

# **The Safer Living Foundation and Prison-based Circles of Support and Accountability: what, why, how and what next?**

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&

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# Overview

This presentation will briefly outline the development (and reason for being) of the Safer Living Foundation charity, before moving on to review the charity's work running prison-based Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA).

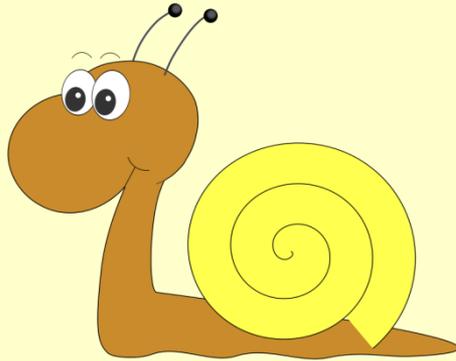
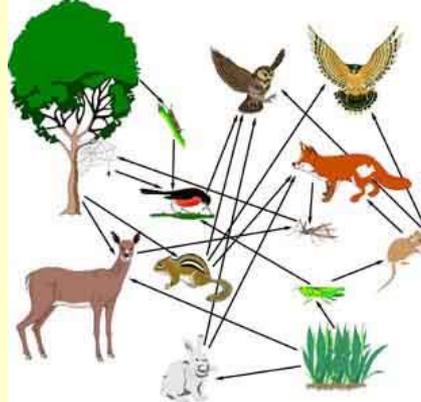
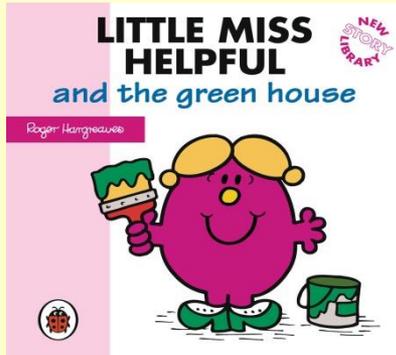
Commencing the circles from within prison was the idea of HMP Whatton's Governor, Lynn Saunders, and there are a number of benefits to commencing the circles whilst prisoners are in custody, as this talk will demonstrate.

Challenges with circles, and their evaluation, will be presented, and the talk will not shy away from highlighting difficulties that have emerged. Finally, the presentation will describe future plans of the Safer Living Foundation with regard to 'new' types of circles.

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# Origins of the Safer Living Foundation



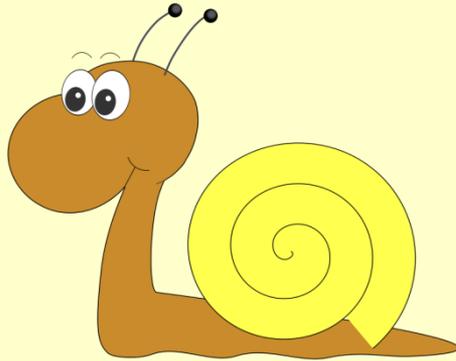
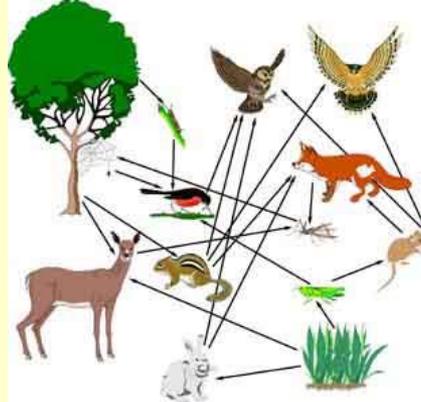
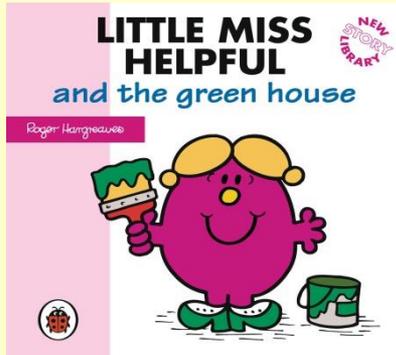
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TEACHER, BUT  
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# Origins of the Safer Living Foundation



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# Origins of the Safer Living Foundation



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# Origins of the Safer Living Foundation

- Ongoing and long term collaboration between prison & university
- Symbiotic and trusting working relationship, motivated and readiness for change
- Good inter-communications, problem solving
- Shared passion for evidence based rehabilitation
- Frustration with the challenges of finding funding, slowness of the system
- Wanted to find faster way of achieving things
- Right personnel including experience of charity work

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# History of the SLF

- First meeting to discuss possibility of running a Circles pilot project from within prison on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012



- Registered as CIO 13 February 2014

# SLF

- [www.saferlivingfoundation.org](http://www.saferlivingfoundation.org)



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# SLF: Projects

- Prison-based Circles of Support and Accountability
- Prevention project
- Community-based Circles of Support and Accountability project
- Young People's Circles project
- Transitions and Release project
- Three-quarters House project

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# SLF: Projects

- **Prison-based Circles of Support and Accountability**
- Community-based Circles of Support and Accountability project
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# SLF Prison-based CoSA

- Concern some high risk prisoners were leaving Whatton without family or community support.
  - Particularly those with intellectual disabilities and the elderly
  - These type of prisoners are particularly vulnerable and can find the transition from prison to the community the most difficult and socially isolating.
  - Those who do not meet the above criteria but who have a severe lack of social support on release also considered (but need to consider WaNTUSUREg)
- The Circles begin 3 to 6 months before a prisoner's release and continue with them into the community. The aim is social buffering and scaffolding.
- Transition from prison to community seen as particularly challenging for these individuals (and what is challenging for individuals will be challenging for society).

# SLF Prison-based CoSA



**Scaffolding**, also called **scaffold** <sup>[1]</sup> or **staging**,<sup>[2]</sup> is a temporary structure used to support a work crew and materials to aid in the construction, maintenance and [repair](#) of [buildings](#), bridges and all other man made structures. And people who may be considered 'broken'.

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scaffolding>

Specialized components used to aid in their use as a temporary structure often include heavy duty load bearing transoms, ladders or stairway units for the ingress and egress of the scaffold, beams ladder/unit types used to span obstacles and rubbish chutes used to remove unwanted materials from the scaffold or construction project.



# SLF Prison-based CoSA

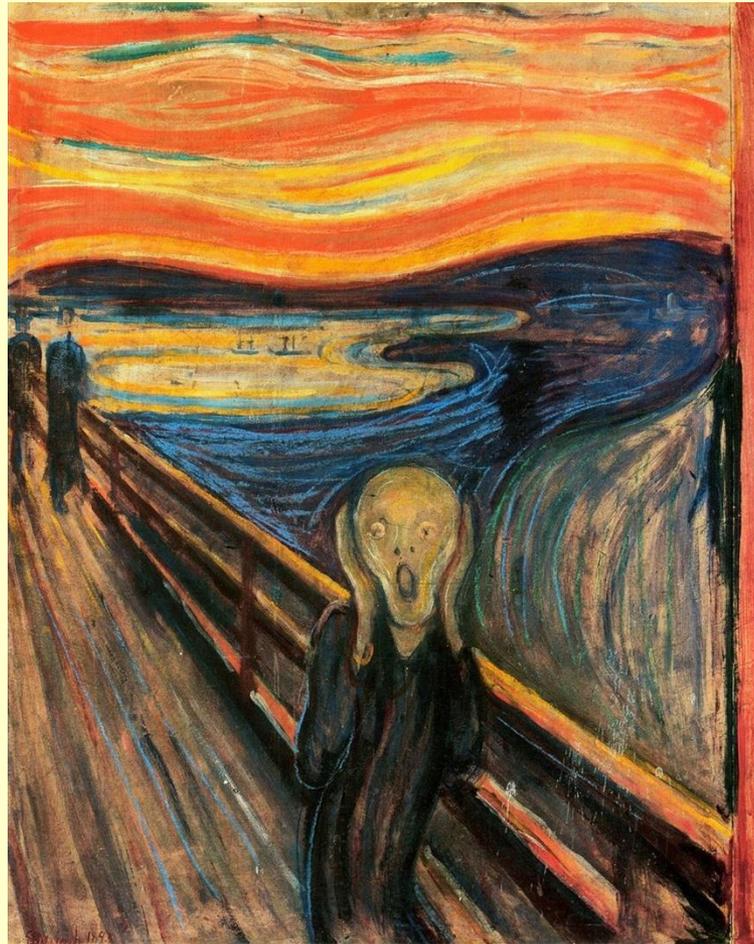
- But why might they work?
- Good Lives Model
- RnR
- Desistance

And.....consumer psychology models

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# Shopping and Sexual Offending?



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# The Xmas shopping theory of reoffending

*The shopper says 'I really shouldn't' – 'transfixed with infatuated desire.....the budget is tight, the price is too high, the item is not desperately needed, and so the shopper should not buy it'.*

*'Ranged against these sensible concerns is a murky alliance of wants, impulses, and emotions, all clamoring for the gratification of the purchase and wanting to believe that the purchased product will bring true happiness, at least for a while...the outcome of such consumer decision points depend considerably on the conflict between the competing strengths of self-control and desire'*

(Baumeister, 2002)

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# Desire vs self-control

- Battle between self-control and desire
- We must always work to reduce desire
- We should also look to strengthen self-control, which can vary systematically with a number of key factors

Baumeister uses self-control and self-regulation interchangeably, thus:

- Suppression or replacement of unwanted thoughts
- Changing emotions
- Regulating impulses
- Altering performances

Baumeister (2002) states that 'impulsive behavior is most interesting and relevant when it contradicts some of these long-term goals (such as saving money) because the person may regret having yielded to the impulse'. Rook (1987, p.189) asserted that 'impulses sometimes prove irresistible'. This is not really the case.....

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# Desire vs self-control

## **Standards** (Goals, norms, ideals)

- Uncertain or conflicting goals undermine standards, norms and ideals

## **Monitoring** (Keeping track of relevant behaviour)

- When people lose track of their behaviour, self control breaks down.
- Or when they feel they have failed (Polivy et al's (1986) study of dieters (milkshakes vs no milkshakes)).
- Alcohol strikes again.... and emotions

## **Capacity to change**

- Can we restrain ourselves, resist temptation?
  - Cognitive processes driving behaviour
  - Self-control as a skill
  - Willpower or strength model (prior exertion and ego depletion, recovery after rest); stress, decision making and timing)

## **CoSA and self-control / ego depletion**

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# SLF Prison-based CoSA

**Total Prison Circles:** 10 started

**Total Still Going:** 7 active / 1 on hold

**On Hold:** CM agreed to Circle then father died. He asked to stop but we persuaded him to reconsider at a later date. He is on our list to chat with.

**Total Failed.**

1 CM recalled then charged with additional historic offences. In HMP Notts now.

1 ended at CM request (PD?)

**Total Currently in Prison:** 1

**Total moved to community:** 6

**Total ended naturally:** 0

# SLF Prison-based CoSA: Volunteers

**Total recruited to date:** 66 ( 42 trained / 10 awaiting training / 12 awaiting interview)

**Total trained to date :** 42 (12 males / 30 females )

**Total trained in circles:** 27

**Total trained awaiting a Circle:** 12

**Total in a Circle requesting 2nd Circle :** 3

**Total awaiting training:** 10

**Total awaiting interview:** 12

**Average age volunteers (mean, sd, age range) :** TBC

**Total Dropped out:**

F1- young female - final year student found it too much

F2 - mature female - decided it wasn't for her

F3 - mature female - new job too much responsibility

**Dropped out but returned**

F4 - mature female teacher - stopped temporarily for personal reasons. Returned now awaiting a Circle

F5 - young female - returned to Greece. Now back in UK and on original Circle.

**2 volunteers currently not attending**

**Men awaiting assessment for suitability for a Circles** (both prison or community) - approx. 9 who appear to meet the criteria.

**There are approx. 20 potential volunteers** (completing volunteer application forms)

# CoSA Challenges

- Problems – helping them too much as individuals instead of using / feeding back difficulties into the system
- Making up for system weaknesses and cuts
- Attachment – how to judge optimal time for pre-release circles
- What about indeterminate sentenced prisoners
- More people might benefit even those who are not socially isolated
- How far do we use static risk as guiding measure? (RnR principles)
- In Whatton, we need to expand to MH and PD prisoners
- Need to connect cross country to other CoSA projects
- Needs RCT
- Projects in different parts of the country seem to run projects slightly differently
- Needs large-scale evaluation (Circles UK, BL funding for projects but needs UK-wide evaluation to do it justice). Kieran and myself, with Andrew Bates (probation) and Helen Elliott (SLF) currently designing this. Project coordinators working hard to deliver circles, find it difficult to put time aside for the evaluation data.

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# Research and Evaluation

Two strands of research form the evaluation:

## Strand One

**Questionnaires** administered to the core members at different time points of the Circle

*Hope Scale, Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale (Short), Personal Growth Initiative scale II, MOS Social Support, UCLA Loneliness Scale*

- Evaluate the impact and effect of the Circle on the Core Member
- Compare core members against a matched control group

**Reconviction data** collected

- After a sufficient follow-up period

# Preliminary Results (Strand One)

- Ethical approval
- 9 cases (6 experimental, 3 control)
- Scales and measures look fine
- Too low n to conduct even preliminary analysis
- Pre- release norms for measures look comparable to other prison populations
- Watch this space!

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# Evaluation

## Stand Two

**Semi-structured interviews** with core members at different time points during the Circle.

- To explore their experiences of being in a prison-based circle and compare them to core members on community only circles

**Semi-structured interviews** with the volunteers

- To understand their experiences of working on a prison-based circle and compare them to volunteers on community only circles

**Repertory grids** administered to the core members at the same time as the interviews above.

- To examine the constructs used by the core members to make sense of their world

# Preliminary results (Strand Two)

Superordinate theme	Sub-themes
Benefits of the prison-model	Being prepared In the 'comfort zone' Keeping skills alive Through the gate Assisted desistance
Ambiguous practice	Chaotic practice Doing risk management Finding the balance Links to the research

For full write up please email Rosie:  
[rosie.kitson-boyce2004@my.ntu.ac.uk](mailto:rosie.kitson-boyce2004@my.ntu.ac.uk)

# Ambiguous practice:

## Chaotic practice

‘I don’t feel actually the practical stuff about when he comes out, yeah I feel a bit in the dark about that and how much we do on our own initiative and how much is arranged by the coordinator or whatever, yeah so I think the answer is I don’t feel prepared for that bit.’ *Volunteer participant 1*

‘You know we talk about him until we get there, we spend that time with him, without a plan erm without a real agenda you know, we know maybe a couple of things we want to discuss...it’s, it’s a bit disorganised.’ *Volunteer participant 5*

# Ambiguous practice:

## Doing risk management

‘some of the examples I gave about things which you know he could be challenged or he could be encouraged to think about differently, you know I held back partly because I thought well this will hijack the rest of the session and are they necessarily on board with this and we never discussed that sort of thing.’ *Volunteer participant 1*

‘erm I think just the concern is because if we don’t know a lot about his risk factors then how can we identify them to help him cause like you say ultimately it is also about accountability and protecting him, protecting the public and ourselves erm so I think if we don’t cover much of that then I’m concerned that we won’t know what to pick out, pick up’ *Volunteer participant 4*

‘Erm knowing more of the risk factors that we’re looking for erm I know it’s been, it was discussed in the training but I probably would have liked a refresher on that before we went back in to the community you know ‘what are we looking for, what are we supposed to be keeping an eye out for in case this happens?’ *Volunteer participant 5*

# Ambiguous practice:

## Finding the balance

‘Erm cause I guess as well in part it is really good that we build rapport with him and we get on very well and equally, it hasn’t happened and I don’t think that it will but it’s possible that, that if you have a certain, if you do get on very well and you do have a certain level of rapport then that might lead you to missing certain things’ *Volunteer participant 2*

‘cause you don’t want to stop people from establishing rapport with someone but saying ‘oh yeah actually it’s great to tell us your problems but you should be wary of us’ *Volunteer participant 2*

‘it was really sort of difficult to get your head around as to how you’re gonna sort of support this person yet obviously help them be accountable erm have that professional relationship with them’ *Volunteer participant 3*

# Ambiguous practice:

## Links to the research

The role of the volunteers includes being able to identify and react to recidivistic behaviour.

*(Elliot and Zajac, 2015)*

Previous research has found similar confusion surrounding the role of accountability, however despite this volunteers were still found to be holding the core members accountable for their behaviour.

*(Thomas, Thompson & Karstedt, 2014)*

Contact and risk escalation documents are now in place for each circle and have guidelines specific for each core member's risk factors and what to do should the situations arise - this should provide the extra guidance required by volunteers.

# Evaluation Challenges

Small sample sizes to start with (as ethics pointed out) BUT need to start at the beginning; Data collection to date (Exp = 6/2; Control = 3). Difficulties with accessing data.

Core members being flooded with stuff 'to do'

Explaining to control group what control is especially with ID and elderly individuals

Control group issues: Difficulties accessing a control group due to screening process for Core Members. Currently Whatton only screens men who are already confirmed to be released into Nottinghamshire.

Community data collection issues: There has been difficulty arranging research meetings with Core Members in the community. The research team are trying to do this through the volunteers.

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# Future Directions

- Already outlined most of our plans
- Looking to extend prison-based CoSA to include MH and PD circles (working with Birgit Vollm and Martin Clarke to do this and additionally to set up an RCT for circles)
- We welcome any thoughts, comments, feedback and channels to funding opportunities
- Also welcome individuals interesting in strengthening the trustee board or membership

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# SLF Trustees, Members and Employees

- ✿ Dr Nicholas Blagden
- ✿ Dr Kerensa Hocken (SLF Clinical Lead)
- ✿ Jane Hilton
- ✿ Rebecca Lievesley
- ✿ Dr David Rowson (Chartered Accountant, SLF Treasurer)
- ✿ Lynn Saunders Hon Dr (SLF Chair)
- ✿ Karen Thorne
- ✿ Steve Turner
- ✿ Ian Waterfield
- ✿ Prof. Belinda Winder (SLF Vice Chair, SLF Secretary & SLF Research/Evaluation Lead)
- ✿ Helen Elliott (SLF Chair Members, SLF Research Coordinator)
- ✿ Anne McMeekin (SLF Office Manager)
- ✿ David Potter (SLF Community CoSA Coordinator)
- ✿ Karin Spenser (SLF Prison CoSA Coordinator)
- ✿ Rosie Kitson-Boyce (PhD student)
- ✿ VACANCY (PhD student – ¾ House project)
- ✿ VACANCY (PhD student – Circles UK Community Circles project)
- ✿ VACANCY (Young People's CoSA Coordinator)

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# Research and Evaluation team

- Nick Blagden
- Helen Elliott
- Kerensa Hocken
- Rosie Kitson-Boyce
- Rebecca Lievesley
- Belinda Winder

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