

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SEX OFFENDERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES: THEIR ORIGINS AND IMPLEMENTATION BETWEEN 1999 - 2005¹

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Abstract

Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs) are an innovative, volunteer-based means of supervising sex offenders, usually upon release from prison, which were 'transplanted' from Canada to England and Wales at the turn of the 21st century. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Lucy Faithful Foundation, were concerned with both the extreme demonisation of sex offenders in the press, and with the need to find better ways of safeguarding children from sexual abuse. The Home Office was simultaneously developing new mechanisms of public protection and funded three COSA pilot schemes between 2002 and 2005. The processes of development and implementation were essentially informal and improvised, crucially dependent on the choices, decisions, energy, status and reputations of particular individuals in particular places and networks. Circles flourished at the intersection of a nascent official concern with public protection, and the determination of faith-based professional activists (and others) to reaffirm the redeemability of sex offenders, but there was never a "structural logic" which made the emergence of COSA inevitable. Drawing on information from the key players, this paper details the processes by which they came into being.

Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs) are an innovative, volunteer-based means of supervising sex offenders, usually upon release from prison, which were 'transplanted' from Canada to England and Wales at the turn of the 21st century. They were initially taken up and piloted by the Home Office, albeit on a small scale, and their early development can be illuminated by Jones and Newburn's (2007) insights into "policy

transfer". In England, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was the body through which transfer was effected, and had it not been for their initiative - which reflected both a long tradition of Quaker involvement in penal reform and their considerable experience of turning spiritual and social concerns into enduring (and eventually independent) secular projects² - it is quite possible that Circles may never have come to the attention of the Home Office. The fusion of Quaker discernment and Home Office judgement proved timely. It meant that there was just sufficient official appreciation of what Circles might be able to offer in Britain before the media-driven moral panic about released sex offenders that had steadily gained momentum in the late 1990s intensified into a serious confrontation between the redtop press and government over the issue of "naming and shaming", when eight year old Sarah Payne was murdered by a known paedophile in July 2000 (see Silverman and Wilson (2002) and Critcher (2003) for detailed analyses of this moral panic).

Although COSA continue to exist in England and Wales, this paper seeks only to explain their origins and implementation between 1999 and 2005. To appreciate why the Home Office (and some local criminal justice agencies) came to value Circles it is necessary to understand how policy towards sex offenders had been developing throughout the 1990s. Numerous national and international studies had documented the activities of "predatory paedophiles" and enlarged professional understanding of the scale and nature of child abuse. (Wyre and Tate 1995; Grubin 1998). The tabloid media were quick to demonise these offenders (Kitzinger 1998), and to elide the clinical term "paedophile" with the generic categorisation "sex offender". While increased levels of multiagency working and changes in legislation would have occurred anyway in response to heightened sensitivities towards paedophiles, the strident and aggressive tabloid critique formed the backcloth against which changes occurred. It created an image of released paedophiles/ sex offenders so loathsome and terrifying that no-self respecting community would be prepared to tolerate them in their midst. Indeed, communities were encouraged to take steps to shame and/or expel them. The (admittedly challenging) cases of Sydney Cooke, Robert Oliver and Lennie Smith, (present during an orgy in 1985 during which a 14-year old boy died), who were hounded from venue to venue after release and eventually housed either in Police stations or in a flat in the grounds of Nottingham Prison, received considerable attention in 1998. It also led, in the Home Office, to the development of an "early warning system" which apprised ministers of the imminent release of potentially high profile sex offenders. Notwithstanding that predatory paedophiles do pose real risks to children - Cooke made contact with a paedophile network quite soon after release and was subsequently re-imprisoned - the often prosaic human reality of releasing sex offenders from prison was obscured by the media's skewed imagery. Not all offenders who sexually assault children resemble the tabloid stereotype - some had undergone treatment, some were motivated to desist and to start new lives, and some were themselves very fearful of the way communities would react to them.

Sex offender legislation in the 1990s contained both punitive and actuarial elements, and was primarily intended to enhance public protection through risk management. New

developments in rehabilitative treatment were occurring too - some originating in Canada - but these were low key compared to the general regulatory thrust of legislation, whose reach affected far more offenders than the Sex Offender Treatment Project (SOTP) introduced into prisons in 1991 (Barker 1996; Heberton and Thomas 1996; Spencer 1999; Beech and Mann 2002). The Sex Offender Act 1997, for example, required all sex offenders against children to register their addresses with the Police and implicitly pressured the Police to work more closely with probation services in proactively managing the risk these offenders were deemed to pose. The assumption behind the Sex Offender's Register was that inadequate official knowledge of offenders' whereabouts had hitherto facilitated reoffending, but fears were expressed from the outset that a requirement to register would drive some offenders "underground" and therefore make them harder to "manage". The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 formalised co-operation among a range of agencies in respect of local crime generally, and created a Sex Offender Order, a civil measure with a criminal sanction if breach occurred, for which the Police could apply to a court in respect of any sex offender in the community who was thought to pose a risk of harm to the public. The Crime Sentences Act 1998 reinforced the perception of "sex crime" as increasingly heinous by permitting courts to impose discretionary life sentences for second serious violent or sexual offences, and allowed extended periods of post-prison supervision where harm was still considered likely. Even as this legislation was being enacted, further legislation was being planned to formalise Police-probation co-operation in the form of "multi-agency public protectional panels" (MAPPs) and it was into this evolving context that the idea of Circles of Support and Accountability was first introduced to the Home Office.

The Quaker Initiative

In May 1999, Nick McGeorge, a former principal prison psychologist, member of the Society of Friends and tireless champion of restorative justice, sent Helen Drewery, Assistant Secretary of Quaker Social Responsibility and Education some articles he had read in Canadian Quaker publications about the development of COSA by Mennonites (a "peace church" with clear spiritual and theological affinities to Quakers) in Canada. Drewery, who oversaw the Crime and Community Justice Committee, a standing national committee in the Society of Friends) had herself read about the Mennonite initiative earlier in the year³. Noting that COSA in Canada had developed in the context of the same media-driven hostility towards sex offenders as now prevailed in Britain, McGeorge and Drewery wondered if the idea could be developed here. The provocation of communal anger towards sex offenders - any offenders - was profoundly at odds with the reasoned and compassionate sensibility which Quakers have traditionally promoted in respect of lawbreakers, borne of a conviction that "there is that of God in every man" and a deep faith in non-violent and (as far as possible) non-punitive responses to criminals. The Mennonites were asked for further information, and sent their 50-page draft manual for establishing Circles (Mennonite Central Committee Ontario 1996). In August 1999, McGeorge contacted a former prison psychologist colleague, Hugh Marriage, then Head of the Criminal Policy Strategy Unit at the Home Office, to check if there was likely to be official interest in Circles. Marriage had been closely involved in brokering complex

resettlement arrangements for Sydney Cooke and Robert Oliver, knew from experience more generally how problematic it could be to release dangerous offenders without adequate support, and was aware from a previous job as Deputy Head of the Home Offices' Probation Unit that the Probation Service was not then prioritising work with ex-prisoners. For all these reasons he saw potential in COSA, and directed McGeorge to the Dangerous Offenders Unit (DOU).

Carol Kellas, head of DOU, convened a small initial meeting at the Home Office on 10th February 2000 to explore and test enthusiasm for COSA among potentially interested parties. In addition to McGeorge and Drewery, it was attended by Paddy Doyle, a senior probation officer from the Northumbria service seconded to the DOU to work on public protection issues, Roger Kennington, a probation officer from the Northumbria service (who was also chair of the National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA)), and by Donald Findlater, Deputy Director of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, and clinical manager of its Wolvercote Clinic in Surrey. The latter two were particularly well respected experts in work with sex offenders. The meeting concluded that a pilot scheme linked to a "local public protection panel and to local prison, probation and Police", and with strong links to faith-based organisations would be a good idea (Drewery 2000a). It also decided that a workshop should take place in June to which Canadians involved with Circles would be invited, and shortly afterwards, the Quakers gained funds from the Allen Lane Foundation to facilitate this.

The workshop was jointly hosted by the Home Office Dangerous Offender's Unit and the Quaker Social Responsibility and Education section of the Society of Friends, at Friends House, London, on 21st June 2000. It was chaired by Tim Newell, the governor of HMP Grendon (a therapeutic prison, many of whose inmates were sex offenders), and a prominent member of the Crime and Community Justice Committee. The previous month he had given a prestigious Quaker lecture on "forgiving justice", which, along with a book of the same name, was arousing great interest in the Society of Friends (Newell 2000). Five Canadians attended the workshop - a prison governor/parole director and a psychologist from the Ontario region of the Correctional Service of Canada; the national coordinator of Circles work in the Correctional Service Prison Chaplaincy; a detective from the Sexual Assault Squad of the Toronto Police, and the Executive Director of the Circles of Support and Accountability project of the Ontario Mennonite Central Committee. The twenty invited UK participants were drawn from a range of stakeholders in work with sex offenders: Police forces and probation services, Nacro, NOTA, The Derwent Initiative, Langley House Trust, Lucy Faithfull Foundation, the NSPCC, Victim Support, the Anglican and Catholic Churches, the Parole Board and various units within the Home Office, particularly the Dangerous Offenders Unit (DOU).

The Canadians explained that Circles in Canada were an entirely faith-based initiative, originated by members of the Mennonite Church and conceived as a form of community reintegration and restorative justice - of which, twenty years before, the Canadian Mennonites had also been pioneers, and remained champions. The first Circle had come

into being in 1994, somewhat serendipitously⁴, in Hamilton Ontario, and subsequently the model was extended elsewhere in the province, focussed particularly on sex offenders who had been deemed too risky to release early under supervision, and who were therefore released at the absolute endpoint of their custodial sentence, without any supervision or support at all, and perhaps without anyone to turn to. The workshop was shown a television documentary about a notorious Canadian paedophile called Bobby Oatway, early released after treatment in a British Columbia prison, but hounded from his probation accommodation in Toronto by public protests. He voluntarily returned to prison to serve his full custodial sentence, and was subsequently supported by a Circle. The aim of Canadian Circles, as summarised by Helen Drewery in her report on the workshop, was "to encourage the offender to recognise his responsibility towards the community", and simultaneously to encourage communities to take "greater responsibility in working with offenders, .. accepting that offenders form part of that community" (Drewery 2000b:3).

The creation of each Circle was the responsibility of the Mennonite Central Committee in each province (most at this point had been in Ontario). A distinctive, non-stigmatising vocabulary was developed to describe them. The offenders were called "core members". Between four and six volunteers were allocated to each core member, as far as possible from his own home area, though they tended not to be demographically representative of it. Many have been criminal justice professionals working in their spare time, students or retired people. Group meetings were initially weekly, but could become less frequent if the core member was interacting with at least one volunteer per day. A "covenant" was drawn up between the core member and the volunteers, detailing mutual expectations; "the core member must state that he is committed to 'no more victims of sexual abuse'" (Drewery 2000b:5). Volunteers signed up for a year, but some Circles lasted beyond this, into second and even third years. Individual volunteers can be replaced, sometimes by new friends of the core member, if suitably vetted. At least one Circle member is required to read the core member's full "official file", consultation is available with Correctional Services staff, and it is understood from the start that any signs of offending behaviour will be reported to the authorities.

The Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (1996) devised its manual "under contract" with Correctional Services Canada, but individual Circles and core members were rarely integrated into statutory supervision arrangements. The utility of Circles in individual cases was nonetheless recognised by individuals from statutory agencies; four of the five visitors were from such agencies and attested to this at the workshop. Working with high-need, high-risk and sometimes high profile sex offenders needed all the resources on offer. Canadian prison and probation staff had recognised that COSA were not in any way at odds with the work of community-based treatment programmes, and could supplement them. The Police had seen COSAs as a part-solution to the scarce resources they had in respect of sex offenders, more useful in some instances than the blunt instrument of a Judicial Restraint Order (the equivalent of an English Sex Offender Order), or the power to publicly broadcast the name and location of known paedophiles. The Correctional Service of Canada had made its own efforts to educate the public about the management

of sex offenders in their midst, sought to avoid raising expectations too high and came to see COSA as helpful in this respect. They understood that “people often feel powerless when faced with the introduction of released paedophiles into their community” and shared the Mennonite’s view that ‘by involving community representatives in the planning and establishing of Circles of Support it [was] hoped that their input could dissipate public hostility situations if the worst should happen” (Drewery 2000b:4).

At the time of the workshop, some thirty Circles had been run in Canada. An informal evaluation of them had just taken place. Tentative analysis suggested that the recidivism rate of core members averaged 10% over two years, compared to an expected/projected recidivism rate for such high-risk/high need sex offenders of 21.5% (Correctional Services of Canada Chaplaincy 2000). Whether this was an adequate and accurate evaluation is arguably beside the point: at the time it was sufficient to create confidence in the enterprise. In terms of local community attitudes towards sex offenders, there was no evidence either way to suggest that these had changed as a result of the presence of a COSA; no serious incidents had occurred in any of them to put communities to the test. Thus, in England, in terms of hard independent evidence, Circles could not yet be regarded as an entirely proven success, but neither were they an obvious failure, and in the context of the emerging policy challenges facing the Home Office in respect of sex offenders, their image and ethos was undoubtedly attractive.

The presentations and dialogue at the workshop convinced the UK participants that “the concept was worth pursuing in the UK context” (Drewery 2000b:7), although it was understood from the outset that any British circles would be more integrated within statutory services than their Canadian precursors had initially been. It was not thought necessary to restrict COSA to offenders released from prison; they were considered potentially useful supplements to any statutory supervision, and a better means of ensuring relapse prevention. It was hypothesised that probation officers might become members of Circles⁵. Although the Mennonites had not wanted Circles ever to be a “condition” of statutory supervision, it was also thought here that “Sex Offender Orders could also be adapted to include provision for Circles of Support” (idem) and the Quakers, whilst preferring to articulate Circles in the language of “restorative justice” and “community empowerment”, acknowledged that official agencies were thinking of it more in terms of “public protection”. In essence, Circles were seen to meet the needs of key agencies; prisons who were looking for safe ways to release people who were still possibly dangerous; Police who were increasingly involved in managing sex offenders in the community; and probation who had always understood the difficulties of reintegrating sex offenders. Tim Newell reminded the workshop, on the basis of his experience as a prison governor, that there were emotionally lonely prisoners who would welcome the support and protection offered by Circles. On the day after the workshop the Canadian visitors ran a Circles training day for interested parties.

The Home Office representatives got first hand confirmation at the workshop that there was genuine and widespread professional interest in COSA, and sensed that Circles would indeed support the work of the forthcoming public protection arrangements. Their commitment to Circles was nonetheless noteworthy, for two reasons. Firstly, proceeding with Circles required amending their view that volunteers were to be discouraged from working with sex offenders. Recent Home Office guidance had stated that “in view of the manipulation and denial that characterise much sexual offending, it is generally unsafe to deploy volunteers in work with sex offenders” (quoted in Drewery 2000b:7). Donald Findlater, who had once seriously doubted whether volunteers were suited to work with such a manipulative client group, was instrumental in encouraging this change. Secondly, despite pervasive Home Office rhetoric about the need for policy and practice to be “research-based” and “evidence-led”, and for interventions to be “accredited”, no such strictures were applied here; Circles were to be piloted despite the tentative nature of the evidence on reduced recidivism that had emerged so far in Canada. It was deemed sufficient to proceed on the basis of it, but the basis of the DOU’s support for COSA was primarily normative, and it was hoped that the pilots would themselves generate evidence of their utility.

The workshop concluded with a commitment to setting up a working group to take forward the idea of a COSA pilot, using several different models in order to identify the varieties of best practice. No pilots were expected to start before 2001, but Donald Findlater had been so impressed with the concept of Circles that before the end of 2000 he had visited Canada himself and subsequently established the very first English Circle, in Guildford, for an offender who had completed a period of residential treatment at Wolvercote.

Planning the Pilots

The 21st June workshop would have lent momentum to the development of Circles in any case - the DOU had already identified two areas in which pilots might be undertaken - but the pace of change may have been slower had it not been for the tragic event (and its media inspired repercussions) which took place a fortnight later. In Sussex, on July 1st, eight year old Sarah Payne went missing. Her body was found two weeks later and it transpired that she had been abducted and murdered by a known paedophile. This quickly became what Martin Innes (2003) has called a “signal crime”, a shocking event freighted (by the media) with meaning about the kind of country we have become, which seemingly contains within its associated narrative a clear, common sense, prescription of what needs to be done in response. There was an immense wave of public sympathy for the child’s parents and the tabloid press were quick to indict the government for failing to protect her: whatever changes had already been made on this front, it was implied, they had patently not been enough. The News of the World took up the case, and began a sustained campaign for the introduction of a “Sarah’s Law” - full community notification of 110,000 convicted English sex offenders whereabouts - to mirror “Megan’s Law”, the prototype of which was passed in the USA in 1996. Between 23rd July and 2nd August, until the Home Office pressured them to stop, they ran a “name and shame” campaign,

publishing the identities, addresses and photographs of convicted paedophiles who were living in relatively anonymity in towns and cities across Britain. This had the all too predictable consequence of provoking, or catalysing, vigilantism - most famously in the Paulsgrove area of Portsmouth, Hampshire - where on 6th August 150 protesters gathered to evict a man with fourteen convictions for child abuse. This became a riot - a Policeman suffered a broken nose, the man's house was invaded - but the tabloid press tended to portray it as a welcome example of community empowerment which might never have been necessary if the authorities had been doing their job properly. Demonstrations on Paulsgrove went on until 10th August but less dramatic incidents continued elsewhere in the country for many months afterwards, (some involving people who were merely mistaken for paedophiles). Despite clear evidence of the damage public notification could do, the paper continued its campaign for Sarah's Law throughout the whole of the following year.

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act, which established the MAPPAs, received royal assent in November 2000, but, whilst useful, did not go far enough for Sarah's parents or the tabloid press (Payne 2004:104). As Silverman and Wilson (2002) show, the Home Office was perturbed by the News of the World campaign and considered making some minor concessions to it (e.g. giving released sex offenders less time to sign the register) but it did not waiver in resisting full community notification of sex offenders' whereabouts to the general public. It preferred "controlled disclosure" to relevant agencies, recognising nonetheless, that they needed to work more closely together. MAPPAs were to be the mainstay of their solution, and COSA were seen firmly within that framework, not as a solution in themselves. They were in many respects a high risk intervention for the Home Office - humanistic, lacking a justifying research base, obviously vulnerable to criticism if things went wrong, and easily lampooned by the tabloid media, not at all the kind of measure which would easily assuage public anger - and it says something for the courage of the Public Protection Unit (as the Dangerous Offender's Unit was subsequently renamed) of the National Probation Directorate that they maintained their investment in it.

After the June workshop the Quakers did establish a National Circles Meeting, made up of interested parties and chaired by Tim Newell, to create a forum for further discussion about Circles and to promote involvement of other faith groups. Several meetings took place, but the Home Office in fact reacted more quickly than Quakers had anticipated, indicating that they would fund two pilot schemes, in the Hampshire and Northumbria Probation Areas respectively, pending receipt of a suitable business plan. These areas had been "in the frame" since the original February meeting in the Home Office, because of Nick McGeorge's links to Hampshire and the Kennington/Doyle links to Northumberland. Once the Home Office's intention was clear, the need for further open discussion was reduced, and attention switched to the proposed projects. In retrospect - in view of the fact that neither of the pilot schemes worked out (see below) - it was fortuitous that the Lucy Faithfull Foundation also applied to the Home Office for funding to extend their existing work, and that the Quakers themselves, realising that a project was unlikely to emerge in Northumberland, did likewise.

One other organisation also considered the idea - the Langley House Trust, a Christian-based provider of hostel accommodation for offenders since 1958, and which had been involved, (unsuccessfully, largely because of local neighbourhood opposition) in attempts to resettle Robert Oliver. Nick McGeorge had triggered Langley House's interest, by telling the chair of their trustees, Colin Honey (a former governor of HMP Albany, for whom McGeorge had once worked), about COSA⁶. The Trust had subsequently attended the June 2000 conference, and some later meetings, and in November 2000 the vice-chair of its trustees, David Lane, visited the Mennonites in Hamilton, Ontario. Lane concluded that Circles there had been successful, and that although volunteers were difficult to find, their use was viable, and did, as the Mennonites believed, "give the community a sense of control and ownership of the problem" (Lane 2001). He believed, however, that in two respects Circles had been easier to establish in Ontario than they might be in Britain. Firstly, because local churches had more authority and influence in local communities than was likely to be the case here. (The Mennonites had in fact sought to bring in other churches, but not all wanted to be involved, so some volunteers were advertised for in the local press). Secondly, Circles may be vulnerable in Britain because the level of public and media hostility to sex offenders in Canada, whilst intense, was seemingly not as vehement as that articulated in the News of the World's "name and shame" campaign. Lane was personally supportive of developing Circles, but was unable to persuade his fellow trustees to diversify into this work, and the Langley House Trust did not in fact become involved in a pilot.

By June 2000, Helen Drewery and Tim Newell, in conjunction with the Crime and Justice Committee were thinking that, following the Mennonite example, and given the apparently worsening public mood in respect of sex offenders, that Quakers themselves should bid to run a pilot. Circles were consistent with their commitment to restorative justice, even if they did not provide a direct service to the victim. The idea was taken forward, first to the central committee of Quaker Peace and Social Witness, then to the Society's highest authority, Meeting for Sufferings (its trustee body). There was strong support at each level, although some individual Quakers (sometimes survivors of abuse themselves, or relatives thereof) believed that energies would be better directed towards victim's than to perpetrators. These were partly assuaged by the idea that if Circles successfully prevented sexual offending, they would reduce future victimisation. The Quakers first attempt to find independent funding for their project was unsuccessful, but the Home Office agreed to fund it for three years, and Thames Valley was chosen as the site in which it would be undertaken. In the event, it was fortuitous that Quakers themselves became involved, for it was their pilot which showed most clearly that COSA could be successfully implemented within a local criminal justice system. The Hampshire scheme did start but was not as successfully implemented, while the Northumberland scheme never in fact started. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation pilot was implemented successfully but did not operate within a particular locality - its Circles were scattered across the country and their relationship with local criminal justice agencies looser and more variable than in Thames Valley.

The Circle Pilot Projects

The Quaker/Thames Valley Pilot

The Thames Valley Police and probation area operated a unique interagency Partnership, a charity founded in 1993, which had done much to mainstream the idea of “community safety” and to mobilise “on the ground the instinct of so many groups and individuals for active and effective citizenship” (Lord Hurd of Westwell 1998:13). Its culture of cooperation and innovation made it an ideal site for the Quaker COSA project, and the Partnership’s chief executive, Sue Raikes (1998), (a former Probation Officer) was a supporter from the outset. It already had an emerging interest in restorative justice, stimulated by its Chief Constable, Sir Charles Pollard, and also one of the longest established Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP) in the country. Tim Newell, who, as former governor of HMP Grendon - he had retired from the prison in September 2001 - was already a respected figure within the Partnership, became chair of the newly constituted Thames Valley Circles of Support and Accountability Steering Group in 2002. The project acquired an office next to the Thames Valley Partnership office, in Thame, in April 2002, the point at which Newell fully retired from the Prison Service.

Chris Wilson, and Rebekah Saunders, experienced senior probation officers from the Thames Valley SOTP, were appointed in April and June 2002 respectively. They spent their time contacting religious denominations for volunteers, visiting the prisons that were likely to refer “core members” (Grendon, Oxford, Bullingdon), devising protocols with various agencies. And, later, recruiting two more probation officers (also with backgrounds in sex offender work) to be Circle Coordinators. Recruitment of volunteers had to be worked at, but was never seriously difficult. A conscious effort was made to recruit secular volunteers, but the work - perhaps inevitably given the Quaker connection - was particularly attractive to some faith-based groups, and at various times all the major Christian denominations have been represented, as well as the Jewish and Buddhist faith, and, in one Circle, two Muslims, one of whom was a social work student. Fifty per cent of volunteers were faith-based in the second year of operation, one third by 2005. Where core members had faith, they self-defined as Christians. It has not been possible to ascertain equivalent data from LFF.

Age, experience and location were also important to recruitment in Thames Valley. Particular urban centres were targeted - Oxford, Reading, Milton Keynes, especially Universities - but care was taken never to create a Circle made up only of young people. Some volunteers - as in Canada - were care professionals of one sort or another, with variable knowledge of sex offenders. An initial training programme was devised - two weekend modules - in the course of which volunteers’ suitability was assessed, and in which some volunteers decided themselves that Circles were not for them⁷. Some nine months elapsed between starting the project and setting up the first Circle, in November 2002 - longer than had been anticipated - but the lengthy preparative work paid dividends, in that there was neither a shortage of volunteers, nor of referred core members.

The pilot was established and evolved against a backcloth of continuing media interest in sex crime - the murder of ten-year olds Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, Cambridgeshire in August 2002, and the murder of a registered sex offender, Arnold Hartley, in Middlesbrough in November 2003, which the tabloids welcomed. Local and national media coverage of COSA was relatively high, and could have been greater than it was. Within the Society of Friends Helen Drewery turned down numerous requests for access by TV documentary makers, but supported some academic and student researchers (see Bell 2003), taking all their interest as evidence that COSA had captured imaginations. Such media coverage of COSA as occurred was not always good - local radio and the national broadsheet press delivered the best - but, paradoxically, even negative media coverage elicited a positive response from potential volunteers, who were attracted rather than repelled by the idea of COSA. The Home Office press office took charge of dealings with the media, but there seemed initially to be no clear media strategy⁸. The pilot’s interim report in November 2003 constructively challenged the need for a “Sarah’s Law” (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2003).

Among criminal justice agencies, COSA were quickly seen to add value to other work with sex offenders. Probation Officers, for example, reported that involvement with a Circle enabled them to move offenders out of hostels earlier than otherwise, and facilitated their gaining a job. There were data protection issues to be resolved on the statutory/voluntary interface, e.g. volunteer access to Police files on the core members. A settled understanding of COSA’s viability emerged quickly among the agencies involved, but different agencies, perhaps inevitably, had different perceptions of their importance. The MAPPA emphasised “accountability” from the start, noting that “a critical part of this process is the role of the circle in challenging and reporting any behaviour by the offender which indicates possible relapse” (Thames Valley MAPPA 2002). On the other hand, the Quakers, the steering group and some of the volunteers continued to emphasise “support” and saw them “as a restorative answer to sex crime” (Alexander 2004:9; Wilson C 2005). Part of the Steering Group’s task was to manage the tension between the different perspectives.

The Quaker COSA project was being hailed as a success within the Thames Valley area well before its three year funding expired. Overall, over three years, the project ran 15 Circles with 20 high risk sex offenders. The three people recalled, none of whom committed a further sexual offence, were not regarded as failures, but as proof that accountability could genuinely be demanded of core members. Sixty people were trained as volunteers in the three year period. The project won the support of Reading East’s MP, Jane Griffiths, who spoke up for it in Parliament. Within two years the Society of Friends was already envisioning the prospect of COSA being adopted elsewhere, and on 12th July 2004 the first national Circles conference was held at Friends House to review progress and promote this agenda. Attendance was UK wide. The then Home Office Minister for Prisons and Probation, Paul Goggins, spoke warmly of the work in Thames Valley.

The Home Office had initiated an evaluation of the Thames Valley pilot, but the results of this had not been shown to the steering group (even by 2008). The Quakers published their own three year evaluation in 2005, which provided an overview of implementation, some statistical evaluation and some firsthand accounts by key organisations and individuals, including a core member (Quaker Peace and Social Witness 2005).

The Hampshire Pilot

The Hampshire initiative (which encompassed the Isle of Wight and the prisons thereon) went ahead as a partnership between the Probation Service and the Hampton Trust, a locally-based voluntary organisation/charity which mostly worked with young offenders (some of whose trustees were ambivalent about taking on COSA, and did not want the fact publicised). Nick McGeorge, who lived locally, originally broached the idea of Hampshire being a pilot site to Sue Wade, the Deputy Chief Probation Officer, (whom he had met in Vienna, when both were members of a United Nations crime prevention committee). Wade hoped that a Hampshire pilot would demonstrate that a statutory/voluntary sector partnership could manage COSA without the faith community dimension that the Quakers brought to it. The Home Office funded a part-time post in May 2002, anticipating the establishment of five Circles. The person appointed had voluntary sector experience, including housing sex offenders, but not - as with the Thames Valley appointees - experience of direct work with them. It turned out that this background limited the incumbent's credibility with statutory agencies, particularly Police and probation staff, who were in any case somewhat sceptical of the very principle of Circles, and who did not refer core members. Volunteers also proved hard to recruit - emphasis was deliberately not placed on recruiting from faith communities of any kind - and in retrospect it was recognised that a part-time post was not sufficient to generate either confidence in the idea or momentum to the project. Despite Sue Wade having become acting director of the Hampton Trust, failure was obvious before the three years expired - by which time only one Circle had been set up. The Hampton Trust withdrew at the end of the pilot, and in 2005 Quakers were asked (and funded) by the Home Office to revitalise the initiative, utilising their experience in Thames Valley.⁹

The Northumbria Pilot

Northumberland emerged initially as a potential pilot area simply because of Paddy Doyle's and Roger Kennington's links with the local Probation Service, and the available expertise in the Sexual Behaviour Unit, (a local interagency body comprising the Forensic Psychiatry Service of the Northumbria NHS Trust, the Northumbria Probation Area and Barnardo's, the children's charity). Roger Kennington and Professor Don Grubin, who both worked in the Unit, attended the June 2000 workshop, as did The Derwent Initiative (TDI), a charity established in North East England in 1993, which specialised in stimulating multi-agency initiatives in work with sex-offenders. TDI (with which Grubin was associated) also attended some of the subsequent National Circles Meetings, and conceived the idea of using COSA to meet a specific local need, namely working with sex offenders who, by dint of a learning difficulty, were not able to benefit from

conventional sex offender treatment programmes. TDI deemed the probation service central to any such initiative, but formal probation service support was not forthcoming. Locally, probation was already committed to other specialist projects, so the idea of using Circles in this distinctive way was not pursued. The perceived need to support sex offenders with learning difficulties was eventually met in other ways, first by the probation service itself, then under the auspices of the Sexual Behaviour Unit. Two probation officers remain seconded to the Unit, one of whom works half their time with sex offenders with learning difficulties.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation Pilot

Although the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (LFF) set up the first Circles in Britain, they would not have done so had it not been for the links that Quakers - and initially Nick McGeorge - had made with the Mennonites. The LFF model was somewhat different to that operating in Thames Valley. Donald Findlater immediately saw in Circles a solution to the problem of providing follow-up for sex offenders who had undergone residential treatment at the Wolvercote Clinic at Epsom, Surrey - a facility which Hugh Marriage, in the Home Office, had been instrumental in funding - then returned to their home areas (or elsewhere) in England, frequently without support from friends and family. The Home Office funded him to visit Canada (Toronto) in October 2000, although he had already been persuaded by then to change his mind about the value of using trained groups of volunteers with this notoriously manipulative group of offenders. A Christian himself (and a former probation officer), he approached local church leaders in the offenders' home areas in order to find volunteers, but part of his agenda, in addition to gaining support for an individual offender, was to encourage congregations themselves to become more self-aware and vigilant, because "there's evidence that church communities contain a higher rate of sex offenders (sic) than the community as a whole" (quoted in Hartill 2000). Finding volunteers was sometimes difficult, and in each area LFF had to win over Police and probation anew, rarely an easy task. Findlater himself became a member of LFF's first Circle, in Guildford, Surrey. Several Circles had been established before the LFF formally became a funded Home Office pilot scheme, but the means of establishing Circles simply continued as before. Dick Foot was appointed as the Circles Development Officer, to work alongside Findlater. Several Circles were established outside the formal framework of the pilot, one in the Isle of Man (for a female offender), two in Ireland (for sex offender priests) as news of LFFs work spread abroad. LFF twice attempted to establish Circles in Scotland¹⁰, but there was insufficient local support in both cases. All Circles were set up for men who had offended against children although some also had convictions for sexual offences against adults. Even after hostility from local people prevented the move of the somewhat dilapidated Wolvercote Clinic to new premises in July 2002, COSA were still created for offenders known to LFF whether they had been in residence or not. Overall nine circles were run in the course of the three year pilot, less than Findlater had hoped for, but more than enough to convince him of the approach's worth.

Although weekly reports were sent on core members to Police and probation services, the LFF did not see Circles as the eyes and ears of the MAPPAs in the way that they were seen by the Police in Thames Valley. Even when restrictions were placed on offenders in terms of parole licence conditions (as sometimes happened), LFF sought to preserve a stronger emphasis on reintegration and rehabilitation more akin, in Findlater's view, to the original Mennonite conception of COSA, but aided by the fact that LFF Circles, by dint of being set up in different places whenever necessary, were simply less embedded in formal criminal justice structures and left more to their own devices. They were often perceived by indigenous agencies as having been parachuted in from outside, and were sometimes treated with scepticism. These pioneering efforts did, however, attract positive publicity in the national broadsheet press (Hartill 2000, Stuart 2002), the first Circles in Britain to do so. The Home Office press office was latterly unhappy with this, preferring the development of Circles to have a low public profile and to control the information flow themselves (as they insisted once pilots were funded), whereas for Findlater (and indeed for the Quakers) Circles were a very useful means of stimulating a much needed public debate on how society could better respond to sex offenders, and in particular for challenging the fear and loathing being stoked by the tabloids.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the origins and implementation of the COSA pilots over their first three years, up to March 2005, not (for the most part) with their subsequent development, or with their formal effectiveness. It is a history that could easily have been different, or even non-existent, for although it made use of established patterns of communication between faith-based, voluntary, and public bodies, and was grounded in a practiced Quaker form of social and political engagement, it was critically dependent on the choices, decisions, energy, status and reputations of particular individuals in particular places and networks. This was just as true for the COSA which developed outside Quaker auspices. The processes involved were essentially informal and improvised. Circles came to flourish at the intersection of a nascent official concern to devise new forms of public protection, and the determination of a faith group (and others) to reaffirm the full humanity of sex offenders, but there was never a "structural logic" which made their emergence inevitable. But for the actions of particular individuals, it could all have been otherwise.

In implementation terms, both the Thames Valley and LFF pilots were successful in their own ways, the former spectacularly so, and both have lessons for the establishment of COSA elsewhere. Useful things can also be learned from the two pilots which, each for different reasons, did not work out. In explaining the success of the Thames Valley pilot, attention must be paid to the structural and cultural uniqueness of the Thames Valley Partnership in whose networks it was embedded. Structured multi-agency relationships, a culture of innovation, and a progressive commitment to restorative justice were in play before the COSA project arrived. Tim Newell, as governor of HMP Grendon, was already a senior and authoritative individual within it. There was perhaps no more congenial

place in England to attempt to establish COSA, and it is no denigration of the immense hard work that was put in - the personal and professional credibility of the key workers was vital - to create training programmes, to recruit volunteers and to establish interagency protocols to say this. That is the merit of local organisational innovations like the Thames Valley Partnership - once established they in turn facilitate further innovation. In essence, the Thames Valley Partnership lent "social capital" to COSA that it would not otherwise have garnered so quickly, although within a couple of years COSA were reciprocating, adding to the Partnership's "social capital". The LFF strategy for developing COSA show that it is possible to develop COSA on an ad hoc, case by case basis in different parts of the country (though with more chance of rejection), but agencies in each area have to be won over anew each time each time a Circle is proposed.

The LFF circles were arguably closer to the Mennonite originals (although not all LFF core members were ex-prisoners, some are subject to statutory supervision, and volunteers were better trained), while in Thames Valley it was understood from the start that a modified model of the Canadian original was being attempted. As Chris Wilson (2005:6) put it: "Our agenda was to adapt Circles to support the agencies in the successful management of high risk offenders living in the community. While the model for Canadian Circles is organic, the UK Circles model is systemic". A key similarity between the original model and the LFF and Thames Valley models, however, was the initial reliance on faith-based volunteers, which worked on the assumption that people of faith might have a stronger commitment to the redeemability-through-befriending of sex offenders than more secular-minded people. That said, secular people were never discouraged from becoming involved, and in the long run, the Society of Friends actually wanted Circles to become a secular initiative within mainstream criminal justice provision. Recruiting faith-based volunteers was simply thought "strategic" in getting the initiative established, if not essential to its longer term future. It is arguably one of the key strengths of the COSA initiative in England that they have created opportunities for expressing "civic goodwill" in a sphere of activity that had hitherto been dominated by professionals, and that concerned and committed individuals have come forward. This may not amount to community empowerment as Mennonite rhetoric envisaged it - volunteers have not typically been demographically or personally representative of given localities (and may indeed be modest and anonymous figures, whose participation in Circles is not publicly known) - but the successful creation of structures and channels which "enable altruism" is a social good in its own right.

It seems significant to the failure of the Circles pilot in Hampshire that the county lacked an infrastructure comparable to the Thames Valley Partnership. The newly emergent MAPPAs were not sufficient in themselves to generate demand and support for COSA, despite a strong local champion like Sue Wade. Although he lived in the area, Nick McGeorge was not actively involved in supporting COSA there, and the Hampton Trust appointed a coordinator who, compared to his counterparts in Thames Valley and LFF (it can be seen in retrospect) lacked the requisite professional credibility with agencies. That

said, there did ostensibly seem to be a viable multiagency structure for hosting COSA in Northumberland, and the failure there (even to get started), despite local champions, is more difficult to explain. It suggests that there are limits to what credible local champions in the voluntary sector can accomplish if the leadership of key statutory agencies are unwilling or simply unable (because of prior preoccupations and resource commitments) to participate. It may also be significant that other ways were found to meet the specific identified need in Northumberland, namely support for sex offenders with learning disabilities, which involved all the agencies that might otherwise have been involved in COSA.

As noted at the outset, this is a story of “policy transfer” (or perhaps more accurately, “adapted practice transfer”, as the tentative and rudimentary steps taken by Home Office officials in the early stages barely amounted to a “strategy”, let alone a “policy”). It reflected first and foremost the international nature of Quaker involvement in penal reform - English Quakers read a Canadian Quaker newsletter which mentioned the Mennonite project, and after brief contact with some Home Office officials, arranged for five Circle-involved Canadians to visit. Although the June 2000 workshop, which the five attended, was the decisive catalyst for establishing the pilots, “practice transfer” was in fact an iterative process. Donald Findlater went at Home Office expense to Canada. David Lane, from the Langley House Trust, visited the Mennonites whilst on a family holiday. Reputable men both fed information back into the penal reform and policy networks and added to the lustre of Circles. Helen Drewery and Dick Foot from LFF visited Canada in January 2002. Toronto Police officer Wendy Leaver, one of the original Canadian visitors at the June 2000 conference, was twice invited back during the pilots to speak at other English conferences which promoted Circles. Equally important, although in a less direct way, had been the 2001 visit to Canada to see Circles in action by journalist Jon Silverman and academic David Wilson: their incisive and well-publicised book on paedophiles, media and society vividly endorsed Circles as a key way forward in safeguarding children and reintegrating offenders (Silverman and Wilson 2002).

Faith community networks and penal reform networks played a significant part in enhancing the wider public reputation of Circles, and there was an element of “cultural politics” in the way they set out to mobilise support across a range of constituencies and challenge the redtop mentality on released sex offenders. They consciously built upon Tim Newell’s (2003) insistence that COSA were about “countering hatred and fear”, that through “relationships of compassion ...a transforming process [can be set in motion, which] challenges the stereotype that sex offenders are frightening people, deserving of hatred and exile”. The ecumenical Church’s Criminal Justice Forum (whose coordinator, Stewart Dew, was a former probation officer) did much to spread word about Circles beyond Quakers. The Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales (2004:96) also lent strong support, finding significance in the fact “that approaches like this, which appear to be successful, are ones which work with the grain of Christian theology rather than against it”. Within Christian faith groups, at all levels of church hierarchy, the

advent of COSA created an opportunity both to further a pre-existing internal church dialogue about safeguarding children in their midst (Church of England Board of Social Responsibility 1999; Glazer 2004), and an opportunity to declaim publicly on the relevance of compassion and redemption in contemporary life. Among penal reform organisations COSA were construed as a uniquely persuasive and desirable way of countering an ugly public mood - a “signal initiative” (to paraphrase Martin Innes) to challenge the tabloid hatred of sex offenders. More pragmatically, they were upheld as a way of giving politicians who, it was feared, might otherwise succumb to populist demands for community notification, a timely and better alternative. The faith community and penal reform “investment” in COSA came together in February 2004 when Archbishop Desmond Tutu, visiting England from South Africa, gave the Frank Longford Charitable Trust “highly commended” award to the Thames Valley pilot.

There was, in fact, an initial consensus in the Home Office about the worth of Circles, and only a few, mostly remediable, reservations. Hugh Marriage, already engrossed in the thorny issue of released sex offender management, had clear and cogent reasons for responding positively to Nick McGeorge’s overture - and although he left the central Home Office in 2000 he was the Home Office Regional Director for the South East during the Hampshire and Thames Valley COSA pilots. DOU officials, drawing on expert advice, readily accepted Circles as a potentially credible contribution to the management of released sex offenders. Ministerial commitment was quickly sought and won: when Helen Drewery met Paul Boateng, Deputy Home Secretary, in July 2000 (as part of a round of Quaker meetings with political parties’ home affairs spokesmen), he was already supportive, and authorised the pilots. Support was reaffirmed in December 2002, in a subsequent meeting, with Hilary Benn, the Prisons and Probation minister. Whether Home Office officials would have responded so positively and quickly in 2000 - or deliberated longer, and demanded more “evidence” - had it not been for sustained media criticism of the way released sex offenders were being managed is a debatable point, but some officials simply saw COSA as valuable in themselves, a plausible solution to enduring problems with resettlement, not merely as an opportune and defensive reaction to criticism. The Home Office’s Circles Steering Group, which met quarterly, and on which all the pilots were represented, moved from having an enabling orientation under William Payne’s chairmanship to a more performance management orientation (under a lower ranking civil servant) before the pilot period ended. Official support for COSA waned somewhat at this point, but never died. Home Office investment in MAPPAs was understandably far greater than in COSA, and it was always appreciated that MAPPAs would require time to (re)generate public confidence in the state’s management of sex offenders. As the Thames Valley pilot developed, COSA came to be seen as an adjunct to MAPPAs, perhaps “the human face of MAPPAs” rather than (as the Mennonites had seen it), a form of community empowerment or as a means of scotching media-driven demands for a “Sarah’s Law”¹¹.

Such appeal as COSA had, however, remained normative, rather than empirical, and in this instance prevailing standards of evidence-ledness were circumvented - the long-term

Canadian evaluation of Circles did not become available until the end of the three year pilot period in England (Wilson R, Picheca and Prinzo 2005, see also Bates, Saunders and Wilson C 2007). Yet although COSA fitted (normatively) with a longstanding Home Office strategy of civic engagement, involving voluntary organisations and faith communities in service delivery at local level, they were still in this context an informal, person-centred, far-from-obvious, relatively untried solution to the kind of criticisms being made of them, particularly when conceived in restorative rather than surveillant terms. Nonetheless, a cluster of civil servants undoubtedly remained committed to COSA throughout the pilots, seemingly for reasons other than ensuring that they achieved 'value for money'. The degree of trust between particular individuals in the Dangerous Offender's Unit (Paddy Doyle, Carol Kellas, William Payne - the latter also having been Governor at HMP Grendon) and the various COSA champions mattered greatly. LFF (and particularly Donald Findlater), Quakers (and particularly Tim Newell) and the prestigious Thames Valley Partnership all had a great deal of "reputational capital" and were seen as safe hands and good bets. Helen Drewery, although not a professional in the sex offender field, came to be appreciated by all constituencies for her dedicated and sustained stewardship of the Circles project within the Society of Friends; her judgement, vision and energy have in fact been integral to the successful implementation of the Thames Valley pilot. Public ministerial endorsement of COSA in 2004, fittingly at Friends House, vindicated not only the individual Quakers who had seen potential in the idea, but also the civil servants who had responded positively to them five years before. Perhaps paradoxically in view of this endorsement, further Home Office funding beyond the initial three years of the pilots was never assured, causing anxieties among Quakers as to whether staff could be retained and new core members enrolled. Funding was eventually secured, although it did not keep pace with inflation, necessitating additional financial support from local agencies in Thames Valley - itself an indication of the extent to which COSA had proved their worth. What happened next is outside the scope of this paper, but suffice to say that both LFF and Quaker Circles continued, the practice was adopted piecemeal by some other organisations (this in fact began before the pilots ended), and in 2007 Quakers established an independent (Home Office funded) organisation to promote Circles in the UK as a whole.

Endnotes

1. I was a member of the Quaker Crime and Community Justice Committee between 1998-2001 and observed the beginnings of this story unfolding firsthand, but I am nonetheless grateful for information from the following people who were much more closely involved. During March and May 2008 they agreed to telephone interviews, conversations and email exchanges about the birth of the COSA pilots. DCI Mark Ashworth (Hampshire Police); Roger Cullen (Thames Valley area Quaker), Helen Drewery, Paddy Doyle, Donald Findlater, Don Grubin, Colin Honey, David Lane, Roger Kennington, Marian Liebmann (Clerk of Crime and Community Justice Committee 2001-2004), Hugh Marriage, Nick McGeorge, Tim Newell, Sue Raikes, David Turner, Sue Wade and Chris Wilson. Any errors of fact, and the overall interpretation of events, remain my sole responsibility.
2. Oxfam, Family Service Units, the Child Poverty Action Group and the Alternatives to Violence Project all began, at least in part, as Quaker initiatives. Some were developed by concerned individuals; others were formally nurtured in the Society before being "floated off" as independent organisations.
3. The articles that Drewery and McGeorge took note of were by Mark Forget in Quaker Concern - newsletter of the Canadian Service Committee (Spring 1999); by Evan Heise in QCJJ Newsletter (March 1999, number 43); plus an article from the Canadian Mennonite (18th January 1999). I am grateful to Helen Drewery for this information.
4. The first Circle in Hamilton, Ontario was a specific response to one particular serious sex offender being released from prison - illiterate, unemployable, homeless and with a low IQ - who was taken in by Mennonite minister Harry Nigh (who had previously met him in prison). Local people objected, and the local media were hostile, while the Police took a neutral stance. Nigh sought his congregation's advice and they agreed to support the man. A small group of them were established to find him accommodation, get to know him, help him and keep an eye on him. The approach won over the local community and the Police, although the media remained hostile. Six and a half years later the man had not reoffended, and still lived in Hamilton (Lane 2001; Silverman and Wilson 2002:168-170).
5. In the event this never happened, but it is indicative of the relative formality being envisaged for English COSA at this very early stage, compared to the Mennonite originals. Had it come to pass, the nature of Circles would have been very different. Nonetheless, many of the people who initially supported Circles had had probation backgrounds or were still working for the Service; the principles underpinning Circles appealed strongly to probation sensibilities. All the paid workers in Thames Valley COSA had probation backgrounds, and there is a sense in which the Quaker project enabled "probation-by-proxy", facilitating the expression of an ethic of concern for offenders that in the probation service itself was beginning to fade. Without the skill and credibility that probation staff brought to the project, volunteer-based supervision of sex offenders would not have been as viable or effective as it proved to be.
6. Nick McGeorge, born 1934, had a long history of social activism within and without the Society of Friends. He worked first as a journalist and public relations consultant before becoming a chartered forensic psychologist in 1982, though he had been involved in criminal justice issues since 1974. He co-founded the practitioner network Quakers in Criminal Justice in the 1980s, the same decade in which he became a British Quaker delegate at the UN Commission on Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention in Vienna. He was instrumental, with others (not all Quakers) in establishing the Restorative Justice Consortium in 1997, promoted restorative justice within the Liberal Democrats (in which he held various party positions), and has been active in various community mediation schemes. A man of considerable charm and energy, he used his very extensive professional and friendship networks to stimulate interest in COSA, in the Home Office, in Hampshire Probation Service and the Langley House Trust. From the outset he had envisaged the Society of Friends running a Circles project of its own, and considered asking The Retreat, a longstanding Quaker mental health project, (on whose board he sat) to do this.

7. The training programme consists of presentations, exercises and discussion delivered and organised by the project coordinators and Police and probation officers. Topics covered include attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and offenders, the nature of sex offender treatment, relapse prevention, legislation and risk management protocols, roles and responsibilities in Circles, case studies and the maintenance of personal boundaries and self-care.
8. Given the prevailing climate towards sex offenders, media interest in Circles could not be avoided, so their champions have had no alternative but to engage with the media, to place their perspective, their "truth" into the public domain. Circles cannot be left to grow "under a mushroom", in the hope that no adverse attention will be shown to them. The Home Office reluctantly recognised this. The Mennonite Church in Ontario had faced this issue, and dealt centrally with the media, lifting the burden of communication from individual Circle members. Quakers in England were not above orchestrating good publicity for COSA in order to counter the hostility of the redtop papers and to provoke constructive debate - journalist Rosemary Hartill, who wrote several supportive articles in the national broadsheet press, was herself a Quaker.
9. Under Quaker management, COSA in Hampshire were subsequently successful. They succeeded in the face of some local agency cynicism, given the original pilot's failure, overcoming it by fielding Thames Valley as a "beacon" of good practice: Police, probation and prison personnel from there spoke well of their experience to their Hampshire equivalents. Up to March 2008, there had been 12 Circles in Hampshire, and no reconvictions for sexual offences. The Hampton Trust continues as before, working effectively in other areas of criminal justice.
10. The Quaker Crime and Community Justice Committee also promoted Circles in Scotland. David Turner (a former probation officer), a member of the Committee, took the lead on this and formed a Scottish Steering group early in May 2001, comprising faith groups and social work interests. Helen Drewery and Donald Findlater both spoke at a conference on COSA at the Police College, Tulliallan, in May 2002, after which Sacro became involved and first indicated a willingness to run pilots. The then Scottish Executive was sceptical of Circles because of their reliance on volunteers, and because, at the time, there were no equivalents of MAPPAs in Scotland in which they could be embedded.
11. Although it lies outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that pressure to introduce a Sarah's Law - public notification of sex offenders' whereabouts - did not cease and it could never be assumed that the Home Office/Ministry of Justice would never succumb to media and/or victim advocacy groups' demand for it. Up to September 2008, when pilot notification schemes were introduced, the successful implementation of MAPPAs and COSA, together with the Stop It Now! campaign, had held it at bay. (Donald Findlater and LFF were the driving force behind Stop It Now! - which originated in North America to encourage actual or potential sexual abusers to seek professional help and was developed in Britain in the same time period as COSA. As with COSA Hugh Marriage and Carol Kellas were key supporters in the Home Office).

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