Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) have been used to increase post-release reintegration potential for high-risk/need sexual offenders returning to the community for more than 20 years. In spite of methodological difficulties associated with evaluating citizen-led interventions, available evidence (Canada, UK, USA) has consistently demonstrated that offenders in a CoSA are less likely to experience post-release difficulties than matched comparison subjects who do not participate. Qualitative investigations (the Netherlands, New Zealand, USA) have recently started to unpack the sociology and psychology of CoSA, to the extent that we now have a better understanding of the social and clinical aspects of participation in the model. This poster will outline new findings from Vermont demonstrating the utility of the CoSA model, both in terms of reductions in recidivism for sexual, violent, and general offenders and the development of a unique community based network of services seeking to promote restoration.

Discussion

CoSA has been a post-release option in Vermont for more than 10 years. It is now an integral part of the restorative justice landscape that thrives in the state. Discussions with participants highlight the relationship development and reciprocity as being important elements.

CoSA evaluations have been conducted in Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Although more results are required to state with certainty that CoSA is achieving its goal, the findings have been consistent that persons in CoSA reoffend less often than comparison subjects not in a CoSA. In this study, we found a consistent tendency for CoSA participants to do better in the community than their matched comparison peers. Further investigations are ongoing regarding this unique application of the CoSA Model.