



December 2021

WELCOME TO CIRCLESEUROPE
The Association for European Providers of
Circles of Support and Accountability and their supporters

Dear Colleagues

I can't believe we are approaching the end of another year and that the festive season is looming again. It is also another year when COVID-19 has continued to impact all our lives, both personal and professional. Who knows how the Omicron variant will unfold over the next few weeks! On behalf of the CirclesEurope Board I want to wish you, your loved ones and colleagues an enjoyable Festive Season and a well-deserved rest. Please stay safe as we continue to face the challenges of the new variant.

Despite the ongoing challenges, the Board has been impressed by the continuous efforts all of you as CoSA Providers have made to deliver Circles in creative and innovative ways and give much needed support to our Core Members. This Newsletter will be a short one, but hopefully you will enjoy the short updates of what some member Providers have been focusing on in the last few months.

THE CIRCLESEUROPE GENERAL MEETING

We held a very successful General Meeting of the CirclesEurope Association on 8 October 2021. Due to the ongoing issues with COVID-19 the event again took place online, but the Board was pleased to see so many participants (all member countries were represented as well as some non-European countries). Prof Bart Claes from Avans University in the Netherlands also delivered a very interesting guest seminar at the event which looked at the links between CoSA and Restorative Justice. The follow up discussion was particularly rich and raised many interesting points. Thank you to Bart for a very stimulating presentation and discussion.

**UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE CIRCLESEUROPE
ASSOCIATION BOARD AND SUB-GROUPS**

The CirclesEurope Board is currently discussing whether we may be able to hold the next CirclesEurope General Meeting together with the annual mini-conference at a face to face event in the summer of 2022, possibly in June. This is very much dependent on how COVID-19 will progress with the new Omicron variant over the next few months. The Board will consider this in the New Year and communicate with all members. In the meantime, if you

have any ideas for a theme for the mini-conference or suggestions for speakers, please contact any of the CirclesEurope Board members. We are thinking of possibly focusing on online abuse, but do let us know what you think. Fingers crossed that we will be able to hold the General meeting and mini-conference face to face!

I am sad to report that our Board Treasurer, Michelle Vreede, will be leaving her role on the Board as she has taken up another position with '*Blijfgroep*' an organisation in the Netherlands that works against domestic abuse. We are very sad that Michelle will no longer be involved with both CoSA and the Board but wish her only the very best for her new role. Thank you, Michelle, for all the years of having worked in CoSA and for your contribution to CirclesEurope. We are going to miss you.

The Board considered the vacancy and has agreed that Marijke Bijlsma can replace Michelle in the interim as the Board Treasurer. This is until June 2022 when the next Board elections will take place. Marijke is a CoSA Coordinator in the Netherlands. We are grateful to Marijke for being willing to take up the position and warmly welcome her on the CirclesEurope Board.

NEWS FROM COSA PROVIDERS

FROM PACE IN IRELAND BY MICHAEL DALY

PACE is delighted to share the good news that the work of CoSA Ireland is being acknowledged once again this year by Fingal Volunteer Centre. CoSA Ireland was nominated for their work in training and managing volunteers on their CoSA programme where their volunteers work with people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. This is challenging work and PACE has worked with excellent volunteers since the programme started in 2015. Following on from the success of being awarded the Fingal Managing Volunteer Award Level 1 in 2020, PACE CoSA will receive the Fingal Managing Volunteer Award Level 2 on the 16th December 2021. This award builds on the success of last year and is an important recognition of the value that PACE CoSA and the volunteers bring to the community.

The award acknowledges the Volunteers who, through their commitment to CoSA, have played a significant role in enhancing the quality of life of the community.

PACE is grateful for the ongoing contribution of the volunteers and the recognition awarded of this invaluable work by Fingal Volunteer Centre. Congratulations to PACE from all of us at CirclesEurope!

FROM THE UK – CIRCLES REBOOT (A COSA PROGRAMME SPECIFICALLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ACCESS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION MATERIAL, CSEM)

In the UK we are pleased to report that the pilot and evaluation of the new Circles ReBoot programme is progressing well despite months of delay due to the impact of COVID-19. Members of CirclesEurope will remember that the design of Circles ReBoot is underpinned by relevant research. Desistance research, trauma informed work and approaches such as the Good Lives model and Self-Regulation contributed to the approach and programme content. During the design phase, the programme benefitted from the advice of Professor

Derek Perkins and Dr Hannah Merdian from onlinePROTECT at Lincoln University. They have developed a new assessment tool specifically for individuals who access CSEM; this tool forms an integral part of Circles ReBoot and will be used at specific points in the programme.

The Circle is strength-based since offending behaviour work that recognises and harnesses the skills and aptitudes that an individual possesses have been shown to be most effective. Core Members are encouraged to take responsibility for their own life – they identify areas of their life they want to focus on and define and work towards specific goals. Setting realistic and positive goals for the future has been identified as a significant element in achieving an offence free lifestyle.

During a ReBoot Circle, the Core Member works through 'Keys for Change', learning new skills which assist them in developing self-awareness, self-efficacy and ways of coping with the challenges of daily life. The Keys for Change are intended to address aspects of life frequently apparent in the lives of those who access CSEM (e.g., social isolation, difficulties managing negative thoughts and feelings, issues around identity, etc.). At the end of the Circle, the individual has space to reflect on what they have learnt and plan for the future. The intention throughout the Circle is to look to the future with hope, without ignoring the past.

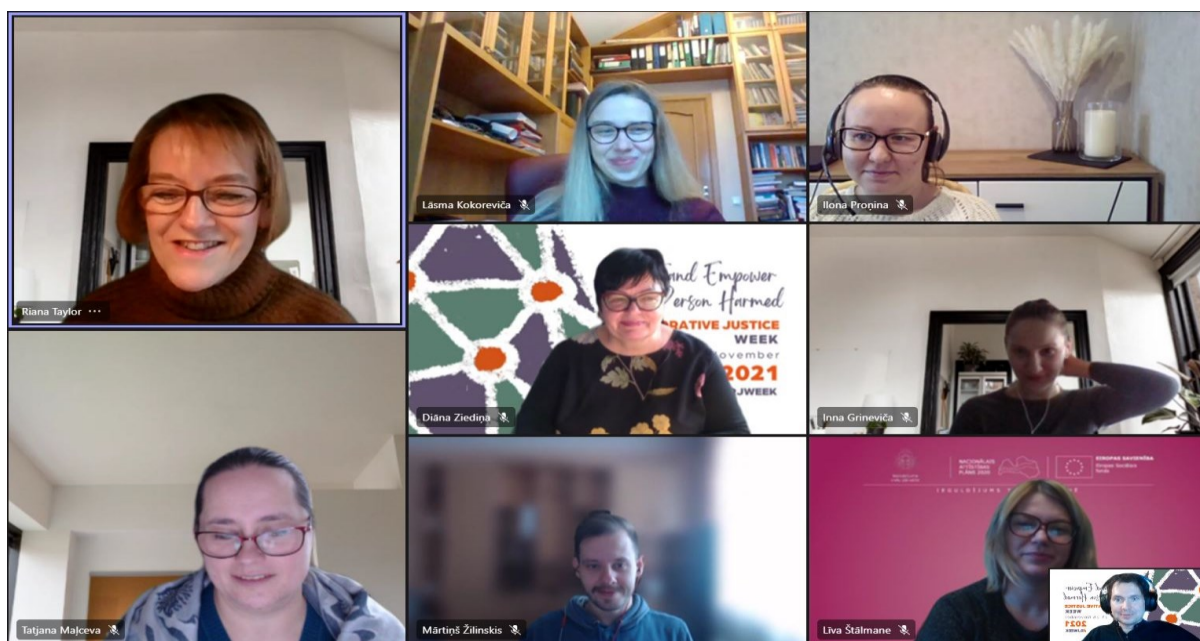
We are pleased to report that of the 12 pilot Circles ReBoot, 3 have already completed; a further 6 are in progress and the last 3 referrals are expected to be received in January 2022. The evaluation is also progressing with very interesting information being gathered on how Core Members and volunteers experience the pilot programme; how the materials contribute to the delivery and how a strengths based approach assists the Core Member to make positive changes in his/her life. So far none of the findings have raised concern about the programme and we are excited to see the final evaluation results, which we plan to share at an online seminar in 2022.

FROM COSA LATVIA – (LATVIA STATE PROBATION SERVICE)

The State Probation Service of Latvia is grateful for the opportunity to have recently involved the Circles UK CEO and the CirclesEurope Board Chair in a meeting to discuss CoSA issues. The meeting took place during RJ Week 2021, which made this meeting even more meaningful and memorable! Representatives of the Prison Administration of Latvia also participated in the event.

During the meeting plenty of important questions were discussed related to CoSA delivery, including supervision of volunteers and sustainability of CoSA. Participants also discussed the place of CoSA in Restorative Justice.

The meeting ended with a sharing of plans for the future, one of which includes a next meeting where both UK and Latvia CoSA volunteers can come together and share their work practices and experience of being CoSA volunteers. Here is a screenshot of some of the participants of the event:



A very big thank you for this opportunity. We hope to continue this productive cooperation and partnership and wish all in the CoSA community a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

INTERESTING PUBLICATIONS

- The European Commission's European Committee on Crime Problems which makes recommendations to member States regarding the assessment, management and reintegration of persons accused or convicted of a sexual offence held a meeting on 20 October 2021 where Kieran McCartan, the CirclesEurope Association Board lead for research and evaluation attended as a scientific expert. The Committee published guidance in which Circles are mentioned explicitly. Rule 32 states: *'96. Risk management is the remit of trained professionals; however, community integration schemes involving trained members of the public (i.e., Circles of Support and Accountability or a community Restorative Justice programme/intervention, see Rule 33) can be used if the appropriate safeguarding measures are in place'*. The full guidance can be accessed here: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a3ce9f
- An article appeared in the Irish Times, in which Pace and CoSA get a mention. You can read the article here: [Is introducing more punitive measures the only way to deal with sex offenders? \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/is-introducing-more-punitive-measures-the-only-way-to-deal-with-sex-offenders-1.4588888)
- The WeProtect Global Alliance published the 2021 Global Threat Assessment Report into Online abuse. Although the findings are disturbing the report points out that there is hope as child sexual exploitation and abuse online has moved up the global agenda and more countries, companies and civil society organisations are involved in tackling this crime. The report can be accessed here: <https://lnkd.in/dbjCsuxC>
- Protect Children, a Finnish human rights group, recently published a survey on the "dark web" so users would find it while actively searching for illegal content of children. So far more than 10,000 people have responded to the survey. This makes for very interesting reading and more information can be accessed here: [Online child abuse survey finds third of viewers attempt contact with children | Child protection | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/18/online-child-abuse-survey-finds-third-of-viewers-attempt-contact-with-children)

Remember to also regularly check the CirclesEurope website. Michelle Vreede and Mechtild Höing who kindly look after the website ensure that relevant articles, blogs and other

interesting information are placed on the website (www.circleseurope.eu).

FESTIVE SEASON'S GREETINGS!

Thank you for your support over the past year. The Board greatly appreciates your commitment to the development of CoSA in Europe and beyond and the help and support you have given the CirclesEurope Association. We wish you all the best for the festive season and look forward to continuing to work with you in 2022.



JOINING THE CIRCLESEUROPE ASSOCIATION

Full membership of the Association is open to all Circles Providers in Europe, including Trustees, Staff and Volunteers. Associate and Associate Individual membership is available for non-European Circles Provider organisations and individuals, as well as those with an interest in Circles but who are not CoSA Providers. If you want to join the Association, details are available on the website: www.circleseurope.eu. Membership fees are 40 Euros for full membership, 25 Euros for Associate Membership (for organisations) and 10 Euros for Individual Associate Membership.

We are pleased that the membership of the Association is steadily growing. Please circulate the information to all your volunteers and staff and encourage them to join the Association. We are always looking for funding and the limited funding that we have at the moment is limiting how much work we can do. Please may we therefore ask that you continue to share the news of the Association, and that we need donations and members to grow the Association to the benefit of CoSA in Europe. The Board will of course continue to keep you updated on its work and progress.

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