Community
Justice Network
of Vermont

360° Review of the Vermont COSA Program
A Report on Current Practices Across the State

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1.0 Executive Summary

Vermont's Circle of Support and Accountability Program (COSA) recently surpassed ten years of service implementation. Vermont COSA, which was originally modeled after Canada's pioneering program, began as a localized experiment in 2005. Since then, COSA has gradually expanded across Vermont and there are now programs in 19 communities, reaching nearly every corner of the rural and geographically diverse state.

COSA's expansion is notable for its scope, scale and institutional commitment. In the last year (FY16) alone, more than 150 community volunteers offered thousands of hours of volunteer service to assist 51 reintegration clients (or Core Members). Beyond service numbers, this expansion also represents a remarkable investment of both Federal and State financial resources and bureaucratic support.

In light of the ten-year milestone, the Community Justice Network of Vermont–with funding and collaboration from the Vermont Department of Corrections–has commissioned the *360˚ Review of Vermont's COSA Programs*. The overarching goals of the *360˚ Review* are to:

- Understand the strengths and challenges of replicating COSA's high-intensity community-based service

- Offer a series of data-informed findings and recommendations to support the continued enhancement of Vermont's COSA Programs.

The *Vermont COSA Programs 360˚ Review and Report* is organized into seven sections: **Overview** provides both the history and defining characteristics of COSA; **Methodology** details the *360˚ Review's* data-gathering and analysis processes; **Findings** provide an overarching assessment of the current status of Vermont's COSA programs; **Recommendations** identifies areas in need of further attention, consensus decision-making and implementation; **Conclusion** identifies potential next steps; **Stakeholder Comments** is a collection of reviews and responses to the *360˚ Review and Report*; and the **Index** includes summarized online data and meeting reports.

The recommendations outlined below are ordered neither according to priority nor proposed chronology of implementation. There may be opportunities to undertake/address some recommendations immediately while others may require more long-term commitment and effort. Most of the eventual policy and practice solutions, however, will undoubtedly draw both inspiration and content from the many innovative COSA practices currently being implemented across Vermont.

The following is a summary of the Review's nine recommendations:

1. **Ensure Competent COSA Services to Clients with High Mental Health Needs:** In order to effectively meet the long-term needs of clients with major mental health disorders, Vermont's COSA programs (including staff and volunteers) require additional support, training and resources.

2. **Expand Housing Resources Available to COSA Clients:** Efficient and timely delivery of COSA services will be strengthened by the expansion of Core Member housing resources across the state.

3. **Launch a Statewide Community Education and Volunteer Recruitment Campaign:** Vermont's COSA stakeholders should develop common program marketing materials and conduct statewide outreach to educate and recruit volunteers.

4. **Develop and Distribute Common COSA Outreach Materials to Key Stakeholders:** In order to ensure the accurate representation of COSA services, supports and goals, stakeholders should develop common outreach program materials for Caseworkers/Probation Officers and Core Members.

5. **Develop Consistent and Transparent Referral and Acceptance Processes:** The *360˚ Review* includes a series of recommendations to establish more consistent, efficient, timely and transparent referrals and acceptance processes that reflect both COSA program values and service priorities.

6. **Provide Guidance and Clarification to Circle Practices:** The 360˚ Review identified several domains of Circle practice that could benefit from additional discussion, guidance and clarification. These include: Inclusion of Treatment Perspective and Information; Volunteer Access to Core Member Information; Circle Note Taking and Sharing; Case Management Tools and Responsibilities; Engagement of Probation Officers; Post Completion Guidelines; and data collection.

7. **Enhance COSA Volunteer Training:** In order to both better prepare and support their COSA volunteers, stakeholders should clarify statewide guidelines for the training and support of COSA volunteers.

8. **Establish Consistent Staff Training:** Vermont's High-Quality COSA Practices and Procedures would be further strengthened by the creation of a common COSA Staff Manual and the inclusion of additional training and supports for new COSA staff.

9. **Involve and Integrate Victim Perspectives:** In order to achieve COSA's restorative potential, stakeholders should establish a COSA/Victim Services Working Group to develop processes and protocols for the safe and meaningful inclusion of victim perspectives in the referral, acceptance and delivery of Circles.

2.0 History and Overview of Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability first took shape in Hamilton, Canada, in 1995, as a spontaneous and faith-filled response to the reentry of high-risk sexual offenders. These early Mennonite Circles–before they gained name, organization or funding–sought to balance the community's understandable feelings of fear and outrage with the congregation's commitment to the inherent worth and value of all people, regardless of past actions.

With time, these improvised experiments clarified a core set of practices and values that came to be known as Canada COSA. This includes:

- An 'inner circle' of 4 to 7 trained volunteers who meet regularly and build relationships with one reentering individual with a sexual offense (Core Member) who voluntarily commits to participate in the program;
- Support staff that coordinate trainings, referrals and Circle administration;
- An 'outer circle' of police, probation, treatment, psychologists and other vested reintegration parties to offer training, consultation and support to volunteers and staff;
- A "Covenant" that establishes a set of mutually-held Circle expectations and commitments, including the "No Secrets Policy," which clarifies that anything shared with one volunteer must be shared with all;
- A Mission "to substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting released men in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive, and accountable lives;"
- And a values-informed motto that reflects the program's foundational commitment to both support and accountability: "No More Victims – No One is Disposable."

As COSA Canada accumulated service and outcomes data, evaluators (led by Psychologist Robin Wilson) conducted a series of studies to understand and quantify the program's apparent success. The evaluations–starting in 2001 and then at repeated intervals with greater numbers of Core Members (larger data sets)–confirmed that Canada COSA has a dramatic impact on recidivism rates, including reductions greater than 70% in sexual reoffending. Researchers also noted that there was quantifiable 'harm reduction' in the new offenses.[1] In his 2007 qualitative evaluation, Wilson and his colleagues noted that COSAs'

> …community-centered model is the one which embraces and validates the basic premise that, when faced with imminently dangerous situations, ordinary people, correctly prepared and professionally supported, are more than capable of taking care of their own safety needs. (Wilson, Picheca & Prinzo, 2007: 9).

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[1] A number of research findings suggest the value and import of COSA for offenders, communities, and those working in the justice system. Some have been compiled here: http://cosacanada.com/documents/cosa-canada-research/

Canada COSA's demonstrable success and commitment to Restorative Justice values gained increasing international traction and recognition, including in Vermont. In 2005, a small group of staff from the state's Community Justice Centers (CJCs) traveled to Canada to learn about the COSA model and meet with program administrators, volunteers, core members and evaluators. Upon return, the four CJCs adopted and adapted the reintegration program to their local communities' reentry infrastructures and relationships. Their initial endeavors–which received considerable support and training from Canada COSA staff–established many of the benchmarks and practices that would become "Vermont COSA."

In the last decade, Vermont COSA has gradually expanded from the early pilot projects (with limited federal funding, geographic reach and systemic impact) into a statewide network of COSA programs and services, dedicated state funding and increasing systemic integration. This growth has not been without periods of contraction, (largely due to funding constraints). With the 2015 legislative commitment, however, the Vermont's Department of Corrections now supports the engagement of at least 85 Circles for the current fiscal year. All of these Circles are developed and supervised by local CJCs in collaboration with Probation and Parole offices and the Community Justice Network of Vermont.

None of this experimentation, development and replication would have taken place without the existing infrastructure of Community Justice Centers (CJCs). Since the formation of the first Justice Centers in the late 1990s–the vision of a small group of Department of Corrections leaders–CJCs have been at the forefront in facilitating locally-based justice processes. The CJCs' early restorative justice programs–including Reparative Boards–established referral frameworks and collaborative partnerships with Probation and Parole Offices and other regional service providers. Vermont's COSA programs are a natural extension of the state's historical support for CJCs and their restorative justice programs.

There is no formal or consistently recognized description of COSA. For the purposes of the 360˚ Review, Vermont's COSA Program is defined in the following way:

> Vermont's COSA Programs are designed to work with moderate to high-risk offenders who are being released from prison. The programs recruit and train (a minimum of) three community volunteers to work with each client for at least one year after release. The COSA team meets weekly in a formal circle (with staff present) and most volunteers also meet with the client informally in the community. The COSA programs are funded by the Department of Corrections and are available at Community Justice Centers throughout the state.

Although Vermont's COSA Programs share many of the practices and values from Canada's pioneering program (identified above), it is important to identify some distinctions. From the outset, CJC staff have partnered with the Vermont Department of Corrections in the design, development and implementation of COSA. This systemic approach (unlike Canada's 'grassroots' origins) has shaped the programs' referral processes, administrative practices, designation of roles and responsibilities, and funding.

Key distinctions include:

- **Target Client Population**: While Canada's COSA program exclusively serves people with sexual offenses, Vermont's COSA programs have adopted more broad client criteria, serving medium-to-high risk clients, regardless of the offense type.

- **Supervision Status**: Canada's COSA programs serves clients who are 'maxing out' their incarceration sentence and will be under very limited community-based supervision. Vermont's programs work almost exclusively with reintegrating clients who are under active community-based supervision.

- **No Secrets Policy**: Due in part to the above differences in Supervision Status, Vermont's COSA Programs extended Canada's No Secrets Policy to include Probation Officers. The COSA Programs also incorporated the clients' supervision conditions (rules that define and limit their movement, schedule, associations and activities) as a framework for ensuring client accountability. As such, any client violation of conditions (witnessed by either staff or volunteers) is reported to the supervising Probation Officer.

- **One Year Agreement/Contract**: From the outset, Vermont's programs have identified a term of 1-year for the COSA *Contract* or *Agreement*. Although COSA Circles may extend beyond the terms of the commitment, this requires a revised consensus agreement between program staff, core member and volunteers.

These program distinctions aside, Vermont and Canada's programs share more in common than not. Both programs hold true to the community-based, nonprofessional model that focuses on relationships rather than services. Their respective CoSA volunteers help core members navigate community expectations and life; understand and develop relationships of reciprocity; and hold each other accountable to the commitments of the Covenant/Contract/Agreement. The programs' similarity was confirmed in a 2013 study of "Evaluability Assessment," which concluded that Vermont maintained a 86% 'fidelity' to the Canadian model (Elliott, Zajac, Meyer, 2013: 47).

Vermont's COSA Programs also share common ground with Canada in effecting similar reductions in recidivism. Two recent studies by UVM researcher Kathy Fox analyzed Vermont COSA's qualitative (2013) and quantitative (2015) outcomes. In her research, Fox identified several key factors that promote the core members' desistence from crime, including the Circles' ability to "… model normative and ordinary relationships of mutual obligation and respect, and aid in the de-labeling process by focusing on the other attributes of offenders beyond their criminality" (Fox, 2016: 45). According to Fox's preliminary outcome data, Vermont COSA outcomes confirmed a significant reduction in recidivism across several offense classes, including a 74% reduction in sexual re-offenses.

3.0 Methodology

The Community Justice Network of Vermont (CJNVT) commissioned the 360˚ Review of Vermont's COSA Programs with funding and support from the Department of Corrections (DOC). The Review was undertaken with three contractually defined goals:

1. Understand the perspectives of key program stakeholders including CJC staff; COSA Volunteers; DOC Probation & Parole, Facility and Central Office staff; DOC Victim Advocates; and Core Members.

2. Document common and unique local COSA practices, from service referral through Circle completion.

3. Explore a set of overarching questions, including:

    3.1 What draws citizens to volunteer for the COSA program and how can their indispensable service be supported and sustained?

    3.2 What are the service experiences and needs of the COSA programs' referring and partnering agencies?

    3.3 What are indicators of high-quality COSA service?

    3.4 Where are COSA programs feeling most successful at meeting these indicators and where are they encountering localized or shared challenges?

    3.5 Where are the opportunities for statewide standardization of practice and where is it imperative to protect the local integrity of service?

    3.6 What are the respective and shared roles/responsibilities of the COSA programs' key stakeholders: Corrections, Treatment, Victim Services, Community Justice Centers and the CJNVT?

3.1 Data Gathering

Working in consultation with the CJNVT and DOC Central Office, Marc Wennberg (Consultant) organized the *Review* into four sequential phases: Initial Outreach, Online Surveys, Focus Groups, and Report Formulation.

Between March 1 and April 31, 2016, the *360˚ Review* began with initial outreach and in-person and phone meetings with COSA program stakeholders, including CJC administrative and program staff; DOC Victim Advocates; and DOC Central Office Restorative Unit staff. These initial meetings served to both frame the purpose and structure of the *Review* and inform the topic areas, content and distribution methods for the Online Surveys.

Between May 1 and May 25, 2016 five distinct online surveys were designed, tested and distributed to the COSA program stakeholders. Survey data was analyzed for identification of key words; participant content knowledge; weighted response rankings; program strengths and challenges; and overall program satisfaction. Results were then tabulated and summarized into five summaries. (Summaries of Survey Results can be found in the Index of this Report)

The following stakeholders participated in the Online Surveys:

a. **COSA Volunteers:** 79 volunteers from across the state completed the survey, which explored personal motivations to volunteer; training; time commitment; and overall volunteer experience with the program.

b. **COSA Coordinators**: 17 Coordinators completed the survey, which explored local referral and acceptance processes; reintegration and completion practices; administrative practices; and successes and challenges.

c. **CJC Directors**: 15 Directors completed the online survey, which explored their CJC's organizational structure and history providing COSA services; COSA housing and training resources; volunteer recruitment; and successes and challenges.

d. **Probation Officers**: 70 Probation Officers from across the state completed the online survey. The survey explored knowledge of the COSA program; experience with COSA referral and acceptance practices; experience supervising COSA clients; and overall service experience collaborating with COSA programs.

e. **Caseworkers:** 37 Caseworkers from seven facilities (including the Out of State Unit) completed the online survey. The survey explored knowledge of the COSA program; experience with COSA referral and acceptance practices; and overall service experience collaborating with COSA programs.

Between May 18 and July 21, a total of six focus groups were conducted. Drawing from professional experience, the *Review* outreach and Online Survey Results, Marc Wennberg developed a set of *COSA Best-Practice Indicators*. The *Indicators,* which span service practices from referral to completion, were initially tested and revised with DOC Central Office Restorative Unit staff.

The revised Indicators were subsequently presented to five regional Focus Groups that included the participation of DOC stakeholders, CJC staff and COSA volunteers (as well as one DOC Victim Advocate). Focus group participants (total of 46 from across the state) offered reactions, suggestions and edits to the *Indicators*. Participants also identified both promising local practices and challenges to meeting the *Best-Practice Indicators*. The Focus Group phase concluded with a meeting with 3 successful Core Members, who shared their experiences with COSA from referral to completion. The notes from the Regional Focus Groups can be found in the Index of this Report.

3.2 Data Analysis and Approach

Marc Wennberg employed a multi-stage, mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. [2] A survey was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative responses on key questions around existing practices, implementation challenges, and aspirations for COSA. Focus group questions were designed to delve deeper into the themes that emerged from the survey. Themes were identified through a process of identifying common responses and comparing the depth and detail of the open-ended questions. (Detail is related to the number of unique concepts that emerged throughout all data collection. By contrast depth is connected to the nature of the responses, especially in the open-ended survey responses. This included the length of responses, the complexity of connections made, and specific examples provided.)

Three primary strategies included counts (survey analysis), interviews and interpretation (Outreach Meetings and Focus Groups), and applying his professional experience and self-reflection. Each phase included formal and informal data gathering and analysis that, in turn, informed the design and delivery of the subsequent phase. The *360˚ Review's Findings* and *Nine Recommendation*s (as well as the *15 COSA Best Practice Indicators*) emerge from a pragmatic combination of the three strategies. Throughout the *Review*, Wennberg repeatedly drew upon (and tested with *360˚ participants*) assumptions that have formed from his 10+ years working with COSA, both as an early COSA Program Coordinator and subsequently as CJC Director and local and national COSA Trainer.

3.3 Report Formulation

Marc Wennberg drafted the 360˚ Review with editorial and content consultation from former CJNVT Director, Johannes Wheeldon. The Draft Review was then distributed to the DOC Central Office Restorative Unit staff for review and response. Upon completion of this initial phase of response and feedback, the Review was circulated to the 360˚ participants and CJC Directors for a period of *Response and Comment*. The final report was prepared and submitted to the CJNVT on November 3rd, 2016. Participants' *Response and Comments* are included in the latter part of this Report.

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[2] For more on a multistage mixed methods design see Wheeldon, J. & Ahlberg, M. (2012) *Visualizing Social Science Research: Maps, Methods, and Meaning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Wheeldon, J. (2010) Mapping Mixed Methods Research: Methods, Measures, and Meaning. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(2): 87-102; and Wheeldon, J. (2011) Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? Using Mind Maps to Facilitate Participant Recall in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2): 509-522

4.0 Findings

There is one overarching conclusion to the *360˚ Review*: Vermont's COSA programs are strong, diverse and innovative. Each day, Circles gather to continue the state's ten-year support of intentional reintegration communities. If it's early in the Core Member's reentry, the team may be exploring their connections, histories and sense of humors, seeking common ground and building trust. Other more-advanced Circles may be working through a particular challenge or concern, gently nudging the Core Member to consider a different perspective or alternative plan of action. Still other Circles may be approaching completion and discussing the next chapter in the evolution of their relationships.

> *There are people (COSA Volunteers) in the world who can accept me, care about me and love me, even as the 'terrible person I am,' because that's what I tell myself and that's the message that we get all the time. There are people that see through that and see the good part in me. I'm a human being and can even be lovable and likeable."*
> *(Core Member, Focus Group)*

All of these encounters take place in the unique 'space' known as a Circle Meeting. There are many ways to describe a Circle– 'connection', 'support' and 'family' are just a few that were offered in the focus groups–but in practice each Circle develops its own quality and feel. This diversity is indicative of the restorative foundation of the COSA program: relationships between Core Members, staff and volunteers necessarily have a quality uniquely their own.

> *It was a couple of months in that I started sharing some of the issues that I had. I don't like to talk about myself so it was awkward and uncomfortable… but it was necessary. That was the only way that the team was going to be able to trust me. I saw that it was a safe place to be and share. (Core Member, Focus Group)*

Vermont's COSA Circles, however, also operate within a much larger correctional system and service context. Each day across the state, referrals are identified, processed and approved; COSA staff partner with Probation Officers to identify housing and prepare for release; Volunteers are recruited and trained; COSA staff coordinate team communication; and DOC staff service contracts, process funding and collect data and outcomes. This is just a sample of the behind-the-scenes work of the DOC and COSA program partners.

> *Getting to know the core members, seeing how their personal histories brought them to the present moment; same for the other volunteers, really. I learn from everyone, which helps me continue to grow even now in my senior years. Feeling that I have made some difference in a person's life, by showing up with a caring attitude--this alone seems to be "game-changing" for one who needs it. (COSA Volunteer, Online Survey)*

This *360° Review* begins with an exploration of the Vermont COSA Programs' markers of strength. These markers were identified and confirmed in both Online Surveys and Focus Groups and also reflect the collective wisdom and experience after ten years of COSA experimentation, innovation and development. For the purposes of this report, the markers fall under four broad categories: Partnership; Community Engagement; Circle Practice; Support Practices.

4.1 Partnerships

Vermont's gradual expansion of COSA programs and services has relied on a deepening partnership between the Community Justice Centers of Vermont (CJCs), the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Community Justice Network of Vermont (CJNVT). This partnership is essential to the successful delivery of each and every COSA circle–from referral to completion.

> *The service they provide is invaluable and necessary. I can't spend the time doing what they do. It dovetails perfectly with what I believe in and am doing." (Probation Officer, Online Survey)*
>
> *Every COSA volunteer has been amazing. I have seen a wide variety of members. They are the first ones to call up when the offender gets lodged, have phone conferences with them, they genuinely care. I think the program works well because they aren't 'DOC' personnel either." (Case Worker, Online Survey)*

The 'formalization' of the partnership between the Community Justice Centers, CJNVT, and the Vermont Department of Corrections has several important milestones that are worth noting. These include:

Increased Sustainable Funding: Throughout Vermont COSA's development, staff at the Vermont Department of Corrections have both creatively invested existing resources (Transitional Housing Grants) and aggressively pursued (in collaboration with the CJNVT) additional federal and state funding to ensure the programs' continuation and expansion. This history reflects a remarkable investment of resources, time and credibility on the part of the Department and Network.

Implementation of Bureaucratic Policies, Procedures and Standards: The Corrections Department has instituted new practices, procedures and policies to support COSA referrals and service coordination. This includes Directive #501.03, which defines roles and responsibilities (and forms) in the referral, acceptance and administration of COSA Circles. Community Justice Centers and the CJNVT also have adopted standards of administrative practice (included in the CJNVT Accreditation Process) that support effective collaboration and communication with the DOC and other partnering agencies.

Volunteer Training: The Community Justice Network and DOC staff worked together to develop, test, modify and finalize a standardized statewide COSA training for all new volunteers. CJC and DOC staff collaboratively delivers the experiential training in a different Vermont

community every other month. All COSA volunteers must also attend a DOC volunteer training and be approved by the department's Volunteer Coordinators.

Evaluation: Corrections has worked with Kathy Fox, a University of Vermont Evaluator, to conduct outcomes evaluation of the COSA Program. Justice Centers have partnered with the Department to track and report data on their individual COSA clients.

Collaboration and partnership also take place on a regional level. CJCs and Probation Parole Offices have developed locally-specific practices to support effective COSA service coordination. These often include:

- Standing meetings with P&P liaisons to identify potential referrals;
- Acceptance processes that rely on P&P perspective and expertise;
- Reintegration Case Conferences that facilitate stakeholder sharing of information and goals;
- Consistent sharing of Core Member information with P&P;
- CJC Participation in Core Member's regular supervision meetings;
- Frequent email, phone and in-person communication.

The relationship between CJC Staff and the Core Members' supervising Probation Officers is the lynchpin for successful collaboration. When collaborating at a high level, CJC staff and Probation Officers work seamlessly together to support the Core Member's progress or address supervision concerns; engage in constant and open communication; and swiftly update each other to changes in the Core Member's supervision or COSA program participation.

As might be expected, the quality and depth of collaboration varies across the state. Several CJCs have achieved strong collaborative practices with either/both the management and line staff of their respective Probation and Parole Offices. This appears to be particularly true in those communities that have long histories of COSA implementation and/or higher reentry caseloads. Even with the most advanced programs, however, the level of collaboration can still vary across Probation Officers.

4.2 Community Education and Engagement

Vermont's COSA volunteers come from all walks of community life. Although the majority of volunteers are from an older demographic (according to the online survey), many COSA programs also actively recruit college students, mid-career professionals, social activists, as well as people from faith and *recovery* communities. This diversity of experience and perspective is a key ingredient to Vermont's Circles.

> *I appreciate being involved in the safety of my community and doing so in a way that is compassionate and non-judgmental. (Volunteer, Online Survey)*
>
> *Just playing a part in something I believe is a very important and wonderful thing. And I learn a lot--about people, life, my community, and our justice system." (Volunteer, Online Survey)*

Beyond their significant corps of volunteers, CJC staff also engage a wide variety of local stakeholders in their COSA program administration, including: police, municipal employees, victims' advocates, mental health and recovery professionals, CJC board members, and others. This engagement takes place in the COSA programs' referral and acceptance processes and reentry case conferences as well as through CJC governance structures.

As a result of these and other general and targeted-outreach activities, CJCs are nurturing growing local constituencies that have vested stakes in successful and supportive offender reintegration. This was clearly illustrated in the results of both the online volunteer surveys and focus groups. Although there clearly is more work to be done in community education and volunteer recruitment (see recommendations), Vermont's COSA programs are supported by a passionate and deeply committed group of local citizens. This support will continue to yield significant benefits to Vermont's efforts to create a community-focused and informed reintegration system.

4.3 Circle Practice

Over the course of the five Regional Focus Groups, participants discussed the local and systemic challenges to fully realizing *COSA Best Practices*. The groups identified regional achievement gaps with almost all of the *15 Indicators*, with the exception of one: Circle Meetings.

Circle Meetings are the heart of the COSA Program. The staff-facilitated weekly meetings serve as a ritualized gathering ground to share, support, explore and celebrate. Circles also serve as markers of movement and change, including the evolution in relationships. Initial meetings, which can often feel awkward and guarded, slowly give way to shared trust and connection. By the end of the year, many Circles share a common sense of achievement and purpose, including a desire to maintain their relationships even as the formal COSA process ends.

> *Knowing that when I'm in the meeting, I can say anything… I talk about risks in COSA. I never used to talk about risk before…It's (the Circle) a safe place... They're there for you, not against you." (Core Member, Focus Group)*
>
> *My CoSA meeting is my favorite part of the week. It's helped shape/affirm my career ambitions and I'm so grateful that it was pitched to me at my CJC" (COSA Volunteer, Online Survey)*
>
> *The objective viewpoint of volunteers who care about the individual is invaluable. They're able to have open conversations with the offender that are really helpful. They are excellent role models of what community can be and allow the offender to see that everyone doesn't look down on them. (Probation Officer, Online Survey)*

By all accounts, Vermont's COSA programs 'do' Circle Meetings very well. Regional focus groups confirmed that CJC-led Circle meetings consistently fulfill their restorative premise by offering relationship-infused support and accountability. This element should not be undervalued. As the state moves forward with *360˚ Review Recommendations* and other potential

changes, Vermont's referring and funding partners can be confident that the Circle Meeting foundation of the program is strong.

4.4 Support Practices

Vermont's CJCs have developed a wide variety of localized practices to support the administration and delivery of Circles. Justice Centers (and their partnering Probation and Parole Offices) have worked out procedures to identify and process referrals; involve victim perspectives; decide acceptance; partner on case-management; and transition Core Members to independence. These processes reflect both the collaborative culture of the CJC as well the creative visions of staff and local DOC stakeholders.

During the data-gathering phase of the 360˚ Review, participants shared many promising local COSA practices–from referral to completion–that could have statewide application (see Focus Group Notes). The Justice Centers, CJNVT and DOC partners should explore ways to identify, share and support the application of several of these proven practices.

5.0 Recommendations

The ambitious replication of COSA Programs across Vermont has created a number of regional and systemic implementation challenges. Such challenges are to be expected. COSA programs are high-intensity interventions that require significant social and financial capital; advanced cross-system collaboration; and a locally administered program that supports the organic development of relationships between volunteers and core members. When these ingredients are present, COSA works exceptionally well. The consolidation of effective and consistent COSA practice across the state, however, will require additional time, support and investment.

The *360˚ Review* provided a forum for COSA stakeholders to explore both markers of success and areas of challenge. The following recommendations are drawn from the collective online and focus group data. These recommendations–while specific–are not intended to be consensus solutions. Rather they identify areas that merit further discussion, guidance, policy and collective decision-making. As is mentioned above, local CJCs are invaluable repositories of COSA learning and adaptation and their innovations may hold promise for statewide application.

The centerpiece of the *360˚ Review* process is the *15 Indicators of COSA Best Practice*. As was stated previously, these Indicators were crafted from a pragmatic evaluation of outreach meetings, online survey data, and the Evaluator's professional experience and self-reflection. The Indicators were subsequently tested and revised with DOC Central Office Restorative Staff and then presented in the 5 Regional Focus Groups.

The indicators (below) are not offered as formal recommendations of practice to Vermont's COSA Programs: focus group participants debated several of the Indicators' assumptions and propositions. Rather, the Indicators provided a structure and process to discuss the state's current COSA practices, including both strengths and opportunities for further adaptation and consolidation.

15 COSA Best Practice Indicators

1. **Referrals to COSA should:**
   a. Prioritize services for Moderate to High Risk/Needs clients
   b. Prioritize services for sexual offenders

2. **Referring Partners should:**
   a. Understand Vermont's COSA programs'
      i. Prioritized Client Population;
      ii. Expectations;
      iii. Supports
   b. Know how to make a referral to COSA programs including Contact Information
   c. Understand COSA programs' referral acceptance/denial process
   d. Make timely referrals of the prioritized service population to the appropriate regional COSA Program.

3. **COSA Programs' Referral Processes should:**
   a. Be clearly articulated
   b. Ensure that the client has a clear understanding of the COSA Program's expectations and supports
   c. Be as consistent/uniform as possible across the state and include:
      i. Pertinent information about client's
         1. Strengths/Resources
         2. Risks
         3. Needs
         4. Aspirations
         5. Motivations to meet COSA expectations and supports
      ii. Input from client's Reentry Stakeholders
         1. Probation and Parole
         2. Facility Case Workers
         3. DOC Victim Advocates
      iii. Appropriate Releases of Information
   d. Be processed and evaluated as quickly as responsibly possible

4. **Justice Centers Referral Acceptance/Denial processes should:**
   a. Be clearly articulated, transparent, and consistently apply program/grant criteria
   b. Ensure prioritization for the target client population
   c. Include principal stakeholder perspectives
   d. Keep vested stakeholders informed in a timely and clear manner, including:
      i. Client
      ii. P&P
      iii. Facilities
      iv. Others deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis
   e. In cases of denial, clearly state reasons and/or potential for reconsideration

5. **Upon acceptance and prior to release, the COSA Program should ensure that clients:**
   a. Sign a formal COSA agreement/covenant/contract
   b. Have at least one meeting with the COSA team in the facility

6. **COSA Programs and Referring Agencies should ensure that clients' reentry dates:**
   c. Take place as soon as possible after incarcerate; acceptance; and community supervision requirements are fulfilled
   d. Be on a date coordinated by referring partners and the CJC

7. **At the point of reentry, the COSA Program should insure that the COSA Circle has:**
   a. At least three DOC-Approved volunteers
   b. Diversity of experience and perspective, whenever possible
   c. Received pertinent information about the Core Member including:
      i. Criminal History
      ii. Conditions
      iii. Strengths/Resources
      iv. Risks/Needs
      v. Aspirations
      vi. Motivations
   d. Knowledge and/or familiarity of the Core Member's "Outer Circle"

8. **COSA staff should ensure Circle meetings are grounded in restorative justice values and practice and:**
   e. Take place weekly (until team decides otherwise)
   f. Have COSA staff at all Circle meetings during the initial year commitment
   g. Actively engage Core Members and COSA Volunteers
   h. Acknowledge and celebrate Core Member achievements
   i. Acknowledge and work through Core Member challenges and risks
   j. Acknowledge and address post-release wrongdoing and/or violations
   k. Prepare teams and core members for transition as the year-long commitment nears completion
   l. Include Outer Circle members on a limited and planned basis
   m. Include staff/volunteer-only meetings on an as-needed basis

9. **As part of Circle management, COSA Program staff should:**
   a. Record consistent Circle and case notes
   b. Keep accurate and pertinent data
   c. Coordinate, circulate and facilitate the sharing of Core Member and Circle information with-
      i. Probation Officers
      ii. Volunteers
      iii. Other team/outer circle members

10. As part of their volunteer service COSA Volunteers should:
    a. Have DOC Volunteer, COSA, and offense-specific training
    b. Dependably attend their Circle Meetings
    c. Offer regular informal outreach to the clients in the community (in accordance with their comfort levels and program boundaries)
    d. Understand, support and uphold the "No Secrets Policy"
    e. Know what immediate steps to take if they have a concern about the Core Member
    f. Have opportunities to share and learn from the experiences of other volunteers

11. As part of core-member Case Management, COSA Program staff and Probation Officers should:
    a. Update and/or consult with each other regularly about:
        i. Client Achievements
        ii. Client Risks and Concerns
        iii. Changes that impact supervision restrictions and/or COSA program participation

12. COSA Programs should create opportunities for Circles to:
    a. Celebrate successful completions
    b. Bring closure to unsuccessful completions

13. For Circles that continue beyond the one-year commitment, COSA Programs should:
    a. Clearly define and share the level of staff support available to-
        i. Core Member
        ii. Volunteers
    b. Communicate the new agreement to the Core Member's supervising Probation Officer and the outer circle

14. As a Victim-Informed Restorative Justice Process, the COSA Program should:
    a. Engage DOC Victim Services at the point of referral
    b. Include the input from victim service agencies (DOC Victim Services or local victim service agencies):
        i. Referrals
        ii. Client Acceptance Conditions
        iii. Circle Volunteer Training
        iv. Amends Making, when appropriate

15. COSA Coordinators should have:
    a. A Job Description
    b. High quality training
    c. Regular supervision

The **Nine Recommendations** below largely follow the order (and flow out) of the COSA Best Practice Indicators, starting with the prioritized service population and continuing through Circle completion practices and enhanced victim involvement. The recommendations are supported by the data analysis and discussions from outreach meetings, online surveys and focus groups.

1. **Clients with High Mental Health Needs:** DOC's COSA grants have identified two prioritized populations for COSA referral and service: Moderate to High Risk/Needs Clients and Sexual Offenders. COSA Programs appear to be largely meeting this grant requirement: CJC and Probation staff both indicated in the focus groups that the significant majority of their COSA clients fit within these two categories.

    CJC staff, however, also consistently reported ongoing struggles serving one particular subset of the prioritized populations: clients with significant mental health issues. In both the online surveys and subsequent focus groups, multiple COSA programs indicated that their volunteers (and staff) were not adequately prepared to work with clients with high mental health needs (MH). These Circles particularly test volunteers' capacities to build meaningful and sustained relationships with Core Members, which can lead to eventual disengagement and burnout.

    COSA Programs are, by design, intended to support Core Members' already challenging transition from incarceration to self-sufficiency. If the Core Member, however, has ingrained deficits that limit his/her capacity to achieve self-sufficiency, COSA programming alone may be neither sufficient nor appropriate.

    Clients with significant MH needs clearly fall within the prioritized service population. It's worth considering how COSA Programs can still serve these high needs clients. Some possible alternatives, include:

    - **Targeted** volunteer recruitment (from MH professional community) **.**
    - **Partnership** with the Designated Mental Health Agency and/or Pathways to Housing to establish long-term care and support.
    - **Partnership** with DOC Probation & Parole to identify other long-term supports that can assume greater responsibilities as the COSA program draws to an end.

    When COSA clients present previously undiagnosed MH needs, COSA programs could also benefit from:

    - **Funding** to support MH assessments
    - **Trained** clinical support for CJC staff
   - **Enhanced** staff and volunteer trainings

    Regardless of any eventual 'solution' to meeting the needs of Core Members with significant MH issues, COSA Program staff clearly requested additional discussion and guidance in both the online surveys and focus groups. These future discussions could potentially involve CJC and Probation staff as well as Corrections and non-government MH professionals.

2. **Housing:** Housing is both a key pillar to successful reentry and a driver of Vermont's COSA referrals. In the online surveys, Probation Officers and Case Workers alike listed Housing as the primary reason for referring to a COSA program. Core Member Focus Group participants also identified housing as a key motivator to enroll in the COSA Program.

Case Workers   *Probation Officers*
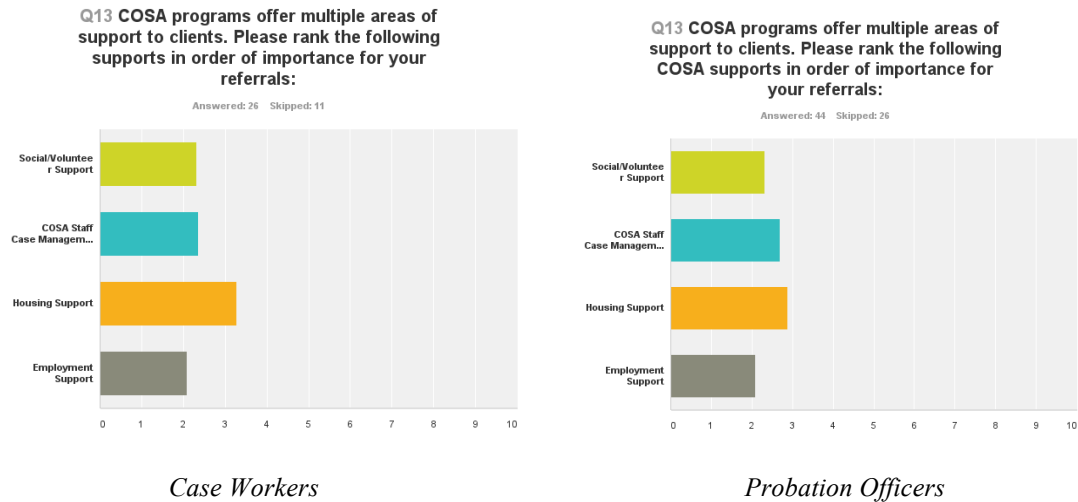
All of this holds true even though the majority of COSA programs (75%) do not include housing as part of their service menu. (The overall majority of COSA referrals, however, may be to programs that include housing).

This contradiction between referral expectations and service capacities is highlighted in the online surveys: 70% of COSA staff and CJC Directors identified housing as a core challenge to the timely delivery of Circles. As a result, COSA clients have been known to remain incarcerated long after program acceptance due to inability to secure approved housing. This delay in COSA engagement may potentially become a disincentive to future referrals (both from DOC stakeholders and clients.)

CJC Directors
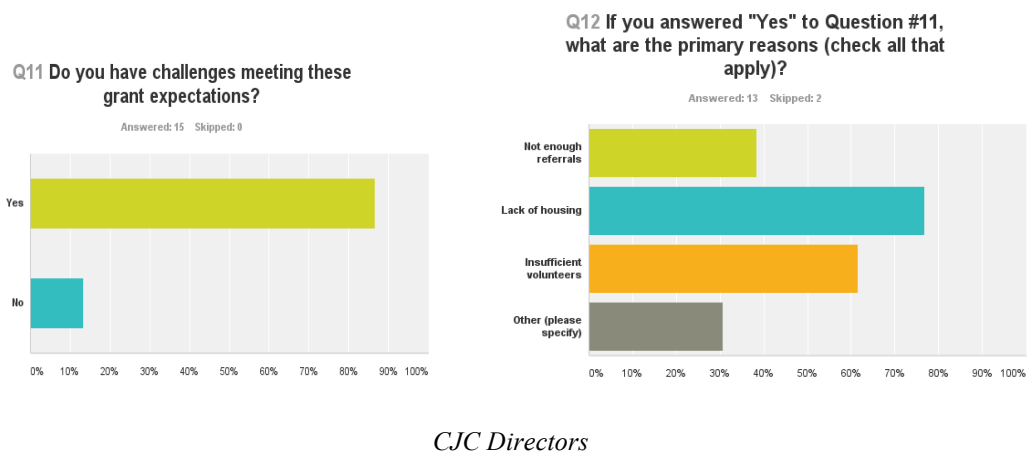
Approximately a quarter of CJCs have addressed this challenge by becoming housing providers and creating a new pathway to the community for people of all offense types. Most, but not all, of these programs secured initial financial support through DOC's Transitional Housing grants, developing housing according to one of two models:

Client Held Leases: The CJC partners with a local landlord to secure an apartment lease and provide initial rental payments. The lease is in the name of the core member, who is expected to eventually assume full responsibility for the apartment's financial expenses.

CJC Held Leases: The CJC secures apartments that serve as 'transitional housing' for core members. The lease is held by the CJC and the core member is expected to save income in preparation for eventual transfer to his/her own apartments. Once the client saves sufficient funds, CJCs will often assist him/her in identifying and securing permanent housing.

Offering housing, however is not without risks. Many COSA clients, which may be grouped together, have both checkered housing histories and poor personal management skills. In order to mitigate these risks, CJCs may resort to increased client monitoring and supervision, which can potentially blur the boundaries between Corrections and the COSA programs.

Housing is clearly a 'stress point' in the timely delivery of Circles. Although the fact-finding phase of the 360˚ Review did not identify potential remedies, it is worth considering some possibilities, including:

- **Support and expand the existing CJC-led housing models:** Priority could be given to programs/areas that have limited housing resources (and high needs) for the COSA service priority population.
- **Connect Transitional Housing Grants to COSA**: Vermont funds transitional housing programs across the state. There may be opportunity in future grant rounds to explicitly link Transitional Housing awards to include housing of COSA clients. This would enable housing providers to do what they do best–provide safe and structured transitional housing environments–and free up COSA programs to focus on high-quality Circle service delivery.

3. **Community Education and Volunteer Recruitment:** Vermont's COSA would not function without dedicated, trained and supported volunteers. In the online surveys, more than 80% of volunteers stated that they contribute at least 1-2 hours per week to the program, which collectively represents a tremendous investment in the wellbeing of Core Members and community safety. Volunteers also expressed a deep connection to both the program and Core Members and almost unanimously indicated that they would recommend COSA volunteering to a friend.

Persistent challenges in volunteer recruitment and retention, however, has constrained the capacity of Community Justice Centers to meet both service needs and grant requirements. This was clearly reflected in the online surveys of the 360° Review: COSA Coordinators and CJC Directors alike identified volunteer recruitment and retention as one of their core implementation challenges (closely behind Core Member Housing).

Q17 Do you have enough COSA volunteers to meet the needs of your program?

Answered: 17   Skipped: 0
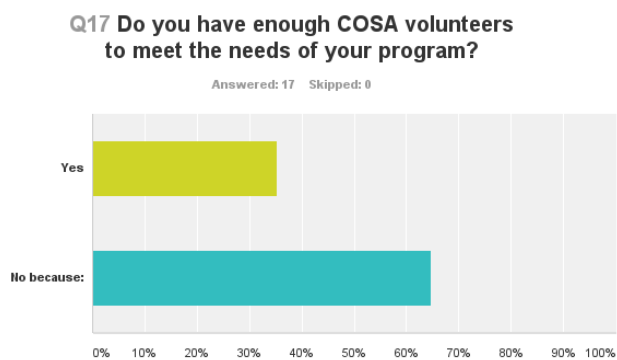
COSA Coordinators

The lack of sufficient volunteers is emerging as a serious impediment to the timely engagement of Circles. Programs are, on occasion, providing community-based reentry services to Core Members prior to the formation of his/her Circle. There also can be delays in reentry dates due to insufficient volunteers. Neither scenario is ideal.

As a result of the scarcity, several Justice Centers rely heavily on a limited corps of COSA volunteers. These volunteers may serve on multiple circles simultaneously or be serving on their third, fourth or fifth Circle. Their contributions to the COSA program are invaluable. Seasoned volunteers offer both a depth of experience and can potentially mentor new volunteers who may have less confidence in their capabilities.

Q16 How many different COSA Circles have you served on?

Answered: 79   Skipped: 0
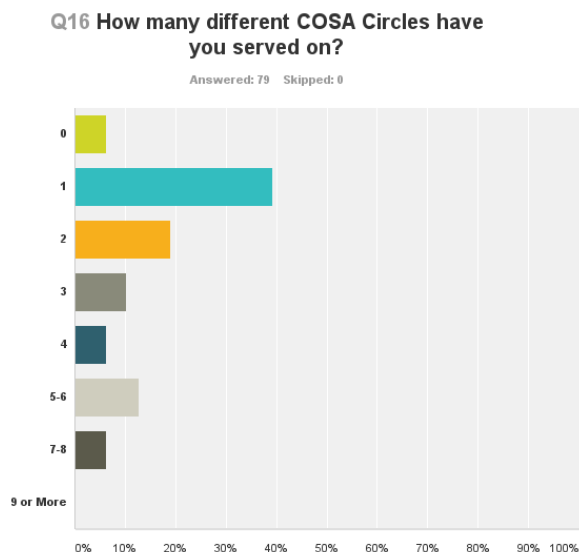
COSA Volunteers

Over-reliance on the same volunteers, however, also carries risks. These include:

- Burnout: In their online surveys, several Volunteers expressed frustration with the 'reentry system' and/or the 'lack of change or engagement' in core members. These frustrations, which are both real and understandable, can lead to eventual disengagement from the COSA program.
- 'Professionalization' of the Volunteer: The primary role of the volunteer is to build a mutually meaningful relationship with the Core Member. Asking volunteers to serve on multiple circles (some of which may not be 'successful') can potentially impact their willingness to build an engaged relationship with the Core Member(s).

Currently, COSA programs rely on their own local marketing materials to inform and recruit volunteers. With the now effective expansion to statewide coverage, Vermont's COSA Programs could potentially exploit a coordinated marketing and promotion campaign.

Statewide Community Education and Coordinated Volunteer Recruitment were consistently identified (in both surveys and focus groups) as potential support to the overall operation and success of Vermont's COSA Programs. This could include:

- **Common Marketing Materials**: Although there is considerable variation in COSA services and support practices across the state, there is near unanimity in the programs' volunteer expectations, training and supports. Circle Meetings also share many similar guiding principles. A collaborative team of COSA stakeholders could work with a graphic designer to develop high-quality volunteer marketing materials that have statewide application. This would require the identification of a centralized contact (most likely the CJNVT) to direct volunteers to the appropriate Justice Center.

- **Coordinated Statewide Outreach:** According to the online survey, COSA Volunteers come from a predominantly older demographic (60% are 59 years or older). Their motivations to volunteer are varied although 'community engagement,' 'learning opportunity,' 'criminal justice reform,' and 'faith' were frequently cited in the surveys. A statewide outreach or publicity team (that includes current volunteers) could target Vermont organizations that support and serve prospective COSA Volunteers' demographics and interests. This could include educational institutions; ecumenical and faith organizations; civic groups; and senior service organizations.

4. **Key Stakeholder Education and Outreach:** Relative to their Probation and Parole counterparts, Vermont's Facility Caseworkers expressed limited understanding and knowledge of COSA program's services and supports. In the online surveys, Caseworkers largely averaged "somewhat knowledgeable" across five distinct COSA domains/practices. In those same surveys, Caseworkers also expressed more limited support, engagement and positive experiences with the COSA Program (than their Probation counterparts).


Probation Officers   *Case Workers*
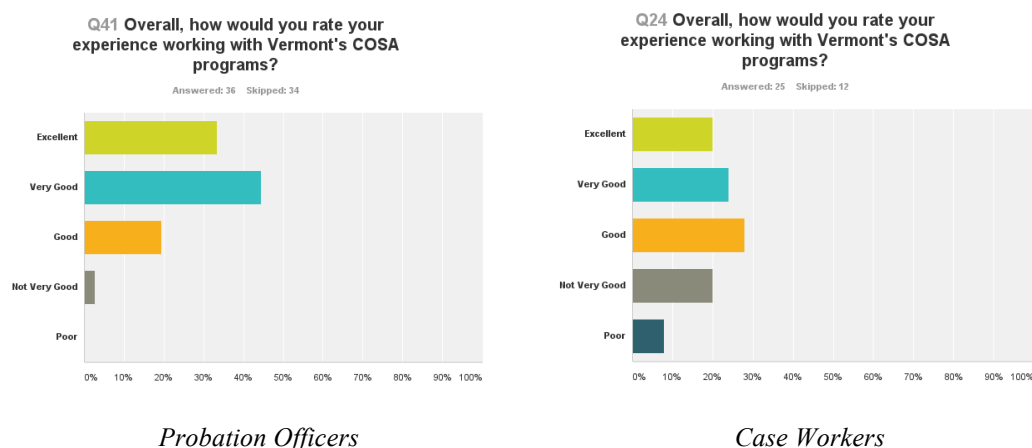
Core Members also indicated (in a focus group) that they had limited prior knowledge of the COSA program. Their initial source of program information largely came from other inmates and/or Facility Caseworkers. (In addition, both Core Members and Case Workers identified reentry housing as the primary driver of their interest and referral. Housing, although critical to reentry, is not the core service or purpose of COSA.)

Similar to the design and implementation of a Statewide COSA Volunteer Recruitment Campaign, the Vermont COSA Programs should consider the **development of consensus marketing materials for key stakeholders**, including:

- **Caseworkers and Probation Officers**: A single brochure or digital site, coupled with coordinated outreach, would provide referring partners with a consistent and clear source of information regarding COSA supports and expectations. The outreach materials could also separately include updated contact information for the respective COSA Programs (or perhaps a single point of contact) as well as availability of housing resources. These materials would enable caseworkers to have informed discussions with prospective COSA clients. (Online surveys indicated that such information could also potentially produce a modest increase in referrals.)

- **Core Members**: A single brochure for prospective Core Members would enable CJCs to shape the prospective client's first exposure to the program. The statewide brochure could be distributed throughout all Correctional Facilities and broadly detail program goals, expectations and supports. The regionally specific details of the COSA programs could be further explored when COSA staff conduct in-person outreach.

5. **Referral/Acceptance/Denial Processes:** Vermont's COSA programs and referring partners would benefit from greater consistency, clarity and guidance in the criteria that are applied in the Referral, Acceptance and Denial of prospective COSA Clients. There are several areas that would benefit from discussion and decision-making, including:

- **Referral Forms:** According to online survey results, Vermont's diversity of COSA referral forms and processes have created confusion for referring parties, particularly Case Workers at the state's correctional facilities. Although Probation Offices are largely familiar with the referral processes of their respective COSA Programs, Case Workers must manage more than a dozen different referral forms and processes.

Probation Officers   *Case Workers*
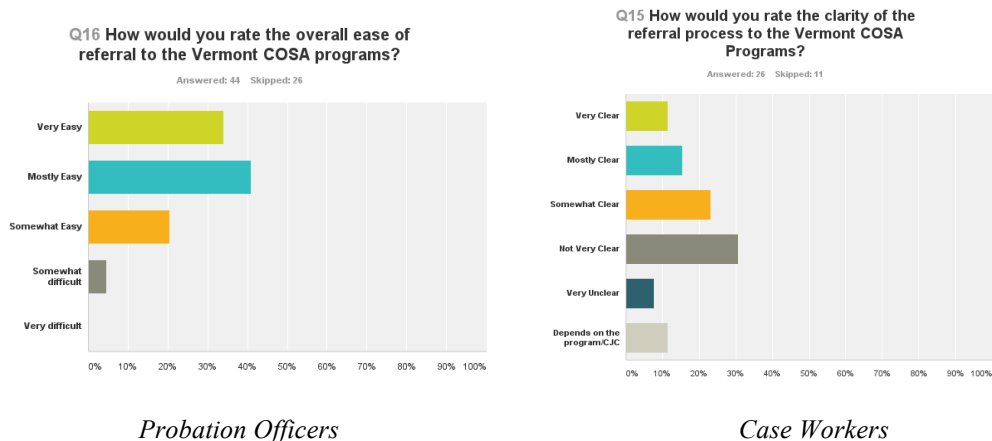
There is an opportunity to create a single referral form for Vermont's COSA programs. The form, which could be drafted and/or supplemented from a combination of existing forms, would eliminate current confusion with referring partners and also ensure that COSA Programs receive consistently relevant and thorough client and stakeholder information/perspectives.

- **Referral Processes and Decision-Making Criteria**: In order to ensure equitable and voluntary access to COSA Services, the DOC and CJCs should develop consensus guidance on the criteria and processes for referring, accepting and denying prospective clients. Such criteria would be beneficial to Core Members, referring parties and COSA programs, ensuring that referrals are:

  - **Timely**: Many COSA Programs across the state indicated that they have insufficient time to respond to new referrals and/or prepare for reentering COSA clients. Whenever possible, COSA referrals should be processed <u>at least 3 to 6 months prior to the client's release date</u> (as specified in DOC Directive #501.03).

This will enable sufficient time for case-planning; volunteer recruitment; training; and multiple team meetings in the correctional facility prior to release. According to focus group participants, these pre-release activities are widely accepted as *Best COSA Practice*. Although achieving this timeline appears to be systemically challenging, focus groups revealed that there are successful COSA/P&P collaborative models that have significantly pushed referrals 'further upstream'.

- **Voluntary and Self-Motivated**: Several CJC staff expressed concerns in Focus Groups that Core Members are sometimes either 'enrolled' in COSA by their Probation Officer or are motivated more by available housing than the core COSA service: participating in a Circle. Several communities currently include 'client motivation' questions in their COSA application forms. These questions, along with potential assessment tools, may be useful in the future design of the single referral form.

- **Prioritization for the COSA Service Population:** Although COSA programs largely serve the prioritized service population (see above), both CJC and Probation Staff expressed concerns that the current criteria can be too limiting. Probation Staff in particular indicated that there should be 'local discretion' to refer clients who may not meet the strict risk/need criteria but who otherwise (without COSA) might be unsuccessful and be returned to the prison. The request for the added discretion was fairly consistent across the five regional focus groups and should be considered for inclusion in future, clearly-defined grant language.

- **Transparent Referrals**: In both online surveys and focus groups, several COSA programs indicated that they currently do not receive sufficient referrals *(see above chart, page 19)* to meet their grant requirements. Several CJC staff also articulated concerns that clients who clearly meet the Risk/Need grant criteria are not being referred to COSA. Developing consistently transparent referral processes across Vermont's complex corrections infrastructure will be a challenge. Correctional Facilities and Probation and Parole offices have different cultures, staffing and priorities that impact COSA referrals. In spite of these challenges, CJCs and P&P offices have experienced some success in developing processes to support COSA referrals. Going forward, these initiatives could be both strengthened and shared in order to ensure that the *right* clients are being referred in sufficient numbers to COSA.

- **Evaluated/Decided with Consistency**: COSA Programs across the state use a variety of Acceptance/Denial processes to approve prospective COSA clients. These processes range from formalized decision-making meetings to unconditional acceptance of all referrals. This *Review* does not offer guidance or recommendations on which process is 'best': regional acceptance/denial processes reflect the priorities and stakeholders of those regions. Decision-making processes, however, should operate within a framework that is

transparent and justifiable. Going forward, it would be helpful for a team of stakeholders to develop clear guidance to limit potentially arbitrary decision-making.

6. **Circle Administration:** There are a number of areas within the administration of Circles (from incarceration through completion) that would benefit from further guidance and clarification. These areas were frequently mentioned and/or identified during the Regional Focus Groups. Developing guidance and/or protocols to these areas may require a variety of strategies and participants. The areas include:

- **Inclusion of Treatment Perspective/Information:** Vermont's COSA Programs have had limited success accessing the information and/or perspectives of the treatment provider community. This stands in contrast to the Canadian COSA model, which highlights the supportive role of Treatment providers (in the outer circle). There are many reasons for the current disconnect including compressed provider schedules and lack of financial reimbursement for non-treatment activities. That said, there may be as-yet-untapped opportunities to include treatments' unique perspective in Circle referrals and implementation. COSA Circles, in return, are well-positioned to actively support the goals and activities of the Core member's treatment.

- **Volunteer Access to Core Member Information:** As volunteers begin their Circle engagement across the state, they receive varied degrees and depth of information about their Core Members. According to focus group participants, some volunteers receive information informally, through conversations with staff, while others receive full packets of information that includes Core Member profiles, Conditions, and goals and objectives. COSA and Corrections staff (and Treatment Providers if possible) should work together to develop guidance around Volunteer access to Core Member information. The overarching goal should be to ensure that volunteers have the right information to be able to build supportive, compassionate and safe relationships with Core Members.

- **Note Taking and Sharing:** COSA staff employ varied practices in the recording and sharing of Circle meeting notes. The variance in practice generated a common Focus Group topic of discussion: 'what notes should staff be taking.' The Focus Groups also generated considerable discussion as to whether Circle notes should be shared with Core Members (some programs currently do this) and Probation and Parole. CJC and Corrections Staff should work together to develop guidance on the effective recording and sharing of meeting notes.

- **Case Management Tools and Expectations:** Case management services are an integral part of the COSA Coordinator's job responsibilities: fully 100% of Coordinators indicated in the online survey that they provide Core Member case management/resource navigation. These case management services are also a driver of Probation Officer referrals, ranking a close second to Housing. As with other COSA processes and tools, COSA Coordinators are utilizing a variety of locally-

developed case-management strategies, assessments and evaluations to guide their work with Core Members. Some of these tools may be useful to Coordinators across the state. Coordinators and Reentry Case Managers could work together to develop a case-managers tool kit for evaluating and addressing client needs.

- **Effective Engagement of Probation Officers:** As was mentioned above, the COSA Coordinator and Probation Officer relationship is the lynchpin to on-the-ground program collaboration. There are many regional examples of highly collaborative partnerships, which are characterized by seamless co-case-management and mutual support of supervision and COSA program goals. There are also plenty of examples where active partnership and information sharing is challenging. These challenges appear to be particularly pronounced in communities that are new to the work of COSA and/or manage relatively few COSA clients. With time and shared work, new COSA programs will build stronger partnerships with Probation Officers. In the interim, it remains essential that COSA Programs continue to strictly uphold the "No Secrets" policy, regardless of the current level of Probation Officer engagement. DOC Central Office and Probation & Parole should also seek ways to build stronger and more consistent COSA engagement from Probation Officers.
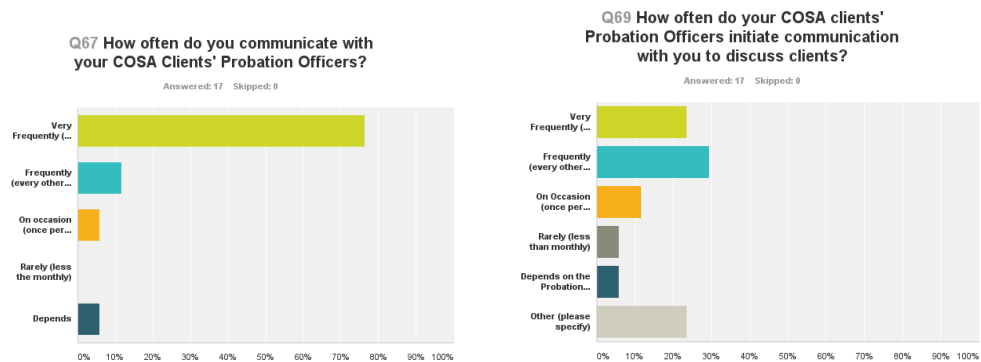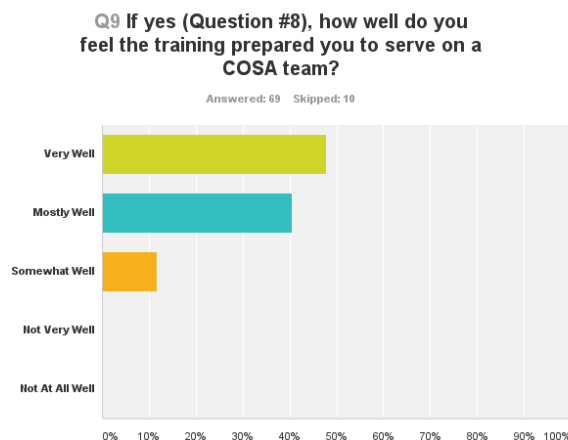

COSA Coordinators

- **Post Completion Circle Guidelines:** Many COSA programs will offer some level of service beyond the initial year commitment: "a year is too short" was a common remark at several of the Regional Focus Groups. Research also indicates that (sex-offender) crime desistence only takes permanent hold after 3-5 years in the community (Hanson et al, 2014: 8). Vermont's COSA Circles, however, operate on a one-year grant cycle. As such, Coordinators must prioritize their time and resources (including volunteers) to serve new clients in order to meet their grant obligations. COSA Programs have developed considerable expertise and practice with transitioning clients and Circles to a 'post-completion' phase. According to focus group participants, Probation Officers also occasionally recommend that COSA Circles continue beyond the initial year to both maintain client progress and protect community safety. COSA programs could benefit from discussion and development of post-completion guidelines. A working group–comprised of Probation Officers, DOC Central Staff, and CJC Staff–could explore both best practices in post-completion circles as well as the potential

'counting' of some post-completion Circles toward the following year's grant requirements.

- **Data Collection:** In spite of its modest population, Vermont is currently engaged in the largest implementation of COSA Circles in the United States. With the unfolding of a new statewide CJC database, Vermont has an opportunity to identify additional data sets that could help tell the COSA story. Some COSA programs are already gathering additional data (including employment search and referrals). Focus group and online survey participants suggested the development of pre-, middle-, and post-completion Core Member surveys. A working group comprised of CJC Staff, DOC Central Office and Researchers could work together to incorporate additional data sets into the CJC data collection practices.

7. **Volunteer Training:** In 2012, the CJNVT and Department of Corrections developed and refined an experiential COSA volunteer training that is both high-quality and consistent. The training, which continues to be implemented across the state, enjoys very strong support: nearly 90% of respondents in the online volunteer survey indicated that the training "very or mostly well" prepared them to serve on a COSA.

Q9 If yes (Question #8), how well do you feel the training prepared you to serve on a COSA team?

Answered: 69   Skipped: 10

COSA Volunteers

The online surveys and subsequent focus groups, however, also revealed gaps in volunteer training. Most volunteers indicated that they did not receive offense-specific training for their Core Members. Some Probation Officers indicated that there was a need for even more focused, client-specific training and expressed a willingness to facilitate such training with individual Circles. Staff identified training in Mental Health issues (see above) as another gap in current volunteer trainings. Finally, volunteers consistently expressed a desire for opportunities to meet with other COSA volunteers to share insights, experiences and ideas. In order to address these training gaps, COSA program stakeholders should consider:

- **Developing Consistent Volunteer Training Guidelines and Resources**: Most of the above trainings will likely require local or regional coordination. Volunteer training guidelines, however, should first be clarified on a statewide level. A team

of CJC staff and volunteers along with DOC partners (including from the treatment community) could develop a set of training recommendations and resources to help local programs and their partners meet volunteer training needs. Implementation of the training guidelines may also require ongoing statewide coordination and support, perhaps from the CJNVT.

8. **Staff Development and Training:** With the infusion of additional financial resources, Vermont's COSA Programs have rapidly proliferated in the past five years from five to nearly twenty. COSA staff also have, as a generalization, limited tenure in their positions. As a result of both the service expansion and normal turnover, nearly 50% of COSA Coordinators currently have less than two years of experience (according to the online survey).

In spite of this near continuous change in COSA Coordination, there is no clear set of guidelines for staff training. Beyond attending the statewide Volunteer training, new Coordinators are, in many instances, expected to learn the ropes anew without the benefit of either their predecessor's or Vermont's collective experience.

Q13 **Do you have a formalized training process for new COSA staff?**

Answered: 15   Skipped: 0
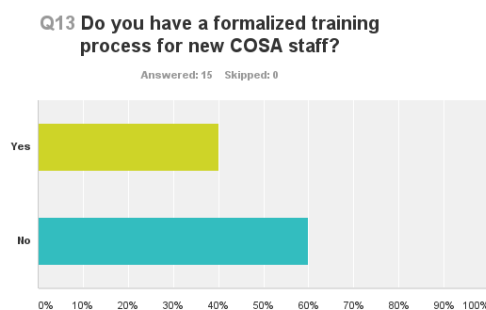
CJC Directors

Some learn-as-you-go experience is positive. Successful COSA programs rely upon partnerships with local stakeholders and these relationships are best established through shared service implementation. That said, Vermont has an opportunity to document, categorize and share the CJCs extensive knowledge and experience partnering with DOC reentry systems; and implementing high-quality COSA practices.

In light of this, Vermont should consider:
- **Developing a COSA Job Description and Staff Manual:** A committee comprised of COSA stakeholders (CJNVT, DOC and CJCs) could develop and distribute a Statewide COSA Job Description and Staff Manual. Similar to the Statewide Volunteer Manual, the Job Description and Staff Manual would orient new staff to program expectations, guidelines and processes as well as contact information for statewide stakeholders. The Job Description and Manual could also serve to identify and delineate respective roles and responsibilities for staff; Probation Officers; and volunteers. Finally, the Manual could highlight areas for potential inclusion of regional-specific protocols, which would enable CJCs to tailor the Manual to local conditions.

- **Supporting Regional COSA Learning Communities:** CJCs and/or the CJNVT should consider supporting the development of COSA Learning Communities. The staff (and volunteer) Learning Communities could gather periodically to share experiences and discuss facilitated topics. The Learning Communities could also provide opportunities for more in-depth training.

9. **Involvement and Integration of Victim Perspectives:** COSA programs, both individually and collectively, have struggled with the incorporation of the affected parties' perspectives in their referral, acceptance and service delivery processes. There have been initial statewide attempts to outreach and inform victims, including a 2012 CJC Victim Safety Protocol and Form Letter. The Protocol, however, requires considerable coordination between Probation Officers and COSA staff and is currently implemented by only 40% of COSA programs (according to online surveys). DOC Victim Advocates also expressed concerns about both the content and effectiveness of the letter.
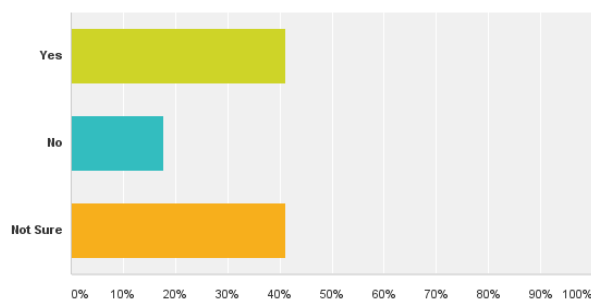
COSA Coordinators

Some regional COSA programs have developed partnerships with DOC Victim Advocates and victim services organizations that move beyond the limited scope of the Outreach Protocol. These partnerships have been employed to inform the referral, acceptance and service delivery of COSA Circles. These programs (and their processes) may hold promising models of collaboration, information-sharing and service coordination that could be applied across the state. In order to support consistent practice in the safe inclusion of victim perspectives and voice, COSA programs should consider:

- **Forming a COSA/Victim Services Working Group:** A COSA/Victim Services Working Group could be tasked with both identifying promising local practices and developing guidance, policy and/or processes and procedures that support the inclusion of affected parties' perspectives into COSA Programs service delivery. Potential areas for discussion/decision-making include:
  - **Inclusion of Victim Information/Perspectives/Needs in Referrals**
  - **Participation in Acceptance Processes**
  - **Participation in Circle Administration, including:**

- Case Conferences
- **Restorative Processes**
- **Information Sharing and Confidentiality Agreements/Understandings**

The working group formation comes at a potentially transformative moment in the CJCs' delivery of Victim Services. In 2017, the Vermont Center for Victim Services will be recruiting an infrastructure of Americorps Victim Liaisons for placement at Community Justice Centers. These Liaisons will provide an invaluable additional resource to the victim services infrastructure and potentially, with training and supervision, help COSA programs fulfill their restorative justice mandate: victim-informed services from referral to completion.

6.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

To summarize the central finding of this study, Vermont's COSA Programs are strong, diverse and innovative. The 360° Review identified multiple areas of program maturity, including: volunteer engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and high-quality COSA training and practice, among others. The program also is clearly effective, producing significant reductions in the recidivism rates of Core Members.

These strengths are supported by the program's growing network of experienced administrators and vested stakeholders, including; successful Core Members who can testify to the programs' benefits; dedicated COSA volunteers who are passionate advocates of the power and value of Circles; committed CJC staff with decades of collective experience forming, managing and supporting COSAs; and Department of Corrections staff who are engaged and supportive partners.

The 360° Review's recommendations are intended to both leverage and build upon these strengths. Taken together, the recommendations seek to:
1. Ensure appropriate, consistent and informed referrals;
2. Enhance and support consistent Circle practice;
3. Improve the efficiency of service delivery;

The nine recommendations put forward in this report emerged from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of survey and focus group data. Upon completion, the Review was circulated to COSA program stakeholders for comments and feedback (available below). This review and comment process, however, does not (nor should it) imply consensus agreement on the recommendations. Securing such agreement will be essential to the effective design and implementation of these and other potential recommendations.

One possible path forward is to conduct a strategic planning process that could identify opportunities and constraints in the implementation of programmatic changes. A planning process would enable the CJNVT, DOC and other COSA stakeholders to explore and identify:
- **Decision-Making Processes:** There are several recommendations included in this report which call for the development of consistent and streamlined practices across CJCs and DOC systems. Prior to design and implementation, the CJNVT and DOC will need to define both the decision-making processes (and authority) that will guide and approve these recommendations.
- **Leadership:** Some of the recommendations clearly fall with the purview and leadership of the CJCs and CJNVT (common *COSA Coordinator Job Description* is an example) while others will require leadership from the DOC (*Timely Referrals* is an example). Identifying at the outset who will take the lead (or shared leadership) on the recommendations will support efficient implementation.
- **Stakeholders:** The design and implementation of each of the Report's recommendations will likely engage different constellations of stakeholders. Identifying these constellations will ensure an inclusive planning and design process, which will support effective implementation.

- **Resources:** Some of the recommendations will require significant additional financial resources to implement (additional *Housing* for example). Other recommendations can potentially be implemented relatively quickly with limited or no new resources (*Common Referral Form* for example). Identifying required resources (and ease of implementation) will inform the prioritization of the recommendations.
- **Immediacy of Need:** A few of the recommendations emerge out of clear and pressing programmatic needs (*Volunteer Recruitment* is one such example). Identifying the level of need will inform prioritization of recommendations.
- **Implementation Support:** Although many of the recommendations will likely be designed and developed on a statewide level, actual implementation may require regional or local support and assistance. Identifying the level of implementation support should be considered from a resource and prioritization perspective.

After ten years of experimentation and implementation, Vermont's COSA program has achieved a remarkable depth of service experience and expertise. Moving forward with the Review's and potentially other recommendations will only build upon this legacy. More importantly, initiatives that support and enhance consistent high-quality practice will be better positioned to meet the needs of Vermont's medium and high risk reentry clients and their reentry communities.

7.0 Stakeholder Comments

Derek Miodownik, Restorative and Community Justice Executive, DOC
September 19, 2016

Thank you for the truly great work and the opportunity to share feedback on it. The fact is, after reading it all, I don't have much to offer because it is comprehensive while being focused, well-written and well-reasoned, informative and engaging.

One question it generated for me was how best to prioritize and sequentialize the recommendations. I am beginning to imagine a matrix that attempts to externalize the priority levels, resource demands, time implications etc. Perhaps that could be part of a second stage process.

Another question is whether in addition to the challenges/opportunities for improvement , do you perceive any deeper vulnerabilities and/or threats to the program worthy of noting in the report?

Other than these, my only other thoughts are those of gratitude and appreciation for such a value-added work product from which we can further strengthen an already leading practice.

I look forward to the final report.

Stuart Recicar, Burlington COSA Coordinator
September 26, 2016
Thanks for the paper Marc, I had a few thoughts to pass along…

First off….Your time and methodology and inclusion of many perspectives is really awesome.

It is very interesting, I was struck by the fact that there is no one definition or program description for Vermont COSA programs….I hope that this and the recommendation of some common outreach materials come to fruition in a relatively short time. I am in absolute agreement with most of the recommendations, especially around common materials and processes, inclusion of victim services, and coordinator and volunteer trainings. Many of your points have been swirling about for a long time so I hope that by it all being in a sanctioned report it will gain more momentum.

I wanted to ask some clarifying questions about recommendation #1. I am unclear as to what major mental health disorders are referring too, it can be pretty subjective so I wanted to ask more about it? Every reentry client we see, regardless of service, that walks through the door has some major mental health concerns and challenges….I think of major mental concerns as part of being labeled as high-risk. Because of this, we do a lot of outreach and asking of questions in regards to mental health concerns and have had success in having questions and thoughts answered so maybe that is a big difference…even in regards to act 248 cases. I also tend to tread lightly here and think it ties into the coordinator training and defining of roles and levels of competency.. I am not a mental health professional or a drug and alcohol counselor so my

questions are around supporting the work of the counselor as opposed to "working" on it…and volunteers with experience in either field I remind that in this role they are volunteers. In general I have found that mental health concerns haven't been as challenging as the prison culture mentality that core members who have spent decades behind bars have ingrained, working to adapt that thought, behavior, and belief system into community living has been a huge challenge. Also struck by how addiction didn't rise to the level of mental health in this review as far as concerns go.

As you had suggested, I hope working groups are created to address some of the best practice indicators…all the clearly articulated, transparent, and consistent suggestions are important!

Pg 25 Voluntary and self-motivated
Concerns that potential core members have been "enrolled", I have been at more than one meeting where a PO will be in support of a COSA and say something like "the more sets of eyes the better" I will then follow up with them because I don't feel it fair to take that at only face value. Having a conversation with the PO about it, the ones I have talked with have a good foundational understanding of what the program can and does offer.

Carol Plante, Director of the Hardwick CJC and Chair of CJNVT
October 26, 2016
I found the review to be well organized, provides accurate and adequate history in the summary and appropriate detail with regard to data analysis. I learned some things from the report which speaks to the need for better statewide coordination to standardize CoSA programs.

The recommendations are clear and seem carefully constructed to appreciate what is going well in addition to addressing and highlighting the most glaring challenges. I especially like the focus on the need to have more clarity in inclusion of victims in the process and in the development of how victims have a voice and are served.

Thanks for this work for the Network.

Yvonne Byrd, Director of the Montpelier Community Justice Center
September 27, 2016
I have reactions/comments on a few sections.
P. 16, #8 In this section of Best Practice Indicators you say
COSA staff should ensure Circle meetings are grounded in restorative justice values and practice and:
This is followed by a list of logistical, operation considerations that relate to the "and" but don't speak to RJ. I strongly suggest that it is important to enumerate the indicators of what is happening when meetings are grounded in RJ values and practice and that this is what should follow. The list you currently have should just be under some other bullet with a heading that relates to them.

For #14 you talk about indicators of "a Victim-Informed Restorative Justice Process"
I believe that it is a COSA staff and volunteer responsibility to model and encourage empathy for

victims and to challenge victim blaming

RE: In response to the recommendations related to working with people who have high mental health needs:

I think it is a safe assumption that all the people we work with in COSA are traumatized people who have significant challenges to being mentally healthy. My recommendation would be that COSA staff and volunteers strive to find comfort with where each person is in their journey and coping capabilities and meet them where they are. There tends to be a practice of shying away from what we don't understand and referring it out for someone else to deal with. While clinical assessment and treatment may also be helpful and COSA staff may play a role in helping a person access care, we should simultaneously be doing all we can to build a relationship that is possible with the particular person we are working with.

Re. Housing Recommendations

I wonder whether this statement is simply hypothetical (and maybe not worth worrying about). "This delay in COSA engagement may potentially become a disincentive to future referrals (both from DOC stakeholders and clients.)" I have never encountered evidence of any truth to this.

"Offering housing, however is not without risks. Many COSA clients, which may be grouped together, have both checkered housing histories and poor personal management skills. In order to mitigate these risks, CJCs may need to resort to increased client surveillance and supervision, which can potentially blur the boundaries between Corrections and the COSA programs."

I find disturbing the idea expressed in the above highlighted phrase. I don't disagree that congregate housing presents opportunities for problems and risks; however, I believe CJCs are compelled to act in accordance with the principles we say we believe in. "Client surveillance and supervision" are not restorative practices.

Re. Volunteers

You talk about "Professionalization of the Volunteer: The primary role of the volunteer is to build a mutually meaningful relationship with the Core Member. Asking volunteers to serve on multiple circles (some of which may not be 'successful') can potentially impact their willingness to build an engaged relationship with the Core Member(s)."

I wonder why you raise this possibility. Did you find evidence of this?

Re. Note taking and your recommendation "CJC and Corrections Staff should work together to develop guidance on the effective recording and sharing of meeting notes."

I find the practice of recording and sharing meeting notes to be controversial at best. I think that it is important to first answer these questions: "Why would we record and share notes from a meeting?" "What would be in these notes?" "How does this practice fit with the RJ practice of doing "with" people?" "Does this practice imply evaluation?" "Does such a practice fit with a "community-based, nonprofessional model that focuses on relationships rather than services" as this report describes COSAs?

Bobby Blanchard, Lamoille Restorative Justice Center
September 28, 2016

- In the section on 15 best practices, number 10, part a.: I think we should include training for volunteers specifically in restorative justice principles and practices, in addition to the trainings mentioned.
- Regarding the CoSA Learning Communities concept, we have arranged for two gatherings of all of our CoSA team members for the purpose of sharing experiences and discussing the rewards and challenges of the work. These have been well received and we plan to continue to arrange for them in the future. We feel doing this at the agency level, as opposed to regionally or statewide, works well. These volunteers are 'neighbors' in our community and connect on that level, as well as on the level of being a CoSA volunteer.

I enjoyed reading the report. Thanks for all your hard work!

Lori Baker, Director of the Greater Barre CJC
September 30, 2016
I'd like to see a guiding document or something like that, that helps CoSA teams in their relationship development with the core member. What do you start out talking about, how do you get to know each other better, or establish common ground (projects you could all do together)? What topics do you cover, and strategies to do so? Is there something specific that you do to build trust? Do you have a guideline on various areas that could be talked about? Guiding questions or list? How deeply do CoSA teams go into the core members issues? What's the boundary of being a team and someone else doing service navigation?

Another comment:
What about teams that use Circles as their format for some of the time (Kay Pranis Circles)- have any done that, and what do they use the Circles for?
I think that's it. Thanks for this fabulous report! Can't wait for the final.

Con Quinby, Volunteer at the Burlington CJC,
October 3, 2016
Thank you for your report which I found very well written, informative, challenging and exciting. It confirms my own belief and experience that COSA works and deserves the support of the community, legislature, DOC and all stakeholders.

It's going to take a while to digest all the information and recommendations. In the meantime, please be assured of my willingness to help with Recommendation Three: Launch a Statewide Community Education and Volunteer Recruitment Campaign.

One other comment: the inclusion in the report of quotes from core members, volunteers, staff and probation officers is vital. I would hope in the preparation of recruiting materials, more of these quotes will be included as well as 'stories' of volunteers and core members.

Again, thank you for an excellent report.

Kathy Fox, UVM
October 25, 2016
This is an excellent report. It is thorough and comprehensive. I especially liked that it demonstrates the tension in the referral processing and the housing constraints/needs/funds.

I would mention a few things that came to mind.

1) In terms of data collection, it would be nice if DOC and/or CJCs recorded complete information in the database what kinds of housing supports the person got, something like level 1=an apt like in X town, level 2=rent assistance, level 3=just a referral, level 4=nothing. (This would make it easier for a researcher to tease out the role that housing might play in desistance from crime…)

2) You state that screening for appropriate CoSA candidates should be based on medium to high risk and mainly SOs. I would maybe flesh that out more or at least talk to DOC about this. One issue is that sometimes less than optimal folks are chosen (partly dependent on adequacy of referral system). In interviews, folks have mentioned that there is some "cherry picking": on the one hand, programs want to select someone who will engage with the program, and don't want to spend a resource on someone who is disinclined to use it, but on the other hand, they need to assess whether s/he would be fine without CoSA. I would suggest looking into the level of social supports they have and using the lack thereof as a screening criteria as well.

3) Along those lines, I am not sure if using it mainly for SOs is warranted, unless they are especially isolated and therefore at greater risk to re-offend. Some people argue that SOs are more "pro-social" anyway, so I think a serious discussion about criteria and screening is in order.

4) There is (no surprise) a big difference in how much probation officers engage with the process. I would suggest that as a best practice, DOC should create some guidelines for engagement. For example, some POs go to the meetings with some regularity, and those seem to work better. And lots of POs don't want to go to night meetings, but I would think you'd want to encourage them to come to at least some of the meetings, maybe once a month, and DOC would need to create a mechanism for flex time to accommodate that. (Might be a union issue to take up that night meetings will be part of the work sometimes!) Or perhaps find another mechanism for PO involvement.

Overall, really excellent report that should be vital to refining processes going forward.

7.0 Index   **Page**

Summary of Survey Findings
Volunteers

Overview
Total Responses: 79
Geographic Reach: 16 out of 20 CJCs

Demographics
Age: 60% are 59 years or older
Gender: Nearly 60% are Female

Service Overview
Length of Service: Nearly 60% have volunteered for less than 2 years
Recruitment: 32% of volunteers learned about the program through CJC staff. Next highest is "Through Work" at 15%.
Reasons for Volunteering (Sample Key Words): "To Help" "Gospel" "To Contribute" "Learning Opportunity" "I believe…" "Meaningful" "Community" "Give Back" "Interesting" "Support" "Second Chances" "CJ Reform"
# of COSA's: 45% are volunteering on their first COSA
Recommend COSA Volunteering to a Friend: Nearly unanimous "Yes"

Training
2 Day Training: Nearly 90% have attended the 2-Day Training
Preparation: 85% felt that the training Very or Mostly Well prepared them for COSA service
Additional Training: Majority appear to have attended additional trainings
Desired Trainings: Not any clear indicators although most widely cited are Learning/Sharing Gatherings for Volunteers, Trauma, Understanding Incarceration, and Sexual Offending.
Staff Support: 82% feel "Very Supported" by CJC staff

Time Commitment
Overall Time/Week: Nearly 80% volunteer between 1-2 hours/week
Outside the Circle: 72% meet their Core Member outside of the Circle
Additional Volunteering: 30% also volunteer with other CJC/CD programs

Open Ended Questions
Most Appreciate About COSA (Sample Key Words): "Make a difference" "Meeting/Working with other volunteers and staff" "Watching people grow, change, be successful.." "Community building" "Be a positive role model"
Most Challenging About COSA (Sample Key Words): "Amount of time required" "DOC Rules" "Doubts about the value (am I doing this right) of my service/skills" "Reentry Obstacles" "Lack of core member trust" "Age/cultural/class gaps with Core Member" "Balance of support and accountability and not enabling, creating dependency" "Lack of core member engagement" "Criminal thinking"
Survey Summary

Summary of Survey Findings
COSA Program Coordinators

Overview
Total Responses: 15 out of 20 Coordinators
Length of Employment: 60% have 2 or fewer years coordinating COSA
Percentage of Time Dedicated to COSA: 30% are Full Time COSA Coordinators
Other CJC Responsibilities: 55% work in some other capacity at the CJC
Other Offender Reentry Programs: All CJCs provide other reentry programming. Core Members represent a minority of total CJC reentry clients.

COSA Client Population
Type of Offense: Nearly 90% of programs serve all offense types. (Two programs do not cover all risks)
Risk of Re-offense: Vast majority of COSA clients are moderate to high risk although 30% of programs were unsure of the ORAS/LSI scores of their clients.

Training
Additional Training: Most CJCs offer some type of additional training for COSA volunteers
Additional Training Desired: Motivational Interviewing mentioned by many. Additional mentions: SA, SO, and Trauma trainings.

Volunteer Recruitment
Enough Volunteers: 65% said they do NOT have enough volunteers to meet the needs of their COSA Program.
Strategies: Coordinators are employing a broad range of recruitment strategies

Referral and Acceptance Process
Initial Contact: Most frequent source of referrals is from P&P followed by Facility Case Workers. Client self-referrals happen on occasion across most programs.
Referral Process: 13 CJC's have a formal referral process. These processes vary by county. Where CJCs share a county, there is a common referral and acceptance process.
Referral Process Participants: Most CJCs (with formal referral processes) actively include the client and P&P in the referral process. Participation of Facility Case Workers, Victim Advocates, Treatment Providers, and Family is much more sporadic.
Waiting Lists: CJCs have developed different criteria (and/or defer to P&P) for determining who is served first.
Currently on Wait List: About 50% of CJCs currently have clients on a wait list (some as many 4-5 clients)
Acceptance Process: 9 CJCs (80% of respondents) have a formal acceptance process. The processes vary widely across the state with some involving additional stakeholders (through panels, etc) while others are reviewed internally by CJC staff and either accepted or denied.
Acceptance Process Participants: Almost universally includes P&P, COSA Staff and CJC Director, followed by Facility Case Workers, Victim Advocates, Treatment Providers and CJC Volunteers.

Referrals: CJCs received more than 75 referrals (estimated) in the past year and accepted more than 50 (estimated).

Denials: 65% of respondents did NOT deny any referrals for COSA. Of those who were denied, reasons varied from poor behavior in the facility; mental health needs; lack of client accountability; limited CJC resources.

Pending Release: A little over 50% of respondents have clients currently incarcerated pending release. Reasons vary although the most often cited is lack of housing.

Reintegration Practices:

COSA Visits in Prison: 85% of respondents conduct at least one COSA meeting with the client prior to release.

Victim Notification: 30% of respondents follow the CJC Victim Safety Protocol but only 20% utilize the Victim Outreach Letter.

Release Dates: Practices vary across the state although the largest majority defer to P&P to establish the release date.

Case Conferences: 60% of respondents organize Case Conferences during the first 2 weeks of a client's release, as well as follow up conferences during the reentry.

Case Conference Participants: Client, COSA Staff, and Probation Officer are the most frequent participants in the Case Conference. COSA Volunteers and CJC Director are also frequent participants. are a second tier of participants.

Family Participation: The vast majority of respondents actively try to involve core member families in the program. Programs use a variety of engagement strategies but most core members' families do NOT actively engage with the program.

Staff Case Management: 100% of respondents say their agency provides case management/resource navigation for their COSA clients. Types of services provided are spread almost uniformly across multiple need areas.

Volunteer Case Management: A little over 40% of respondents say that their COSA volunteers also provide some type of case-management support for their core members. The services most frequently cited is transportation, followed by employment and housing search.

Meeting Length and Staff Participation: Majority (65%) of respondents said their COSA meetings last 60-90 minutes. All but one respondent said staff attend every COSA meeting.

Formal COSA Meeting Structure: 30% of respondents say they employ a formal structure for their COSA meetings. Of those who responded, Circle Process was the most frequently cited structure.

Community Service: 25% of respondents say that they require some form of community service from the COSA clients as a way of giving back.

RJ Process for Wrongdoing: 20% of respondents facilitate some kind of RJ process when a COSA client commits some type of wrongdoing. Most typical process cited is either Circle or RJ Panel.

Successful COSA Completion Process: 50% of respondents hold some type of "formal" successful closure for their COSA clients. These include a combination of celebration dinners, Circle Processes, evaluation/surveys, and meeting with the CAB.

Unsuccessful COSA Completion Process: 30% of respondents try to hold some type of closure process for unsuccessful core members, meeting at the facility if feasible, or holding a team meeting in the community with the P.O.

Successful/Unsuccessful Completion Rates: Respondents reported an (estimated) successful completion rate of 70%.

Unsuccessful Trends: Respondents most frequently mentioned drugs/substance abuse as the cause for program 'failure'. This was followed by Mental Health needs and criminal thinking/behaviors.

Greater than 1 Year Engagement: More than 40% of respondents have at least one client who has engaged his/her COSA beyond the year commitment.

Program Administration Practices

Data Collection: Programs have developed varied data tracking systems and information fields. There is expressed interest in collecting pre and post surveys of clients; trauma histories; long-term (3-5 yr) success studies of COSA clients; and education levels.

Case Notes: Nearly all respondents report keeping case-notes on COSA clients. Beyond COSA meetings, COSA staff also record case-management notes as well as records of outside communication.

Communication with P.O: Nearly 90% of respondents report communicating with the supervising P.O. at least once every other week, either by phone, email, or in person.

Communication from P.O: Approximately 55% of respondents report receiving communication from the P.O at least once every other week. Many reported that communication levels depend on either the specific P.O. or the risk/needs of the client.

Crisis Response Protocol: 30% of respondents report having a Crisis Response Protocol for their CJC/COSA program.

Summarizing Questions

Three Components that Contribute to Client Success (key words): "Volunteers" "Relationship" "Caring" "Early Engagement" "Gentle Accountability" "Housing" "Communication across Team Members" "Goal Setting" "Open Minded/Non Judgmental"

Three Components that Contribute to Program Success (key words): "Engaged Staff" "Collaboration/Communication with P&P" "Note Taking" "Case Management"

Three Challenges with Core Members (key words): "Trust and Lying" "Mental Health" "Addictions" "Housing" "Employment" "Manipulation and Lack of Accountability"

Three Challenges with Program Implementation (key words): "Lack of Volunteers" "Not enough Referrals" "Transportation"

Summary of Survey Findings
CJC Directors

Overview
Total Responses: 15 out of 20 Directors
Organizational Structure: 40% of the respondents' organizations are housed in either a City or Municipality and an additional 13% are housed in a Police Department. 40% are either Independent 501c3(s) or part of a larger non-profit organization.
Length of Employment: 75% have 3 or more years as Directors of their organizations (with 20% reporting more than 10 years of directorial experience)
Years Offering COSA: More than 65% of respondents reported having 3-6 years of experience providing COSA at their CJC. One organization reported less than 1-year experience and two organizations reported more than 10 years of experience delivering COSA.
CJC Full-Time-Equivalent Employees: 55% of respondents report that their CJC has 1-2 FTE in their organization. The average CJC size is 3.5 FTE.
Amount of Staff Time Dedicated to COSA: 55% of respondents reported that their CJC spends (on average) 10-20 hrs/week delivering COSA services. The remaining 45% of respondents ranged from less than 10 hrs/week to more than 60 hours/week.
Amount of Director's Time Dedicated to COSA: Nearly 50% of respondents reported dedicating less than 2 hrs/week to COSA services/programs. Two Directors report dedicating more than 15 hrs/week to COSA.
Grant Expectations for Clients Served: More than 50% of respondents indicated that they are contractually obligated to serve 3-4 COSA clients/year. Five Directors reported that they must serve 5-8 COSA clients/year.
Challenges Meeting Grant Expectations: Nearly 90% of respondents reported that it was <u>a challenge</u> to meet their grant obligations. Of those who reported challenges, 75% identified housing as a primary challenge closely followed by insufficient volunteers (62%). Insufficient referrals was also identified as a challenge by 40% of repondents.
Staff Training: 60% of Directors indicated that they do not have a formal training process for new COSA staff.
Attendance of COSA Meetings: Directors attend COSA at varying rates across the state, from every week (3 respondents) to never (2 respondents).

Housing
Housing Provided: Approximately 25% of respondents (4 total) indicated they the provide client housing as part of their COSA program. These programs primarily hold the lease to the apartments.

Training
Additional Training: Most CJCs offer some type of additional training for COSA volunteers
Additional Training Desired: Similar to the COSA Coordinators, Directors most frequently mentioned Motivational Interviewing as a desired training. Additional mentions: Substance Abuse, Sexual Offending, Criminal Thinking, and Trauma trainings.

Volunteer Recruitment

Strategies: Directors most frequently identified "Word Of Mouth" as the best recruitment strategy for new volunteers. Other mentions include: Community Presentations; Press Releases; and Social Media.

Program Administration Practices

Data Collection: Directors considerable expressed interest in collecting/tracking data on long-term success (remaining offense free) as well as measuring pre and post quality of life indicators. ; trauma histories; long-term (3-5 yr) success studies of COSA clients; and education levels.

Summarizing Questions

Three Components that Contribute to Client Success (key words): "Volunteers"; "COSA Program Staff"; "Relationship"; "Pro-Social Activities/Informal Outreach with Core Member"; "Communication across Team Members"; "Relationship with P&P"; "Open Minded/Non Judgmental"

Three Components that Contribute to Program Success (key words):
"Coaching/Supervising/Supporting COSA Reentry Staff"; "Collaboration/Communication with P&P"; Stakeholder Investment/Involvement"; "Police Dept. Involvement"

Three Challenges with Core Members (key words): "Trust and Lying" "Mental Health" "Addictions" "Housing" "Employment" "Recruiting Volunteers"

Three Challenges with Program Implementation (key words): "Lack of Volunteers"; "Not enough Referrals"; "Housing"

Summary of Survey Findings
Case Workers

Overview
<u>Total Responses</u>: **37** Responses from 7 of 8 Correctional Facilities. Greatest number of responses came from Northern State Correctional Facility (8) and fewest from Southeast State Correctional Facility (1). (No surveys were received from Chittenden Correctional Facility.)
<u>**Client Population:**</u> The vast majority of respondents work with all offense types.

Knowledge of COSA (37 Responses)
<u>**Overview:**</u> Nearly 80% of respondents have "heard about COSA".
<u>**Specific Knowledge:**</u> Respondents were asked about their knowledge of**:**
- How COSA Works:
- Location of COSA Programs
- Target Client Population
- Referral Practices
- Acceptance/Denial Processes

<u>**Conclusions:**</u> There is considerable variation in knowledge about Vermont's COSA programs amongst caseworkers and across facilities. Respondents indicated that they had greater knowledge of **Referral Practices** and **Target Client Populations** and more limited awareness of **Acceptance/Denial Processes** and **Location of COSA Programs**. Overall, however, average weighted scores of all respondents indicate that there is, at best, moderate understanding of most facets of the COSA programs. There also are indications that increased knowledge may generate a modest increase in referrals: 17% of respondents reported that they would be more likely to refer with an increased understanding of the program.

Referral and Acceptance Processes (25 Reponses)
<u>**Knowledge of Referral Practices:**</u> 70% of respondents reported that they know how to make or initiate a referral to a Vermont COSA Program.
<u>**Referral Participation:**</u>
- 75% of respondents said they had made or initiated a referral to the Vermont COSA Program at some point.
- 13 Caseworkers indicated that they had made or initiated more than 6 referrals to Vermont COSA Programs (with 7 CW reporting that the had made 10 or more referrals. Another 13 Caseworkers indicated that they had made or initiated 5 or fewer referrals.
- 21 Caseworkers reported that they had made or initiated referrals to the Vermont COSA Program in the past year.

<u>**Primary Drivers of Referrals:**</u> Respondents were asked to identify the primary drivers for their referrals. 26 Respondents (those who have made referrals) indicated that:
- Among ORAS Risk/Need areas, **Family and Social Support** and **Substance Abuse** were the most frequently cited (61% of respondents), followed by **Criminal History** (50%) and **Antisocial Attitudes** (42%).
- Respondents ranked **Housing** (by a significant margin) as the most important service offered by COSA programs, followed by **Staff Case Management Support** and then **Volunteer Support**.

Referral Destinations: Approximately 65% of respondents have referred to two or fewer COSA Programs. Nearly 20%, however, have referred to 5 or more COSA Programs.

Clarity of Referral Process: Only 26% of Case Worker Respondents indicated that the COSA Referral Process is **Very Clear** or **Mostly Clear**. 23% stated that the process is **Somewhat Clear** and fully 38% rated the process as **Not Very Clear** or **Very Unclear**.

Ease of Referral Process: On average, respondents feel that it is **Somewhat Easy** to make a referral to the Vermont COSA Programs.

Recommendations for the Referral Process: Although respondents had several unique suggestions, there was general (and unprompted) consensus amongst the "Comments" that the COSA referral process be standardized across the state (with a common referral form).

Incidence of Referral Denials: Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that a referral they had made or initiated had been **Denied** by a COSA Program. Although the large majority learned the reasons for the denial, 16% indicated that they never were informed.

Acceptance/Denial Process Participation: Slightly more than 30% of respondents indicated that they had participated in a formal COSA Acceptance/Denial Process.

Acceptance/Denial Process Experience and Recommendations: Survey data indicates that there is divergent experience with COSA Programs Acceptance Denial Processes. Respondents wrote several recommendations on how to improve the COSA Acceptance/Denial Process, many of which centered around better and/or more transparent communication.

Conclusions: Case workers' experience of COSA programs' **Referral and Acceptance Processes** is decidedly mixed. There appears to be general confusion with the diversity of referral forms and expectations, as well as communities' divergent acceptance practices.

Summarizing Questions (25 Responses):
Case Workers General Experience of Vermont's COSA Programs:
- 44% of respondents reported that Vermont COSA works **Very Well** or **Mostly Well** for their clients. 40% of respondents reported that the Vermont COSA Program works **Somewhat Well** for their clients. 16% reported that the program works Not **Very Well** or **Not Well**.
- 44% of respondents reported that their experience working with Vermont COSA was **Excellent** or **Very Good**. Another 28% indicated that their experience was **Good** while 28% reported **Not Very Good** and **Poor**.

Conclusions: Overall, Case Workers experiences with COSA appear to be generally positive but responses trended more towards neutral and/or negative than Probation Officers. A small group of case workers (particularly concentrated in one facility) consistently reported both negative experiences and attitudes regarding the COSA program. There does appear to be consistent and broad confusion around local COSA programs' criteria and referral/acceptance/denial practices, as well as such basic things as contact information. It's also interesting to note program Housing was a primary driver of case worker referrals while Volunteer Social Supports ranked third (out of four) in importance.

Summary of Survey Findings
Probation Officers

Overview
Total Responses: **70** Responses from 11 of 12 Probation Offices. Greatest number of responses came from Burlington Probation and Parole (13) and fewest from Bennington Probation and Parole (2).
Client Population: Distribution of supervision by offense-type was fairly even. The largest percentage of respondents (48%) indicated that they supervised offenders with **Major Substance Abuse Needs**. This was closely followed by **Domestic Violence** (47%) and **General Violence** (46%). 34% of respondents reported supervising clients with **Sexual Offenses**.

Knowledge of COSA (68 Total Responses)
Overview: 91% of respondents have "heard about COSA".
Specific Knowledge: Respondents were asked about their knowledge of the following domains**:**
- How COSA Works:
- Location of COSA Programs
- Target Client Population
- Referral Practices
- Acceptance/Denial Processes

Conclusions: Respondents reported broad knowledge of COSA across all measured domains. Respondents indicated that they had the greatest knowledge of **Referral Practices** and less understanding of **Acceptance/Denial Processes,** but the variation was relatively modest. Overall, average weighted scores of all respondents indicate that Probation Officers have considerable knowledge of the COSA programs.

Even with these high levels of familiarity, there also are indications that increased knowledge/awareness may generate additional referrals: 22% of respondents reported that they would be more likely to refer after receiving additional information.

Referral and Acceptance Processes (44 Total Responses)
Knowledge of Referral Practices: 82% of respondents reported that they know how to make or initiate a referral to a Vermont COSA Program.
Referral Participation:
- 69% of respondents said they had made or initiated a referral to the Vermont COSA Program at some point.
- 32 Probation Officers (45% or respondents) reported that they had made or initiated referrals to the Vermont COSA Program in the past year, (including 6 P.O.s who had made 5 or more referrals).

Primary Drivers of Referrals: Respondents were asked to identify the primary drivers for their referrals. 44 Respondents (those who have made referrals) indicated that:
- Among ORAS Risk/Need areas, **Family and Social Support** was by far the most frequently cited (77%). This was followed by **Criminal History** (55%); **Education/Employment/Finance** (48%); **Substance Abuse** (45%); and **Antisocial Attitudes** (45%).

- Respondents ranked **Housing** as the most important service offered by COSA programs, followed closely by **Staff Case Management Support. Volunteer Support** was ranked a more distant third.

Referral Destinations: Nearly 50% of respondents have referred to just one COSA Program. Another 35% had referred to two COSA Programs.

Clarity of Referral Process: 70% of Probation Officer Respondents indicated that the COSA Referral Process is **Very Clear** or **Mostly Clear**. 25% stated that the process is **Somewhat Clear** while less than 5% rated the process as **Not Very Clear** or **Very Unclear**.

Ease of Referral Process: 75% of respondents reported that the COSA Referral Process is **Very Easy** or **Mostly Easy**.

Recommendations for the Referral Process: Although respondents had several unique suggestions, there were three similar suggestions that the COSA referral process be standardized across the state (with a common referral form).

Referral Notification: 15% of respondents indicated that they had made referrals to a Vermont COSA Program but never heard a response regarding the referral.

Incidence of Referral Denials: Nearly 43% of respondents indicated that a referral they had made or initiated had been **Denied** by a COSA Program. The vast majority or Probation Officers learned the reasons for denial.

Acceptance/Denial Process Participation: Slightly more than 60% of respondents indicated that they had participated in a formal COSA Acceptance/Denial Process.

Clarity of Acceptance Denial Process: 55% of respondents said that the Acceptance/Denial Process was **Very Clear** or **Mostly Clear**. Another 20% stated the process was **Somewhat Clear**.

Acceptance/Denial Process Experience and Recommendations: Survey data indicates that Probation Officers generally have positive experiences with Vermont COSA Programs' Acceptance/Denial Processes. Multiple comments, however, referenced that the process could be improved through more clear and/or transparent communication.

Conclusions: Overall, Probation Officers' experience of COSA programs' **Referral and Acceptance Processes** is positive. Although the Probation Officers' positive experiences are in contrast to the survey findings from Caseworkers, both groups of stakeholders indicate that the process could be improved through both standardization and more consistent communication.

Supervision Questions (38 Total Responses)

Experience with Supervising a COSA Client: 39 of the 70 respondents (55%) indicated that they had supervised a COSA client.

COSA Case Conference: Nearly 80% of Probation Officers who have supervised a COSA client have attended a COSA Case Conference. Of those, 80% reported that they were **Very or Mostly Well Prepared** for the conference by COSA staff.

COSA Case Conference Goals: Probation Officers were asked to evaluate the Case Conference's achievement of three core goals:
- **Share Relevant Reentry Information**
- **Build Connection Between Team Members**
- **Establish Program Expectations of Support and Accountability**

Weighted responses from the respondents indicated that the Case Conference generally successful at achieving these goals.

Communication from COSA Programs to Probation Officers:

- **Client Concerns**: Probation Officers said they felt that COSA Programs shared client concerns **All of the Time (23%)** or **Most of the Time (50%)**. 26% of respondents said that concerns were shared **Some of the Time (21%)** or **Rarely (5%)**.
- **Client Achievements:** 74% of Probation Officers said they felt that COSA Programs shared client achievements **All of the Time (29%)** or **Most of the Time (45%)**. 26% of respondents said that achievements were shared **Some of the Time (16%)** or **Rarely (10%)**.
- **Frequency of Updates:** Nearly 85% of Probation Officers indicated that they **Very Frequently (34%)** or **Frequently (50%)** receive updates from the COSA programs regarding shared clients.
- **Outreach:** Almost without exception (97%), COSA Program staff take the lead in reaching out to Probation Officers. (2 Probation Officers reported receiving reports directly from Volunteers).
- **Overall Communication:** More than 80% of Probation Officers report that they feel **Very Well (37%)** or **Mostly Well (45%)** about the level of communication from COSA Programs. Probation Officers also offered several comments on potential ways to improve communication, which could prove useful for COSA program enhancement.

Communication from Probation Officers to COSA Programs:
- **Sharing of Information:** 91% of Probation Officers indicated that it is **Very Important (61%)** or **Mostly Important (30%)** to share information and decisions with COSA Program Staff.
- **Frequency of Updates:** 83% of Probation Officers indicated that they **Very Frequently (28%)** or **Frequently (55%)** reach out to COSA Program Staff to share information.
- **Information Sharing Barriers:** 28% of Respondents indicated that there are **Barriers** to sharing information with COSA staff although the specific reasons (from the comments section) can not be generalized.

Summarizing Questions (36 Total Responses)
COSA Program Impact: Probation Officers were asked to evaluate the COSA Programs' impact across five domains:
- **Client Support**
- **Client Accountability**
- **Client Service Coordination**
- **Community Safety**
- **Community Support of Offender Reentry**

Overall, respondents stated that they feel that Vermont's COSA Programs have significant impact in **Client Support** and **Community Support of Offender Reentry**, followed by **Client Service Coordination**. Probation Officers feel that the COSA Program have a modest impact on **Client Accountability** and **Community Safety**.

Case Workers General Experience of Vermont's COSA Programs:
- 71% of respondents reported that Vermont COSA works **Very Well (39%)** or **Mostly Well (33%)** for their clients. 17% of respondents reported that the Vermont COSA Program works **Somewhat Well** for their clients. 11% reported that the program works **Not Very Well**.

- 77% of respondents reported that their experience working with Vermont COSA was **Excellent (33%)** or **Very Good (44%)**. Another 20% indicated that their experience was **Good** while one respondent reported **Not Very Good**.

Conclusions: Overall, Probation Officers experiences with COSA appear to be strongly positive (with a few exceptions). Responses trended more towards good and/or very good than the Case Worker surveys which were decidedly more neutral. This may be due to the close and consistent relationships that exist between Probation and Parole Offices and Community Justice Centers. Similar to the Case Worker survey, Housing is the primary driver of Probation Officer referrals while Volunteer Support again ranked a distant third.

Central Vermont Focus Group
5/31/16
Notes

(Present: Patt Hoffman, Alfred Mills, Lori Baker, Linda Murphy, Sara Winters, Phyllis Hanley, Rod Perry, Carole Richards, Susan Wells)

Introductions-
- A Cosa Circle Is…
    - Community
    - Welcoming
    - Conversation
    - Hope
    - Support
    - Second Chances
    - Team
    - Affirming
    - Role Modeling
    - Accountability
- In Three Years, I hope the COSA Program is…
    - Going Strong
    - Expanding
    - In Other States
    - A Common Place for Volunteering
    - Broadly Known by All DOC Divisions
    - Understood by the Public
    - Consistent Across the State
    - Valued by Core Members
    - Well Known and Recognized by the Public
    - Funded (Including Community Education)
    - Available to Meet the Need
    - Utilized Resource for More P.O.s

Value Statements

 # 1- Referrals to COSA should:
- **Prioritize services for Moderate to High Risk/Needs clients**
- **Prioritize services for sexual offenders**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations- Value Statement #1:
- Should also include opportunity for Stakeholders to expand criteria on a case-by-case basis based upon their knowledge of the clients
- Be available to meet the needs of other non-DOC client populations (example: youth)
- Should not be designated for low-risk, high resourced clients

Promising Practices- Value Statement #1:
- Generally happening locally

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges- Value Statement #1:
- Finding housing for sexual offenders limits capacity
- Definition of Moderate/High Risk is shifting and a challenge
- Co-occurring MH/Addiction Clients are difficult to serve
- Young clients do not readily take to the COSA Model
- Female clients present unique challenges

#2- Referring Partners should:
- **f. Understand Vermont's COSA programs'**
  - **i. Prioritized Client Population;**
  - **ii. Expectations;**
  - **iii. Supports**
- **g. Know how to make a referral to COSA programs including Contact Information**
- **h. Understand COSA programs' referral acceptance/denial process**
- **i. Make timely referrals of the prioritized service population to the appropriate regional COSA Program.**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #2:
- Referring partners should not make decisions for the clients- provide clients info and allow them to decide.

Promising Practices #2:
- Barre/Mtpl hold weekly meetings with designated P.O. contact to discuss potential and existing clients.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #2:
- Some Case Workers are confused about who is the local contact for the Central Vermont COSA Programs.
- Central Vermont designated P.O. and P&P Supervisor are not fully informed about all of the needs/risks of the client (need additional info)
- Lack of education amongst case workers.
- Referral flow is erratic and low.
- Due to changes in law, Conditions are being further restricted and limited. This can impact referral flow.

#3- COSA Programs' Referral Processes should:
      a. **Be clearly articulated**
      b. **Ensure that the client has a clear understanding of the COSA Program's expectations and supports**
      c. **Be as consistent/uniform as possible across the state and include:**
          i. **Pertinent information about client's**
             1. **Strengths/Resources**
             2. **Risks**
             3. **Needs**
             4. **Aspirations**
             5. **Motivations to meet COSA expectations and supports**
         ii. **Input from client's Reentry Stakeholders**
             1. **Probation and Parole**
             2. **Facility Case Workers**
             3. **DOC Victim Advocates**
        iii. **Appropriate Releases of Information**
      d. **Be processed and evaluated as quickly as responsibly possible**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #3:
- Input should also come from "other local stakeholders" as determined by regional programs (Example- Police).

Promising Practices #3:
- Whole application is filled out by Client (client driven) (Barre/Mtpl)
- Staff meet with Case Workers in the referral process (Barre/Mtpl)
- Interpersonal Relationships between CJCs and P&P are strong and supportive
- Randolph gathers and shares a lot of information (informally)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #3:
- Treatment summaries are not shared with CJC
- DOC has a lot of information that is not available or shared with CJC
- Mix of formal and informal information sharing does not ensure consistency
- There is a lack of accountability in ensuring expediency of referral processing.
- Referrals should be moved further upstream- 6 months prior to release date- may require a directive.

#4- Justice Centers Referral Acceptance/Denial processes should:
   a. Be clearly articulated, transparent, and consistently apply program/grant criteria
   b. Ensure prioritization for the target client population
   c. Include principle stakeholder perspectives
   d. Keep vested stakeholders informed in a timely and clear manner, including:
      i. Client
      ii. P&P
      iii. Facilities
      iv. Others deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis
   e. In cases of denial, clearly state reasons and/or potential for reconsideration

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #4:
- Programs need a better definition of "What is success and how is it measured?" with COSA.
- Programs need to balance high needs clients with potential for success. Can this be part of Acceptance/Denial criteria?

Promising Practices #4:
- Regional Advisory Panel, which includes multiple stakeholders, makes Acceptance/Denial Decision. (Barre/Mtpl)
- A letter is sent immediately after referral decision (Barre/Mtpl)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #4:
- Treatment Providers are not represented either in referrals or acceptance/denial decisions.
- No victim advocate representation.
- Lack of victim information has delayed (and scrambled) release planning for COSA clients. Should be included in application process.
- Programs need to balance high risk/needs clients with capacity for success to prevent volunteer burnout, etc.
- Client should be informed of the reasons for denial.
- Local stakeholders (police) influence over acceptance process can be a challenge.

#5- Upon acceptance and prior to release, the COSA Program should ensure that clients:
   a. Sign a formal COSA agreement/covenant/contract
   b. Have at least one meeting with the COSA team in the facility

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #5: None suggested

Promising Practices #5:
- In-prison visits by COSA team are a good practice when possible.
- Randolph made several visits prior to Core Member's release
- Both programs have contracts signed prior to release.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #5:
- Scheduling volunteers for prison COSA meetings can be a challenge.
- Distance to facility is a challenge
- Entering facility with volunteers sometimes is a challenge.

#6- COSA Programs and Referring Agencies should ensure that clients' reentry dates:
      a. **Take place as soon as possible after incarcerate; acceptance; and community supervision requirements are fulfilled**
      b. **Be on a date coordinated by referring partners and the CJC**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #6: None suggested

Promising Practices #6:
- There is excellent collaboration between CJC and P&P to improve reentry for Core Members

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #6:
- Not always consistent with all Probation Officers- coordination has varied
- The Max Date to Probation limits flexibility on the part of P&P

#7- At the point of reentry, the COSA Program should insure that the COSA Circle has:
   a. **At least three DOC-Approved volunteers**
   b. **Diversity of experience and perspective, whenever possible**
   c. **Received pertinent information about the Core Member including:**
      i. **Criminal History**
      ii. **Conditions**
      iii. **Strengths/**
      iv. **Risks/**
      v. **Aspirations**
      vi. **Motivations**
   d. **Knowledge and/or familiarity of the Core Member's "Outer Circle"**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #7:
- What do Volunteers need to know about the client to be able to serve on the COSA?
- Should include treatment information as well.

Promising Practices #7:
- Volunteers receive the client's application to COSA (Barre/Mtpl)
- In Randolph, volunteers learn a lot of information through conversations with staff.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #7:
- COSA Volunteer recruitment is very challenging. Delays implementation of full COSA, at times, for several weeks after reentry.
- Treatment Providers are not available to the program.

#8- COSA staff should ensure that Circle meetings are grounded in restorative justice values and practice and:
   a. **Take place weekly (until team decides otherwise)**
   b. **Have COSA staff at all Circle meetings during the initial year commitment**
   c. **Actively engage Core Members and COSA Volunteers**
   d. **Acknowledge and celebrate Core Member achievements**
   e. **Acknowledge and work through Core Member challenges and risks**
   f. **Acknowledge and address post-release wrongdoing and/or violations**
   g. **Prepare teams and core members for transition as the year-long commitment nears completion**
   h. **Include Outer Circle members on a limited and planned basis**
   i. **Include staff/volunteer-only meetings on an as-needed basis**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #8:
- There should be an expectation of "reciprocity" for the COSA circle meetings.
- Team meetings take place in the community on occasion without staff presence.

- Ceremony for circles (meditation, structures) can be an important part of the Circle Meeting process.

Promising Practices #8:
- Definitely happening in Central Vermont

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #8: None mentioned.

#9- As part of Circle management, COSA Program staff should:
> a. **Record consistent Circle and case notes**
> b. **Keep accurate and pertinent data**
> c. **Coordinate, circulate and facilitate the sharing of Core Member and Circle information with-**
>> i. **Probation Officers**
>> ii. **Volunteers**
>> iii. **Other team/outer circle members**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #9: None identified.

Promising Practices #9:
- Definitely happening in Central Vermont

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #9: None mentioned.

#10- As part of their volunteer service COSA Volunteers should:
> a. **Have DOC Volunteer, COSA, and offense-specific training**
> b. **Dependably attend their Circle Meetings**
> c. **Offer regular informal outreach to the clients in the community (in accordance with their comfort levels and program boundaries)**
> d. **Understand, support and uphold the "No Secrets Policy"**
> e. **Know what immediate steps to take if they have a concern about the Core Member**
> f. **Have opportunities to share and learn from the experiences of other volunteers**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #10:
- Informal outreach by volunteers should be known/shared with all members of the team for safety precautions.
- Informal outreach (and whether it should take place 1-to-1) should be informed by staff and P.O. recommendations.
- "Volunteers should be appreciated."

Promising Practices #10:
- Statewide and DOC Volunteer trainings are taking place.
- Mostly good attendance at Circle Meetings

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #10:
- Offense-specific training is not taking place as frequently as it should
- Training should take place prior to release and can be led by Probation Officer
- Bringing people (volunteers) together takes a lot of coordination.

#11- As part of core-member Case Management, COSA Program staff and Probation Officers should:
      a. **Update and/or consult with each other regularly about:**
            a. **Client Achievements**
            b. **Client Risks and Concerns**
            c. **Changes that impact supervision restrictions and/or COSA program participation**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #11: None Suggested

Promising Practices #11:
- Generally happening in Central Vermont

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #11:
- Coordination/communication can vary from P.O. to P.O.

#12- COSA Programs should create opportunities for Circles to:
      a. **Celebrate successful completions**
      b. **Bring closure to unsuccessful completions**

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #12:
- Instead of closure, consider the term "Debrief"

Promising Practices #12:
- Programs will typically celebrate a successful completion by going out to dinner, etc.
- Programs may go to the facility to debrief when the client is returned to prison

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #12:
- A year is too short for what the client needs
- Keeping everyone engaged for a year is also a challenge.

#13- For Circles that continue beyond the one-year commitment, COSA Programs should:
  j. Clearly define and share the level of staff support available to-
    i. Core Member
    ii. Volunteers
  k. Communicate the new agreement to the Core Member's supervising Probation Officer and the outer circle

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #13:
- Stakeholders should be involved in the 'completion' discussions, (including to address liability issues for volunteers who continue to meet with clients after completion)

Promising Practices #13:
- Weekly meetings with P&P include a review of all active clients, including those that are still engaged after one year.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #13:
- A year is too short for what the client needs

#14- As a Victim-Informed Restorative Justice Process, the COSA Program should:
  a. Engage DOC Victim Services at the point of referral
  b. Include the input from victim service agencies (DOC Victim Services or local victim service agencies):
    a. Referrals
    b. Client Acceptance Conditions
    c. Circle Volunteer Training
    d. Amends Making, when appropriate

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #14: None Indicated

Promising Practices #14: None Indicated

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14:
- Capacity of Victim Services is a limiting factor

#15- COSA Coordinators should have:
  a. A Job Description
  b. High quality training
  c. Regular supervision

No Feedback was offered. Value statement was accepted and is currently being implemented.

Northeast Kingdom Focus Group
6/1/16
Notes

(Present: Sue Cherry, Harry Adamek, Sue Teske, Carol Plante, Bobby Blanchard, Duncan Tingle, Libby Hillhouse, Lisa Levesque)

Introductions-
- A Cosa Circle Is…
    - Inclusive
    - Focused
    - Compassionate
    - Connection
    - Resilient
    - Relationship
    - Opportunity
    - Practice
    - Diversity
- In Three Years, I hope the COSA Program is…
    - In every community
    - Fully staffed with volunteers
    - Highly utilized
    - Self-requested by Core Member
    - Integral part of the criminal justice system
    - Understood and accepted by the greater community
    - Stronger

Value Statements: See Central Vermont notes for specific Values Statements

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations- Value Statement #1:
- The two criteria (High Risk and Sexual Offenders) should be tied together with "and"…
- Should include analysis of the existing resources of the client (higher resourced clients may not need COSA)
- Include analysis of client's readiness for change
- There should also be case-by-case flexibility on a local level to broaden criteria

Promising Practices- Value Statement #1:
- There are monthly meetings at P&P with the designated "Transition P.O.". The meetings also include housing providers; MH providers; and Case Workers (phone-call into facilities).
- Meetings also take place in the facility with prospective Core Members

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges- Value Statement #1:
- Finding housing for offenders limits capacity (Hardwick)
- Struggles with volunteer recruitment limit capacity

- Training of staff and volunteers on how to work with clients with high MH needs- not prepared to deal with this level of challenge.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #2:
- Are there common "Expectations and Supports" for COSA that apply to all programs across the state?
- Need a clearer definition of "Timely" that includes accountability for all stakeholders.

Promising Practices #2:
- Probation Officer and Case-Worker are involved in COSA Referrals (St J. and Hardwick)
- Team meetings with Designated Transition P.O. facilitate the achievement of this Value Statement
- CJC staff trips to the facility also support this Value Statement

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #2:
- Case Workers don't really know what COSA is…
- "Timely" is a big factor. Not really taking place (Lamoille)
- Keeping updated contact info (for facilities, etc) on COSA programs can be a challenge with the level of turnover.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #3:
- Who gathers this information?
- How can 'motivation' be assessed and clarified?

Promising Practices #3:
- Transition P.O. meets knows (and meets) with client prior to release date to discuss possible COSA referral
- Secures Release of Information as gateway to referral

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #3:
- Confusion around whether COSA is presented as a voluntary or mandatory program to the client.
- Incentives and benefits (of the program) can drive motivation to participate
- Facilities will have the Core Member fill out referral form instead of ensuring accurate information
- Scheduling intakes (at the facilities) can be a challenge.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #4:
- Can/should the client be involved in the stakeholder acceptance/denial discussions?
- Identifying and informing the client about the reasons for denial is important part of transparency
- Volunteers should be involved in the discussions (NE Kingdom programs are recruiting volunteers prior to the client being accepted)
- How is the referral and acceptance process reflective of restorative values?

Promising Practices #4:
- There is a gathering of stakeholders to discuss referrals (see #1, Promising Practices)
- "We're more open than not… " (accepting most referrals)
- There is also a quarterly gathering of program stakeholders
- Referral process is improving
- P.O. knowledge of clients can override referrals (both promising practice and programmatic challenge)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #4:
- There is no written criteria around acceptance/denial for COSA
- Programs are not equipped to handle certain clients (with high MH needs)
- Logistically challenging to include client perspective in the acceptance/denial process
- P.O. knowledge of clients can override referrals (both promising practice and programmatic challenge)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #5: None suggested

Promising Practices #5:
- All programs have some type of contract

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #5:
- Timeliness of referrals is a big challenge (programs are not receiving enough advance notice to do the prep work identified in this Value Statement)
- Can Circle Meetings in the facility count for grant purposes?
- Shortage of volunteers is a challenge

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #6:
- NE Kingdom programs are not comfortable with having discretion of when a client reenters the community.
- Want to be informed of the date with some advance notice but not involved in the specific decision
- Want clarification of what "coordinated" means in this value statement (6b)

Promising Practices #6:
- Lamoille has conversations with P&P around the specific date of someone's reentry
- Hardwick and St. J typically have one-month notice for a client's release date.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #6:
- If a COSA program is not prepared, does this mean that a client stays in longer?

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #7: None identified.

Promising Practices #7:
- Programs hold case conferences, sometimes prior to release (in the facility)
- Case conferences have included family; Core Member; P.O; volunteers; counselors;

- DOC training is going well.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #7:
- DOC is no longer sharing conditions due to a change in directive (client must offer these to the programs)
- Maintaining COSA Circle Cohesion throughout a year is a challenge.
- Commitment to diversity should still be underpinned by a commitment to Restorative Values by all volunteers.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #8:
- Meetings can happen without staff, when necessary (vacations, illness, etc)
- Programs should periodically evaluate teams and core members together (formal process with list of questions)

Promising Practices #8:
- Generally happening across programs
- Weekly meetings are important
- COSA Booster Trainings and Volunteer Support Group gatherings are taking place periodically in some communities

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #8:
- Taking time off (staff) can be a challenge when trying to balance the needs of the Circles
- Meetings without Core Member may challenge the program's commitment to 'transparency' (8i)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #9:
- Core Member should also be included as a recipient of information in 9c.
- Questions about what constitutes "pertinent data"

Promising Practices #9:
- COSA program staff are sharing notes with P.O.
- District Manager also gets a copy of notes.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #9:
- Who should receive notes of meeting? Should client also receive notes?

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #10:
- 10c should be changed to "Program/DOC boundaries")

Promising Practices #10:
- Offense specific training is taking place but it's not always effective/high quality
- Volunteer gatherings are taking place
- St. J is offering every-other month 'COSA Boosters'
- There is ongoing training

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #10:
- Getting access to client's DOC Conditions is becoming more difficult
- "Statewide COSA Volunteer Training was not helpful"
- Ongoing training is a challenge and not funded
- Statewide COSA training is not frequent enough in the Northeast Kingdom

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #11: None Suggested

Promising Practices #11:
- A lot of information is shared regularly

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #11:
- Some P.O.s are unresponsive
- Staff turnover in COSA creates inconsistency of implementation practices and relationships
- Close collaboration between P&P and COSA can be confusing to the core member (on a case-by-case basis)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #12: None Suggested

Promising Practices #12:
- Definitely taking place locally

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #12: None suggested

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #13: None Suggested

Promising Practices #13:
- Decisions to lengthen COSA are made with the Probation Officer present.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #13:
- Capacity/funding is a challenge when trying to maintain COSAs beyond one year.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #14: None Indicated

Promising Practices #14:
- The DOC Victim Advocate is available on a case-by-case basis

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14:
- Capacity and access to DOC Victim Services is a limiting factor
- DOC Victim Advocate has limited local presence across the region

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #15: No Feedback was offered. Value statement was accepted and is currently being implemented. One other over-arching suggestion: Replace the word "Should" with "Will" in all Value Statements.

Northwest Vermont Focus Group
6/22/16
Notes

(Present: Rob Thayer, Kristin Prior, Stuart Recicar, Kym Anderson, Karen Holmes, Eli Ferree, Con Quinby, Glenn Boyde, Carol Smith, Susan Deacon, Camille Coosman, Danielle Levesque, Heather Laggis, Ethan Bacon)

Introductions-
- A Cosa Circle Is…
    - Micro Community
    - Embryonic Family
    - Support
    - Friendly
    - Connection
    - Engagement
    - Strong
    - Solid
    - Pro-Social
    - Reliable
    - Important
    - Possibilities
    - Transparent
    - Meaningful
- In Three Years, I hope the COSA Program is…
    - Still Going
    - Integrated (with various agencies and systems)
    - Serving everyone that needs or wants to be served
    - Valued by the community we serve
    - Expanding with housing and referrals
    - Both flexible and consistent across the state
    - United (with CJC and DOC on the same page)
    - Busier (seeing more clients)
    - More well-known in the community
    - Connected to housing
    - Responsive to the need and with greater participation
    - More vibrant (integrated)
    - Very strong recruitment program for volunteers
    - Stronger state infrastructure- with consistency

Value Statements: See Central Vermont notes for specific Values Statements

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations- Value Statement #1:
- Referral criteria should include a balance between client risks and needs. (Clients with higher needs should receive priorities)

- Women should not be excluded solely because they present lower 'risks'. They have unique needs
- How do minorities fit within this criteria? Are they underserved?
- General discussion regarding 'why people with sexual offenses?'
- Younger offenders could benefit from the social skills development that COSA can support

Promising Practices- Value Statement #1:
- There are monthly meetings at P&P with District Manager and a P.O. Supervisor (Franklin). Chittenden referrals are reviewed at P&P and then circulated to the appropriate CJC.
- Franklin has housing tied to the program which facilitates referrals
- Chittenden prioritizes first according to risk/need and then for sexual offenders

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges- Value Statement #1:
- Finding housing for offenders limits capacity (Chittenden)
- Struggles with volunteer recruitment limit capacity
- Timing of release can create stress in the referral process (sometime clients wait months for housing to be secured)
- Franklin has experienced a lull in referrals this past year (some potential referrals are not being designated as COSA appropriate)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #2:
- It's an unfair expectation to assume that Case Workers will know all of the different referral requirements for COSA Programs.
- There is confusion around the different COSA program supports and expectations across the state (housing in particular)
- There should be a more streamlined process with a centralized point of contact
- Concerns that 'good client fits' for COSA might be excluded in this process

Promising Practices #2:
- Probation Offices have a good understanding of the COSA Programs and their referral practices
- Essex is starting monthly meetings at Northwest Facility to educate clients (may turn into a reentry curriculum)
- Similar information sessions are being considered for the Chittenden Facility

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #2:
- There is insufficient education about COSA with both Case Workers and prospective clients
- Insufficient COSA referrals are making it to the programs. Randolph gets more referrals than all of Chittenden county.
- Franklin County is seeing more clients that could be COSA appropriate being referred just for Transitional Housing.

- The lack of housing is a limiting factor (both for Case Worker referrals and client interest)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #3:
- Should treatment information also be gathered?
- More family and other types of support information?

Promising Practices #3:
- Chittenden county receives treatment summaries
- Franklin County gets verbal accounts of case-notes.
- Client completes Chittenden application and receives information from Probation Officer
- All programs receive the DOC case-summary.
- Franklin County gets all of the information (and input form Reentry Stakeholders) in a referral form

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #3:
- Clients sometimes have limited understanding of COSA program's expectations and supports.
- Chittenden County referral follow up and tracking can be inconsistent. Some referrals have been dropped.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #4:
- Community should be included in the list of 'Vested Stakeholders'
- Want to know more about how/why someone is either accepted or denied (Essex)
- Chittenden County's Acceptance/Denial process is in flux and may lead to a unified process

Promising Practices #4:
- Franklin County appreciates their current Acceptance/Denial process.
- Both Chittenden and Franklin say there is very strong communication between Probation and Parole and the CJCs.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #4:
- There is inconsistency in criteria around acceptance/denial for COSA (across the state)
- There is inconsistency of process (both locally and statewide)
- COSA (and the lack of volunteers) shouldn't be a barrier to reentry
- Franklin's current low referral rates have impacted community participation/commitment in the Community Reentry Panel.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #5:
- Volunteers should receive contract/agreement
- Contract/Agreement may need to be revisited with the client multiple times during the COSA process
- Volunteers want more than one visit with the client prior to release. Helps build relationships, transitions, team cohesiveness…

- Should there be larger team meetings in the facility prior to release?

Promising Practices #5:
- All programs have some type of contract that is signed prior to release
- There is a commitment to hold COSA meetings prior to release

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #5:
- Pre-release circle meetings are not taking place as frequently (or consistently) as desired

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #6:
- Volunteer recruitment can hold up release dates.
- Not sure I want influence over the specific release date of a client (Essex)
- Would like predictability of release dates in order to plan.

Promising Practices #6:
- Burlington has had some success in co-coordinating release dates

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #6:
- There has been limited advance notice on release dates.
- Central Office pushes release dates without regard to local needs/conditions
- Max-out to Probation can also affect planning

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #7:
- Circle should understand/receive the client's Program Covenant/Contract/Agreement
- Core Member should also have clear understanding of the various parties "decision-making powers"… (COSA Volunteers do not have the discretion to decide whether the core member gets a sanction or goes back to jail. Program-provided housing can complicate their understanding).
- Volunteers should have the opportunity to read the client's affidavits.

Promising Practices #7:
- Volunteers generally have the above client information prior to release.
- Chittenden has had volunteer meetings with the Probation Officer prior to the client's release.
- Team meetings generally are taking place soon after release (Franklin)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #7:
- Access to client's Conditions can be provided by DOC for Probation cases but require a Release of Information for Furlough cases.
- Release dates can affect volunteers access to information prior to release.
- Coordination of Team meetings can be very challenging and hard to organize. Affects the regularity of these meetings.
- Family participation is limited in the team meetings (Franklin) but very important.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #8:
- There should be an intentional effort to expand the client's circle so as to prevent dependence
- There should be clear and shared understanding of the different roles of staff versus volunteers.
- The staff/volunteer only meetings should be available as an option but only when necessary to address volunteer or team concerns/dynamics.

Promising Practices #8:
- Generally happening across programs
- South Burlington checks in with volunteers prior to or post Circle meetings.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #8:
- Staff/Volunteer meetings should take place more frequently in Franklin

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #9:
- Questions as to whether the information/notes should be shared with the clients.
- Questions around what should be recorded and what shouldn't (concerns about subpoenas, etc)
- Some volunteers also take notes of the meetings.

Promising Practices #9:
- Generally happening across the region.
- Some programs share notes with clients.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #9: None Mentioned

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #10:
- Dependability of attendance is important. It affects Circle dynamics.
- Current volunteers are willing to serve as recruiters for new volunteers (Con Q.)

Promising Practices #10:
- Generally happening although the last bullet (volunteer gatherings) not so much…
- Corrections has historically done an excellent job in Chittenden County in bringing together volunteers from different programs.
- Sex-offender training is happening for volunteers

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #10:
- D.V. and S.A. trainings are not taking place.
- Ongoing COSA volunteer gatherings are not taking place.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #11:
- Collaboration should be systemic, not individually based (from P.O. to P.O.)

Promising Practices #11:

- Generally happening very well across the region.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #11: None Noted

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #12:
- Use the term 'debrief' instead of closure

Promising Practices #12:
- Definitely taking place locally

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #12:
- Unsuccessful Completions can sometimes be murky.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #13:
- Question as to whether Circles that continue meeting without staff are still DOC volunteers or just community members?
- Volunteer Coordinators should be explicitly added to the 'Outer Circle' in the communication loop.

Promising Practices #13:
- Generally happening across the region.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #13: None Mentioned

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #14:
- Victim Services should be engaged prior to referral. Will allow for more time to prepare the victims/affected parties.
- "Probation and Parole" should be included in the list of victim services agencies.

Promising Practices #14:
- Generally happening across the region.
- Franklin County has a referral form and acceptance/denial process that intentionally incorporates the perspective of victim services.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14: None indicated

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #15:
- There should also be a Program Description available

Promising Practices #15:
- Generally happening.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #15: None indicated

Southwest Vermont Focus Group
6/20/16
Notes

(Present: Shawn McMore, Matt Willey, Miche Chamberlain Modiba, Jenny Quesnel, Joan Eckley, Leslie Briere, Robert Bach, Kathy King)

Introductions-
- A Cosa Circle Is…
    - Community
    - Engagement
    - No Secrets
    - Accountability
    - Connection
    - Fortifying
    - Support
- In Three Years, I hope the COSA Program is…
    - Expanding
    - Model Outside of Vermont
    - Community Supported
    - More Accepted by DOC
    - Embraced by the Community
    - Bursting at the Seams
    - Strong Established Foundation

Value Statements: See Central Vermont notes for specific Values Statements

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations- Value Statement #1:
- Not right for everyone in the prioritized population
- There should be referral opportunities based upon local discretion/knowledge of the individual clients
- MH/Criminally Motivated clients may not be appropriate

Promising Practices- Value Statement #1:
- There is a shift in P&P perceptions to view CJC Reentry services as a resource (Middlebury)
- Supervisor and Program Director review potential referrals (Bennington and Rutland)
- Referrals are sent over by P&P via email and reviewed by CJC Staff (Midd)
- Gate money is available to help with housing (Benn)
- Having a supportive supervisor has really shifted the collaboration (Midd)
- Middlebury has recently shifted board policy and now accepts people with sexual offenses

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges- Value Statement #1:
- Finding housing for offenders limits capacity (Midd, Rut, Benn)

- Need education across the system (P&P and Facilities)
- Not all P&P Officers are supportive of the program (negative office culture)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #2:
- Facilities should send referrals to P&P Supervisor as a gateway for the COSA Program
- There should be Co-Case-Management between Case Worker and Probation Officers to discuss referrals

Promising Practices #2:
- COSA Coordinators are preparing updated COSA Contact List.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #2:
- 'Timely referrals' are a challenge across the region- not really happening.
- Release dates shift (in both directions) which strains collaboration
- Local community climate does not support reentry (Rutland)
- No people with Sexual Offenses are allowed to reside in the Rutland City (zoned)
- Resource variation across the counties/state is a challenge (some programs provide housing, others not)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #3:
- Should the victim information be coordinated by P&P?

Promising Practices #3:
- Conversations between CJC and P&P round out information but this is not systematized
- There is some connection to Victim Services

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #3:
- Clients are not fully informed of Program Expectations and Supports
- Education across the system is an issue
- Bennington receives inconsistent information about the clients
- DOC info doesn't always capture client's resources and strengths
- There is no information about victims in Bennington's referrals

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #4:
- Can there be flexibility in how criteria is applied (SFI, for example. Are CJC's set-up to meet this level of need.)
- What if there are insufficient local resources?
- Discussion about whether it can be based upon individual program development and concerns about whether this enables arbitrary decisions.

Promising Practices #4:
- There is a strong desire to build successful programs

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #4:
- Referral processes are not always followed

- Some shifting in the acceptance/denial processes
- Bennington accepts all referrals (due in part to a lack of referrals)
- Housing is a limited resource and affects service delivery
- Timeliness of referrals is a real issue

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #5:
- Should agreement be signed in the community as opposed to the facility?

Promising Practices #5:
- Programs attempt to hold first Circle meetings in the facility (All communities)
- The contracts/agreements are typically signed <u>after</u> release
- Rutland has a binder of information that is distributed to clients and volunteers

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #5:
- DOC process can get in the way of facility COSA meetings
- Release dates also can complicate facility meetings.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #6:
- There are competing priorities in the attempt to coordinate release dates.

Promising Practices #6:
- When coordination takes place, it works really well (Bennington)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #6:
- Release dates are rarely coordinated

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #7: None Offered

Promising Practices #7:
- Rutland prefers 4-5 volunteers
- Recruitment efforts are being made with churches, personal outreach, local paper advertisements
- Volunteers receive a binder with client/Circle information
- Probation Officer attends first meeting
- Bennington teams meet with P.O. prior to cleint's release
- Some programs have Core Member-specific training conducted by the Probation Officer (prior to release)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #7:
- COSA Training is challenging to attend due to location (Bennington)
- Recruiting sufficient and appropriate volunteers is a challenge

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #8:
- Should also add: "Challenge and explore client's thinking and perceptions issues/errors"

Promising Practices #8:
- Rutland debriefs after core member leaves.
- Bennington works through issues in circle and coach the client how to have conversations with their Probation Officers
- Rutland has team meetings every 6 weeks

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #8:
- Middlebury needs practice with COSA
- Coordination of team meetings is a challenge

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #9: None Offered

Promising Practices #9:
- Region is keeping notes but would like to know if it is the 'right stuff'
- Bennington has "Goal Sheets" that include action steps with the clients. Reviewed periodically
- Middlebury does a good job of connecting stekholders

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #9:
- It can be a struggle to get P.O.s to attend meetings
- There can be a lack of information coming from P&P regarding changes to supervision, etc.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #10:
- There should be core-member specific training for circle volunteers with specific boundaries
- There should be continued on-going trainings

Promising Practices #10:
- All communities have a clear communication chain to follow to respond to crisis/events
- "No Secrets" done very well in Rutland

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #10:
- Volunteer recruitment and timing of trainings can be a challenge
- Training can also take place too soon (before the client is ready for release)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #11:
- Want collaboration to be built upon values as opposed to DOC directives

Promising Practices #11:
- There is strong regular communication to P.O.s
- CJC is taking office space at P&P (Bennington)

- Consistent communication is strongest when there is a good working relationship with the individual P.O.
- Middlebury is now coming to Rutland to build relationships with the P&P office and attend the monthly team meetings (coordinated by the District Manager)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #11:
- There is irregular communication from P.O.s

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #12:
- Closure is important for the client as well- so as not to reinforce the sense of burnt bridge

Promising Practices #12:
- Definitely taking place locally

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #12: None Offered

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #13:
- COSA can offer unique ways to support a Core Member in their continued growth even after the initial year is up

Promising Practices #13:
- Bennington offers periodic support to teams that continue to meet after completion
- Rutland makes a formal decision whether to continue beyond a year and keeps PO informed

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #13: None Mentioned

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #14:
- Probation Officer will need to take an active role in the work with victims

Promising Practices #14:

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14:
- There is not clarity about who the Victim Advocate is for Rutland
- DOC also has confusion on this as well

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #15: Non Offered

Promising Practices #14:
- Middlebury is providing clinical consultation/support for staff
- There is value to figuring it out on your own…

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14:
- Some training could be structured better
- There are challenges to figuring it out on your own…

Southern Vermont Focus Group
7/13/16
Notes

(Present: Jonathan Tuthill, Martha McClafferty, Wendi Germaine, Jim Cecere, Kathy Astemborski, Kitty Ohara, Bianca Zaransky)

Introductions-
- A Cosa Circle Is…
    - Support Network
    - Good Listener
    - Safety
    - Friendship
    - Role Model
    - Fun
    - Hope
- In Three Years, I hope the COSA Program is…
    - Fully Volunteered
    - Better Communication with P&P
    - Going Strong
    - Known by Everyone
    - Secure
    - Financially Supported
    - Fully Funded

Value Statements: See Central Vermont notes for specific Values Statements

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations- Value Statement #1:
- There should be referral opportunities based upon local discretion/knowledge of the individual clients
- Client willingness/desire to participate must also be taken into account.
- Lack of Social Network should be a factor in referring
- There isn't clear consensus on what is 'high risk'.

Promising Practices- Value Statement #1:
- Brattleboro and Hartford are mostly receiving referrals of the prioritized populations
- Springfield is receiving referrals of people with sexual offenses but not high risk clients
- Bellows Falls referrals are larger directed to high needs clients.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges- Value Statement #1:
- Springfield does not see other high-risk referrals beyond sexual offenders
- Brattleboro is receiving some low-risk referrals (who have high needs)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #2:
- All referrals should flow through Probation and Parole, which would minimize confusion

- Communication between Facilities and P&P can be a challenge (different priorities)

Promising Practices #2:
- Springfield is receiving referrals in a 'timely manner.' Hartford's advance notice of referrals is more mixed.
- Springfield has monthly Reentry Support Meetings that discuss reentering clients and their specific needs.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #2:
- Brattleboro is receiving some referrals on the day of release.
- Volunteer recruitment is a constraint on capacity.
- Springfield has some potential referrals 'pulled' even though the clients meet the definition of the prioritized population.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #3:
- There is limited contact with the DOC Victim Advocate
- Will the complexity of information turn off referring partners?
- Different perspectives (such as Case Workers and P.O.s) present information in different ways (potentially non-restorative perspective)
- Referral form should be kept simple
- Employment info/goals should also be included
- 'If the DOC says I'm working with someone, I work with that individual'
- Needs to be a voluntary program

Promising Practices #3:
- Hartford is getting the client information it needs in its current referral process
- Springfield receives what it needs (or asks for additional information if required).

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #3:
- Programs are getting the information but not always the context (such as a risk score but no interpretation)
- Bellows Falls is getting varied amounts of information (not consistent with all referrals)
- Some clients feel mandated to participate in COSA
- Case Workers need better information about COSA

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #4:
- None of the programs have "Acceptance/Denial Processes". They work with each referral (with only rare exceptions).
- Capacity limits acceptance. COSA is a limited resource.

Promising Practices #4: None offered

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #4:
- Lack of volunteers and staff time limits programs capacity

- DOC sometimes 'encourages' clients to participate in COSA even if they don't have intrinsic interest in the program.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #5:
- It would be nice to have flex funding to support volunteers time traveling to facilities, etc.

Promising Practices #5:
- Some clients are transferred to facilities closer to the reentry community (to facilitate reentry planning, etc)
- All programs really appreciate being able to meet with clients prior to release, when possible
- Each program has a contract/agreement/covenant (some are adapted to the specific commitments of the client and the circle)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #5:
- Transportation to distant facilities is challenging, making pre-release visits unlikely
- Volunteers can't take a whole day to travel and meet a client in the facility

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #6:
- There should be a reentry needs assessment checklist for all programs
- There should be clarity in roles and responsibilities to insure that certain details don't fall through the cracks
- Good coordination is required to ensure a smooth release

Promising Practices #6:
- Hartford and Springfield have had success coordinating reentry dates with Probation and Parole.
- Some clients are being released with 'Gate Money' to help pay for rent, etc.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #6:
- Bellows Falls sometimes learns of a client's release by seeing them in the community.
- Clients are sometimes released without adequate preparation (lack of meds, clothing, etc)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #7:
- More important than specific age, volunteers should be able to engage with the core members based upon their life experience.

Promising Practices #7:
- Volunteers receive information at the point of engagement (BF share's information more informally through conversation, etc)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #7:
- Recruiting sufficient and appropriate volunteers is a challenge
- DOC approval process for new volunteers is slow (Brattleboro)

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #8:
- Brattleboro is interested/curious about the use of a formal structure for COSA meetings
- Some staff/volunteer-only communication takes place through the internet

Promising Practices #8:
- Generally happening across the region.
- Staff are not at all meetings in Springfield (once/month it is just volunteers). This allows volunteers to take greater responsibility.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #8: None Offered

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #9:
- What to share, what not to share is a general question across the region.

Promising Practices #9:
- Multiple programs participate in the clients' meetings with their probation officers.
- Staff reach out when something significant takes place

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #9:
- There are variations across the region in the level of note taking. This reflects, in part, concerns about client perception of the program and its relationship with P&P.
- Need some guidance on what should be shared and how with P&P

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #10:
- There should be a training on safety.

Promising Practices #10:
- Generally taking place across the region (with some issues with training)

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #10:
- Despite efforts, Springfield is unable to organize offense-specific training
Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #11:
- Communication loop should also include employers and landlords (when a client is returned to the facility), but it's not clear whose responsibility this is. This level of communication would help to maintain positive community relationships.

Promising Practices #11:
- Most communities have strong communication with P&P officers.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #11:
- Brattleboro doesn't receive a lot of information from Probation Officers.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #12: None Offered

Promising Practices #12:

- Celebrations are definitely taking place
- Brattleboro also has a 'Certificate of Completion'

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #12:
- There is inconsistent 'closure' or 'debrief' of unsuccessful completions.

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #13: None Offered

Promising Practices #13:
- Generally happening across the region.
- Brattleboro has a post-completion phase for three months that includes monthly meetings between the successful Core Member and three Panel (non-COSA) volunteers and/or members of the Board of Directors.

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #13: None Mentioned

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #14:
- There is varied engagement across the region with the regional DOC Victim Advocate (strongest in Hartford).
- Information regarding the needs/context of victims can be nuanced (not always black and white).

Promising Practices #14:
- Hartford has been able to engage the DOC Victim Advocate to help with particularly challenging cases

Systemic/Programmatic Challenges #14:
- The DOC Victim Advocates have limited capacity

Reflections, Edits, Adaptations #15:
- Bellows Falls and Springfield COSA Coordinators are also the Directors of the CJCs. They rely on their CABs for support as well as DOC Central Office Staff.

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