

## Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions

MnCoSA stands for Minnesota Circles of Support and Accountability. This pilot program enhances public safety by providing support to those convicted of sex offenses who have served their court-ordered prison term and are released to the community. This FAQ sheet addresses commonly-asked questions by prospective MnCoSA volunteers.



### *Whom does MnCoSA support?*

Minnesota assigns a risk level to individuals who are incarcerated for certain offenses. Level 1, 2, or 3 is assigned using an actuarial tool, much like actuarial tools used in the insurance industry. Levels provide an estimate of risk, not a guarantee. MnCoSA supports level 2 offenders (moderate risk to the community). Offender participants are known as Core Members.

### *Do all offenders convicted of a sexual offense re-offend?*

No, they do not. In fact, sex offender recidivism in Minnesota is declining. Current research by the Minnesota Department of Corrections ([www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/documents/05-08CommunityNotificationResearchRpt.pdf](http://www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/documents/05-08CommunityNotificationResearchRpt.pdf)) indicates the reconviction rates for a sexual offense within three years of release from incarceration for a sex offense are:

Level 1	3.9%
Level 2	6.0%
Level 3	3.2%

### *How are Core Members selected to be part of MnCoSA?*

- MnCoSA is a research-based, pilot project operating in Hennepin, Ramsey, and Olmsted Counties
- Core Members are randomly selected, based on eligibility criteria and interest
- Treatment is not a condition for participation
- Core Members must be scheduled for release within 2-6 months
- Participation is voluntary and not a condition of community supervision

### *Are volunteers safe?*

Volunteer and community safety is the **utmost priority** of MnCoSA. Volunteer training will address techniques, practices and appropriate boundaries designed to enhance volunteer safety within the Circle as well as in their personal lives.

### *How much will the Core Member know about volunteers?*

Core Members will know what volunteers – known as Circle Members – choose to share based on their training and comfort level. Volunteers may decide to share additional information as the Circle progresses.

### *Where are Circle meetings held?*

The Circle as a whole will decide when and where to meet based on geography (Hennepin, Ramsey or Olmsted County), availability of meeting space, and ability for the Core Member to meet in the location chosen. MnCoSA staff assist with determining meeting locations.

### ***When do Circle Members meet the Core Member?***

Upon completion of training, volunteers will meet the Core Member in prison. The Circle will meet with the Core Member 4-6 times prior to release. During this Circle-building process, a covenant will be developed that establishes guidelines to be followed by everyone after the Core Member is released.

### ***What is training like?***

Training consists of three content enriched sessions of classroom training that cover many topics including the criminal justice system, boundaries, group dynamics, and victim impact. Each session varies in the amount of interaction/experiential learning practices and lecture. Many sessions include topic speakers, including individuals convicted of sexual offenses and abuse survivors. The remaining 15 hours cover the actual Circle at work in the community and specific tasks such as covenant writing as the Core Member is brought into the Circle. Advanced training is available upon request by the Circle or as assessed by MnCoSA staff.

### ***Who are the other Circle Members?***

Circle Members range in age, professions and interests. Some volunteers know each other (faith communities, neighborhood organizations and professional affiliations); others have never met. The application process includes a criminal background check, interview and training. This process helps the volunteer and staff make a decision about the suitability of MnCoSA participation.

### ***What if a training session is missed?***

Training is a key element to Circle success, and applicants are asked to commit to attending all sessions. Applicants who cannot attend a session are asked to inform MnCoSA staff as soon as possible to schedule a make-up session or to participate in the next training cycle.

### ***Who supports the Circle?***

The Circle is supported by an Outer Circle comprised of staff and a variety of professionals. These may include community supervision agents, law enforcement, mental health professionals, health care providers and others depending on the needs of the Core Member and the Circle.



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