the matched-control group for the five measures examined; these measures included: (i) re-arrest, (ii) reconviction, (iii) reincarceration for a new offence, (iv) reincarceration for a technical violation (licence breach) and (v) either reincarceration for a technical violation (licence breach) or for a new offence . However, the only statistically significant difference between the two groups was re-arrest rates, with one individual in the control group being arrested for a new sexual offence. The author suggested that the small sample size may have contributed to the non-significant results and argued

for further RCTs to be carried out upon larger cohorts, with lengthier follow up periods (Duwe, 2012).

Höing, Vogelvang and Bogaerts (2015) researched the desistance process of Core Members and their experiences of Circles. The research consisted of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with seventeen Core Members and twenty-nine professionals. Core Members were interviewed at the beginning of their Circle and again at six and twelve months follow up stages. In addition to interviews, the researchers carried out a quantitative analysis using several scales relating to desistance theory and self-regulation theory (Höing, Vogelvang & Bogaerts, 2015). Results of the qualitative research indicated that Core Members made improvements in self-reflection, openness and assertiveness after six months in a Circle. Whilst twelve months into a Circle, Core Members reported marked improvements in their problem-solving skills as a direct result from participating in Circles. Furthermore, Core Members continued to report improvements in their interpersonal skills which were associated with improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence. Because of their newly developed social skills, some Core Members were able to increase their social networks, outside that of the Circle (Höing, Vogelvang & Bogaerts, 2015). The quantitative component of the research reported positive changes to a significant level in emotion regulation and internal locus of control; $p<.05$. Furthermore, whilst most variables evaluated showed improvements, only the variables of (self-esteem; $p=.06$) and (self-soothing; $p=.06$) approached significance (ibid).

In Vermont, USA, Fox (2016) carried out semi-structured interviews with twenty Core Members, their respective Circle volunteers and Circle coordinators to evaluate the process of desistance. Fox (2016) asserted that the Core Members perceived the most successful Circles to be those in which the volunteers were more involved with them. Such successful Circles were perceived by the Core Members as having a stronger focus on support rather than accountability, allowing for the Core Member to feel supported as an equal. It could be argued that the Core Member does not need reminding of their accountability within the Circle. If Circles is to be a strengths-based approach, the needs of the Core Member must be prioritised. Höing et al. (2013) identified the importance of a positive group climate and balanced execution of Circle functions within their intervention model.

At present there is limited qualitative research on Core Members of Circles based in the UK and the literature would benefit from further input. One of the few qualitative studies was completed as part of a social action fund evaluation. In this research, McCartan (2016) carried out in-depth interviews with 19 Core Members, 15 stakeholders, and 10 volunteers. McCartan (2016) reported that all participants felt Circles made a positive impact upon Core Member integration and management. All participants viewed volunteers as an extra set of eyes and ears, used to increase surveillance of Core Member behaviour in the community. Whilst all participants agreed on this, there were differences in how the participant group viewed the purpose of surveillance. Core Members viewed volunteers in a supportive capacity, as did stakeholders. Stakeholders viewed accountability as the role and responsibility of the professionals toward Core Members and not something for the volunteers to be involved with, due to their lack of experience and training. Volunteers held different views and saw themselves as responsible for delivering both support and

accountability functions (McCartan, 2016). The research reported the difficulties the volunteers faced when attempting to encourage Core Members to engage in discussions which focussed around accountability. Whilst the Core Members were happy to be supported in many areas of their life, they were less forthcoming when faced with topics relating to their risk and potential for reoffending. Volunteers described themselves as pro-social role models and viewed the Circle as a safe place in which the Core Member is free to discuss their views openly and without persecution (McCartan, 2016). In this sense, volunteers view the discussion of risk as a supportive function. However, regardless of volunteer intent, it is the Core Members perception of such discussions which influence the level of success achieved. As noted previously, the balance between support and accountability is a key contributor to success in Circles (Höing et al., 2013).

In terms of Core Member views, McCartan (2016) reported that Core Members believed that participation in a Circles was beneficial for several reasons such as providing a social circle and emotional support. Core Members viewed the Circle as being different from other criminal justice interventions and services, often positioning the Circle as a midway point between the public and the criminal justice service. Furthermore, Core Members noted the importance of the Circles being voluntary, which the Core Members felt indicated the positive impact the Circle had upon them, because of their attendance. The sample of (n=19) Core Members interviewed all had planned endings, with all Core Members in the sample reporting positive experiences of Circles. McCartan's research included a sample of (n=10) Core Members with unplanned endings due to: recall (n=4) and breach of licence (n=6). Furthermore, two of the Core Members with unplanned endings were arrested. It is unfortunate that these Core Members were not interviewed, as it would be beneficial to carry out research with individuals who leave Circles earlier than planned. Such research would provide a balanced view of Circles from the perspective of Core Members with less successful experiences of Circles. Adverse Circle outcomes is an area which has not yet been investigated. Yet, it is an area which may provide opportunities to understand what leads to adverse outcomes. Previous research has reported upon Core Member drop-out because of a strong focus upon accountability and lack of volunteer support (Höing, Bogaerts & Vogelvang, 2015; Fox, 2016). Whilst these findings were a result of research carried out in countries other than the UK, it is likely that such explanations are universal. However, further research in the context of the UK is required to confirm this. Clarke, Warwick and Völlm (2017) argued that unplanned endings do not necessarily imply an adverse outcome, although they also support the need for further research to contextualise unplanned endings.

Duwe (2018) built upon the preliminary findings of the RCT completed in 2012. The later study comprised of 100 Core Members, inclusive of the original 62 included in the 2012 evaluation. As per the 2012 evaluation, the author was able to ethically randomise the selection of Core Members due to limited volunteer resources. The extended evaluation yielded positive results for Minnesota Circles (MnCOSA) with Core Members demonstrating lower rates of recidivism for six measures in comparison to the control group. The control group had seven convictions for new sexual offences compared to one MnCOSA participant and the control group had more reconvictions than MnCOSA. In terms of recidivism impact, Cox regression models indicated that MnCOSA participants presented with lower hazard ratings than the control group to a statistically significant level for rearrests,

reconvictions, resentences and revocations. Whilst results also indicated that MnCOSA lowered the risk of sexual offending by 88% (Duwe, 2018).

The extended evaluation of MnCOSA also built upon a previous cost-benefit analysis completed in 2012. Results indicated that, over an eight-year period, MnCOSA produced an economic benefit of approximately US$2,046,163, (approximately US$40,923 or approximately 31k UK pounds per participant).

The evidence to date demonstrates that not only are Circles effective in reducing sexual recidivism and protecting the public, but they are also cost effective. The impressive findings from the robust randomised control trial was only possible, however, as there was an ethically viable means of conducting the trial – brought about by a lack of volunteers so that some potential Core Members who wanted a Circle needed to be put on the waiting list since there were not sufficient volunteers to deliver all the Circles that were required. Additional challenges with Circles were highlighted by Duwe (2018) as being centred on the public's perception of individuals with prior convictions of sexual offences. The public do not all agree with the Circles principle of 'no one is disposable', however much they believe in the first Circles principle of 'no more victims'.

Furthermore, while there is robust evidence that Circles reduce sexual recidivism, it is still important – as Duwe (2018) has stated, that future research should explore instances when Circles are not successful in a bid to determine whether Circles can be implemented even more effectively. Researchers have called for exploration into the differing causes that may lead to unsuccessful Circles (Höing, Vogelvang & Bogaerts, 2015). Indeed, Clarke, Brown and Völlm (2015) have argued that Circles effectiveness can only be evaluated through the inclusion of Circle non-completers. Clarke, Warwick and Völlm (2017) have also argued that unplanned endings do not necessarily indicate the intervention has been unsuccessful, although they also support the need for further research to contextualise unplanned endings, and to learn from them in order to make Circles even more effective for both Core Members and the public.

Study 1: Evaluating changes in dynamic risk and protective (reintegration) factors for Core Members

Aims

1. Highlight changes over time for risk-related items in the Dynamic Risk Review
2. Outline 'normal' trajectories of Dynamic Risk Review scores (baseline and end points)
3. Incorporate advanced analysis of data to maximise usefulness of the Dynamic Risk Review in predicting less effective Circles /a red flag incident
    - Report on the re-integration of Core Members (in paid or voluntary work; stable emotional relationships outside Circles; engaging in appropriate activities or hobbies; with stable and suitable accommodation)

Method

Materials

The Dynamic Risk Review (DRR) is a psychometric measure based on the Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN; Thornton, 2002) and was developed specifically for use with Core Members of Circles. The DRR was not designed to predict risk, but like the SARN, has been used as a means of considering treatment need. The DRR is completed by the Circles coordinator and volunteers; it assesses Core Members' dynamic risk throughout the term of the Circles in the following domains: sexual interests, offence related attitudes, relationships and self-management. The DRR assesses dynamic risk using seventeen questions. Questions 1-7 and 9-15 use a seven-point Likert scale. Question 8 reports on Core Members stable emotional relationships, outside of the Circles and is scored on a four-point scale (no one, 1 person, 2 people, 3 or more). Question 8 scores were aligned with the 7-point Likert scale for analysis: (no one equates to a score of 0; 1 person equates to a score of 1 or 2; 2 people as 3 or 4 and 3 or more as 5 or 6). The DRR also includes some items about protective factors such as employment, stable emotional relationships and purposeful activity. The DRR was designed to be carried out at three monthly intervals throughout the term of the Circles.

Procedure

Dynamic Risk Review (DRR) data were collected every three months for each BL Circles. Completed DRRs were collated by Circles UK on an excel spreadsheet and this dataset was made available to the evaluation team. Table 1 details the data received as at 1 December 2019.

Table 1. Data Summary

Project Area	Number of Circles Started	Baseline Data Received
SLF: Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	25	27
Y&H Circles/Re:shape : Lincolnshire	13	18
SOVA: Merseyside	27	23
CROPT/Re:shape: Lancashire	13	9
Circles South East: London	88	72
Circles South East: Northamptonshire	17	13

Total	**183**	**162**

Ethics

University and HMPPS ethical approval were received for all elements of this study.

Sample

The sample for analysis of DRR changes over time comprised n=59. The sample for the data analysing the items relating to the reintegration of Core Members comprised n=61 (data were not available for 2 participants as that part of the DRR had not been completed).

Results

The results below comprise: (i) an analysis of potential changes in DRR scores over time for Core Members; (ii) the same analysis split by Circles that ended successfully and those that did not end successfully; (iii) changes in protective factors for Core Members throughout the duration of Circles.

Changes in Dynamic Risk Review scores of Core Members over time

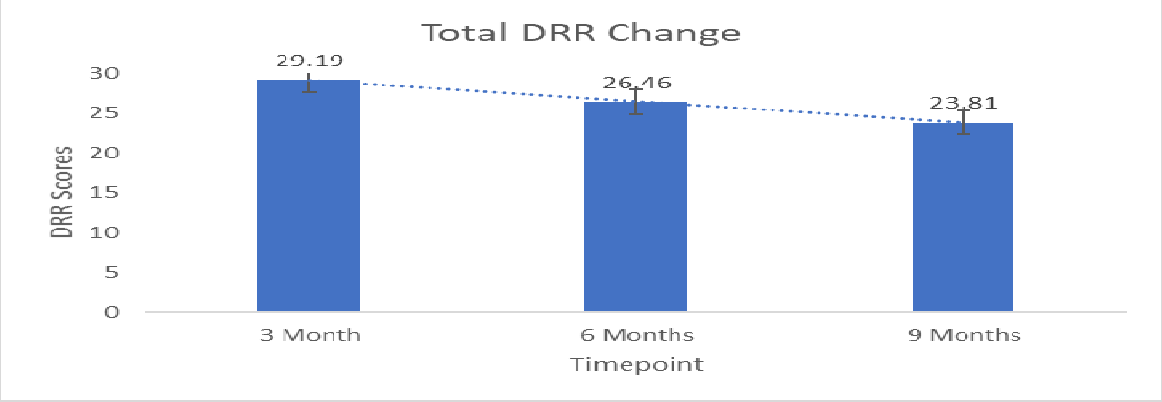
A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare DRR scores at three months, six months and nine months on a Circles. The means and standard deviations are presented in table 2, highlighting typical 'start' and 'end' points for DRR scores.

Table 2. Changes in mean DRR scores for n=59 Core Members

Time point	*n*	Mean	Standard Deviation
3 Months	59	29.19	11.66
6 Months	59	26.46	12.71
9 Months	59	23.81	13.74

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference in DRR scores over time ($F(2,116)=8.19$, $p=.001$). Figure 2 demonstrates changes in DRR scores over time, which equates to a 18% reduction in DRR scores overall. The results indicated a statistically significant reduction in DRR scores over time.

Figure 2. Changes in DRR scores over time for Core Members (n=59)



Paired t tests were conducted to explore the differences in DRR scores between the three time-points (3 months, 6 months and 9 months into Circles). The results indicated there were significant reductions in mean DRR scores between three months (Mean=30, SD=11.72) and six months (Mean=27.73, SD=12.36), t(74)=2.09, n=75, p=.04; six months (Mean=26.17, SD=12.80) and nine months (Mean=23.53, SD=13.79), t(59)=2.27, n=60, p=.02 and; three months (Mean=30, SD=11.72) and nine months (Mean=23.53, SD=13.79), t(59)=3.45, n=60, p=.001.

Changes in DRR scores over time: successful outcomes

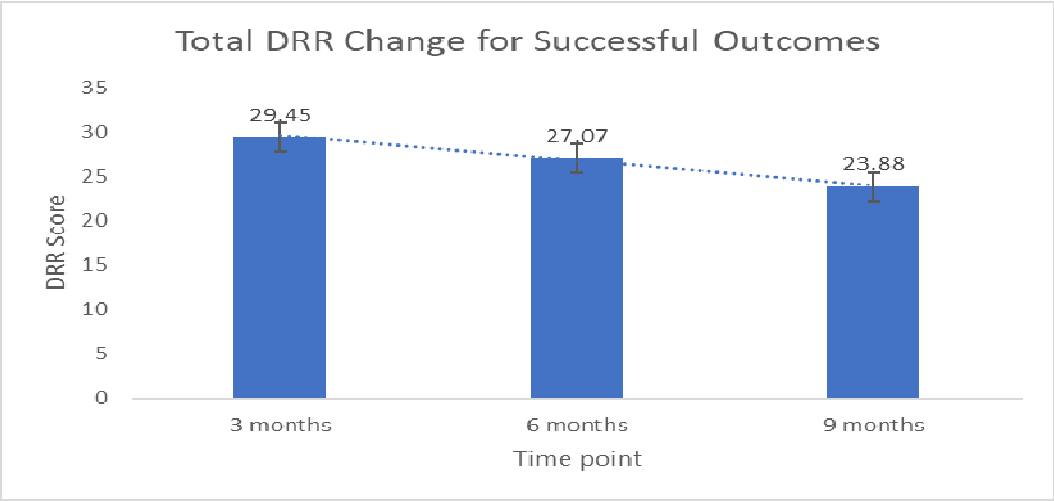
Data were split by (i) successful and (ii) unsuccessful outcomes (for those Circles that did not complete the full duration). A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare DRR scores at three months, six months and nine months on Circles with a successful outcome. The means and standard deviations of DRR scores are presented in the table below.

Table 3 Changes in mean DRR Scores for n=42 successful outcomes

Time point	*N*	Mean	Standard Deviation
3 Month	42	29.45	11.20
6 Months	42	27.07	11.73
9 Months	42	23.88	11.94

The repeated-measures ANOVA indicated there were significant differences in DRR scores for successful outcomes over time F(2,82)=5.68, p=.008. Figure 3 shows the changes in DRR scores over time for Circles where there was a successful outcome; the data demonstrate a 19% reduction in DRR scores overall.

Figure 3 Mean Change in DRR Scores for Successful Outcomes



Paired t tests were conducted to explore the differences in DRR scores between the three time-points (3 months, 6 months and 9 months into Circles) of successful outcomes. The results indicated there were no significant differences in DRR scores between three months (Mean=30.08, SD=11.89) and six months (Mean=27.65, SD=11.73, n=48). There were significant reductions in DRR scores

between six months (Mean=27.07, SD=23.88) and nine months (Mean=23.88, SD=11.94), t(41)=2.05, n=42, p=.046, and three months (Mean=30.09, SD=11.84) and nine months (Mean=24.47, SD=12.40), t(42)=2.91, n=43, p=.006. These results indicate that Core Members' dynamic risk, as measured by the DRR, is reduced after six months involvement in Circles, and reduces further after nine months involvement in Circles.

Changes in DRR scores over time: unsuccessful outcomes (for those Circles that did not complete the full duration)

An analysis of potential differences between two time points (3 months and 6 months) for Circles where there was an unsuccessful outcome was conducted using a paired samples t test. The means and standard deviations of DRR scores for Core Members whose Circles had unsuccessful outcomes are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Changes in mean DRR scores for Circles with unsuccessful outcomes (matched pairs sample)

Time point	*N*	Mean	Standard Deviation
3 Month	5	32.20	10.25
6 Months	5	29.60	10.64

The paired samples t test indicated there were no significant differences between DRR scores between three months (Mean=32.20, SD=10.25) and six months (Mean=29.60, SD=10.64) on a Circle for unsuccessful outcomes. A larger sample size of Circles with unsuccessful outcomes may result in more meaningful results. It is also possible that the presence of non-significant results indicates that risk was not elevated over time within unsuccessful outcomes and instead other factors may influence unsuccessful outcomes, but the sample size is too small to draw robust conclusions from this data.

Reintegration of Core Members

Stable emotional relationships

To measure the number of Core Members with stable emotional relationships (including friendships), outside of the Circle, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare scores at three months, six months and nine months. The means and standard deviations are presented in the table below.

Table 5: Changes in mean DRR scores (stable emotional relationships) for Core Members (n=61)

Time point	*N*	Mean	Standard Deviation
3 Months	61	2.92	2.26
6 Months	61	3.57	2.25
9 Months	61	3.70	2.18

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference in relationship scores over time F(2,120)=6.18, p=.003. Figure 4 shows the changes in relationship scores over time, which

equates to a 27% increase in the number of Core Members with stable emotional relationships outside of the Circles.

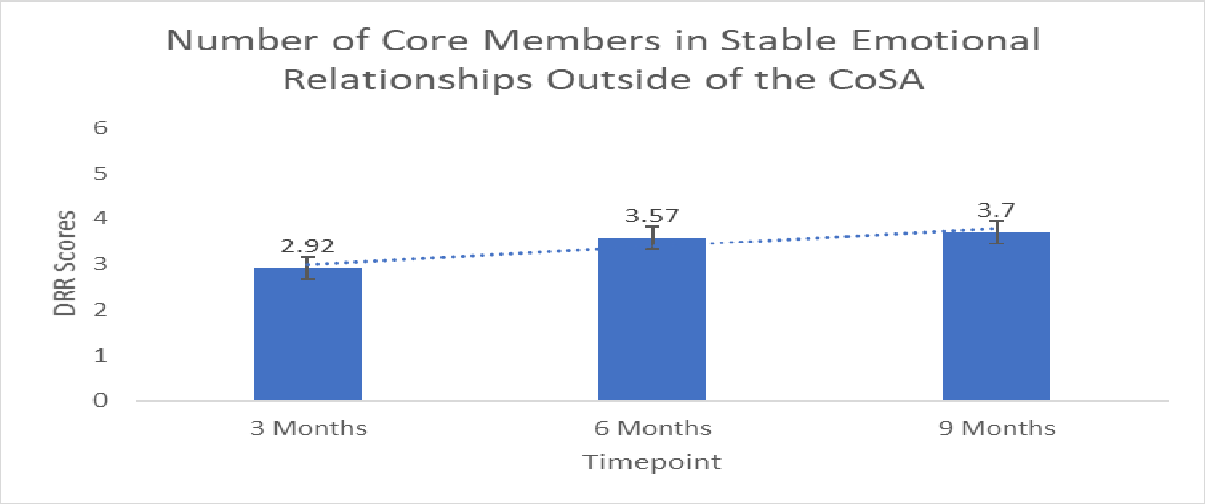


Figure 4. Changes in stable emotional relationships over time for Core Members

A series of paired t tests were conducted to explore the differences in relationship scores between the three time-points (3 months, 6 months and 9 months). When examining incremental improvements between each of the timepoints (3 months, 6 months and 9 months), the results indicated there were no significant differences when comparing the 3 month timepoint to the 6 month timepoint, and no significant difference when comparing the 6 month timepoint and the 9 months timepoint (3 months, Mean=2.92, SD=2.26; 6 months, Mean=3.57, SD=2.25; 9 months, Mean=3.70, SD=2.18).

However, there were significant mean increases in stable emotional relationships of Core Members (n=61) over the lifetime of the Circle. Thus, there was a significant improvement in stable emotional relationships for Core Members between three months (Mean=2.92, SD=2.26) and nine months (Mean=3.7, SD=2.18), t(61)=-2.88, p=.005. This indicates that Core Members took some time to build stable emotional relationships outside of the Circles, but that time was needed for these improvements to occur. The benefits accrued incrementally over the lifetime of the Circle, rather than in the immediate three months post-Circle. This finding suggests that it is important that Circles are given time to 'work', since the significant improvements in their stable, emotional relationships happened over time.

Activities and hobbies

To assess potential increases in Core Members engaging in appropriate activities or hobbies, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare scores at three months, six months and nine months of the Circles. The means and standard deviations are presented in the table below.

Table 6: Changes in appropriate activities or hobbies for Core Members over time (n=61)

Time point	*n*	Mean	Standard Deviation
3 Month	61	2.84	1.93
6 Months	61	2.87	1.86
9 Months	61	3.38	1.89

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated there was a significant improvement in Core Members' engagement with activities and hobbies over time F(2,120)=4.18, p=.023. Figure 5 shows the changes in activities and hobbies over time, which equates to a 19% increase in the number of Core Members engaging in appropriate activities and hobbies.

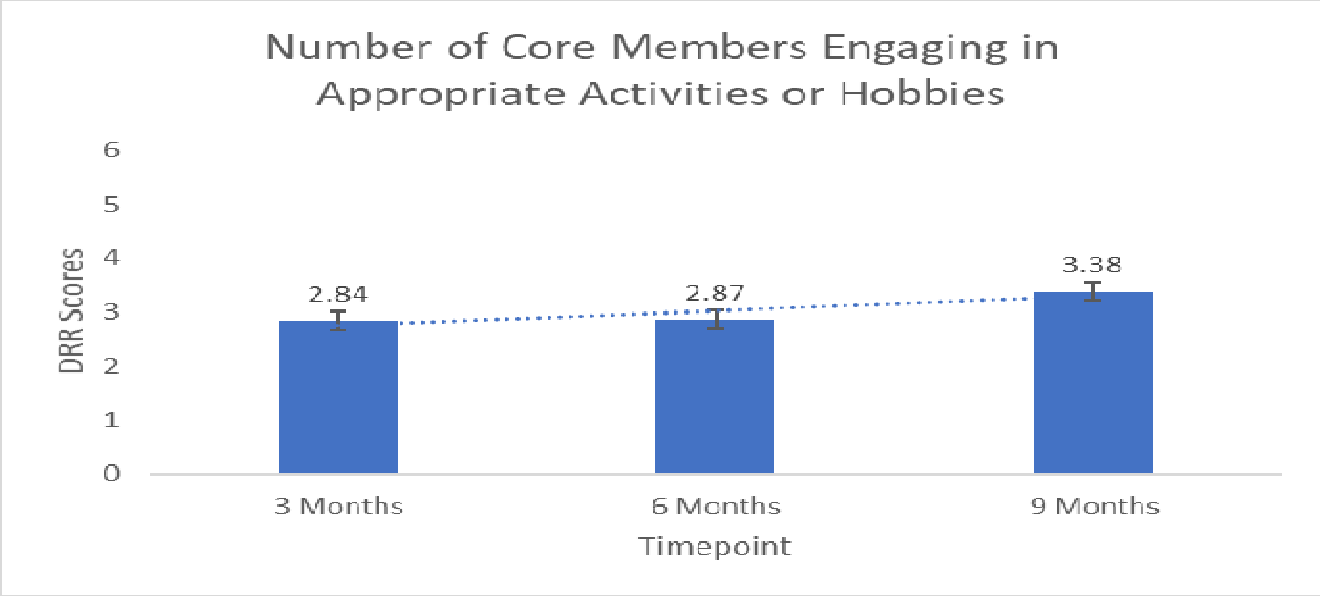


Figure 5. Changes in engagement in activities and hobbies for Core Members

A series of paired t tests were conducted to explore the differences in scores for activities and hobbies through the lifetime of the Circle (3 months, 6 months and 9 months into Circles). The results indicated there were no significant differences in scores of Core Members (n=75) between three months (Mean=2.61, SD=1.93) and six months (Mean=2.61, SD=1.87), as can be seen in Figure 5. However, as the Circle matured, Core Members began to show significant mean increases in activity and hobby scores of Core Members (n=62) between six months (Mean=2.89, SD=1.85) and nine months (Mean=3.39, SD=1.87), t(61)=-2.45, p=.017.

Overall, there were significant mean increases in scores of Core Members (n=62) between three months (Mean=2.81, SD=1.93) and nine months (Mean=3.39, SD=1.87), t(61)=-2.38, p=.020, thus through the lifetime of the Circle.

Stable and suitable accommodation

To measure the number of Core Members with stable and suitable accommodation, data were collated for 163 Core Members and transformed into percentages. Table 7 details the percentage of

Core Members with stable and suitable accommodation at three monthly intervals throughout the term of the Circles.

Table 7: Percentage of Core Members in stable and suitable accommodation.

Q16	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
Core Members in stable and suitable accommodation	96%	99%	100%	100%
Data Split:				
Successful Outcomes	97%	98%	100%	100%
Unsuccessful Outcomes	45%	25%	100%	100%

The majority of Core Members on successful Circles were in stable and suitable accommodation within 3 months, and this increased to 100% by 9 months. Interestingly, just under half of those with unsuccessful outcomes were in accommodation within 3 months, and this dropped to one quarter by 6 months. Although this increased to 100% at 9 months, it raises questions about the early experiences of release and how this may have contributed to their eventual unsuccessful outcome.

Paid and voluntary employment

To measure the number of Core Members in paid or voluntary work data were examined for 163 Core Members. Table 8 details the number of Core Members in paid or voluntary work at three monthly intervals throughout the term of the Circles. As demonstrated below, the number of Core Members in paid or voluntary work was variable throughout Circles involvement. Circles with unsuccessful outcomes were shorter in length than successful Circles, hence the reduction of Core Members in paid or voluntary work over time.

Table 8: Percentage of Core Members in paid or voluntary work

Q17	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months
Core Members in paid or voluntary work	26%	26%	42%
Successful Outcomes	20%	31%	41%
Unsuccessful Outcomes	22%	20%	12%

Demographic data from the main evaluation database are presented in figure 6; these data outline more detailed information regarding employment for Core Members pre- and post-Circles. The demographic data indicates that there were more Core Members in both paid and voluntary work post-Circles than pre-Circles and fewer Core Members unemployed post-Circles. Descriptive data provided in Figure 6 consisted of (n=153) pre-Circles and (n=102) post-Circles Core Members.

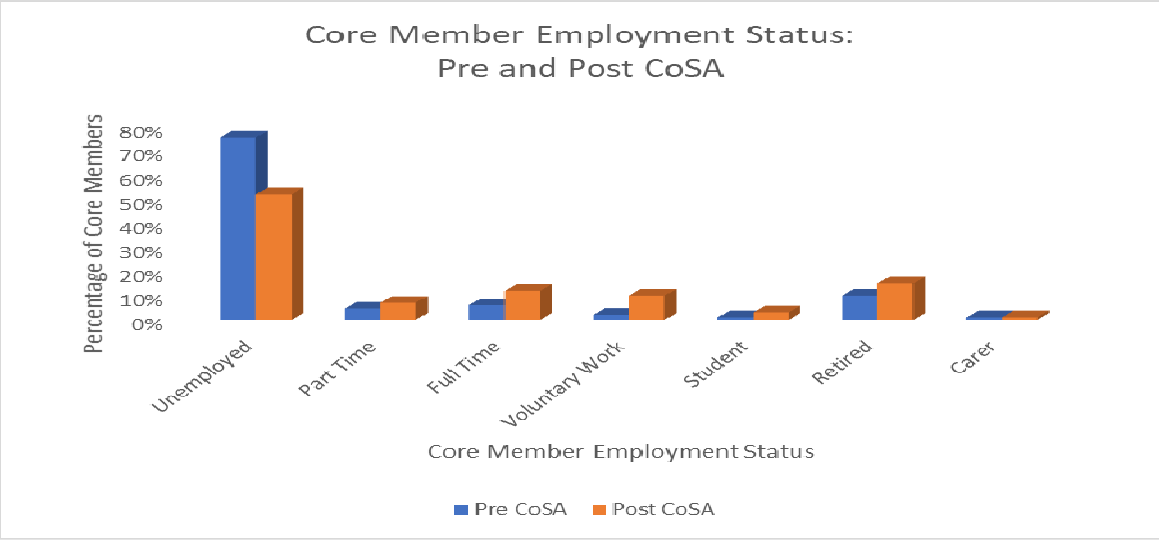


Figure 6. Core Member Employment: Pre and Post Circles (all outcomes)

Summary

Statistically significant reductions in mean DRR scores suggest that Core Members dynamic risk is reduced after three months involvement with Circles, with further dynamic risk reductions over time. The incremental reductions in dynamic risk over time highlight the utility of Circles being more than a brief (i.e. three months, for example) intervention. The reintegration of Core Members (gaining voluntary work and employment, creating social connections and improving social capital), as measured by additional items on the DRR, indicated that Core Members were reintegrating well with the help of Circles, and the benefits accrued with time. Thus, Core Members made gains in their engagement with appropriate activities and hobbies after six months involvement with Circles and had increased their development of stable emotional relationships outside the Circles, and employment after nine months' involvement.

The increases in employment and/or voluntary work for Core Members is an important aspect to highlight, since being involved in purposeful activity, particularly paid employment, has a plethora of benefits. These benefits include a structured day, purposeful activity, social contact with others, improved status and sense of identity, and a reduced financial strain on self and family (Creed & Macintyre, 2001). The benefits of employment for Core Members (and all those with sexual convictions) are magnified, since employment and voluntary work bring with them a sense of purpose, having structure in one's day (Seleznow, Littel & Matson, 2002), something to look forward to and greater social contact (Waddell & Burton, 2016): these are all protective factors that mitigate against sexual reoffending.

Suggestions for future research and evaluation include: (i) commencing the assessment of DRR scores pre-Circles as a baseline score, (ii) collecting further detail about purposeful activity (including hobbies, volunteering and employment) and appropriate relationships at the end of Circles; (iii) the item asking about work for Core Members should be split between paid and voluntary. Further education and training would also be helpful categories to add into the DRR form.

Additionally, more attention to how data are collected for those who drop out of Circles, and for those who complete Circles, would result in fewer data gaps and a more robust picture of the benefits that Circles appear to bring. Control group data would also have been useful since, although it is positive that Core Members are less likely to be unemployed by the end of a Circles, this does not take into account that other ex-prisoners may also be more likely to gain employment after 12 months of living in the community.

Study 2: Assessing changes in the wellbeing of Core Members

Aims

1. Examine putative changes in the emotional wellbeing of Core Members over time
2. Report on the number of Core Members reporting feeling emotionally more secure, confident, and less isolated.

Method

Materials

The Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant, Fishwick, Platt, Joseph & Stewart-Brown, 2006; Tennant et al., 2007) was used to address the aims of this study. The WEMWBS is an ordinal, self-report measure consisting of 14 positively phrased Likert items. The WEMWBS measures two distinct perspectives of mental wellbeing: "the subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction, and the psychological functioning and self-realization" (Tennant et al., 2007, p. 2). The scale was selected for its validity, reliability, appropriateness and brevity for this population.

Procedure

The WEMWBS was administered pre- and post-Circles as well as every three months during a Circles with Core Members for all BL Circles. The scale was administered by project coordinators. Completed scales were collated by Circles UK and forwarded to the evaluation team for analysis.

Ethics

University and HMPPS ethical approval were received for all elements of this study.

Sample

The sample for analysis included in this report comprised a maximum of 119 participants (n=119). Individual sample sizes are reported for each statistical test.

Analysis

Psychometric analysis of the WEMWBS data was conducted using SPSS. Analysis included exploring changes in Core Member wellbeing over time whilst participating in Circles, together with comparisons between Core Members and the general population's emotional wellbeing. Current analysis runs until nine months into Circles due to the availability of data. Further time points, including post-Circles, will be included when the data is available.

Results

Comparison with norms of the general public

A one sample *t*-test[1] was conducted to determine whether a statistical difference existed between

[1] a statistical test to determine whether a sample mean is statistically different from to a population mean

wellbeing scores from Core Members prior to starting Circles (n=119) and a sample of adult English males from the general population (Taggart, Stewart-Brown & Parkinson, 2015).

Core Members demonstrated significantly lower wellbeing scores (Mean=39.76, SD=12.08) compared to the general population of adult males (Mean=52.50, SD=0.22), t(118)= -11.50, p<.001. This demonstrates that Core Members had lower levels of wellbeing in comparison to adult men in the general population prior to starting Circles.

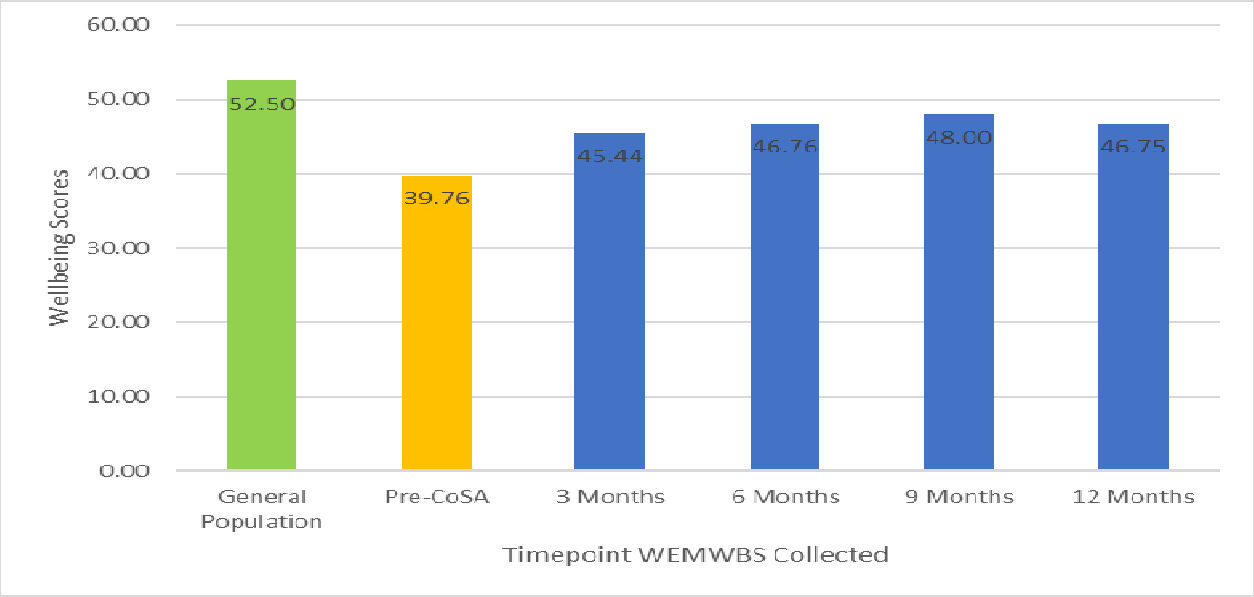
The same test was performed to compare wellbeing scores of the general population with Core Members' wellbeing 12 months into Circles (n=28) to determine whether Core Member wellbeing changed. Results indicated that, after nine months of being part of Circles, Core Member wellbeing had increased. However, despite this improvement, Core Members' wellbeing remained lower than the wellbeing of the male general population (Mean=46.75, SD=11.50), t(27)=-2.65, p=.013. These comparisons can be seen in graphical format in figure 7.

Changes in wellbeing over time

For Core Members who had pre- and mid-Circle wellbeing scores (three, six, nine and 12 months, n=27), 67% of these demonstrated improved wellbeing, reflected in an increased WEMWBS score. This data demonstrates that most Core Members were feeling more emotionally secure, confident and less isolated after being supported by a Circle.

A paired t test was conducted to explore the differences in wellbeing scores across two time-points (pre-Circles and 12 months into Circles, n=27). There were significant mean improvements in wellbeing scores from pre-Circles (Mean=38.30, SD=13.31) to 12 months (Mean=46.93, SD=11.69), t(26)= -3.26, *p*=.003. Based on the means at pre-Circle and nine months, there is a statistically significant increase in wellbeing scores for Core Members. This represents an 18% increase in wellbeing scores. Figure 7 demonstrates the change in wellbeing scores over time in graphical form and includes the general population norms for a visual comparison.

Figure 7: Wellbeing means for Core Members and the general population over time



Summary

This study examined the changes in emotional wellbeing of Core Members throughout the duration of a Circle. The results demonstrated that prior to beginning a Circle, Core Members demonstrated significantly lower wellbeing than the general population. This is not surprising, with wellbeing concerns, including rates of mental health issues (including acts of self-harm and suicide) being higher in the prison population (Fazel & Seewald, 2012; Forrester & Slade, 2013) and among those being released back into the community (Binswanger et al., 2007; Jarrett et al., 2012), than in the general population. However, throughout the course of the Circle, significant improvements were observed. The results provide support for the positive impact of Circles on Core Members' wellbeing demonstrating that, after 12 months of engaging with a Circle, wellbeing scores had significantly increased. Overall, 67% of Core Members demonstrated improved levels of wellbeing by the end of their Circle, suggesting that Core Member confidence and emotional security had improved and social isolation had decreased. This is consistent with work by Bates et al. (2012) who found a 70% improvement in emotional wellbeing among Core Members following their engagement with a Circle. These authors suggested that the reason for this improvement in wellbeing was related to Core Members' growing ability to work with volunteers to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation. In doing this, Core Members are able to work through more productive and prosocial solutions to their practical and emotional problems, which is important for helping them to reintegrate into society, live a 'normal' life and desist from sexual offending (Göbbels et al., 2012; Höing et al., 2013). More broadly, improved psychological wellbeing is something that is known to reduce risk and encourage desistance, with this being a central premise of the Good Lives Model of rehabilitation (Ward & Brown, 2004).

While these findings provide preliminary support for the positive impact of Circles on Core Member wellbeing, this is not without limitation as the sample size was limited to 27 Circles for the pre-Circle to 12 months analysis, due to the availability of data. Suggested future research and evaluation would extend the data collection to 12 months post Circle completion; a matched control study would also be useful, as would a UK-based randomised control trial.

Study 3a: In-depth examination of successful and unsuccessful Circles

Aims

1. Explore the reasons for Circles ending.
2. Report on the reintegration of Core Members into the community.
3. Explore the components of Circles that work and those that do not and identify differences between them.

Method

Materials

Materials comprised the End of Circle Reports (EOCR), which were routinely completed after every Circle and document the progress and outcome of a Core Member's time on a Circle. These were completed whether the Circles ended prematurely or continued for the standard duration.

Procedure

EOCRs were completed by project coordinators within two months of each ended BL Circle; they were collated by Circles UK and forwarded to the evaluation team for analysis. A summary of the data received to date are presented in table 9. All EOCR were compiled into a main evaluation dataset for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data were split into successful outcomes and adverse outcomes, and analysed (in this study) using thematic analysis. Ninety-five EOCR were received, with eighty-four appropriate for qualitative analysis.

Table 9. EOCR Data received to data

Project Area	Number of Circles Commenced	Number of EOCR Received
SLF; Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire	25	20
Y&H Circles/re:shape (Lincolnshire)	13	4
SOVA; Merseyside	27	14
CROPT/re:shape (Lancashire)	13	10
Circles South East; London	88	41
Circles South East; Northamptonshire	17	6
Total	183	95

Ethics

University and HMPPS ethical approvals were received for all elements of this study.

Sample

Participants were male Core Members (n=84) who took part in a Circle between January 2016 and December 2019. The inclusion criteria specified that participants must be Core Members, funded by BL Circles in England. No minimum term was set for Circles participation, meaning that once a Core Member had met with their volunteers, they were suitable for inclusion in this study.

Analysis

The study comprised a qualitative analysis of EOCR data. All EOCR with successful endings were compiled into one evaluation dataset. All EOCR with adverse endings were compiled into another dataset. Both datasets were separately subjected to inductive, latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once each dataset had been separately analysed for themes, the two datasets were cross referenced to explore similarities and differences between successful and adverse endings. Clarification of definitions around successful, unsuccessful, adverse et cetera are available in a separate document (see Dwerryhouse, Winder, Blagden & Lievesley, in prep.).

Results

Eighty-seven of the 95 EOCR received to date fitted into one of the Circle endings delineated in the table below. The remainder (n=8) were noted as 'Other' in their respective EOCR and are not included in this table. Within these 87 EOCR, 59% of all completions ended in successful reintegration of the Core Member with a planned ending; 18% resulted in Core Member drop out; 7% resulted in Core Member recall; 13% resulted in Core Member re-arrest and 3% of Circles ended due to volunteer dropout. The higher number of unsuccessful outcomes evidenced in this table is a reflection of the shorter timescales involved in 'adverse' Circles endings. The full dataset will be available in August 2020 and will undoubtedly highlight a much smaller proportion of Circles with unsuccessful endings.

Table 10. Mean time spent in Circles categorised by outcome

Circles Ending	Mean Number of Months	Mean Number of Circles Meetings	Number of Circles
Reintegrated	14	38	51
Dropped Out	6	16	16
Recalled	3	8	6
Rearrested	9	21	11
Volunteer Dropout	7	14	3

Notwithstanding the proportion of unsuccessful Circles, analysis of the EOCRs provided positive data regarding the benefits of Circles in relation to changes in all Core Members' over time. The EOCR data documented that, over time:

- 52% of (n=86) Core Members demonstrated increased confidence
- 45% of (n=87) Core Members demonstrated increased self-esteem
- 32% of (n=84) Core Members felt more positive
- 56% of (n=89) Core Members demonstrated reductions in feelings of isolation

Qualitative Results Part I

Thematic analysis of (n=54) successful and (n=30) unsuccessful Circles revealed 14 themes. Some emergent themes appeared within successful and unsuccessful Circles, whilst other themes were specific to either successful OR unsuccessful Circles. A summary of the themes is included at the end of this section of analysis.

Support

Successful Circles

Successful Circles were characterised by positive and supportive relationships in which Core Members felt able and comfortable to discuss their concerns in a safe environment, free from judgement. Difficulties in these Circles were usually overcome through open and honest discussion with all those involved. Volunteer frustrations relating to Core Member motivation were openly discussed and resolutions were reached with the input of all. Successful Circles benefitted from a range of positive outcomes. Core Members gained improvements in their emotional wellbeing, identified and became involved with new social activities and hobbies and increased their social circle. Core Members valued the support of the volunteers and were appreciative of their time and support. Another salient theme which arose from analysis of the successful Circles was that of volunteer commitment. Although successful overall, volunteer dropouts and inconsistent attendance was common. The key element which appeared to support the success of these Circles was the adaptability of the remaining Circle volunteers and the Core Member to the volunteer drop outs, which often appeared to draw the remaining Circle members closer together.

Theme 1: Trusting Relationships

A key component of successful Circles was the development of trusting relationships between the Core Member and their Circle. Core Members within successful Circles, allowed themselves to trust in their Circle and in doing so trusted the process. Whilst some Core Members were initially nervous to open up to their Circle, in doing so they realised the benefits of using the Circle as a safe space in which to discuss their concerns in a non-judgemental environment.

> ''*The CM went from being initially very shy and reserved to quickly gaining in trust and being able to be open and honest with us about his risk management and mental health / self-harm concerns*'' *(EOCR-17)*

EOCR-17 reported upon how the Core Member was able to utilise his Circle to address concerns related to his outward risk in addition to concerns around his risk to self. This Core Members experience positively reflects the two aims of Circles advocated by the two core principles of *no more victims* and *no-one is disposable*. The trusting relationships which developed within successful Circle appeared to be a result of genuine relationships that were built.

> ''*The CM and volunteers were able to build a strong, safe and trusting relationship which was a significant contributing factor to the success of the Circle. Whilst there was a very strong relationship as a group (Circle), each volunteer was able to develop their own individual relationship with CM which placed the circle in a further position of strength when engaging in several challenging and emotive conversations and activities*'' *(EOCR-2)*

EOCR-2 reports upon how trusting relationships formed at the level of the Circle as a whole in addition to more intimate relationships between the Core Member and the individual volunteers. EOCR-2 reflects a Circle in which relationships between the Core Member and individual volunteers were distinct from the Core Member to group-volunteer relationship. The development of such personal relationships enabled the Core Member to develop trust in volunteers as individuals. Rather than viewing the volunteers as an out-group, the Core Member was able to build meaningful relationships on a one to one basis. The development of trust on an individual basis is perceived to have positively contributed to the group-work of volunteer when attempting to engage the Core Member in discussions of a challenging nature. A sentiment which volunteers reflected in EOCR-33.

> ''*The three volunteers also completed the end of Circle questionnaire – In it they said-* '*Our core member often disclosed risky sexual thinking which we could manage and discuss sensitively within the Circle. If he did not have this safe space to discuss such thoughts, it is much more likely he would have been tempted to reoffend*'.'' *(EOCR-33)*

Here, volunteers explained how their Core Member felt comfortable opening up about his risky sexual thoughts. Volunteers described the Circle as a safe space in which their Core Member was able to discuss his concerns in a non-judgemental environment. Volunteers further argued that it was the presence of the Circle as a safe space which contributed to their Core Member's desistance. Within this Circle the Core Member was provided with the opportunity to reflect upon his risk-related concerns without fear of persecution. The sensitiveness the volunteers demonstrated when listening to their Core Member's concerns encouraged their Core Members openness. This enabled the Circle to support the Core Member in working through his concerns whilst providing insight to his thought processes. Furthermore, through the development of trust, the Core Member's openness meant that volunteers were able to monitor his potential risk. This Circle presents another example of the dual process of Circles in supporting the Core Member whilst simultaneously holding them to account.

Theme 2: External Support

Another common feature of successful Circles was the presence of an external support network, beyond that of the Circle. Many successful Circles reported upon the positive contribution provided by Core Members friends, family and work colleagues. Core Members were also reported to have experienced good working relationships with those in the criminal justice service.

> *"CM continues to have the support of his Probation Officer, mother, sisters and work colleagues. He felt through finding work, he could begin to make a new group of friends. He acknowledged the importance of avoiding those who encouraged/ supported his previous pro criminal lifestyle" (EOCR-41)*

EOCR-41 details the extended support network that Core Member had in place at the end of his Circle. This EOCR reports upon how the Core Member perceived value in findings and obtaining work to develop new friendships. This Core Member acknowledged the importance of avoiding negative associates and in doing so demonstrated a good level of self-awareness of his own risk

triggers. The development of a supportive external network was something which the Circle equally valued.

> *''The CM is living with his parents now and has a good relationship with them. He is in a stable relationship with his boyfriend and he will continue to have contact with the coordinator and the (provider). He also has MOSOVO support and we are hopeful that his new job will lead him to make new friends" (EOCR-13)*

EOCR-13 similarly noted the external support the Core Member had in place upon finishing the Circle. Again, there is recognition of the professional support provided to the Core Member. Within EOCR-13, the Circle reflected the hopeful sentiment of employment offering the opportunity for the development of new friendships. There is a sense that the existence and further development of an external support network act as a turning point in which Core Member can develop new life plans. Circles are future-focussed as Circle support is removed and replaced by wider support networks. The gradual removal of the Circle support network means that Core Members must be encouraged to seek support elsewhere and also become more responsible for their own needs. Such self-helping behaviour is demonstrated in EOCR-18.

> *"The CM has his OM and MOSOVO contacts plus he is getting help for his mental health and revaluating his meds. He has some friends and has had some romantic associations with appropriate adults" (EOCR-18)*

Here, the Core Member has acknowledged his need for support with his mental health and actively engaged in addressing his requirements. Core Members in successful Circles demonstrated a good level of self-awareness and worked to address any concerns that may otherwise act as a barrier in their reintegration efforts. Successful Circles shared a positive view of authority figures and developed good working relationships with police and probation, recognising the benefit of working with, rather than against them.

Theme 3: Reduced Isolation (through active participation)

Reduced isolation through Core Member support was equally important to successful Circles. Reduced isolation was linked to the development of external support networks and trusting relationships. However, it is presented as a theme in its own right due to the active participation of Core Members attempting to reduce their social isolation. Something which differed considerably to those in unsuccessful Circles. Isolation is a widely recognised risk indicator for sexual recidivism (Malinen et al., 2014). Whilst the presence of Circles reduces risk in the interim, Circles that support Core Members to build their social networks to reduce their social isolation in the long term are further beneficial and, in some instances, genuine friendships are formed between Core Members and volunteers, such as the one reported in EOCR-40.

> *"The Circle supported the CM to attend social/community groups regularly which assisted him in building relationships with new associates linked with his hobbies and interests. Both attending these groups and the Circle itself helped the CM to feel less isolated. In addition, the CM has developed a meaningful friendship with one of the volunteers which will continue after the end of the Circle" (EOCR-40)*

EOCR-40 reports on the Core Members regular active engagement in social groups. With the support of the Circle, this Core Member was able to engage with community groups over shared interests. Furthermore, the development of a genuine relationship formed within the Circle meant that the Core Member developed a friendship with a volunteer which continued after the completion of the Circle. Whilst successful Circles worked to support Core Members to develop broader social networks, Core Members also did their part to actively reduce their social isolation. EOCR-21 reports on a Core Member who demonstrated a good level of person insight and identified someone who could help him both during the Circle and once the Circle came to an end.

> *"CM has also identified a close person from a Sex Addicts group, who is his 'go to' guy if having any urges or crisis periods. It appears as though his social network is broadening for the better. CM's offending was very much linked to isolation and boredom so having these social connections and interactions have alleviated some of the temptation that was there previously" (EOCR-21)*

Whilst the Circles offered this Core Member with support relating to his risk concerns, this Core Member took it upon himself to seek further support and assistance outside of the Circle for his risk-related issues. In doing so, the Core Member took responsibility and ownership of his risk concerns and put processes in place to help himself and protect others. Like other successful Circles, this Core Member was able to reflect on his own risk triggers and identify support that would be beneficial in helping him to refrain from future offences. Whilst reduced isolation in successful Circles was often linked to Core Members active seeking of social connections, the mere existence of the Circle also alleviated Core Members' sense of isolation, even when the Circle was not physically present.

> *"Even though I did not need to use the Circle phone that often it definitely made me a feel a lot less lonely knowing it was there" (EOCR-20)*

EOCR-20 presented a comment from one Core Member who reported that simply knowing that the Circle was only a phone call away, reduced his sense of isolation. The knowledge that support existed helped to alleviate this Core Members loneliness where he may otherwise have felt socially isolated.

Unsuccessful Circles

Unsuccessful Circles provided a stark contrast to successful Circles. Unsuccessful Circles were characterised by low levels of trust amongst members of the Circle in addition to dishonesty on the behalf of Core Members. Core Members' lack of willingness to be transparent often led the volunteers to lose trust in the Core Member whilst the Core Member simultaneously engaged in risky behaviour or criminal activity which was later revealed at the point of re-arrest. Core Members' distrust of Circles led to Core Members being avoidant of challenging questions and discussions around risk. As a result, Circle relationships were tense and difficult throughout and volunteers often became frustrated at Core Members' lack of motivation and commitment to Circles. Core Members' lack of trust spread beyond the Circle as Core Members typically refused to engage in any external social activities or employment opportunities. Core Members reported that they did not require support from the Circle and refused to engage in a productive way. Many Core

Members that did engage with external associates, did so to their own detriment. Core Members in unsuccessful Circles engaged with criminal associates and engaged in substance abuse. Whilst some Circles ended earlier than planned due to Core Member voluntary withdrawal, many Circles came to an end due to adverse outcomes. Core Members were recalled for breach of their licence conditions and re-arrested for new offences.

Theme 4: Trust Issues

A recurring theme within unsuccessful Circles was that of a lack of trust. Core Members had difficulties in trusting in their Circles and this presented in a number of ways. Core Members disliked discussions that revolved around risk and were evasive in risk-related discussions. EOCR-63 demonstrates the difficulties this Circle faced when attempting to engage a Core Member in discussions, particularly those relating to his risk.

> *"Right from the start, despite being clearly briefed several times about the role of a circle, the CM presented as belligerent and defensive with the group. He openly mistrusted the coordinators, and said that he did not want to be asked questions about his risks or sexual thinking" (EOCR-63)*

This extract exemplifies the frustrations experienced by the coordinator in the attempts made to support the Core Member. The coordinator placed emphasised upon how the Core Member was repeatedly briefed upon the purpose of the Circle, yet still refused to engage. The Core Members open mistrust of the Circle is reported as an explanation for the Core Members refusal to engage. The Core Members wish to not divulge his sexual thoughts of discuss aspects relating to his risk, leave the unanswered questions of what it was he may have been willing to discuss. In addition to what led him to participate in Circles. McCartan (2016) reported upon instances whereby Core Members entered into Circles seeking support and disengaged upon the realisation that accountability was equally discussed. This is a potential explanation for this Core Members evasive behaviour. Whilst some Core Members overtly refused to engage in discussions of risk, others chose to engage but demonstrated little self-awareness and a refusal to explore other viewpoints. This is demonstrated in EOCR-79.

> *"CM was always quick to distance himself from those who have offended against children and saw his sexual crimes as different as he offending against adult women. He always went on to minimize his offending, insisting he did not harm anyone. Was regularly challenged for this way of thinking" (EOCR-79)*

EOCR-79 presents a Core Member who used denial of the seriousness of his offences as a defence mechanism. His distancing of himself from those who offended against children acted as a buffer for his self-esteem. However, in doing this, he refused to acknowledge the harm he has caused. The Circle affirmed that he was regularly challenged on his thought-processes, highlighting that this was an ongoing concern. Whilst his refusal of responsibility may have been the result of an unconscious attempt to protect himself, had he have developed trusting relationships within his Circle, he may have been more open to exploring other viewpoints. Tensions between Core Members and the outer Circle was common occurrence within unsuccessful Circles. This is illustrated in EOCR-60.

> *"He had huge issue with authority and boundaries and would constantly push. With the volunteers on their own, he would behave and speak in one way, but as soon as the Coordinator or professionals were present, he changed his whole attitude" (EOCR-60)*

EOCR-60 illustrates a Core Member who struggled to develop positive relationships with authority figures. Whilst this Core Member did demonstrate a level of willingness to engage with his volunteers, he struggled to engage with the coordinator or those involved in the criminal justice system. Mistrusting the professionals involved in his life, this Core Member actively prevented himself from making any positive progress by placing barriers in his own path. This active distrust may have stemmed from his past experiences with the criminal justice system or a negative view of himself that led him to feel distinctly different from the professionals supporting him. This Core Member's behaviour also demonstrates his lack of trust in the Circle as a whole. The Core Member attempted to engage in conversations with his volunteers but by failing to respect the input of his wider circle of professionals, he did not appear to be fully invested with the intervention.

Limited trust in the Circle was a common feature of unsuccessful Circles that limited and sometimes prevented any real progress being made. This lack of trust negatively impacted upon volunteers' ability to engage Core Members in the process. Core Members of unsuccessful Circles were typically happy to engage in receiving support from volunteers but were dismissive of risk discussions and, in some cases, risk-related topics were never raised. Unsuccessful Circles had additional concerns to manage in the form of negative external influences surrounding Core Members outside the Circle.

Theme 5: Negative External Influences & substance Abuse

Many Core Members from unsuccessful Circles struggled with relationships outside of the Circle in addition to those within. Core Members were often surrounded by negative influences outside the Circle, both in terms of criminal associates and those that engaged in substance misuse behaviours. EOCR-55 reports upon concerns that the Circle held around their Core Members' associates.

> *"He was not convicted of a further offence or questioned about offending behaviour in the course of the Circle. However, there were concerns about his associations with others and whether these were pro-offending and exploitative. Initially CM reported managing his alcohol consumption but as he began to withdraw from the Circle, he was reporting a gradual increase in levels, possibly influenced by others" (EOCR-55)*

Here, the Core Member's desistance is noted as a positive element of the Circle, however concerns surrounding the Core Member's associates allude to risk related concerns. The Core Member is reported to have initially demonstrated progress in terms of reducing his alcohol intake however this was short lived. The Circle perceived the Core Member's decline in attendance to be the result of his negative associates, potentially inciting that the Core Member was easily led and subject to manipulation. Whilst Circles provide a supportive and pro-social network to Core Members, it is up to Core Members to make the most of the support offered to them and minimise or ideally remove contact with pro-criminal associates. It appears that many Core Members of unsuccessful Circles struggled to break ties with prior pro-criminal associates, particularly when it came to drugs and

the use of illegal substances, and this proved to hamper Core Members' progress. This is demonstrated again in EOCR-72.

> *''CM was particularly isolated and wanted to build a positive network around him move away from the "associates" that would pull him back to using substances. CM appeared to be very good at laying out in principle what he wanted from life but putting it into practice proved difficult as it quickly became apparent that he was still living a chaotic life that included using substances and mixing with old associates'' (EOCR-72)*

Here, EOCR-72 illustrates how a Core Member held clear intentions to lead a 'good life' but struggled to break negative habits. The Core Members isolation is also noted here as a cause for concern that is reported to have contributed toward his involvement with old associates. Whilst the Core Member may have well been aware of the negative influence his old associates posed, he was also struggling with isolation. Instead of taking on board the advice of his Circle to engage in pro-social activities, he instead opted to return to old associates. This was likely influenced by existing substance misuse issues. Another example of Core Members progress being halted as a result of negative associations is presented in EOCR-66.

> *"All the good work he did was undone by his escalating drug use. He did continue to attend meetings regularly so there must have been some connection there and we genuinely believe he was full of good intentions, but his low self-esteem meant he felt the only way he could make friends was to give people money and to take drugs with them, and ultimately this was to be the cause of the end of the Circle" (EOCR-66)*

In EOCR-66, the Core Members low self-esteem is argued to have influenced his decision to engage with negative associates. It is likely that such negative associates identified an opportunity to extort the Core Member, which the Core Member mistook for genuine friendship. Whilst Circles were able to provide pro-social support to the Core Member, he did make use of the support to establish new pro-social connections outside of the Circle. For Circles to be successful in the long term, it is essential that Core Members build a pro-social network beyond that of their Circle.

Theme 6: Isolation

The third key theme that emerged from unsuccessful Circles was that of Core Member isolation. Unsuccessful Circles were often characterised by Core Members who lacked connections outside of the Circle. In these cases, the presence of the CoSA alone was not enough to keep Core Members from adverse endings. Some Core Members chose to self-isolate, either through avoidance of negative associations or through preference for their own company. EOCR-61 illustrates a Core Member who preferred to spend time alone.

> *"Throughout his time with Circles, CM maintained that he preferred his own company and struggled to be in social settings / family gatherings maintaining that he has always felt like an outsider. CM resisted attempts by volunteers to look at strategies designed to increase his social support network and new friendships. A 'self-confessed isolated person' (EOCR-61)*

This Core Member presented something of a dichotomy. He chose to participate in Circles yet also referred to himself as 'self-confessed isolated person' and chose to self-isolate whilst resisting the reintegration efforts of his Circle. It appeared that this Core Member may have been mistakenly

selected for inclusion in a Circle due to his limited cooperation. However, his reasons for choosing to participate are unclear. Whatever the reasons for Core Member isolation, the resultant effects were predominantly negative. Core Members often appeared to struggle with their isolation yet were unwilling to attempt to make external connections. This is illustrated in EOCR-60.

> *"CM was very contradictory and said wanted to make friends and talk to more people, but every opportunity given to him was refused" (EOCR-60).*

This Core Member appeared eager to make new connections during Circle discussions but lacked the confidence to put his thoughts into actions. Many Core Members who self-isolated struggled with low self-esteem and confidence. This, added to a lack of external support, often led Core Members to make poor decisions to connect with others.

> *"The CM did indicate that he was struggling with the isolation of living alone and as such had sought to make contact others online. He was encouraged to consider attending local clubs for people of a similar age however; he sought recourse to practiced behaviours online, ostensibly looking for females with whom he could have sexual contact" (EOCR-59)*

Isolated Core Members tended to lack the same level of self-awareness of their risk as their successful counterparts. These Core Members did not appear to spend any time reflecting on their behaviours and remained in a negative cycle of poor decision-making. Public attitudes and the stigma surrounding sexual offences often lead to a lack of support from friends and family, which increases isolation (Bailey & Sample, 2017; Mingus & Birchfield, 2012). A concerning issue as isolation is a leading cause of recidivism (Malinen, Willis, & Johnston, 2014).

Qualitative Results Part II

Table 11 presents a summary of the themes that emerged from the case studies completed in this study. Each of the themes has been presented above within the context of Core Members' and Volunteers' narratives.

Table 11 Thematic Themes of successful and unsuccessful Circles

Successful Circles	**Unsuccessful Circles**
Trusting Relationships	Trust Issues
External Support	Negative External Influences & Substance Abuse
Reduced Isolation (through active participation)	Isolation

Summary

Qualitative analysis of the EOCRs highlighted important differences between Circles that ended successfully and those that did not. Successful Circles shared the key components of trust, supportive relationships both within and outside of the Circle and benefitted from reduced isolation as a result. Within the successful Circles, Core Members were offered the opportunity to openly discuss their issues and risk related concerns in a non-judgemental environment. Outside of the Circle, Core Members were able to engage in social activities and employment opportunities in which they could develop new friendships. This added layer of support provides a distinct

difference to that of unsuccessful Circles, which did not benefit from the presence of a positive external network or alternatively, were accustomed to a negative external network. Theme four (trust issues) and five (Negative External Influences & Substance Abuse) often acted as precursors to theme six (Core Member isolation). Core Members' low self-esteem and low levels of trust in others often led Core Members to self-isolate or engage with negative associates. Some Core Members chose to self-isolate to avoid contact with negative associates yet also refused to develop pro-social community connections, seemingly as a result of low self-confidence and self-esteem. Further analysis of these differences is included in the PhD associated with this evaluation (Dwerryhouse, 2020). The case studies included in this report are a selection of the case studies reported in the PhD thesis. These case studies give some indication of the complexity of Core Members' lives, and consequently the complexity that the individuals (and their volunteers) try to cope with through the duration of each Circle. It is also clear that having a rehabilitative intervention, like Circles, that lasts for typically 12 months, allows the group members of the Circle the opportunity to manage and work through the variety of challenges that Core Members bring, and face in their lives.

Study 3b: Exploring the experience of Circles members when Circles end successfully

Aims

1. Qualitatively explore the experiences of Circles members in case study format
2. Explore the components of Circles that appear to promote successful endings

Methods

Materials

These comprised: interview transcripts, EOCRs and Core Member demographic data.

Procedure

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from eight Circles (6x successful and 2x unsuccessful outcomes) and transcribed verbatim. The interview data were compiled into case studies and analysed using thematic analysis. Three case studies are presented below.

Ethics

University and HMPPS ethical approvals were received for all elements of this study.

Sample

Participants consisted of Core Members (n=2), coordinators (n=4) and volunteers (n=6) working across four different Circles providers in the UK. Core Members were male (n=1) and transgender female (n=1). Coordinators were male (n=1) and female (n=3). Volunteers were male (n=1) and female (n=5). All names have been changed to protect individual identities.

Analysis

The study comprised of a qualitative analysis of interview data in combination with Circles EOCR and demographic information. From the data gathered, three case studies were selected for in-depth analysis. For each case study, a pseudonym is used to protect the identity of the participant. Case one offered an example of a Circle which lasted the course and completed successfully. Case two completed successfully and presents the journey of a transitioning Core Member (male to female). Case three was a successful Circle that finished early. Each case study is presented individually. Each interview was analysed separately using inductive, latent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once the interview data had been analysed, the remaining EOCR and demographic data were brought together to gain a multiple perspective view of each of the three Circles.

Results

Case Study one: Martin

Martin joined his Circles some months after leaving custody. His index offence was breach of SOPO and he held prior convictions of possession and creation of indecent images of children. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of Martin's case study. The themes were *Managing Challenges, Identity Conflict and Commitment to Change.*

Theme 1: Managing Challenges

A number of goals were set at the beginning of the Circles including the aim of Martin obtaining employment and identifying potential hobbies and interests. However, during the first six months of the Circles, Martin was reluctant to engage with any of the suggestions provided by the volunteers.

John, Coordinator (2-6)

> *'Yeah uh it went for about eighteen months it was a really long one and uh quite well certainly for the first six months the Core Member was really uh kind of reluctant to take on any advice or suggestions from uh the volunteers. I think uh the reason for this was he had crushingly low self-esteem and he could just never see a way around his problems so in life he would rather not, not try and fail because then he would feel better about himself if he didn't try…'*

It was apparent that Martin suffered from low self-esteem and subsequent fear of failure. Martin's anxieties were further moderated by issues of self-acceptance. It would seem that because Martin was unable to accept himself, he could not understand or believe how anyone else would accept him. Rather than put himself out there and try to find work or integrate with new people, he chose to avoid such interactions, knowing that he could not be rejected if he did not try. Whilst Martin's volunteers consistently worked to support him, they found it difficult. Martin's low mood had a negative impact upon members of his Circles who felt that no amount of effort on their behalf was good enough as Martin would place barriers at every opportunity provided to him.

Theme 2: Identity Conflict

Much of Martin's angst stemmed from difficulties with his own self-acceptance. Martin identified as a Christian but was also gay and as a result he experienced conflict in being unable to reconcile these two aspects of himself. In the first few months, Circles discussion focussed around Martin's religion and sexuality as he tried to reconcile what he saw to be two incompatible parts of himself.

John, Coordinator (7-12)

> *'…the big part of this Circle which makes it so interesting from my point of view was the fact he was raised as a really kind of right-wing Christian but he was gay so he had this, this conflict between his sexuality and his religion and he was in a relationship but he didn't want to be in a relationship but he did but he didn't want to have sex in the relationship but then you know, human, human nature, so of course, so he didn't really know what to do about that and we kind of struggled with it…'*

John discussed how Martin struggled with his identity, self-acceptance and uncertainty over who he was. Identity conflict is common amongst those who identify as both religious and gay (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Hamblin & Gross, 2011). Whilst Circles work to support Core Members in a number of areas, this was a unique scenario in which the Circles felt less equipped to advise. The Circles held goals around Martin's future employment and reintegration whilst Martin instead often drew the Circles into discussions surrounding his identity conflict. Martin's preoccupation with his identity crisis prevented the Circles from making any meaningful progress. The introduction of a new, well-chosen, volunteer at a later date appeared to have helped Martin to reconcile the two aspects of his identity. As a former vicar, Sandra offered different interpretations of the bible which helped to challenge the conflict Martin experienced.

Theme 3: Commitment to Change

Although the Circles felt that Martin used religion and sexuality to avoid addressing the purpose of the Circles and found Martin's low mood to be difficult to manage, Martin's consistent attendance was deemed testament to his commitment to change.

John, Coordinator (148-153)

> *'…Martin was a you know he's a nice guy he sort of he has issues but at least he would talk to us about them and even if he didn't appear to make any progress he'd still come to every meeting, he'd still talk to us even if you came and went over the same thing time and time and time again I always thought well at least he's here, he's talking and it's giving us another chance to kind of turn his view around and get him to see where he needs to be…'*

As a voluntary service, Core Members enter into a Circles voluntarily and are free to leave at any time. The fact that Martin consistently attended meetings was taken as a positive indication of his commitment to the Circles. Even though on the outside, he did not appear to be making any progress, John recognised that Martin's attendance indicated his willingness to listen and efforts to progress. After many months of consistent support and encouragement, the Circles advised Martin that the Circles would eventually wind down. This came as a turning point as Martin began to realise that if changes were to be made, it would be up to him to implement them.

John, Coordinator (35-38)

> *'…ultimately I think we had to tell him you know it's up to you I can remember one central view but basically just said you either listen to our advice or you don't we can't make you do anything, it, it's up to you, you have to do this yourself, we will support you through it but you have to do this'.*

After months of consistent support and encouragement from the Circles, Martin was reminded that the Circles would ultimately come to an end. John explained that this triggered a change in attitude in Martin. His apparent sudden change in attitude is likely to have come about as a result of the consistent support and encouragement from the volunteers in combination with the reinforcement that whilst the Circles is there to advise and support, the decision to implement such changes

remained solely with Martin. It is possible that the consistent positive reinforcement built up Martin's self-esteem and confidence which allowed him to realise he could achieve more than he believed possible. Towards the end of the Circle Martin was able to prove to himself and the Circle that he was capable of moving on positively, and Martin progressed well.

Case Study Two: Elaine

Elaine joined her Circles shortly after leaving custody. Her index offences included multiple counts of indecent assault on a child and engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of Elaine's case study. The themes were *Managing Challenging behaviour, Establishing Boundaries and Core Member Empowerment.*

Theme 1: Managing Challenging Behaviour

Upon commencing the Circle, Elaine spoke openly about her personal life. The Circle became concerned about her chaotic behaviour and attempted to encourage her to slow down. The Circle had concerns about Elaine's turbulent lifestyle choices and felt she continually placed herself in potentially risky situations. However, from Elaine's perspective, she was simply making up for lost time.

Elaine, Core Member (50-53)

> *'I've got all this freedom and I just sort of wanted to pack as much in as, as possible so actually in the beginning it was more sort of calm me down then say look you know you just sort of slow down and take it take take take time in what you're actually doing and that's what I didn't like when people tell me to slow down'.*

After a long period in prison, Elaine wanted to make the most of her freedom. There was a sense that she had much lost time to make up for and did not want to slow down. Elaine was overwhelmed with her newfound freedom and did not like being advised to take her time getting involved with numerous activities and overworking herself. Employment is noted as a protective factor that supports desistance (de Vries Robbé, Mann, Maruna, & Thornton, 2015). However, in this case, the Circle were concerned for Elaine's wellbeing and thought she was taking too much on which may negatively impact her wellbeing. At the same time, upon release from prison, Elaine was able to establish herself as a woman. In forming her new identity, she began to explore what that meant to her through sexually risky activities.

Hannah, Coordinator (47-49)

> *'…putting herself in quite risky positions given her given her convictions uh and then also um engaging in quite uh sexually um risky behaviour so going to sex clubs and um you know she was talking about having sex with random people…'*

The Circles held concerns over Elaine's risky behaviour, particularly in relation to her past offences. Elaine had a tendency towards promiscuous activities but also demonstrated some extreme extraverted behaviours and she overtly drew attention to her offence history. The Circle felt Elaine's

behaviour was the result of attention-seeking. On release from prison Elaine was able to fully adopt her new identity and openly live as a woman, something which she was previously unable to do. The combination of freedom from prison and new identity formation may have led Elaine to attention-seeking behaviour as she asserted herself as a woman in society and wished to be recognised as such. In addition to this, there were concerns that Elaine's behaviour was detrimental to her reintegration as she chose to entertain the Circle rather than address issues.

Theme 2: Establishing Boundaries

The Circle spent a considerable amount of time establishing boundaries with Elaine in terms of topics of discussion and information sharing. Elaine often attempted to dominate meetings with discussions of legal matters which could not be resolved in the Circle, using such discussions as an apparent avoidance tactic to misdirect the Circle from more important issues. Additionally, she attempted to use the inner and outer aspects of her Circle for different purposes, assuming information would be shared on her behalf between the agencies. Her approach to splitting the two aspects of the Circle was perceived by the Circle, to be an attempt to push boundaries.

Elaine, Core Member (149-156)

> *'…it was getting to kind of the legalities and innocence and guilt and um the rules and the regulations and my kind of anger um my anger came out a little bit of spending too much time with spending so much time for something I never did and that kind of I think that kind of went a little bit um I kind of well the six week I'd discussed it with the group and got told, it got explained a lot better (inaudible) um I kind of had to live with it because there's not a lot that can be done to fix the problem so I kind of went back to the group and they accepted there were no legalities and no um so really certain subjects we couldn't talk about…'*

Elaine tried to use the Circles to vent her frustrations about being imprisoned for offences for which she denied responsibility. Elaine may have been seeking acknowledgement from the Circle for her self-proclaimed innocence, using denial as a form of self-preservation. However, the Circle recognised that whilst discussions were centred around legalities, they were unable to make progress with Elaine. The Circle raised this issue with Elaine openly, acknowledging her concerns whilst explaining that such topics of discussion were not conducive to Elaine's future. Whilst she was not entirely happy to step away from the topic, Elaine took on board the advice and agreed to focus on other areas of her life in which she could make positive progress. Elaine often directed topics of conversation away from that which she did not wish to discuss.

Theme 3: Core Member Empowerment

Elaine was encouraged to explore what it was she hoped to achieve through participation in the Circle. In an attempt to regain some form of control, the Circle took the decision to take a short break to allow Elaine to re-evaluate her place in the Circle. The break was beneficial in Elaine identifying the benefit in her participation in Circles and marked a turning point in which she began to take on board advice from the Circle in reducing her chaotic behaviour outside the Circle.

Hannah, Coordinator (117-125)

> *'…I think we took six or seven weeks off of the Circle to give the volunteers a break to, because they were quite frustrated I think they needed some down time but also for the Core Member to reflect on what she wanted from the Circle, if she was missing anything from the Circle um and also to come back to put the ball in her court that if she was willing to kind of if she wanted to carry on what she wanted to do based on the feedback she was given. So is there anything that she can do differently to keep things going and we thought that she would just walk away, but she came back and said I've really thought about this and I really feel like I wanna do things differently uh and she has been since, it's been less kind of over taking the meetings with big dramas…'*

Hannah explains how the decision was made to take a break from the Circle to allow everyone some space and allow Elaine the time to decide what she wanted to do going forward. The break empowered Elaine by allowing her to decide if she wanted to remain in the Circle and how she wanted to move forward. Hannah states how the Circle was surprised that Elaine chose to remain in the Circle and noticed the positive change in her attitude and behaviour since the break. The change in behaviour may have come about as a result of the feedback Elaine received from the Circle and the realisation that the Circle accepted her as she was. Elaine may have realised that she had nothing to prove to the Circle and so no reason to try to shock and dazzle.

Elaine, Core Member (122-127)

> *'…we had a six week, a six week break, uhh that six weeks took an awful long time to go um and it was like it was good because in that six weeks I had to rely on me and not have that (inaudible) so I had to rely and remember on what I'd learnt from them and it kind of like that six weeks was the time I thought well crumbs I actually have learnt quite a bit and changed quite a lot from the time of getting out of prison to that six week gap'.*

Elaine described how her break from the Circle gave her the opportunity to test out the skills she had developed whilst being involved with Circle. The break provided her with a preview of what her life would be like when the Circle came to an end. During this break, Elaine reflected upon how much she had already changed since leaving prison and how far she had some with the help from the Circle. The break allowed Elaine the chance to evaluate herself as a person and how far she had come since leaving prison. Positively, Elaine chose to return to the Circle and continue to work with her volunteers. With the support of her Circle, Elaine came to terms with who she was and was supported to settle into the community. Elaine developed trust in the Circle and their intention to help and began to make positive changes to her lifestyle as a result.

Case Study Three: Ryan

Ryan joined his Circle shortly after release from prison. His index offences were grooming and incitement of sexual activity with a child. Two main themes emerged from the analysis of Ryan's case study. The themes were *Finding Faith and Giving Back and Self-Awareness of Risk.*

Theme 1: Finding Faith and Giving back

Ryan spoke about how he came to find his faith whilst in prison. He continued to seek involvement in church groups upon release and found support through them upon his open disclosure of his offence history. Ryan make positive attempts to reintegrate and progress with his life and whilst Ryan was very self-aware of his risk factors, he also made a distinction between his past and his future. He reflected upon the harm he had done and identified a way in which he could 'give back' following the harm he had caused. He recognised that giving back could not undo the harm but felt he could go some way in doing good. He also linked giving back with his Christian faith.

Ryan, Core Member (89-91)

> *'…I came to faith in, in custody and I've, I've started eh getting involved in a few church groups so I'm making me own social connections now erm whereas they were there for me when I had nothing…'*

Ryan became interested in religion whilst in prison and got involved with church groups upon release. He notes how he has been making his own social connections but how Circles helped him initially when he did not have any connections in place. Ryan's description of Circles describes how Circles filled the gap between leaving prison with no support network and finding his own social support through his church groups. Without the Circles, Ryan may have felt more isolated from the community as he tried to reintegrate. Alison described how Ryan has developed friendships from his involvement in the church.

Alison, Coordinator (244-248*)*

> *'…he's made up like a circle of friends from the church and he's disclosed his offences to, there was like erm some kind of meeting where he disclosed his offences and he said other people came up and, and hugged him and said you know thanks for being so honest with us you know we'll just be here to help and support you so yeah I think he has got what he wanted out of it'.*

Ryan, like many people with a history of sexual offences suffered with low self-esteem. He held concerns over how people would view him due to his offence history. Making connections within the church and being able to openly disclose his offences without being judged has been beneficial to Ryan's mental wellbeing. This is something which started with Circles. Being supported by volunteers that accepted Ryan historical offences, but did not judge his future potential, encouraged Ryan that there would be others out there who would also support and accept him.

Theme 2: Self-Awareness of Risk

Ryan spent much time reflecting upon his own risk factors. He was aware that his risk was linked to alcohol and drug use combined with social media usage and isolation. He often reflected upon the detrimental effect his actions had upon his victims and was cautious not to allow his risk factors to surface.

Alison, Coordinator (158-165)

> *'…he said you know I do realise that I am attracted to teenage girls although I'm kind of struggling with that I know that I have got that attraction and I'm kind of trying to keep everyone safe um and he would talk about things like how he would manage that or you know if situations came up for him how he would cope with that or what strategies he had in place he used to talk about it quite openly and quite honestly and he said at that very first meeting he said you know I want you's to, if I say that I'm going to be doing something and I'm not doing it I want you to hold me to account and to say you know last week you said this or you did this and so he was very straight from the off'.*

Alison described how Ryan was open and honest about his perceived risk from the beginning and wanted the Circle to actively hold him to account for his behaviour. Ryan did not try to minimise his risk in any way and instead spoke openly about his attraction towards teenage girls and the strategies he would employ if ever he found himself in a risky situation. Farmer, McAlinden and Maruna (2016) postulated that individuals who reported that situational factors led to their offending were better equipped to develop a new pro-social identity that was helpful in their desistance. Furthermore, Ryan's openness and honesty signalled a willingness to change and acknowledgement that he required support to address his risk concerns.

Ryan, Core Member (179-185)

> *'I don't wanna go back in jail I don't wanna destroy anybody else's life and if I do feel myself slipping I know I won't do drugs again and I, I seen that as the gateway you know because no-one can tell me why I did what I did, you know I had a fantastic childhood all stuff like that, I've got nothing to blame, it's all down to me. There's something within me, I don't know what it is erm, but I'll do anything to stop that coming out again and if I do feel like I'm slipping again I will get in touch with Alison with a with a view to maybe starting a Circle up again just, just to you know knock some things about again then'.*

In speaking about his offence history, Ryan took full responsibility of his actions. He spoke of having something within him. The way in which he differentiated between internal and external factors demonstrates how Ryan portrays an internal locus of control in relation to his previous offending behaviour. An internal locus of control indicates that Ryan believes that his behaviour is within his control. Ryan is adamant that he does not want to reoffend again in the future and made plans to actively seek out help should he feel like he's 'slipping'. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) argued that the feared self is often a strong motivator in the process of desistance. The combination of regret for his past behaviour and determination to build a new life are positive indicators of Ryan's desistance.

Summary

Study 3 has detailed the results of a qualitative analysis of EOCR and case studies. Whilst study 3a reported on instances that characterised successful and less successful outcomes, study 3b illustrated the qualities of successful Circles. In study 3b, Martin, Elaine and Ryan each faced their

own unique difficulties yet all three remained within their Circles and openly discussed any issues that arose. Whilst each Core Member experienced their own unique difficulties, they were all similar in the way that they each received consistent support and commitment from their respective volunteers. In each of these case studies, volunteers developed genuine trusting relationships with their volunteers and coordinators. These quality relationships encouraged Martin and Ryan to gain confidence to increase their social network outside of their Circles. Whilst Elaine took on board advice to reduce her turbulent lifestyle for her own benefit. The positive influence provided by Circles further encouraged self-reflection and awareness in all three Core Members. The positive effects illustrated in these case studies mirror those of the positive themes that emerged in study 3a.

Study 4: Exploring the experiences and skills of Circles volunteers

There is a diverse literature around the motivations for people volunteering their free time for the benefit of others (see Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Windsor, Anstey & Rodgers, 2008). This can be an altruistic endeavour, or an avenue for volunteers to make meaningful and purposeful experiences in their lives. From an altruistic perspective, volunteerism can be understood to influence reciprocity. In terms of pro-social, empathic and altruistic behaviour, then, volunteerism should make a meaningful impact on public protection and safety.

Circles volunteers working with people with sexual convictions fill a significant and important role. Such volunteers overtly and covertly mitigate against negative, even harmful, societal attitudes. These attitudes often regard people who commit sexual offences as the worst kind of 'offender' (Elliott, Hocken, Lievesley, Blagden, Winder, & Banyard, 2018). Elliott et al. (2018) unpack and explain the desistance process for people with sexual convictions. A purposeful meaningful life is fundamental, with social inclusion representing a corner stone for rehabilitation. Circles volunteers provide an inclusive support network (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007). Implicit here is the modelling of pro-social behaviour. For the individual with a sexual conviction, Circles volunteers provide a safe emotional space (Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo, & Cortoni, 2007) that, in turn, can foster positive outcomes. This group represent belonging, respect, meaning and purposefulness. A significant dimension of Circles for this marginalised group is the process of 'accountability'. The recognition of accountability, by the Core Member, enables honest meaningful reflexivity. Circles volunteers contain and facilitate a process of identity reconstruction.

Aims

1. To chart the volume of volunteering by Circles volunteers
2. To identify increases in skills, confidence and experience of volunteers
3. To report on the percentage of volunteers who have gained valuable skills, experience and confidence
4. To assess the success of BL Circles training in meeting its aims.

Method

Materials

To address aim one, quarterly volunteer timesheets are completed by all BL Circles providers. These are collated by Circles UK and sent to the evaluation team on a quarterly basis. To address aims two, three and four, a questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire assesses volunteers' self-reported levels of confidence and experience in relation to several transferable skills, to determine whether engaging in Circles is associated with increases in their confidence and experience of these skills. Example transferable skills included in the questionnaire were: public speaking; confronting and expressing opinions; collaborating to solve problems; demonstrating empathy; and working independently. The survey presents 14 transferable skills which participants are asked to respond to using a five-point scale (1=Not at all confident /experienced to 5=Extremely confident/experienced).

The questionnaire also assesses the success of training, specifically whether it meets the aims that it sets out to. Volunteers are asked how confident they feel in areas that are covered by the training. These questions are administered prior to completing the training and after completing the training so that changes can be assessed. Examples of the areas that volunteers rated their confidence on were the aims of Circles, volunteer roles and responsibilities, monitoring for people who have committed sexual offences and understanding personal boundaries. The survey presents 12 statements which participants were asked to respond to using a five-point scale (1=Very poor understanding to 5 = Excellent understanding).

Ethics

University ethical approvals were received for collection and analysis of the data described.

Sample

The sample of participants who provided demographic information regarding their age and employment status consisted of 441. Three hundred and ninety-six of these provided information regarding their gender. This sample comprised 57% of the total number of volunteers recruited and trained since the beginning of the BL evaluation (n=778). Two hundred and seventy-one participants (35%) completed the training aims questionnaire pre and post training. Fifty-four participants (7%) completed the skills questionnaire pre- and post-Circles.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered at the following time points: (1) pre-training; (2) post-training (only the training aims questionnaire); (3) post-Circles (only the transferable skills questionnaire). The completed volunteer time sheets were used to chart the volume of volunteering. SPSS software was used to calculate and chart the frequencies of volunteer age and gender. The mean scores of volunteers' skills, experience and confidence were calculated in SPSS.

Inferential statistical (SPSS) analysis was not possible for comparisons between pre-Circles and post-Circles scores on volunteers' confidence and experience in relation to their transferable skills. This was due to only small sample of participants who had completed questionnaires at both time points. Descriptive graphical results are however presented with differences in mean scores discussed. Statistical (SPSS) analysis was possible, however, for a comparison between the volunteers' confidence of the training aims before and after Circles volunteer training.

Results

The number of volunteers recruited and trained by Circles Providers comprised 778 volunteers as at 01 February 2020. The total number of hours committed by volunteers to BL Circles were 35,976 (this includes direct and indirect time contributed, including attending volunteer induction training, which was mandatory for all Circles volunteers.).

Volunteer demographics

Demographic information was collected from all of the volunteer participants, regarding their gender, age and employment status at the time they were working in a Circle (see table 12).

Table 12: Volunteer demographic information

Demographic	Category	Number of total volunteers	Percentage of total volunteers
Gender	Male	56	12.7%
	Female	340	77.1%
	Declined to answer	45	10.2%
Age in years	18-24	211	47.8%
	25-34	112	25.4%
	35-44	36	8.2%
	45-54	24	5.4%
	55-64	18	4.1%
	65-74	11	2.5%
	75 or older	8	1.8%
	Declined to answer	21	4.8%
Employment status	Full-time	113	25.6%
	Part-time	81	18.4%
	Student	177	40.1%
	Unable to work	2	0.5%
	Out of work & looking for work	12	2.7%
	Out of work but not currently looking for work	4	0.9%
	Retired	22	5.0%
	Other	8	1.8%
	Declined to answer	22	5.0%

Evaluation of Circles volunteer training

The overall mean scores from pre- and post-training identified a 38.9% increase in the volunteers understanding of the training aims. A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to determine whether this difference between the volunteers' pre and post training questionnaire scores was statistically significant. Results indicate there was a statistically significant difference in the pre-training scores (Mean=37.14, SD=9.0) and the post-training scores (Mean=51.57, SD=7.0); t(270)=-24.610, p=.001. Qualitative comments were that the training was informative, interactive and confidence boosting, with the roleplays perceived as particularly helpful.

> *'I found the training incredibly interesting and surprisingly enjoyable. I appreciated the way all the trainers handled the training and the topics discussed'.*

'The roleplay was really helpful and gave me a better understanding of the possible situations that could happen. I'm not a massively confident person so it pushed me to talk and progressed my social skills further'.

'[The] role play was really helpful, although the information given helped calm prior concerns, putting it into practice [via roleplays] really helped and was the best bit for me. Thank you!'

'Very interactive and effective training'

'Good quality, confidence boosting training very proactive and interesting'

'Excellent training, really good mix of interactive anecdotes and practical information. I feel confident at the thought of working in a circle. Thank you very much.'

Assessing change in volunteers' experience and confidence in using transferable skills

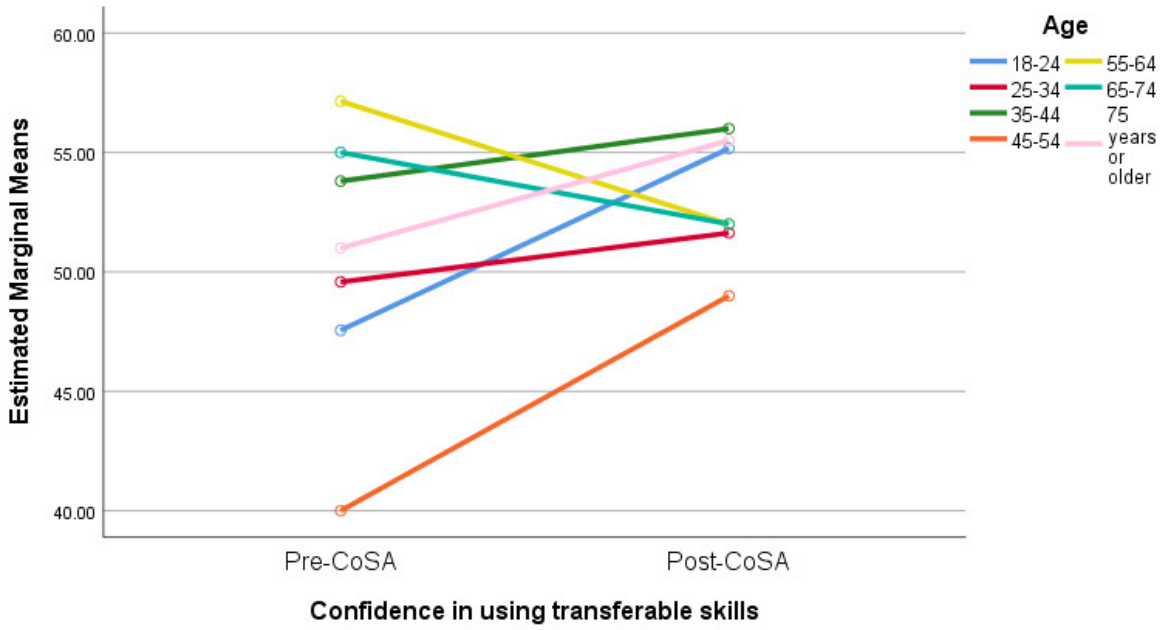
Volunteer mean scores were calculated in SPSS for the volunteers' experience and confidence in using transferable skills. As highlighted in table 12, the greatest positive change for volunteers during their time on a Circle, was in their experience of public speaking, co-ordinating people and activities and facilitating self-awareness in others. Public speaking, advising and guiding others and making decisions were also some of the skills that volunteers felt more confident in using by the end of the Circle.

Table 13: Mean scores for the experience and confidence in using transferable skills

Transferable skill	Experience in using the skill		Confidence in using the skill	
	Pre Circles Mean (S.D)	Post Circles Mean (S.D)	Pre Circles Mean (S.D)	Post Circles Mean (S.D)
Public Speaking	3.0 (.93)	3.5 (.87)	2.9 (.97)	3.2 (.80)
Confronting & expressing opinions without insulting	3.6 (.86)	3.8 (.71)	3.7 (.89)	3.9 (.69)
Giving constructive feedback	3.5 (.8)	3.6 (.92)	3.5 (.78)	3.8 (.76)
Creating innovative solutions to problems	3.4 (.84)	3.6 (.88)	3.3 (.81)	3.6 (.91)
Coordinating people & activities	3.3 (1.02)	3.8 (.79)	3.3 (.96)	3.7 (.93)
Working with people on a group project	3.9 (.87)	3.8 (.83)	3.9 (.82)	4.0 (.88)
Motivating team members to work towards collaborative goals	3.5 (.93)	3.7 (.95)	3.6 (.92)	3.8 (1.00)
Dealing effectively with conflict or difficult people	3.6 (.92)	3.8 (.85)	3.4 (.94)	3.7 (.86)
Advising & guiding others	3.5 (.86)	3.9 (.81)	3.6 (.83)	4.0 (.82)
Demonstrating empathy	4.1 (.77)	4.0 (.98)	4.1 (.79)	4.2 (.83)
Facilitating self-awareness in others	3.3 (.98)	3.9 (.83)	3.4 (.92)	3.7 (.92)
Making decisions	3.9 (.78)	4.1 (.73)	3.6 (.82)	4.0 (.92)
Working independently	4.3 (.69)	4.2 (.74)	4.3 (.73)	4.3 (.89)
Taking on new challenges	4.0 (.81)	3.7 (.84)	3.5 (.86)	3.7 (.86)

Overall, there was an increase of 2.78% in volunteers' experience of using these skills pre- and post-Circle. A larger increase (6%) was demonstrated by volunteers in terms of their confidence in using these skills from pre to post Circles. As can be seen in Figure 8, the most notable increase was for volunteers aged 45-54 followed by those aged 18-24 years. There was a slight decrease in confidence for those in the 55-64 and 65-74 age category; this finding would benefit from further exploration in future research.

Figure 8. The changes in volunteer confidence of using the transferable skills for pre to post Circles.



A paired sample *t*-test was conducted to determine whether the overall difference between the volunteers' confidence of using the transferable skills pre to post Circle was statistically significant. Results indicate there was a statistically significant difference in the pre-Circle confidence scores (Mean=50.26, SD=9.06) and the post-Circle confidence scores (Mean=53.4, SD=8.4); t(52)=-2.047, p=.05.

Summary

The participants included within this study comprised, for gender and age variables, 57% of the total amount of volunteers recruited and trained since the beginning of the BL Circles project. The sample size for the participants who had completed the pre and post training questionnaires was 35% of total volunteers recruited and trained, with only 7% of volunteers completing the skills questionnaire post Circles. This may have been due to attrition, to challenges collecting the data (in particular the new regulations around GDPR that came into force in during the lifetime of the project), lack of motivation to complete the surveys post-Circle, but also may be due to some of the BL Circles not yet having completed.

The use of volunteers has been described as the strength of Circles, allowing Core Members to feel part of the community by having contact with 'real people' other than just professionals (Armstrong & Wills, 2014). In their role as a volunteer, members of the community provide support for volunteers, whilst also holding them accountable for their thoughts and behaviours relevant to their 'past offending self' (Kitson-Boyce, Blagden, Winder & Dillon, 2019). In addition, volunteers are also required to provide both instrumental (practical) and expressive (emotional) support to the Core Members during their Circle journey (Northcutt Bohmert, Duwe, & Hipple, 2016). The role of the volunteer is therefore complex and recognised within the literature as a difficult balance to strike (McCartan, 2016). Feelings of increased connectedness need to be balanced with vigilance to prevent a blurring of the boundaries between volunteers and core members (Höing, Bogaerts, & Vogelvang, 2015). The need for these complex skills can lead to a lack of confidence and uncertainty in their role as a volunteer and, in certain situations, issues of ambiguous practice can arise (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019).

From the data collected so far in this study, however, participation in a Circle is associated with increases in confidence and experience of using a range of transferable skills for volunteers. This could indicate the possibility of Circles having a wider impact for local citizens and communities in terms of increasing local skills and employability. In addition, the Circles training appears to meet its intended aims. The results demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the volunteers' understanding of the training aims form pre to post training. The results from this study can be situated within the existing body of research literature (see Elliott et al., 2018), which demonstrates volunteering as a process of reciprocity, often delivering beneficial outcomes for volunteers. The above results demonstrate this with volunteers experiencing a significant increase in their confidence of using the transferable skills measured during their time working with a Circles. The role of reciprocity is significant here in supporting people with sexual convictions and influencing the desistance process.

The Integrated Theory of Desistance from Sexual Offending (ITDSO; Gobbels et al, 2012) advocates progressing phases for people achieving lasting desistance. External support networks, such as that provided by Circles volunteers, form fundamental aspects of both desistance and community reintegration. Similarly, the Good Lives Model (GLM; Ward & Stewart, 2003) advocates strength-based approaches. This focuses on the positive aspect of living pro-socially and the fundamental experiences of living fulfilling lives. Strength based approaches can, perhaps, be conceptualised as can-do approaches, focusing on Core Members' abilities and capacities. These are all processes of core members actualising personal development. From a perspective of reciprocity, the role of volunteers becomes mutually beneficial and symbiotic in nature. Thus, suggested by volunteer personal growth throughout the Circles process.

General Conclusions

This report provides an overview of evaluation results for the BL funded Circles. More detailed and in-depth analysis are available through the associated PhD (Dwerryhouse, 2020) and additional dissemination via academic presentations (see Winder et al, 2020).

The results of the research indicate that Circles have a statistically significant and positive impact upon Core Members in terms of improved emotional wellbeing, and positive effects on reduced isolation and positive reintegration. Thus, the data identified that, prior to beginning a Circle, Core Members demonstrated significantly lower emotional wellbeing than the general population. However, throughout the course of their Circle, Core Member wellbeing significantly improved, though this remained lower than the general population. The results demonstrate a significant increase in wellbeing scores from pre-circle to 12 months, representing an 18% increase, with 67% of Core Members demonstrating improved levels of wellbeing by the end of their Circle.

The findings also highlight a reduction in risk, such that dynamic risk was significantly reduced between the first measurement point (three months post-Circle start) and the nine-month assessment point. The findings indicate a gradual reduction in risk over time; this incremental decrease in risk highlights the importance of the Circle lifecycle. Circles are not a 'quick fix' but work as a function of the time invested in them by all parties (Circles Coordinators, Core Members and volunteers). For Circles with unsuccessful outcomes (this was a small number, however), there was no significant change in dynamic risk scores. However, where Circles had successful outcomes there was a 20% reduction in dynamic risk between the starting assessment point and the 3rd assessment point (at nine months post-Circle start). This is a significant reduction in risk, which has accrued gradually over the lifetime of the Circle. Furthermore, Circles the results demonstrate how Circles can often complete earlier than planned for positive reasons. Examples include Core Members gaining employment and developing pro-social networks such as religious affiliations. In such cases, Core Members are deemed to be reintegrated at an earlier timepoint and are not in need of Circle support. As Clarke et al (2015) reported, early outcomes do not necessarily indicate unsuccessful outcomes.

The findings from study 1 and 2, which are reported above, supports the conclusions of previous research apropos increased Core Member wellbeing (see Bates et al, 2012) and is reflected in the findings that service users were generally stable throughout the Circle's cycle, with data trends indicating pro-social and personal improvement.

Other positive factors are also evident in the findings, such as the high percentage of service users gaining and maintaining suitable accommodation, establishing more stable, emotional relationships and engaging with purposeful activities and hobbies throughout the lifetime of the Circles. Whilst all Core Members gained accommodation (see Lomas, Winder, Blagden & Lievesley, 2020, for research around the accommodation needs of people with sexual convictions), the results demonstrated that Core Members gained work (paid or voluntary), increased their engagement with activities and

hobbies, improving their social capital, and built up relationships with others through the lifetime of their Circle. The increases in employment and/or voluntary work for Core Members is an important aspect to highlight, since being involved in purposeful activity, particularly paid employment, has a plethora of benefits. These benefits include a structured day, purposeful activity, social contact with others, improved status and sense of identity, and a reduced financial strain on self and family (Creed & Macintyre, 2001). The benefits of employment for Core Members (and all those with sexual convictions) are magnified, since employment and voluntary work bring with them a sense of purpose, having structure in one's day (Seleznow, Littel & Matson, 2002), something to look forward to and greater social contact (Waddell & Burton, 2016): these are all protective factors that mitigate against sexual reoffending.

The findings demonstrate a positive picture for all those Circles with successful outcomes. However, part of the focus of this evaluation was to consider why not all Circles are successful. Emergent findings suggest that, where an adverse outcome does occur, it may be related to low levels of Core Member commitment, as indicated by feelings of distrust and erratic attendance at meetings. This dimension of Circles requires further investigation and will be followed up in the associated PhD thesis that sits alongside this report (see Dwerryhouse, 2020). It is logical to hypothesise that any link between Circles with unsuccessful outcomes and the recidivism of ex-Core Members conversely supports Circles' efficacy and effectiveness. Thus, the data indicate that those who commit to Circles in the long term appear to gain the greatest benefits. Where Circles do end in adverse outcomes (that is, unplanned endings, such as re-arrest), it is important to consider if the Circle played its role in monitoring and accountability of Core Members. Where this is the case, and a person has been recalled as a consequence of risky behaviour highlighted in a Circles meeting, or by volunteers, it is important to recognise that this is a valuable outcome (in terms of protecting the public), even if the outcomes is an adverse one for the Core Member and their volunteers.

The example case studies detailed in study 3 of this report highlight the complex nature of the work involved in delivering a Circle. Core Members are complex individuals with complex lives. The richness and depth of detail provided in these sample case studies highlight the highs and lows of the Circle journey for both Core Members and volunteers. This qualitative research (and other Circles qualitative research, such as the work by Kitson-Boyce et al., 2017, 2018) give some context to the improvements in wellbeing, emotional stability and reductions in risk that have been evidenced for Circles with successful outcomes. They also help to demonstrate why some Circles may not have successful outcomes. As with many Criminal Justice System interventions, part of the challenge is ensuring service users complete the intervention. The current findings highlight the low dropout rate of Core Members in comparison to other interventions (for example, 34% dropout rate in a social-correctional programme in Germany for individuals who have committed sexual offences; Brunner et al., 2019 and 40% dropout rate for people convicted of domestic violence offences attending court ordered treatment; Rosenfeld, 1992).

There are also positive results in terms of volunteers who feel they have more transferable skills post-Circle. Increases in volunteer reports of confidence and transferable skills suggests that Circles

may also deliver a positive by-product within the community. With the literature suggesting the reciprocal nature of volunteering and the fundamental importance of Core Member support networks, these findings, then, are also indicative of positive personal and social impact.

This report details the findings to date of the 188 BL funded Circles. The associated PhD peer-reviewed publications will be made available as they become available; a revised version of this final report utilising the complete dataset will be available after Autumn 2020.

Recommendations

- The use and design of the dynamic risk tool should be evaluated. Training should be given to volunteers to improve consistency on its completion and reduce missing data.
- There should be a renewed emphasis on improving the quality and quantity of evaluation data, perhaps providing additional training for Providers and their Coordinators to support consistency in completing DRRs and EOCRs.
- The dynamic risk review tool should be completed pre-Circle and at the first Circle meeting between Core Member and volunteers (to provide more baseline data).
- In completing reviews subsequent to the pre-circle DRR there should be a process of comparison and reflection on the scores on the current and previous reviews, which could then inform the direction and the immediate objectives of the Circle.
- Items about accommodation (and other questions which produce little variability in terms of data responses) should be amended to assess quality of accommodation.
- Locus of control and a measure of hope could be added to the evaluation of change measures (alongside the emotional wellbeing measure). Both measures are gaining traction in the desistance literature and thus might be useful additions.
- Validated static risk and dynamic risk measures should be considered for all Core Members at the start and end of the Circle.
- Sufficient funding needs to be put aside for the evaluation to ensure the process and outcome evaluation is as complete and robust as possible.
- Differences across regions should be explored, analysed and reported.
- Circles UK should consider a control group design or a randomised control trial to evaluate the effectiveness of Circles in a UK context.
- The 'ripple effect' of volunteers building relationships with people who have committed sexual offences and who are typically excluded from society should be assessed.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Circles UK for their help and support in carrying out this evaluation. We would also like to extend thanks to the Circle Coordinators for their lasting commitment to Circles and this evaluation and their support in gathering the required data. Thanks are also due to the Circle volunteers in giving their time in supporting Core Members and in reporting upon their experiences of Circles. We would also like to thank each and every Core Member, past and present involved in this project for sharing their experiences with us.

We would also like to recognise the help of Daniel Micklethwaite (NTU), Lynn Taylor (Circles UK), Kerry Earnshaw (Circles UK) and Jade Lamont (NTU) in compiling and inputting data for this project.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale was funded by the Scottish Executive National Programme for improving mental health and well-being, commissioned by NHS Health Scotland, developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh, and is jointly owned by NHS Health Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh.