



# A Mixed Method Evaluation of 188 UK-wide Community Circles of Support and Accountability: Wellbeing, Dynamic Risk and Volunteers

HELEN ELLIOTT, PROFESSOR BELINDA WINDER, DR NICHOLAS BLAGDEN, REBECCA LIEVESLEY & MICHELLE DWERRYHOUSE  
SEXUAL OFFENCES, CRIME AND MISCONDUCT RESEARCH UNIT (SOCAMRU)  
NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

# This presentation aims to...

## **Part One**

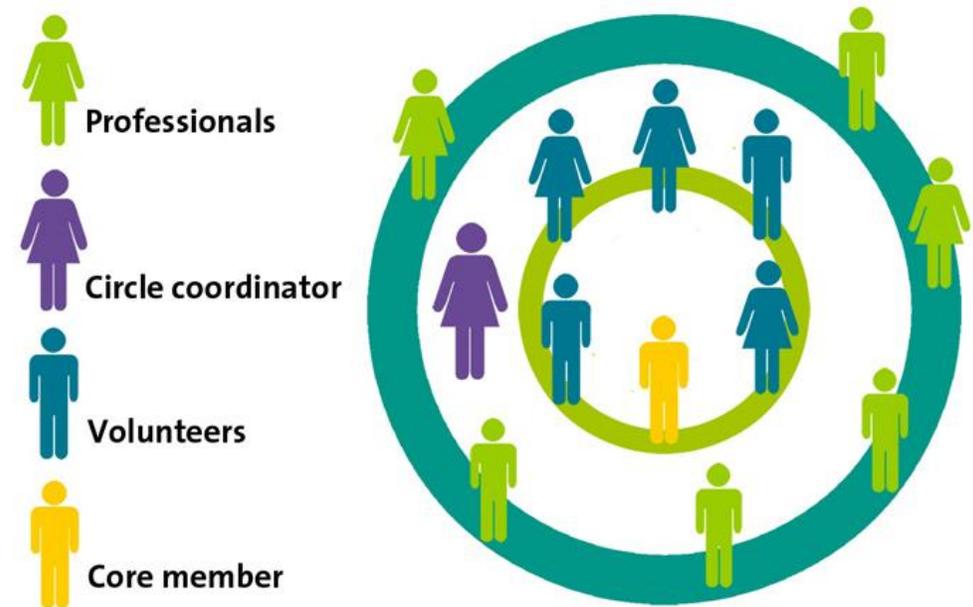
- ▶ Brief introduction to CoSA
- ▶ Introduction to the evaluation of 188 Big Lottery funded UK Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)
  - ▶ Core Member wellbeing
  - ▶ CoSA volunteers
  - ▶ Dynamic Risk Reviews

## **Part Two**

- ▶ CoSA Success and Failure

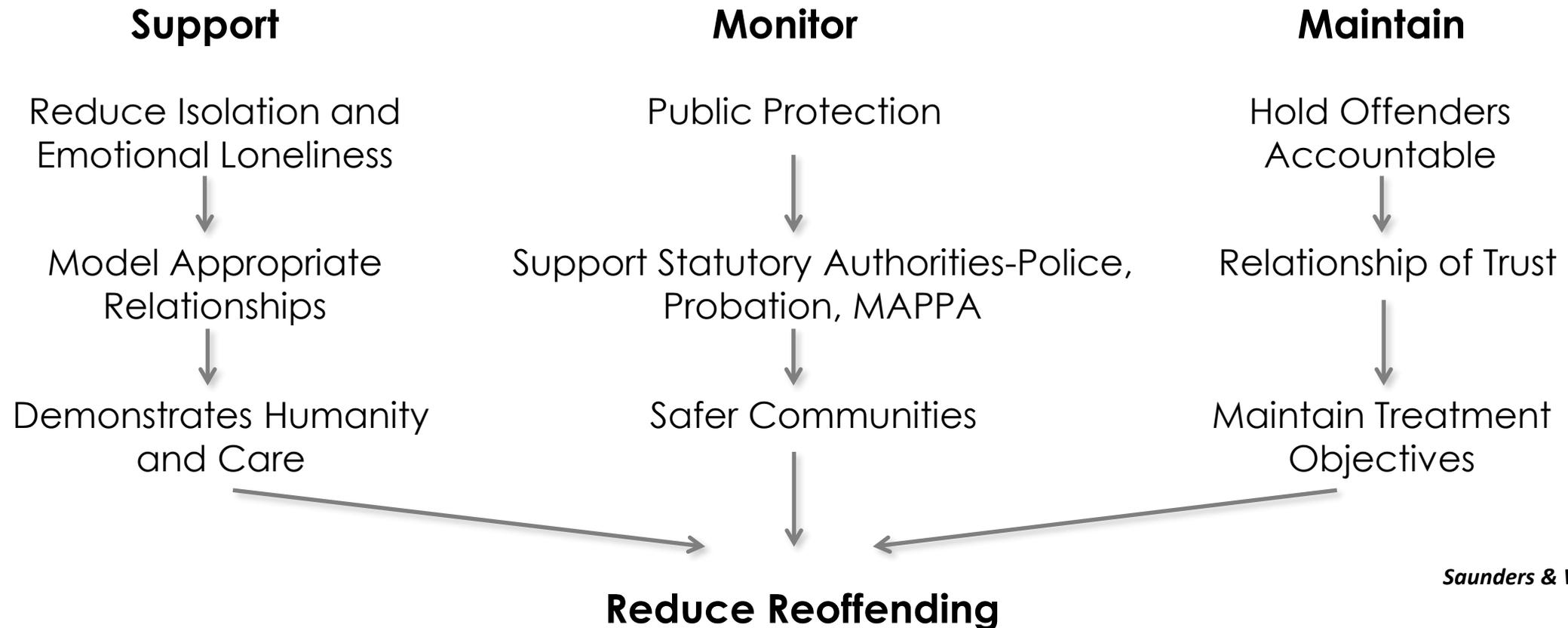
# Recap: Circles of Support and Accountability

- ▶ A CoSA consists of 4-6 trained volunteers and a Core Member
- ▶ The CoSA meets weekly to offer support
- ▶ Lasts around 12-18 months
- ▶ Supervised by a qualified Coordinator
- ▶ Coordinator liaises with other professionals regarding Core Members risk and progress



*Graphic representation of Circles model (Bates, Williams, Wilson and Wilson, 2013)*

# How Does CoSA Work?



*Saunders & Wilson (2003)*

# Context

- ▶ Circles UK received funding from the Big Lottery to set up 188 Circles across the UK over the next four years.
- ▶ Big Lottery CoSA providers:
  - Circles Merseyside
  - Safer Living Foundation
  - Circles South East
  - Yorkshire, Humberside & Lincolnshire Circles
  - Circles North West
- ▶ 188 CoSA to run over 2016-2019
- ▶ Evaluation by Nottingham Trent University

# The Evaluation: Aims

- ▶ To understand the impact and success of CoSA in risk management and re-integration of individuals convicted of a sexual offence released into the community.
- ▶ To ensure robust evaluation data are collated and disseminated that can form the platform for future funding bids.

## **Specifically:**

- ▶ Dynamic risk of Core Members – explore changes over time and outcomes related to successful reintegration (e.g. employment, accommodation)
- ▶ Mental wellbeing of Core Members – explore changes over time
- ▶ Volunteers – explore changes in skills, confidence and experience over time on CoSA
- ▶ 'Success' & 'Failure' of CoSA – how are they defined, what goes wrong?
- ▶ Coordinators – exploration of experiences of success and failed CoSA, geographical challenges, lessons learned
- ▶ Stakeholders – perceived value of CoSA in relevant geographical areas

# Mental Wellbeing

- ▶ Stigma associated with the 'sex offender' label – a life sentence
- ▶ Prejudice – media, sensationalised (x9 over-represented when compared to national crime stats; *Harper & Hogue, 2015*)
- ▶ Loss of relationship – disownment, ostracised
  - ▶ Depression
  - ▶ Anxiety
  - ▶ Low self-esteem
  - ▶ Poor coping skills
  - ▶ Poor locus of control

# Mental Wellbeing and CoSA...

- ▶ So how does CoSA influence mental wellbeing? We hypothesise that CoSA improves wellbeing through:
  - ▶ Volunteers freely and willingly giving their time - many do not have any support structures in place outside of the professionals they must meet with. The simple fact that the Core Member has four to six people who are not paid to be there can go a long way in improving a Core Member's emotional wellbeing.
  - ▶ Volunteers support Core Members to apply for work, help with social scenarios and confidence building all of which are associated with increased self-esteem.
  - ▶ Volunteers support Core Members to take accountability for their behaviour, helping them to realise their potential to be in control of their actions increasing locus of control.
  - ▶ Volunteers support Core Members to create pro-social coping mechanisms to replace previously unhealthy ways of coping e.g. exercise, hobbies thus increasing coping skills.

# The evaluation: Investigating change in wellbeing on CoSA

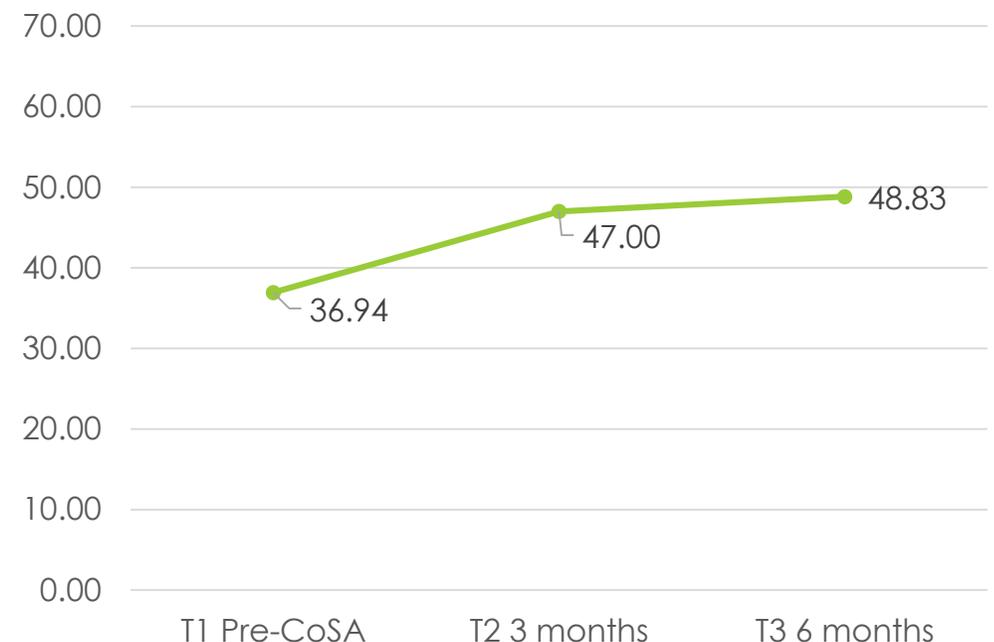
- ▶ This study will examine changes in the emotional wellbeing of Core Members.
- ▶ Administered (1) pre-CoSA; (2) every three months during CoSA (3) post-CoSA
- ▶ The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) - 14 positively worded items including:
  - ▶ “I’ve been feeling useful”
  - ▶ “I’ve been thinking clearly”
  - ▶ “I’ve been feeling cheerful”

# The evaluation: Investigating change in wellbeing over time on a CoSA

## Preliminary results

- ▶ Cronbach's alpha was computed as .870, which demonstrates good reliability for its use with adult male (ex)prisoners.
- ▶ One sample t tests against the population norms of adult English men (mean 52.5)
  - ▶ At T1 (pre-CoSA) the Core Members (N=18) showed significantly worse mental wellbeing than the general population of adult English males ( $p = <.001$ )
  - ▶ By the time Core Members (N=5) were three months (T2) into their CoSA they no longer showed statistically significant differences to the general population ( $p = .273$ , non sig)
  - ▶ This remained the same by six months (T3) (N=6) ( $p = .289$ , non sig)

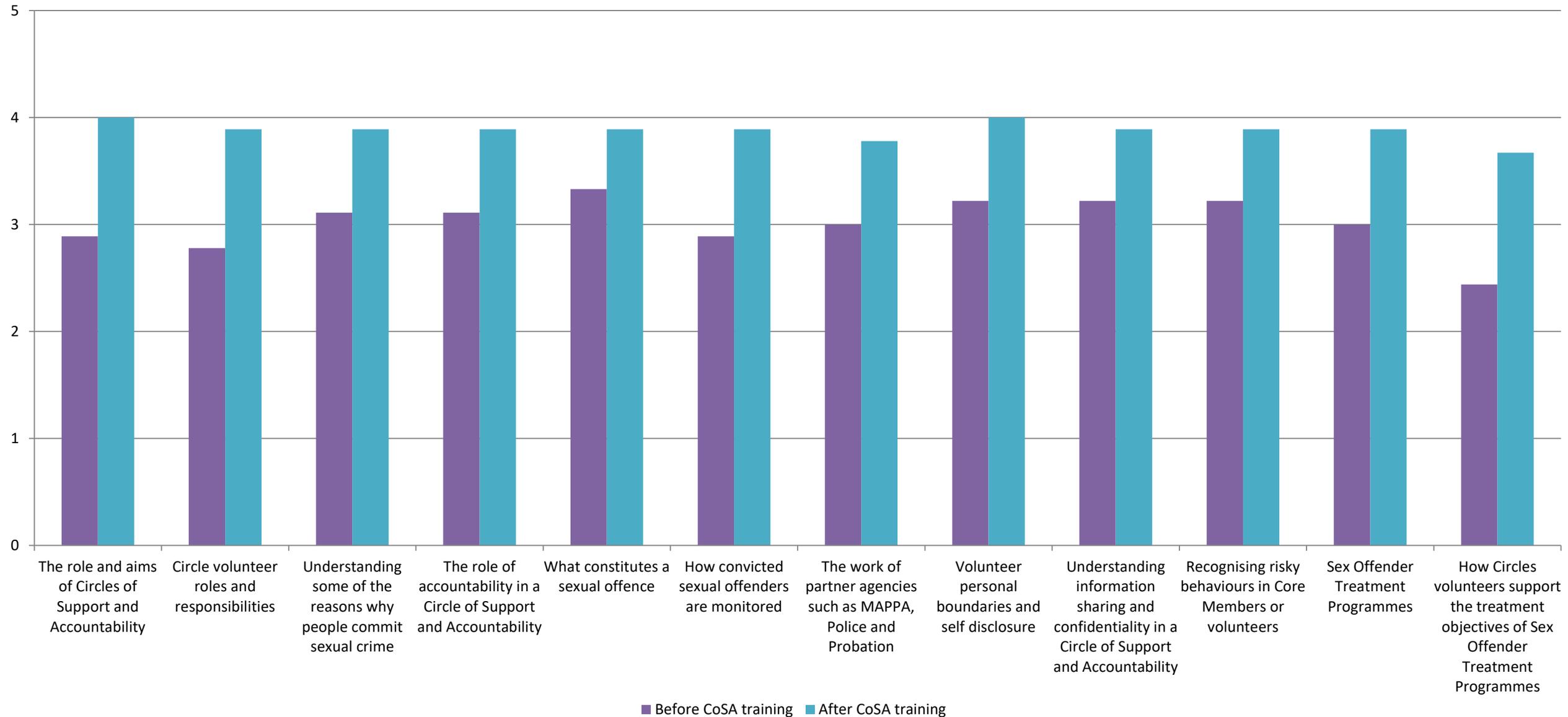
Core Member Wellbeing Scores



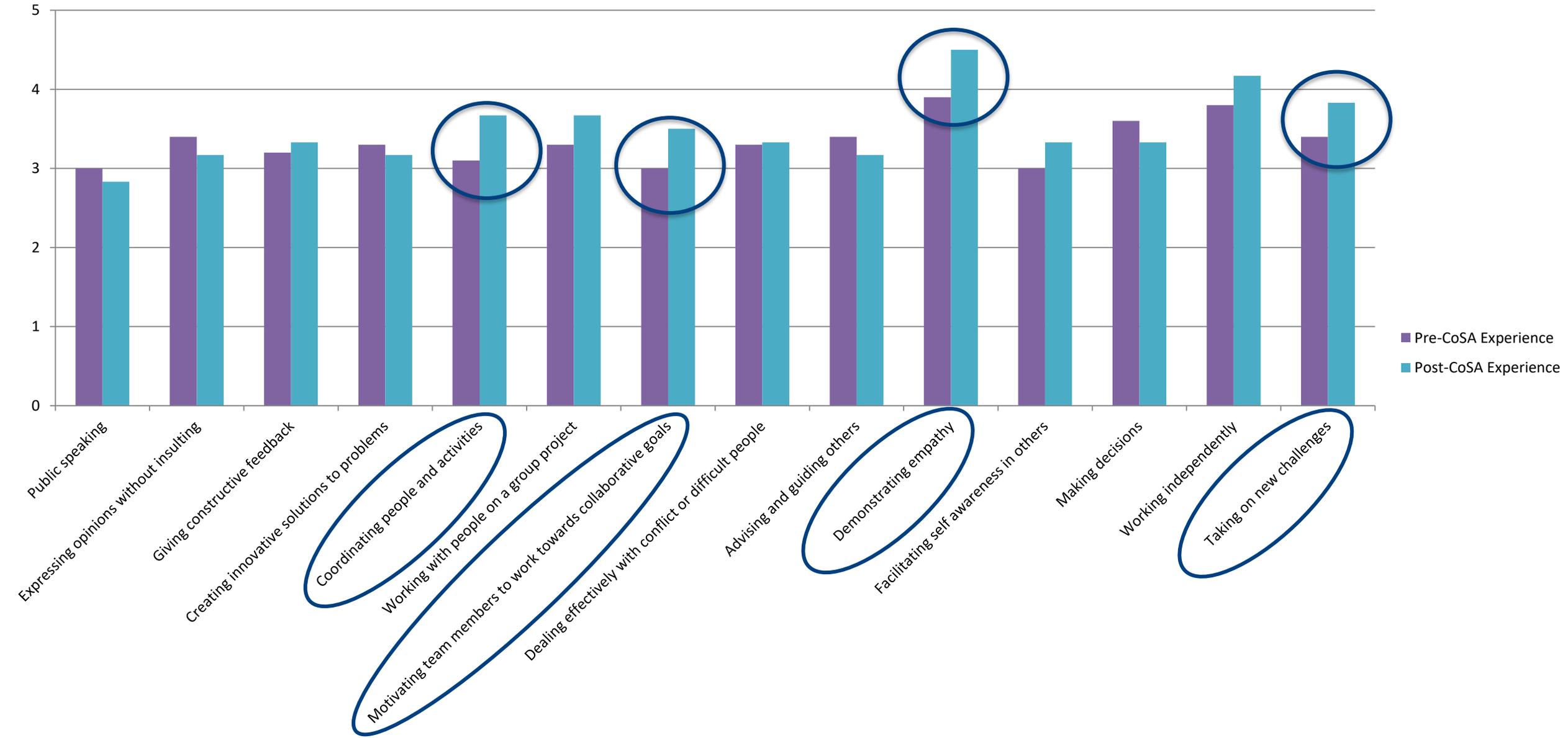
# The Evaluation: CoSA Volunteers

- ▶ Evaluation of CoSA training – does CoSA training meet the aims it says it will?
- ▶ Does engaging in CoSA increase volunteers transferable skills?
  - ▶ E.G. Public speaking
  - ▶ E.G. Giving constructive feedback
  - ▶ E.G. Demonstrating empathy
  - ▶ E.G. Confronting and expressing opinions without insulting
- ▶ Survey distributed to all volunteers engaging in a Big Lottery CoSA: (1) Pre-training; (2) Post-training; (3) Post-CoSA

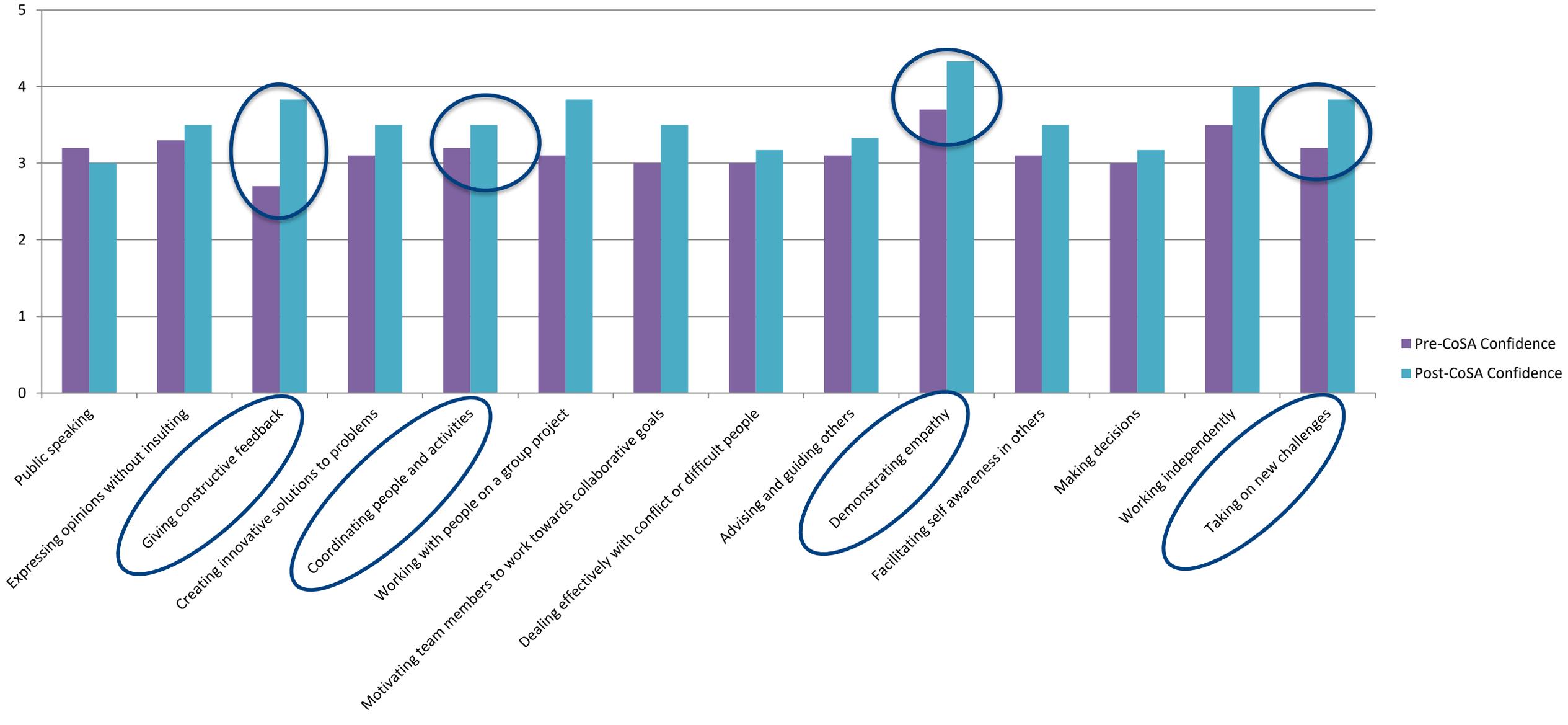
# Volunteers' understanding pre and post CoSA training



# Self-reported levels of experience pre and post CoSA



# Self-reported levels of confidence pre and post CoSA



# The influence of CoSA on changes to volunteers confidence and experience

- ▶ **42%** of volunteers said CoSA has contributed a good amount to changes in their skills experience
- ▶ **28%** said it has contributed a great amount to skills experience
- ▶ **71%** of volunteers said CoSA has contributed a great amount to changes in their skills confidence

# Dynamic Risk Review (DRR)

- ▶ Tool created to assess Core Members' dynamic risk over time whilst engaging with a CoSA.
- ▶ Used at the start of a CoSA and again at three monthly intervals throughout the course of the CoSA.
- ▶ Based upon the four dynamic risk domains identified within the Structured Assessment of Risk and Need (SARN) (*Thornton, 2002*): sexual interests; offence related attitudes; relationships and self-management.
- ▶ Provides possibility to monitor risk of Core Member throughout CoSA as DRR scores have been shown to predict adverse outcomes (e.g. arrest, recall, reconviction) (*Bates & Wager, 2016*)

Domain	Explanation
<p><b>A</b></p> <p><b>Sexual Interests</b></p>	<p>Core Members encouraged to speak openly about their sexual thoughts.</p> <p>Volunteers are responsible for challenging inappropriate thoughts that the Core Member may present whilst offering a safe place for Core Members to discuss their thoughts and feelings.</p>
<p><b>B</b></p> <p><b>Offence Related Attitudes</b></p>	<p>Core Members given the opportunity to discuss their offence related attitudes and are challenged on any inappropriate attitudes.</p> <p>CoSA volunteers usually comprise a mix of males and females - especially important in certain cases e.g. Core Member has specific issues concerning females.</p> <p>Male and female volunteers working together/supporting each other positively demonstrates male – female relationships.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p> <p><b>Relationships</b></p>	<p>To support rehabilitation and integration, volunteers support Core Members to build self-esteem, a sense of self-worth etc. through activities.</p> <p>CoSA is about more than talking through thoughts and feelings; volunteers help to support the Core Member to pursue meaningful activities such as employment, voluntary work and hobbies.</p> <p>Volunteers also assist Core Members to meet new people, make friends and build new and appropriate romantic relationships.</p> <p>Volunteers continuing support instils a belief in Core Members that they have the ability to change and to lead a positive offence free life.</p>
<p><b>D</b></p> <p><b>Self-Management</b></p>	<p>Core Members are encouraged to discuss and reflect on risk situations as they arise. Together the CoSA can devise tactics for dealing with difficult situations, such as crossing the road if an attractive person is walking towards them in the street, or avoiding being outside during school opening and closing times. In doing this,</p> <p>Core Members are encouraged to proactively prepare for situations which may put them at risk of reoffending and act to discourage impulsive behaviour.</p>

# The evaluation: Investigating change in dynamic Risk on CoSA

- ▶ Highlight changes over time for risk-related items
- ▶ Outline 'normal' trajectories of DRR scores (baseline and end points)
- ▶ Investigate usefulness of the DRR in predicting the failure of a CoSA or a red flag incident
- ▶ Report on the re-integration of Core Members as assessed by participation in appropriate hobbies and activities, having stable accommodation and having any paid or voluntary employment.
- ▶ No results to date – data collection ongoing



# A Mixed Method Evaluation of 188 UK-wide Community Circles of Support and Accountability: Success and Failure

MICHELLE DWERRYHOUSE, HELEN ELLIOTT, PROFESSOR BELINDA WINDER, DR NICHOLAS BLAGDEN & REBECCA LIEVESLEY  
SEXUAL OFFENCES, CRIME AND MISCONDUCT RESEARCH UNIT (SOCAMRU)  
NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

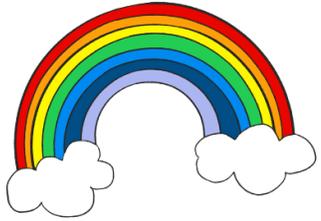
# Part Two: Success and Failure

# Success and failure - what is this research about?

- ▶ Defining failure
  - ▶ Suggestions for theoretical frameworks for understanding different types of failure
- ▶ Presenting some preliminary analysis

Completion Decision to End	Early Ending	Full Completion	Recall
Unilateral Decision	Re-offence during CoSA	Re-offence post CoSA	
	CM Dropout		
Group Decision	Successful	Successful	
	Exclusion	Reintegration	
External			

# An Ideal CoSA Ending



# An Alternative CoSA Ending



# Alternative Endings in CoSA

## Drop out



CM wanted to 'go it alone'

## Exclusion



CM became abusive towards CoSA

## Recall



CM recalled due to breach of license conditions at AP

# The consequences of Success & Failure in Circles of Support and Accountability

## CoSA Success

- ▶ Reduced recidivism
- ▶ Community reintegration
- ▶ Improved wellbeing
- ▶ Employment opportunities
- ▶ Pro-social activities
- ▶ Reduced isolation

## CoSA Failure



# Why the interest in failure?

- ▶ Little is known about the consequences of failure
- ▶ CoSA has been criticised for being overly positive
- ▶ Some potential causes of failure:

Volunteer  
training

Core  
Member  
Recidivism

Non  
Therapeutic  
Relationship

Group  
Dynamics

Volunteer  
Selection

# End of Circles: A Mixed Methods Analysis

## Aims:

- ▶ Explore CoSA Endings
- ▶ Understand Failure
- ▶ Learn from Failure

## Methods:

- ▶ End of Circle Reports
  - ▶ Thematic Analysis of EOCR
  - ▶ Quantitative data

- Data collection is currently underway

# Preliminary Case Study Analysis of 'Failed' Circles

## Successful Completions:

- ▶ More Positive Outcomes



## Alternative Endings:

- ▶ Lack of trust / Suspicion



# Next Steps

Continue  
data  
collection

Progress with  
Analysis

Research  
dissemination

# References

- Bates, A., Williams, D., Wilson, C., & Wilson, R. J. (2013). Circles South East: the first 10 years 2002-2012. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 0306624X13485362.
- Clarke, M., Brown, S., & Vollm, B. (2015). Circles of Support and Accountability for Sex Offenders: A Systematic Review of Outcomes. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 1-33.
- Elliott, I, A. (2014, June 6). CoSA: An Inconvenient Truth [Web blog post]. Retrieved from <https://nextgenforensic.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/cosa-an-inconvenient-truth/>
- Fox, K. J. (2015). Contextualizing the policy and pragmatics of reintegrating sex offenders. *Sexual abuse: a journal of research and treatment*, 1079063215574711.
- Hanson, R. K., Gordon, A., Harris, A. J., Marques, J. K., Murphy, W., Quinsey, V. L and Seto, M. C. (2002) First report of the collaborative outcome data project on the effectiveness of psychological treatment for sex offenders, *Sexual Abuse: A journal of research and treatment*, 14(2), 169-194.
- Harper, C. A., & Hogue, T. E. (2015). The emotional representation of sexual crime in the national British press. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 34(1), 3-24. doi:[10.1177/0261927X14544474](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X14544474)
- Höing, M., Vogelvang, B and Bogaerts, S. (2015) "I Am a Different Man Now"—Sex Offenders in Circles of Support and Accountability A Prospective Study, *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 0306624X15612431.
- Larochelle, S., Diguier, L., Laverdière, O and Greenman, P. S (2011) Predictors of psychological treatment noncompletion among sexual offenders, *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31:4, 554-562
- Marshall, W. L., Marshall, L. E., & Ware, J. (2009) Cognitive distortions in sexual offenders: Should they all be treatment targets? *Sexual Abuse in Australia and New Zealand*, 2, 21-33.
- Romaine, R. E. S., Miner, M. H., Poulin, D., Dwyer, S. M., & Berg, D (2012). Predicting reoffense for community-based sexual offenders: An analysis of 30 years of data. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 24 (5), 501-514
- Saunders, R., & Wilson, C. (2003). In 'The three key principles.' Quaker Peace and Social Witness (2003). *Circles of Support and Accountability in the Thame Valley: Interim report 2003*. London: Quaker Peace and Social Witness.



Thank you for listening

Questions?

Michelle.Dwerryhouse2016@my.ntu.ac.uk

@YasMichelle

Belinda.Winder@ntu.ac.uk

Helen.Elliott@ntu.ac.uk