

# **Generating Social Capital through CoSA: the Vermont Experience**

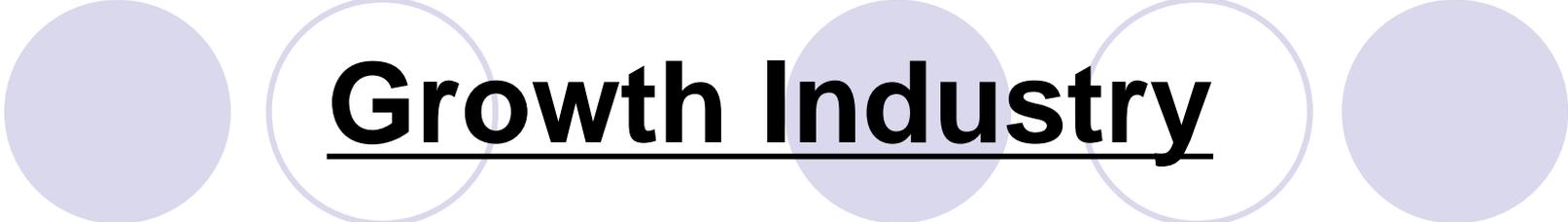
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**Vermont Department of Corrections**

**International Forum on Sex Offender Community-  
Based Management, Reentry, and Reintegration**

**UMass Lowell**

**April 12, 2016**



# Growth Industry

- 1980s & 1990s = Dramatic rise in VT Corrections population

Crime rate steady, but:

- Demand for incarceration goes ↑
- Sentencing threshold goes ↓  
Sentence lengths go ↑
- Parole Board releases go ↓

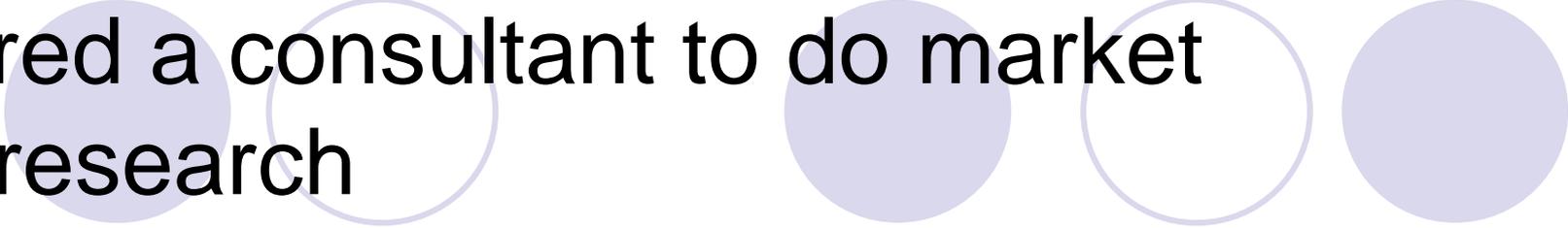
# Public Problem, Private Sector Approach

Our products are public safety services:

- Prison
- Probation
- Usual approach is to test new products through grant money and evaluate
- Overcrowding crisis did not afford us this luxury



*"It's interesting—with each conviction I learn a little more about myself."*

- 
- Hired a consultant to do market research
  - Initial round of focus groups followed by in-depth phone interviews with a statistically representative sample of over 400 Vermonters
  - Favorability rate of 37%
  - If Corrections was a private business (imagine that!) it would have gone bankrupt

# From offenders, the public wanted:

- Full acceptance of responsibility for the crime
  - *The actual crime, not just the plea bargained count.*
- Acknowledgement of Guilt
  - *The offender has to talk about his/her part in the behavior and the damage it has caused.*
- Full Restitution
  - *This means restitution with interest. To the extent possible, the victim should not just be repaid, but restored.*

- A Commitment to Never Repeat

- *The public wanted to be convinced by the offender— not a lawyer— that the s/he will not reoffend, and makes a promise.*

- Some Good to Come From It

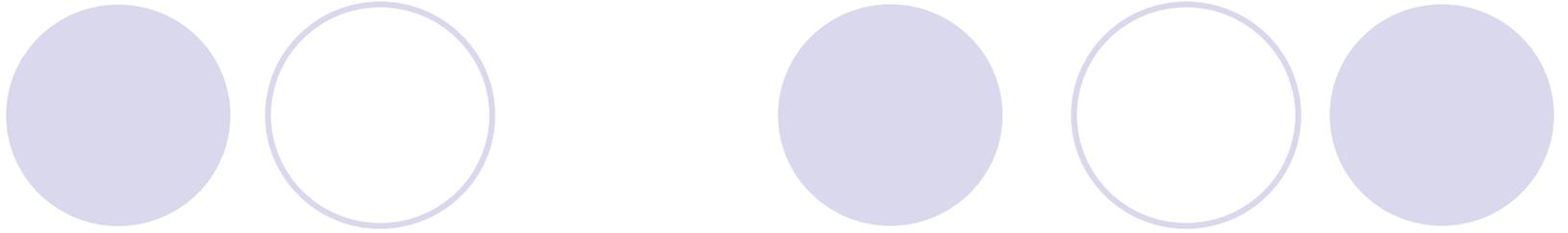
- *The public wanted the process to be positive— one that added value, not simply one that adds cost.*

To the extent that these things occurred, the public did not express a need for punishment.

# From Corrections, the Public Wanted:

- Safety from Violent Offenders
- Accountability for the offense
- Repair of the Damage
- Education and Treatment
- More Involvement in Justice

➤ *This was the strongest and most unanticipated response. The public did not want token involvement, they wanted to make decisions about individual cases. They felt that non-violent offenders can be handled in the community if they are empowered to do it. Moreover, they understood at a basic level that the result of the current situation was that non-serious offenders were largely left to fend for themselves. They thought they could do a better job than the system does.*

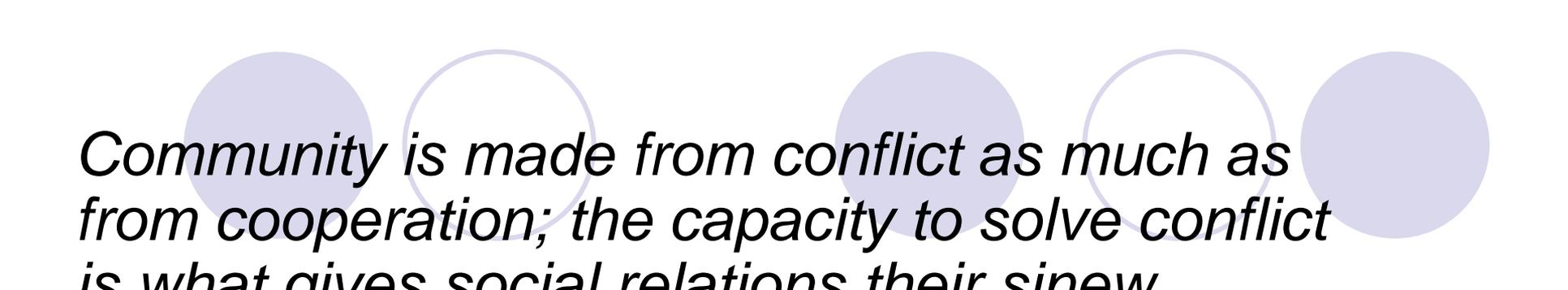


*The first thing to understand is that the public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves. No amount of police can enforce Civilization where the normal causal enforcement of it has broken down.*

***The Death and Life of Great American Cities***, Jane Jacobs  
(1961)



*"Well, I, for one, am grateful for the beefed-up police presence."*

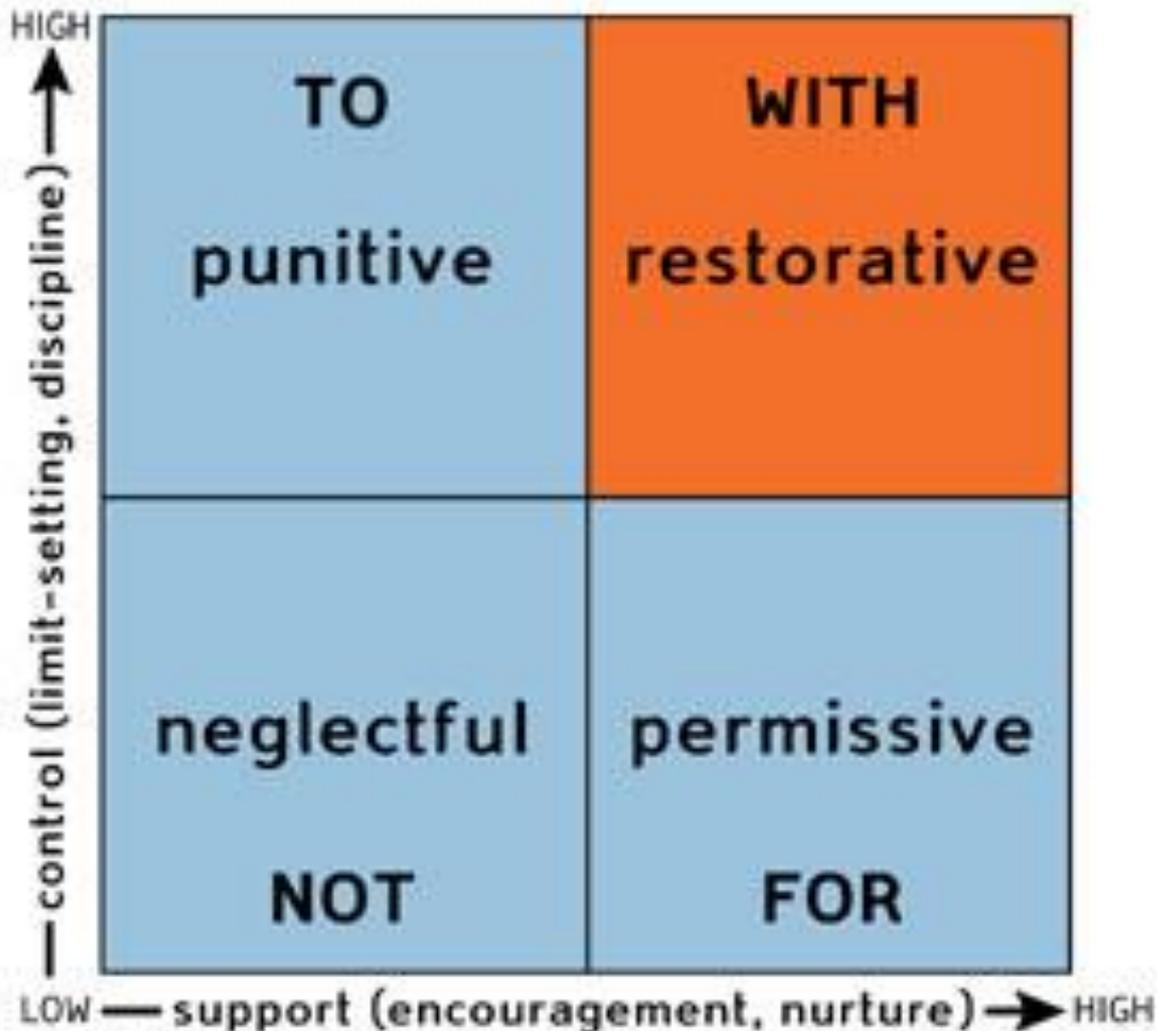


*Community is made from conflict as much as from cooperation; the capacity to solve conflict is what gives social relations their sinew. Professionalizing justice steals the conflicts, robbing the community of its ability to face trouble and restore peace. Communities lose their confidence, their capacity, and, finally, their inclination to preserve their own order. They instead become consumers of police and court services with the consequence that they largely cease to be communities.*

Nils Christie (1977). Conflicts as Property. *British Journal of Criminology*.

# Social Control Window

(Wachtel, 1997, 2000; Wachtel & McCold, 2000)



# Community Justice Timeline

- 1994: VT DOC Pilots Reparative Probation
  - *Volunteers trained to serve on Reparative Boards and hear misdemeanor cases.*
  - *Process goals:*
    - 1) *Understand the Impact of the Offense*
    - 2) *Make Amends to Victim*
    - 3) *Make Amends to Community*
    - 4) *Learn Ways to Avoid Reoffense*
- 1997: VT DOC Funds Community Justice Centers (CJC) through statewide request for proposals process

- *Municipally-based centers for citizen involvement in addressing the conflict stemming from crime.*
- *Reparative Boards coordinated by CJsCs*
- *Additional sites and services added over time*
- *Currently 20+ Centers (municipal or non-profit) comprising a statewide, community-based service delivery system providing a full range of restorative justice practices.*
- *Community Justice Network of Vermont:*
  - [www.cjnvvt.org](http://www.cjnvvt.org)

- **2000: Vermont State Legislature makes Restorative Justice state policy.**

*28 V.S.A. § 2a. Restorative justice*

➤ *It is the policy of this state that principles of restorative justice be included in shaping how the criminal justice system responds to persons charged with or convicted of criminal offenses. The policy goal is a community response to a person's wrongdoing at its earliest onset, and a type and intensity of sanction tailored to each instance of wrongdoing.*

- 2003: VT DOC is awarded federal (SVORI) funds for restorative reentry programs at CJCJs
  - *CJCJs plan and develop their own program models, including mentoring, reentry panels (similar to Rep Boards), and **Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)** for high risk/high need offenders as an enhancement to supervision.*
- 2005: CoSA is adapted and implemented in after several CJCJs received training from Canadian CoSA pioneers.
- 2007: Empirical study of Reparative Probation shows 23% reduction in recidivism: <http://doc.vermont.gov/about/reports/reparative-v-probation/view>

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- 2010: VT DOC receives Second Chance Act
    - *Funds sub-granted to CJCJs for the development of 24 CoSAs.*
  - 2012: Second Chance Act grant refunded for another 24 CoSAs
  - 2013: Awarded new SCA grant to serve include CoSA and 4 additional restorative reintegration services at CJCJs
  - 2016: Over 200 CoSAs developed.

Reentry is not enough. Individuals returning to communities from incarceration need to actually *reintegrate*; to become meaningful, interdependent threads in the socio-economic fabric of civic life. Even the best coordinated and most skillfully delivered Correctional reentry services almost universally fail to facilitate this foundational, yet elusive, restoration process. The common result of this failure is recidivism. And while it may be attributed to any number of specific sub-factors such as housing or employment, one thing is undeniable: the reoffending individual does not place the community's needs above his own when making behavior choices. If we truly aspire to reintegrate offenders and to have no more victims, then the community itself-- through its non-professional citizens-- must be a critically involved partner. The Department of Corrections must reimagine itself as the Department of *Connections*. Anything short of this will simply never produce the individual-level transformation and systemic public safety results we all seek.

-Vermont Department of Corrections Second Chance Act Program Narrative

# Circles of Support & Accountability (CoSA) in Vermont

- A Vermont CoSA is a group of 3-5 trained and professionally supervised volunteers who enter into structured, voluntary and mutual relationship with an individual reentering the community after incarceration.
- The ultimate goal of CoSA is no more victims.
- The offender is known as the Core Member

- Core Members have done considerable harm and are considered high risk/need, but have not necessarily committed sexual offenses.
- Core Members are all under DOC supervision.
- CoSAs are developed and (try to) convene prior to the Core Member's release, and meet weekly for at least one year, although it is common for them to last longer.
- There are often additional meetings/conversations between individual team members and the core member

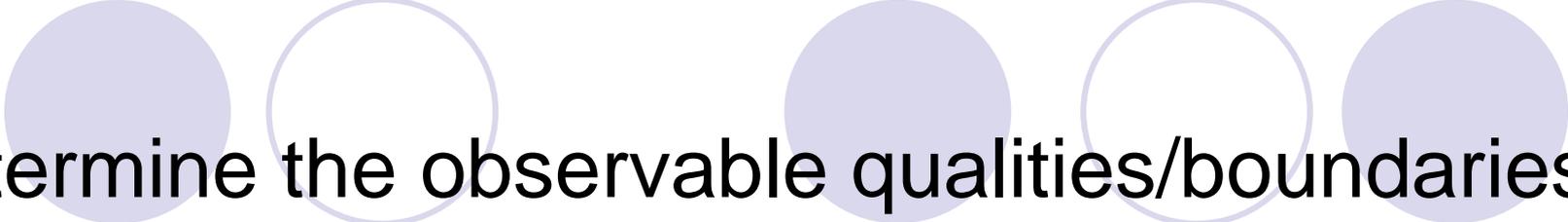
- CoSAs are developed and operated by local Community Justice Centers (CJCs) as an optional enhancement to Corrections supervision.
- VT Dept. of Corrections provides the financial resources and practice standards through centrally-managed grants and the referrals through local Probation & Parole offices.
- CJC-based CoSA Coordinator regularly communicates with DOC Probation/Parole Officer
- Regularly scheduled Case Conferences include CoSA, Probation Officer, family, service/treatment providers.

- CJsCs recruit, train and supervise citizen volunteers to legitimize the ***social contract*** and ensure compliance with conditions of release (a.k.a. ***legal contract***).
- Voluntary basis for all parties leverages informal authority in an otherwise formal control system.
- An intentional micro-community to support self-efficacy.
- CoSA generates social capital in order to increase Core Member investment in the community and promote desistance.

# SOME KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- For each program site, establish a point person within the gatekeeper organization (DOC) who understands, values and will operationally support CoSA **before** you over invest time/energy/money in community-based capacity building.
- Continually align program development process, materials, and all aspects of operations with the primary public safety goal of CoSA: **No More Victims.**

- Establish clear parameters between the role of CoSA and the responsibilities of the supervising agency in an MOU.
- Troubleshoot barriers to Core Member's release (i.e. housing) in order to maximize effectiveness and program efficacy.
- Staff CoSA meetings with a Coordinator, and establish regular communication between CoSA Coordinator and Probation Officer.

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- Determine the observable qualities/boundaries you seek in potential volunteers, and strategize about how you will find such people who are willing to make this significant commitment with the Core Member population.
  - Consider how you intend to structure the resourcing of CoSA, and how you can clearly demonstrate its success to stakeholders in order to justify continued (and increased) support.

# Vermont CoSA Program Evaluation

- 2013: NIJ multi-site CoSA Evaluability Study = greatest program fidelity (Dr. Ian Elliot, Penn State)
- 2010-2013: Qualitative evaluation by Dr. Kathryn Fox, UVM:  
<http://doc.vermont.gov/about/reports/circles-of-support-accountability-summary/view>
- 2014-present: Quantitative outcome study by Dr. Kathryn Fox, Dr. Robin Wilson & Megan Kurmin  
Data/analysis = preliminary & ongoing

# Qualitative evaluation (Dr. Kathryn Fox, UVM)

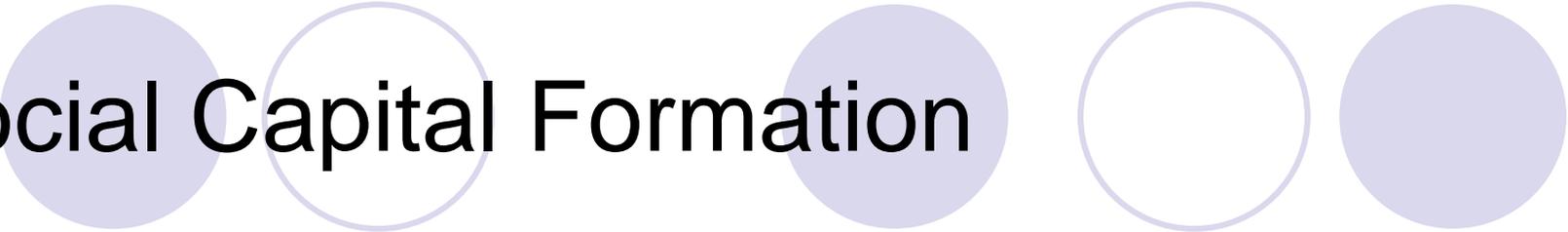
## ❖ Interviewed:

- ❖ 21 core members
- ❖ 59 volunteers
- ❖ 9 reentry coordinators

## ❖ Key findings:

- ❖ Deeper volunteer investment=better
- ❖ Helps with deinstitutionalization
- ❖ Team approach key
  - ❖ Volunteers too
- ❖ Long on support

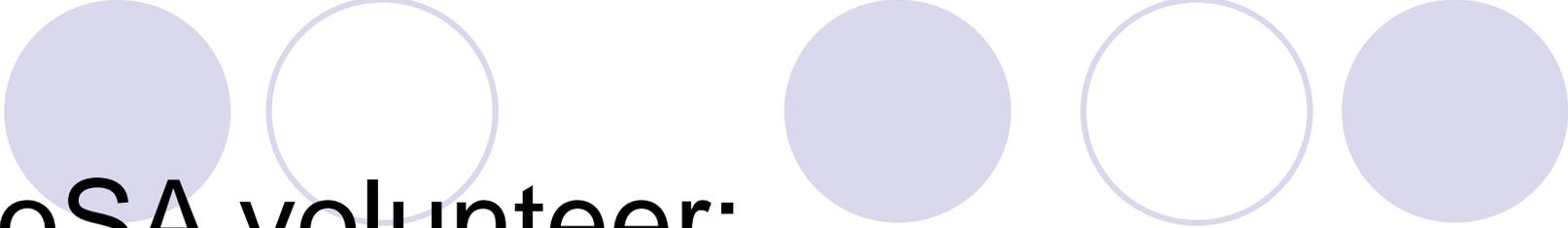
**REINTEGRATION PROMOTES DESISTANCE  
FROM CRIME**



# Social Capital Formation

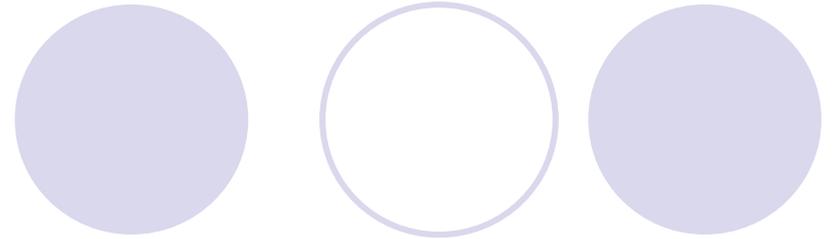
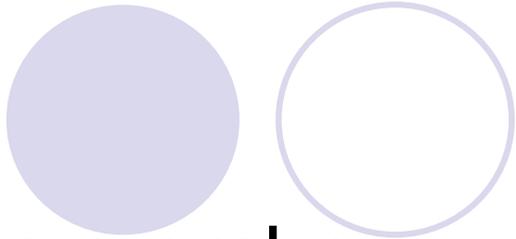
Core member:

*“I think they helped guide me on the path that **I already knew that I wanted to take...** I walked in and it was just like ordinary people. They’re normal, everyday people. I feel I have connections that I didn’t have before.”*



CoSA volunteer:

*“[CoSA] are people who are going to not see him as who he was, but who are willing to help him **manifest his best self**, and are going to be dedicated to it and who are not going to abandon him...”*

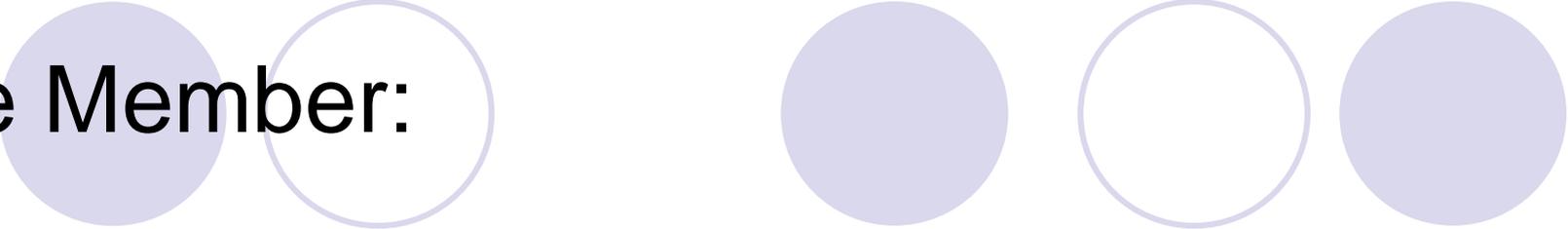


Core member:

*“I can’t stress the fact that they’re not getting paid for this. You know what I’m saying? So they’re just, out of the kindness of their heart. **They didn’t know who I was.** And now even when I’m done with this, I’ve got their phone numbers and I can call them up any time, even if it’s just to talk – at 10 o’clock at night if I’m having a rough time.”*

CoSA volunteer:

*“...ultimately they’re going to be coming out; they’re going to become members of our community...do we want to try and break that cycle someplace and turn them into constructive, tax-paying members of society and **people that we’d be proud to have for neighbors?**”*



Core Member:

*“Yeah, I’m changed and I feel better about myself. I feel more confident that I can do what I need to do and achieve...It’s a lot because of the CoSA because before, I was like ‘I’m just a nobody, nobody really cares about me.’ You know, ‘forget it.’ ...but now I actually can truly see there’s people out there that do care for me and they care for me for who I am.”*

# Quantitative Analysis

(Fox, Wilson & Kurmin)

- Analyzed 139 core members
  - 1-to-1 matched sample for all 139 core members
  - Identical LSI score (average=30)
  - Similar crime type
    - Sexual=any sex crimes
    - Violent=any violent crime (no sex offenses)
    - General=no violent or sexual crimes
  - Similar age = 30 \*
  - Similar release date

\* *average difference in age between matched subjects was 2.14 years*

Variable	CoSA N=139	Comparison N=139
Male/Female	118/21	118/21
Age (SD) $\Delta$ (SD) = 2.14 (3.94)	30.46 (8.91)	30.06 (8.48)
Education (SD)	11.68 (2.03) N=135	11.38 (2.42) N=134
LSI-R (SD)	30.16 (7.32)	30.12 (7.35)
Static-99R (SD)	3.21 (2.0) N=34	3.09 (1.71) N=32
Offense Type	Sex = 34 Violent = 48 General = 107	Sex = 34 Violent = 48 General = 107

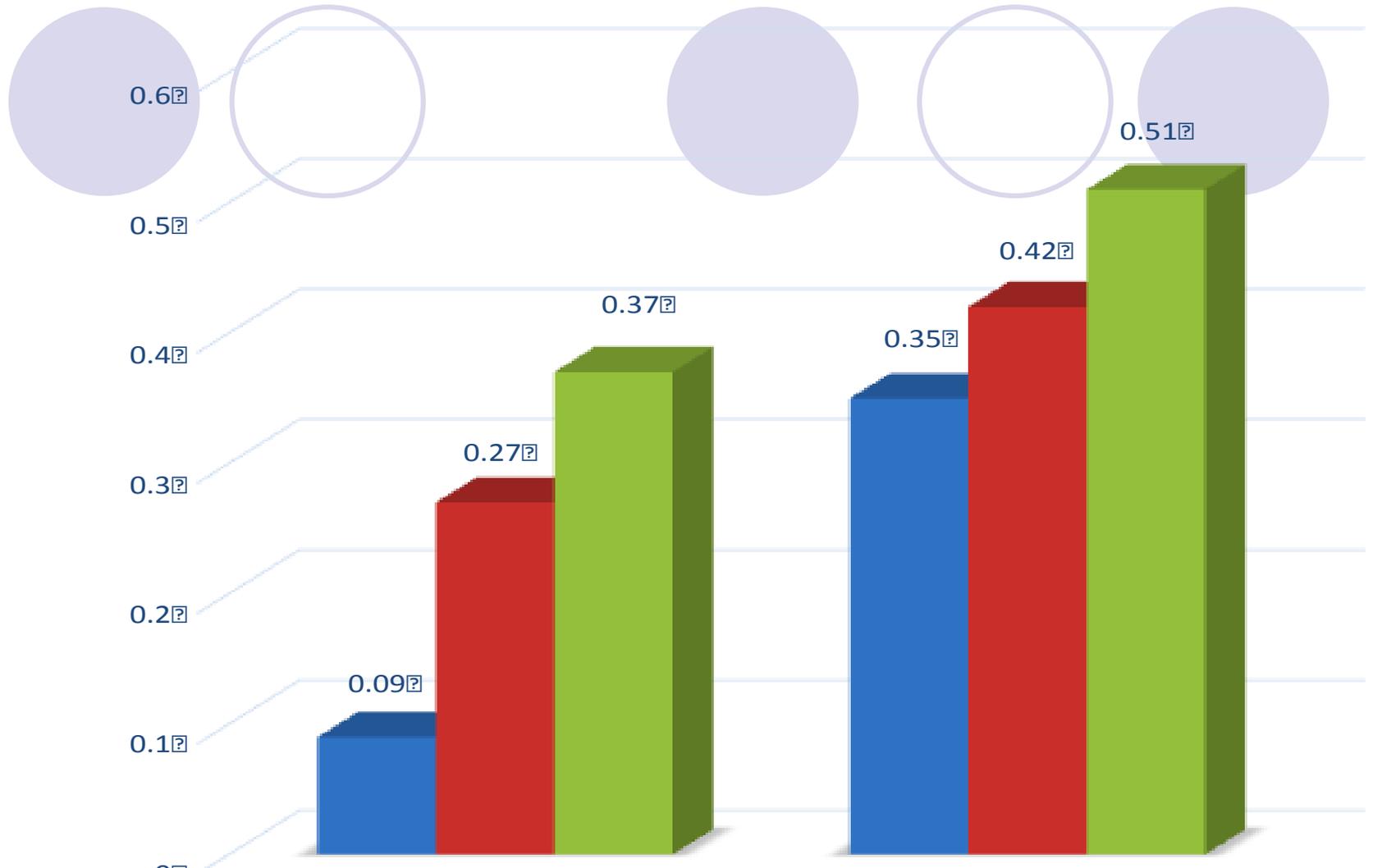
N=278 (139 each group)	CoSA	No CoSA
% Reconvicted**	.27	.44
% Misdemeanors‡ (.107)	.23	.32
% Felonies***	.09	.27
Mean # (SD) of reconvictions**	.65 (1.59)	1.46 (2.64)
Mean # (SD) of felony reconvictions**	.14 (.55)	.45 (1.04)

# CoSA and matched sample (N=278)

Type of Original Crime	% of those reconvicted	% of those reconvicted for felonies
Sexual N=68	.25	.12
Violent N=96	.35	.13
General N=114	.41	.26

		CoSA Group	Control Group	Reduction
Reconvictions	Sexual Offenders	.09	.35	74%
	Violent Offenders	.27	.42	36%
	General Offenders	.37	.51	27%
Felony Reconvictions	Sexual Offenders	.03	.22	86%
	Violent Offenders	.04	.21	81%
	General Offenders	.16	.37	57%

Recidivism



Sexual Offenders	0.09	0.35
Violent Offenders	0.27	0.42
General Offenders	0.37	0.51

Comparing Groups

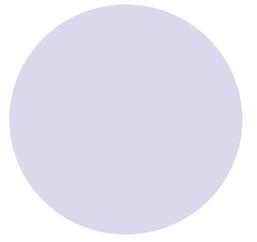
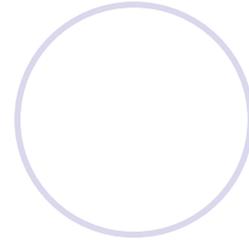
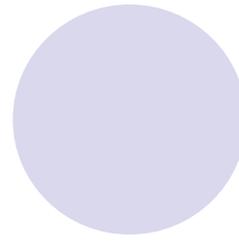
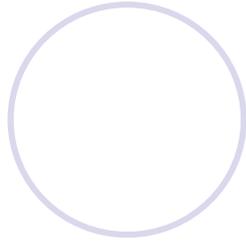
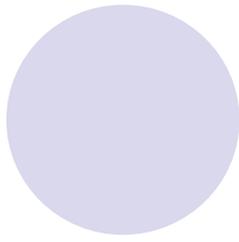
Sexual Offenders Violent Offenders General Offenders



WELCOME BACK  
RECIDIVISTS!

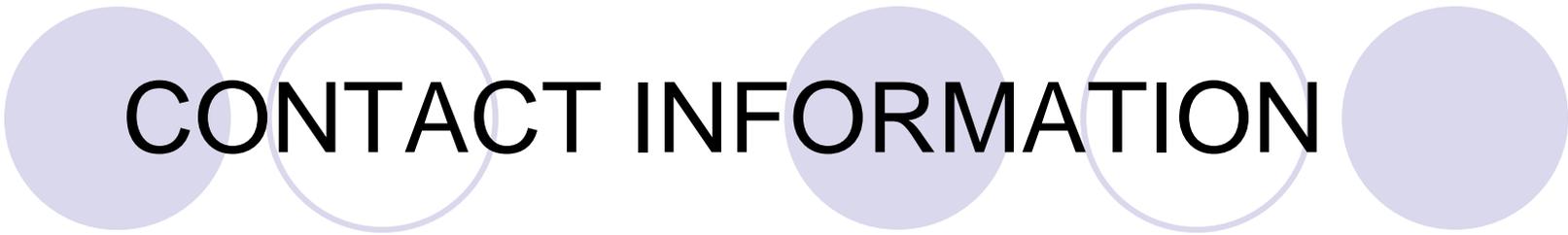


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“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

- Eleanor Roosevelt



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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