

Volume I
Issue 2
September 2021

CoSA Vancouver/Fraser Valley

CoSA Connect



CoSA is a unique and innovative community justice initiative for post release support and accountability of offenders in and by the community. CoSA VFV also provides public education programming on how to create safe communities for all.



Coordinator's Message

Hello everyone,

Welcome to our 2nd CoSA V/FV newsletter. I would like to say a special thank you to Peter K. for helping us with the interviews and content of this newsletter. I hope you are all settling into a “normal” fall. Before the update itself, I want to thank the staff, board of directors, committee members, and all circle volunteers. Your dedication to CoSA and our core members is tremendous.

I would like to give you a quick overview of CoSA V/FV. Presently we have over 30 circles currently in Vancouver, Surrey, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and in B.C.’s Interior. We have 70 active volunteers that we are so grateful for; our program is possible because of you.

In June, we held our Annual General Meeting and were pleased to welcome Connor L. and Jim C. to the Board of Directors for CoSA V/FV. We would like to thank Bob Buckham for his exceptional service on the board over the last four years and are grateful for his continued service as Assistant Coordinator of CoSA V/FV.

We are thankful to CSC for a contract from July 1, 2021, to April 30, 2022 to create and operate “circles of support and accountability” for federally supervised sex offenders on conditional or statutory release, and/or on Long Term Supervision Orders in the Pacific Region. We are also pleased to have received Project Advance funds to research and develop virtual circles that I will elaborate on shortly. We appreciate the continued support from the Basilian Human Development fund and look forward to helping more people through their funding.

CoSA V/FV fundraising committee has been reaching out to the broader community. Over the past few months, they have approached volunteers, the CWL and the Knight of Columbus for donations, and the response was wonderful. Since August 2020, we have held five webinars on a number of pertinent community safety topics. We had people from all over the Fraser Valley joining us to learn about how to keep their friends and loved ones safer. Another tool we have been using to engage people outside of CoSA is our website. We are happy to share that the website is completed and is fully functional. We would like to offer a special thanks to Bill K. for all of his work on creating our website and continuing to maintain it.

CoSA V/FV continue to grow and adapt to the needs of our core members, this is evident through the work of the CoSA Visioning committee that started in February of 2021. The Objective of the CoSA Visioning committee is to look towards the future and see how we can improve CoSA V/FV. One of their first tasks has been to look at developing a program for virtual circles for CM's, both those living locally as well as those who, for various reasons, need to connect virtually. The direction of the group is to look into best practices as they relate to virtual circles and produce training/guideline documents to assist them. They sent out a survey to all CM's to help us understand why they joined and why they stay. Virtual circles allow us to accept volunteers and core members outside of our area. We are beginning to recruit volunteers for virtual circles throughout the pacific region and Yukon. Our greatest need continues to be recruiting for in-person circles.

At a national level, I continue to attend Zoom site committee meetings and board meetings with CoSA Canada. I serve on the board as a representative of the western sites and have given voice to their concern about sustainability of the CoSA program after the end of the contract in March 2022. CoSA Canada, in collaboration with the sites across the country, have produced and distributed to sites a CoSA Volunteer Handbook and a CoSA Staff Good Practice Handbook. These will be valuable reference resources.

I hope this gives you a sense of what is happening locally, regionally, and nationally. These are exciting times for CoSA V/FV and we are glad you are on the journey with us. We hope you can join us at the CCJS Volunteer Support and Development Day on October 2, 2021, from 9:30 am – 11:15 am.

Please also save the date for our CoSA VFV banquet at Eagle Quest Golf Course on March 10th, I hope to see all the volunteers and supporters there.

To find out more information on CoSA VFV, check out our website
<https://www.vfvcosa.org/>

In gratitude,
Maureen Donegan

A Note From One of Our PO's

I would like to thank my offender's CoSA Circle for inviting me to a wonderful dinner celebrating not only his well-deserved completion of his LTSO but also the progress he's made over the past ten years. His one wish was to go up to the Harbour Centre Tower's Revolving Restaurant and I didn't doubt that Maureen Donegan would make his wish come true. His smile, gratitude and appreciation for his CoSA Circle Volunteers equally matched the delicious meal and beautiful views of the Vancouver skyline. He said he would never forget the evening and he credited his CoSA Circle with providing him with ongoing community support, friendship, mentoring and accountability. He said it himself in a few words, he wouldn't have made it without his Circle. I look forward to being invited to his celebratory anniversary dinner next year Maureen! Thank you again CoSA for providing an invaluable service for our offenders.

Sincerely,
Lisa J.
Vancouver Parole Officer



Why I volunteer with CoSA...

Many people ask me what this is and what do I do as a volunteer. I'm always pleased that they are interested, and I love to explain the program and its necessity. I feel that my commitment to CoSA is one of the most important things I do. First of all, I believe in second chances and in being "there" when someone is reaching out for help. Released sexual offenders are invariably on their own having been castoff and disowned by family and friends. I'm thankful that I can be there for them by committing to attending our meetings, being a good listener, being encouraging as they face many obstacles in finding accommodation and employment, helping them reintegrate back into society, deal with loneliness and caring enough to be available 24/7 by cell phone, all without judgment. At the same time, I expect them to keep their commitment to the circle by attending meetings, being punctual, answering the hard questions openly and honestly and being open to the support the circle provides them. Witnessing and celebrating each accomplishment and success a core member achieves, reinforces my belief that CoSA is an integral part of them finding a new, right path in life.

Beverley K.

A Reflection from Carly

Growing up, I was abused by a family member, and unfortunately ended up repeating the cycle, and volunteers have shown me that I can break the cycle and they are helping me along the way to do that.

Because of the volunteers, I feel I am a stronger person now and I can see when I am making mistakes and I am able fix my errors much better than I used to.

And their kindness and commitment to me are amazing. Now that I am released, I meet with them once a week, and they support me and help keep me accountable for my actions.

They have also helped me connect with my faith, look for employment, and provide helpful suggestions regarding everyday life. When I needed furniture for my apartment, they found some for me and even delivered it. And when I moved, they helped with the move.

Through their care and support, for a total stranger, I can feel the love of the Lord. Carly

Thank you, Carly, for your sharing!*

*Name changed for privacy purposes



What is it like being a long Term CoSA Volunteer?

Our Volunteer Mission in CoSA has taught us to Love unconditionally and help each other find Hope and Purpose. This is what we as volunteers are about to Listen to them and be not Judgmental.

The years we have volunteered has been successful in two things no more Victims and They don't go back to Prison. Our Goals are walking with the Core Members through times of crisis and meeting regularly with them once a week.

CoSA has changed our life in many ways to support those returning to the community. There are no Disposable people. We offer the sacrifice of our time as a gift. So, if we exercise any Gift or Service without Love it will do us no good whatever. CoSA Ministry is caring to help those back into the community. This ministry of CoSA has to be to bring God's Love, Compassion, and Mercy to Core Members. We always Hope we can do this volunteer work.

Stan & Marilyn P. - Matthew 25: 36- 40

Support CoSA VFV

CoSA VFV relies on donations to help fund its work. Invest in your community.... financial investments assist CoSA VFV in helping re-integrate released sexual offenders and creating safer communities. Make a one-time gift or a monthly recurring donation. All donations are tax deductible.

TAX #799506514

1. E-TRANSFER A donation from your bank to: vfvcosa@gmail.com
2. BY CHEQUE Make payable to Vancouver Fraser Valley CoSA
Send to: CoSA VFV, 2777 Townline Rd., Abbotsford BC V2T 5E1
3. MONTHLY PRE-AUTHORIZED DEBIT Download the form here: Please note that this form can be completed in browser, printed, signed, and mailed. Alternately, request a regular giving form to be sent to you. Once completed, please send to the address listed above.

CoSA Sponsored Webinars

Thank you to all who attended our webinar series this year. If you would like to watch any of the previous webinars, please visit our website by clicking [here](#).

"Gratitude for his Circle"

Interviewed By: Peter K.

“Jeffrey” (not his real name) was preparing to be released from prison in 2019. This had been his second time through the justice system, and he was only too aware that he needed to stay crime free from here on in and that he could not go it alone. Most of his family members and former friends had been alienated. Who else could he turn to? He nervously removed one of the CoSA pamphlets from the rack, knowing that if noticed by the others, it could serve to identify him as a sex offender. He contacted Maureen, who put a CoSA circle together for him and it has continued right up to the present.

Jeffrey knew that he needed to be challenged and his circle members did just that. He really appreciated that he could openly and honestly share his inner thoughts, temptations, concerns and feelings without anything being reported back to the justice system. He told us that as well as asking difficult questions that need resolution, his circle does some problem solving with him to help rebuild his life.

Finding employment was an enormous challenge. There were some holes in his resume that could not be accounted for at job interviews. He reluctantly accepted a low paid job working in a warehouse at Amazon. Eventually he was able to find a better position, where he could use some of his computer skills. He has been able to do some of his work from home. He likes this but says he actually works harder at the office than from his home.

Before his arrest he had owned his own home, which had to be sold so that he could pay his lawyer’s fees. He hopes to be able to eventually buy his own place again. Another of his long-term goals is to reconnect with some of his family members and to find friends.

Jeffrey realizes that he slipped up last time by violating his condition to avoid alcohol. He does attend A.A. meetings and he told us his “higher power” is his A.A. group. He is not a religious person. He draws strength from other group members to avoid alcohol. He said that in a similar manner he is able to draw strength from his CoSA circle to remain on the right path.

He identified two highlights related to his circle. It felt wonderful to go out with his circle members to a pizza parlour in a social setting and just being able to talk and enjoy being with his CoSA volunteers. The other highlight was when he spoke at one of the CoSA banquets, sharing some details of his life. He felt a sense of accomplishment from speaking to a large group.

As we ended our interview, Jeffrey said that he is very much impressed that people would volunteer their time and effort on CoSA circles to help people in his situation.

To Find Out More...

Our goal is to substantially reduce the risk of sexual victimization of community members by assisting and supporting a released individual in his/her task of integrating with the community and leading crime-free, responsible, productive, and accountable lives. We also value helping educate the community on sexual abuse prevention through webinars and other resources.

If you work with inmates or would like to receive the support of a CoSA circle, please visit <https://www.vfvcosa.org/contact-us>

Or call Maureen Donegan at 604-791-1864 or Angela Veters at 778-982-1353

Register now for Support and Development Day

Join us virtually on October 2nd from 9:30 am - 11:15 am as we restart our programs in the prisons. Come and see the many ways we can serve those in prison and those released.

For more info or to register, contact Angela Veters aveters@rcav.org or 778-982-1353

Summary of CoSA Advanced Training on September 11, 2021

by Peter K.

It has been a while since our volunteer community has gathered together in person, so it felt wonderful to come together again at the advanced training session held at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Surrey on September 11.

The format was different this time, with more involvement in small group discussions, and sharing of experiences in the circles. Understandably because of Covid, the attendance was somewhat less than usual but the participation and enthusiasm were better than ever.

Maureen welcomed everyone and provided an update of CoSA news, including mention of the new CoSA website, which may be viewed at:

<https://www.vfvcosa.org/>

Instead of using Power Point slides, Connor organized small groups, with each assigned to discuss one of the four sections of an information sheet and then had spokespersons share the group summaries. This format was very well received. It

helped newer volunteers to gain knowledge and perspective from the more experienced volunteers and improved the opportunities for asking questions.

Chris shared about his involvement with Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. This organization was started by Father Greg Boyle, and it provides support, encouragement, employment opportunities and many other services for offenders, many of who are former gang members. Chris had been inspired by a book entitled "Tattoos on the Heart" written by Father Boyle. Information regarding Homeboy Industries is available at: <https://homeboyindustries.org/>

A moving video entitled "Step Inside the Circle" helped everyone to see life from the perspective of most sexual offenders, who early in life were victimized themselves, being abused physically, mentally, emotionally and/or sexually themselves.

Anita led us through a series of case study situations, using a unique method of audience participation. Each of us was given a green, yellow and orange coloured popsicle stick to simultaneously hold up to indicate whether we felt a specific situation was okay, questionable or unacceptable in a CoSA circle meeting. This introduced an element of fun and yet was a great lead-in to some good discussions about important principles such as always focusing on the core members at our circle meetings and avoiding letting a group become a friendship circle that no longer asks the tough questions. This session received a number of positive comments from participants, including two who said this was the best exercise ever.

Maureen closed our seminar with some last-minute words of advice to be non-judgmental, compassionate, open and respectful and avoid making assumptions.

Thank you to all of our supporters who make our work possible in keeping communities safe! Especially our partners:

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver
CoSA Canada
Correctional Service Canada

"A Fresh Start for Alex"

Interviewed by: Peter K.

After serving a lengthy sentence, "Alex" (not his real name) was released into a world that was strange to him. Metropolitan Vancouver was immense compared to the small prairie town where he had spent most of his life. Getting around on transit was bewildering to him. Once he had ended up miles away from his intended destination.

Alex broke into a sweat as he anxiously prepared to enter his first CoSA meeting. Even most of his family members didn't want to have him back in their lives again. How would this small group of strangers react when he shared details of the worst part of his past with them? He was actually shaking as he walked into the room.

His P.O. had suggested that CoSA would be helpful for him, but he wasn't able to tell him much about it. He wouldn't have even decided to come if a friend of his who was in a CoSA group had not raved about it. Alex had endured some large group sessions on the inside, where he had learned a few coping skills to reduce his inappropriate sexual urges, but he was always aware that anything he said there could be written in his record and used against him. He once asked to have personal counselling, but he found this was not possible for him unless he was feeling suicidal. He just wanted someone to listen to him.

Alex made it through his story and sat back expecting the circle members would reject him. However, his group accepted him in spite of his past. They showed they cared about him and continued to support him to help him to build a successful life. This amazed him. Now, looking back over recent months since his circle started, Alex's circle members have helped him through the hurdles he has faced since being released. Finding a job was difficult, considering the restrictions that he has. His group helped him to narrow down the places and positions to apply for. Thanks to his CoSA circle, he now has a promising interview coming up, where he can use his past experience to good advantage. The company is aware of his criminal background but are still willing to consider him for the position. His circle has been helping him to prepare and to build up his confidence.

Alex is aware of the dangers such as pornography, sex and alcohol that he needs to beware of and his circle keeps asking him the tough questions that help him to face up to important issues. He contacts individual circle members between meetings, which take place each week. He wishes that he could have had such a wonderful group years ago and he would now probably be in a much better situation. He would eventually like to relocate closer to his hometown, where his mother lives. She has supported him through all of his struggles and Alex appreciates the fact that she says lots of prayers for him, even though he is not a religious person. He has a few real friends nearer to his hometown, including one who is like a brother to him.

On a recent special occasion, Alex's circle took him out to a nice restaurant for an enjoyable meal and some social time together. He loved and appreciated it immensely. One day Alex wrote a text message to Maureen, thanking her for organizing a group that was making such a great difference for him. She responded with a message that meant so much to him he has not deleted it from his phone. It said, "think of this as the first day of a new life for you". That got to him, bringing

encouragement, inner peace and confidence. He really appreciated being told that she had noticed positive changes in him.

Practically Speaking.... Building a CoSA IS to Build Community



Please feel free to share this newsletter with others. If you would like any printed copies, let us know, vfvcosa@gmail.com