Facing our Messy Lives

A New Documentary About Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

In this documentary, three former sexual offenders, CoSA Core Members (clients), relate their journey of being broken and stuck in their offending cycle, being incarcerated and released into an often hostile community, and ultimately developing a meaningful life and committing to never harming again. CoSA volunteers also share how the program works and the director of a victims' support group explains why she believes CoSA should be supported by everyone. Sexual offending causes long-lasting trauma to victims and negatively impacts family members, friends and the whole community. Sexual abuse is a societal problem that must be stopped; however, it can't be managed by the criminal justice system alone (police, correctional officials, the courts) - the community can play a major role in being part of the solution.

CoSA is the only community-based organization that works solely with people who have sexually harmed others. It has been proven to reduce the rate of reoffence by 88% compared to those without the support of CoSA. The program engages citizens in helping former offenders develop the skills to turn their lives around and gain insight to stop the cycle of harm.

CoSA began in Hamilton in 1994, and because of its success, it now operates in over 20 cities in Canada and many countries worldwide. We are proud to call CoSA a Canadian invention! However, despite its effectiveness in reducing reoffending, CoSA is at risk of closing due to the lack of sustainable funding. The goal of this documentary is to raise awareness – that stopping, or at least reducing, sexual offences *is* possible and to demonstrate to potential funders that investing in CoSA is wise.

The film, which runs approximately 53 minutes, will be followed by a Q&A with a panel of topic experts, including:

- Geris Serran, Psychologist, a former facilitator of a sex offender treatment program at a correctional institution
- Heidi Illingworth, Executive Director of Ottawa Victim Services
- Kayla Gaw, The Royal Ottawa’s Sexual Behaviours Clinic Coordinator and Head of the Phallometrics Lab
- Matt, a Former CoSA Core Member
- Geoff Bowie, Producer of *Facing Our Messy Lives*
- Kathleen Weedmark, CoSA Ottawa Director