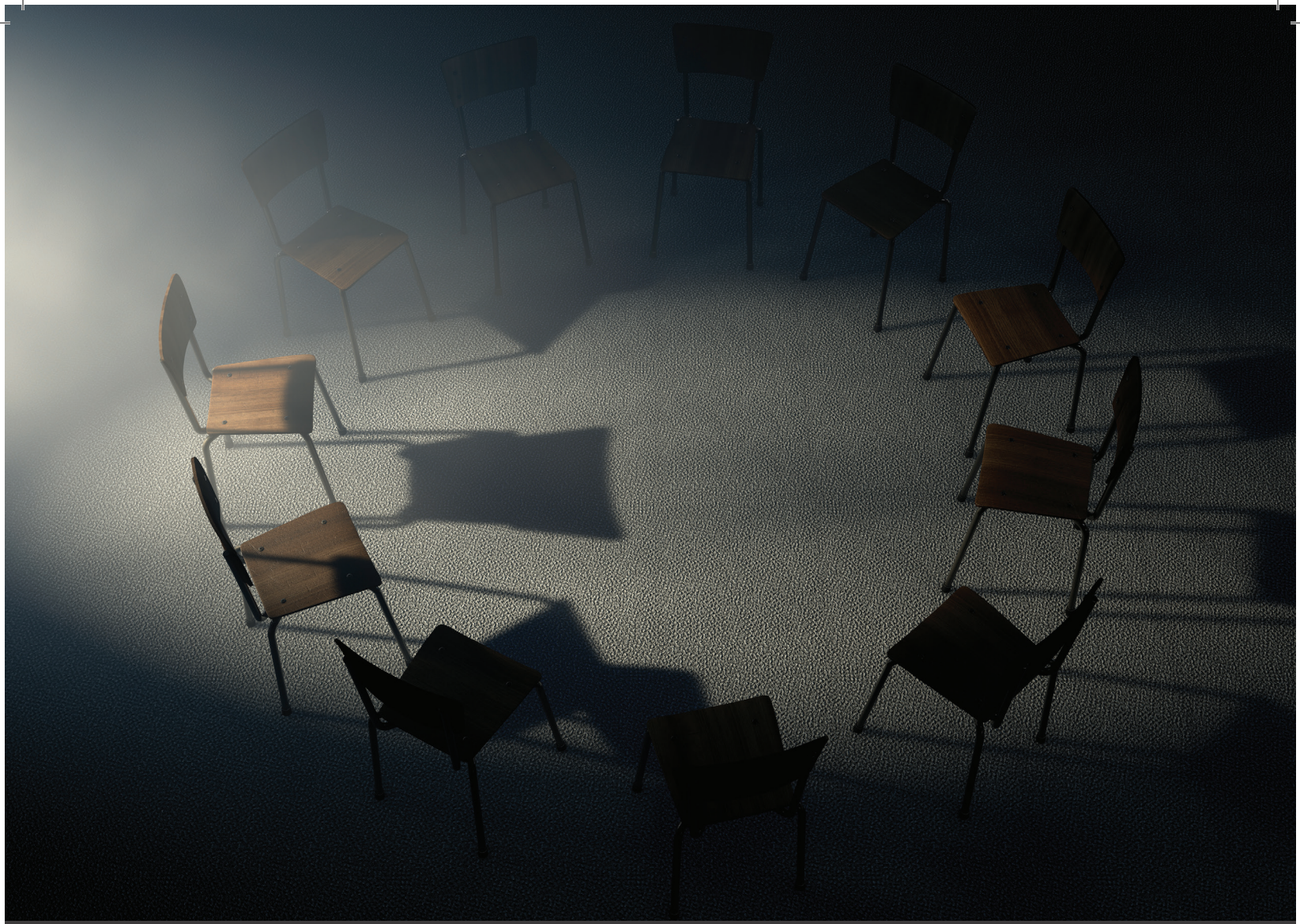
ASSISTED DESISTANCE

An Evaluation of PACE Prevention Services for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour

PACE

Contents



> **You will either step forward into growth or you will step back into safety.**
>
> Abraham Maslow

1. Introduction

PACE is a community-based, not for profit organisation that provides a wide range of services for people who have various convictions, including convictions for harmful sexual behaviour.

This report is a summary of an evaluation of the three PACE programmes that are focused on the reintegration and the rehabilitation of people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. The focus of all three programmes is on the prevention of further harm by the programme participants.

This research was undertaken by Clare Cresswell in fulfilment of a PhD in philosophy at the UCD Sutherland School of Law, under the supervision of Dr Deirdre Healy. This summary report is based solely on this research . All page numbers referenced refer to the original PhD study. The PhD study refers to the participants as "perpetrators of sexual harm". PACE refers to participants as people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour.

This research focuses on a highly sensitive topic for the general public as well as for policy makers and practitioners, namely the treatment and rehabilitation of people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. The sensitivity of this topic relates to the profound personal harm and social impact of sexual offences. In Ireland, most of those convicted of sexual harm go back to the community after prison, with less than 50% having had treatment in custody. Understanding the ways in which reoffending can be reduced and/or prevented is therefore in the best interest of individuals and communities.

Traditionally, the dominant approach taken to the rehabilitation of people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour has been to reduce recidivism through a risk based model. In this approach responsibility for change lies entirely with the offender who is required to modify his/her behaviour, and is supervised in this to some degree.

The PACE model goes beyond this focus, considering in addition to risk, the protective factors that reduce reoffending. These include the social reintegration and personal development of the individuals convicted of harmful sexual behaviour. This whole person orientation is seen as crucial to achieving this desistance from harm. To do this PACE offers a coordinated community based response that works with the different levels of the rehabilitation process – social, personal and moral. The three programmes are delivered through a strengths based approach which draws attention to the capability of the participants to change their identity and harmful behaviours – enabling them to become full and contributing community members and to prevent further harm.

This approach is known in literature as assisted desistance. A framework that, even though it has been well developed and informed on the theoretical side, still lacks empirical research for its efficacy, especially in relation to people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. It is within this context that the research into the PACE Prevention programmes, can contribute to the general body of knowledge on assisted desistance, as well as the policy framework within which it operates. This research explores the challenges and successes experienced by the participants in their engagement with the PACE programmes and outlines the impact of the programmes.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the core findings of this significant study – making these accessible to a broad audience. The report briefly outlines the theoretical framework within which the PACE programmes operate, the methodology used in the research, the research findings and the recommendations deriving from these. A particular focus is given to the experience of the participants within the three programmes in order to capture the effect that engagement with PACE has had in their personal journeys towards desistance.

The PhD can be accessed in its entirety through PACE.

2. Why is Assisted Desistance Different?

Assisted desistance is an approach that explores how criminal justice controls and other social and individuals factors can impact on desistance. Desistance is conceived here as a process in which offenders are enabled to create a crime free and prosocial identity. Key to assisted desistance is the idea that interventions need to extend well beyond developing individuals skills and awareness of the need to avoid reoffending. Programmes also need to include supports for ex-offenders to acquire a sense of control over their life, as well as developing a sense of purpose and meaning.

This conception implies that socio structural factors need to be considered in treatment. The creation of a pro-social identity relies not only on a person's capability to change but also in the social context in which they are immersed. In other words, structural factors can hinder the ability to form the new identity and frustrate the desistance process, which can happen, for instance, when too difficult to manage adverse circumstances or institutional uncertainty cause a person to return to old familiar habits (King, 2013).

Assisted desistance interventions consider both the individual and the social contexts of offenders. More importantly, these are viewed from a strengths based approach (McNeill, 2006; McAlinden, 2016), in which the individual is seen as someone that has the potential to become a good citizen, and use their own resources to overcome challenges in the desistance process (McNeill, 2006, Maruna and LeBel, 2003; 2010) as opposed to being a 'burden for society'. Practitioners working from an assisted desistance approach need then to be able to help build social capital "by acting as a link to resources and developing human capital through treatment".

TABLE 1: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RISK AND ASSISTED DESISTANCE APPROACHES

RISK BASED APPROACH	STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH
• Emphasis on the programme or intervention.	• Emphasis on the individuals life / Whole of life approach
• The person is perceived as a 'burden to society'. Their understanding comes from what they did in the past.	• The person is perceived as someone capable of becoming a good citizen. Their understanding comes from what they can do in the future.
• Focuses on achieving behavioural changes at the individual level (altering or improving cognitive deficits in the person to stop reoffending).	• Focuses on achieving social reintegration and personal development to not only avoid reoffending but move forward in the desistance process.
• Aims to reduce reoffending and protect the community, recidivism rates are the main indicator.	• Aims to reduce reoffending and improve social, personal and moral factors playing a role in the desistance process. Main indicators are flexible.
• It works ON the individual.	• It works WITH the individual collaboratively defining tasks, through the question: "How can each individual be best supported to achieve desistance"
• Accountability is mainly defined as responsibility for the past.	• Accountability is defined as responsibility for the past and for the future.

This framework does not replace the risk based approach. More accurately, it broadens the understanding of desistance and incorporates additional programme focuses, with risk assessment and monitoring still being priorities.

Working from an assisted desistance framework also implies considering wider measures of success when evaluating programmes.

"In addition to measuring the absence of criminal behaviour, it is important to evaluate rehabilitative interventions with regard to other features of the desistance process which requires consideration of a complex range of non-programme factors (McNeill, 2012a; Mc Neill et al., 2012)" (p.91). This can include changes in personal development, social connection, well-being and other factors that may contribute to the desistance process.

3. About PACE

PACE, founded in 1969, is the largest not-for-profit community based organisation working with people with criminal convictions. It's aim is to support the reintegration process of their services users and bring about positive change in their lives, and in doing so, prevent further harm in the community.

PACE works from an assisted desistance and strengths based approach and has a range of community based rehabilitative programmes that work together to develop personal, moral and social capabilities and skills in people with criminal convictions. Combined, these skills can help people move towards social integration and the formation of a crime free, prosocial identity.

PACE is supported by the Probation service, the CDETB and the Gardaí, among other agencies.

Three of the PACE rehabilitative programmes operate under the umbrella of the Prevention Services. These are the Foothold Floating Support Service, the Safer Lives treatment programme and the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) programme. These programmes have been specifically designed to work with adults with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour who are considered to be at medium/high/very high risk of reoffending sexually.

All of the Prevention Service participants are living in the community under the supervision of the probation service and are assigned a Garda Liaison Officer.

These three programmes were the subject of the evaluation study summarised here. The programmes can be viewed through the lens of the assisted desistance theoretical models and evidence based practices that have been implemented internationally.

All three programmes share the common goal of preventing further harm in the community, and represent a holistic response to rehabilitation that includes vigilance, accountability, treatment and support (See Table 2 on page 4).

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF THREE ASSISTED DESISTANCE INFORMED PROGRAMMES

PROGRAMME & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	KEY CHARACTERISTICS
FOOTHOLD Assisted desistance framework - Strengths based as well as risk-based orientated.	**What is it?** Foothold provides one to one intensive floating support to help participants to integrate safely into the community following their release from prison. **How does it work:** It works through one to one meetings with support workers, who offer emotional support and help liaise with other agencies as needed. Workers can do home visits, provide phone support, and can also assign tasks inviting service users to gradually be exposed to social settings with the aim of building social skills in a safe manner.
SAFER LIVES Extensive range of therapeutic and psychological theories (CBT), sex offending models (Good Lives Model and RNR - Risk Need Responsivity Model) and trauma informed care approaches.	**What is it?** Safer lives is a community based and multi-disciplinary therapeutic group programme designed to provide treatment for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. It does this by building the "internal capacity and coping skills required for offenders to live safely in the community" (p.7). It lasts for approximately 12-14 months and it takes place in a multidisciplinary group setting with two facilitators assigned to every group. **How does it work:** It is based on the Good Lives Model and provides participants with a safe space to undertake the treatment programme. The process includes offence related tasks with the aim of deepening their understanding of their offending behaviour, the harm caused by it and the core beliefs and attitudes that underpin it - ultimately leading to an increased ability to recognise and challenge thinking, manage their emotions, and make choices.
COSA Evidence based practice, based on an international model. Based on restorative justice principles. Aligned both with the Risk Needs Responsivity (RNR) model and the Good Lives Model.	**What is it?** Circles of Support and Accountability is a community based initiative that brings together a group of 4 to 6 trained volunteers together with the Core member, (person with the conviction). The aim of the programme is to reduce social isolation and to increase agency by holding the core member accountable for choices they are making in the life currently and prevent further harm. **How does it work:** The group of trained volunteers meet weekly with the core member, offering advice and support, involving them in social activities and also encouraging the core member to take responsibility for their choices. It runs for a period of approximately 12 to 14 months. The person is held accountable for how they are living now and into the future. The social interaction that takes place with volunteers represents a gateway to the wider community - it works as a starting point to break down barriers that may inhibit community reintegration as well as increasing tolerance. Ordinary people get to know the person beyond the 'sex offender' identity that frequently mediates their interaction. This process is accompanied by an outer circle of professionals and a CoSA coordinator who mediates between the inner and the outer circle.

4. Methodology

The study used a mixed methodological approach that collected both quantitative and qualitative data for a period of two years. Different psychometric tools were used to measure changes in mental wellbeing, life satisfaction and other factors correlated with the risk of reoffending.

There were a number of interviews and survey questionnaires conducted with programme participants and stakeholders, and an analysis of individual case documents and files. This two-way approach allowed the researcher not only to evaluate whether change had happened but also to give voice to PACE participants on their experiences and their understanding of the programmes they were participating in.

The research target group were adults with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour, assessed by the Probation Service using actuarial tools, as being at medium or high/very high risk of reoffending sexually, that were participating in any of the three rehabilitative programs run by PACE:

- Foothold,
- Safer lives and
- CoSA.

Stakeholders involved in the study included CoSA volunteers, PACE staff, Probation Officers and members of An Garda Síochána.

5. What We Know
- A Summary of Literature

5.1 Assisted Desistance Practices are Under-Researched

There is a well-developed body of theoretical research on assisted desistance but research on the ways in which this can be applied to real settings is limited.

Empirical studies looking at how different combinations of desistance focused interventions work are not sufficient to define a clear route on how theory can be translated into practice. This research is even more limited for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. Furthermore, applying the general desistance theory to this group comes with complications because of key discrepancies between sexual offences and other offences, for instance, longer timeframes for re-offending (Farmer et al., 2015) or marked differences between the various crime specialisations in sexual offences (Lussier and Beauregard, 2014) highlighting that this is a heterogenous group with varied levels of needs and distinct desistance pathways.

Research has found a diversity of factors play a role in desistance, including social structures, cognitive factors and personal agency, but has not yet outlined how these factors work and in what combination to achieve desistance. Some key associations found in literature are outlined below:

Key risk factors for sexual reoffending:

low personal wellbeing, self-regulation deficits, poor cooperation with supervision, unemployment, shame, exclusion, lack of positive social support, isolation and loneliness, boredom, rejection and stigma.

Key protective factors in desistance process:

- "Personal agency and belief in a capability to exercise control over ones' life"
- "Availability of turning points, in particular, having attended sex offender treatment; and having developed a sense of being a part of a social group"
- Strong family bonds and close relationships
- "Identity, agency, self-worth, hope for the future and criminal thinking patterns are predictors of short and long term desistance"

5.2 Circles of Support and Accountability Work in other Countries

CoSA was first established in Canada in 1994. It has extended since then to several countries throughout the world including; the Netherlands, Belgium, Latvia, Bulgaria, Spain, France, and the UK. It has shown positive results in helping reducing recidivism (Wilson, Picheca and Prinzo, 2005; Wilson, Cortoni and McWhinnie, 2007; Bates, Saunders, Wilson 2007; Wilson, Cortoni and McWhinnie, 2009; Clarke, 2011, Bates et al., 2012; Hannem, 2013, Duwe, 2013; Bates et al., 2014; Banks, Milner and Hough, 2015), as well as enhancing reintegration, increasing social capital, improving community attitudes towards offenders. It has also been linked with increased emotional well-being, pro-social attitudes and behaviours, self-esteem, improved support networks and improved links with families (Bates, et al., 2010).

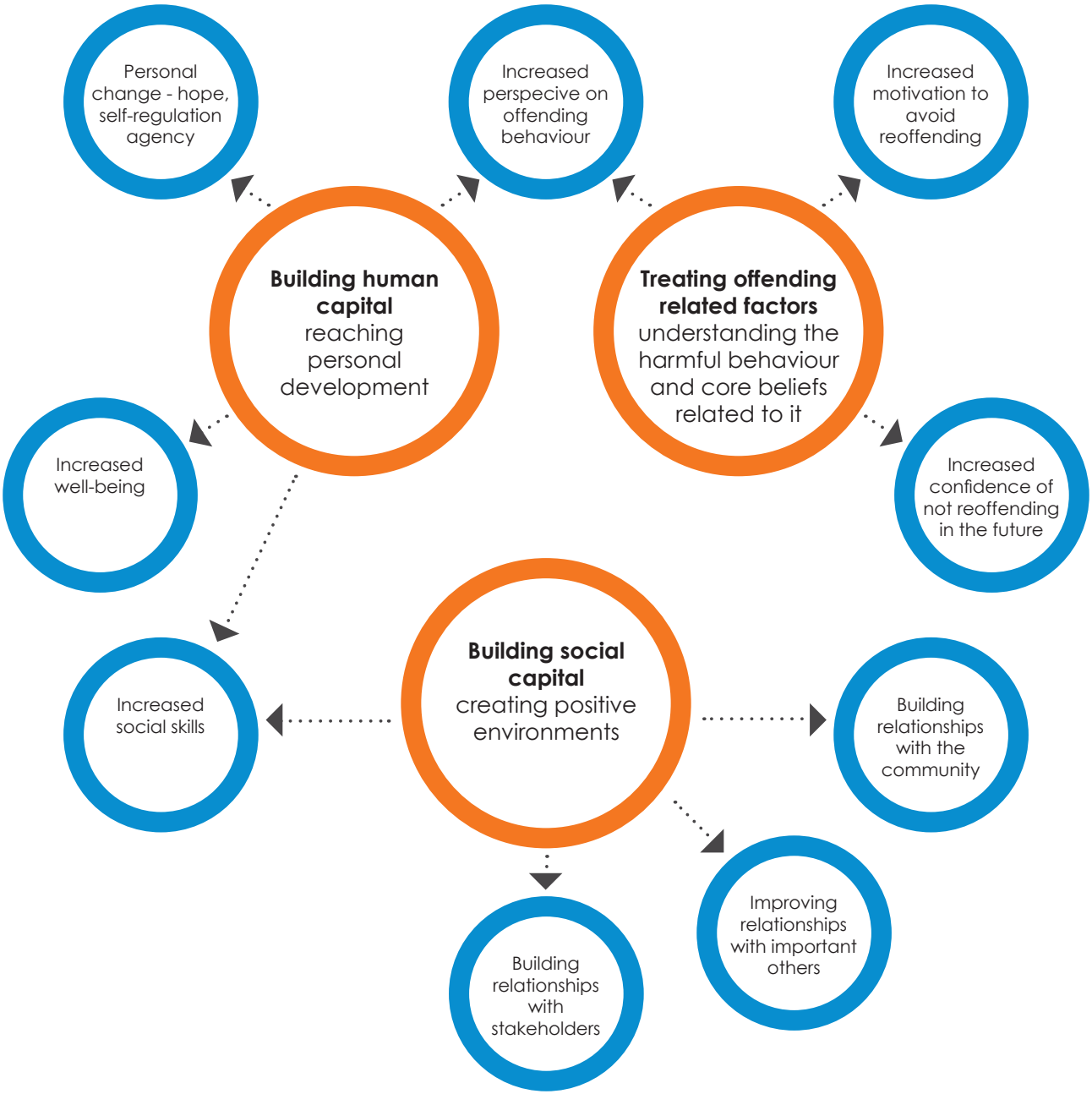
PACE introduced the Circles of Support and Accountability programme in Ireland in 2015. It was initially funded by the Probation Service for a two year pilot and continues to be implemented, with an enhanced risk monitoring component as compared to the original models.

5.3 Structural and Social Contexts of Offenders Matter

People with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour experience particular challenges relating to housing, employment and social and psychological effects of carrying the label of 'sex offender' (Schultz, 2014; McAlinden,2011). This is added to the fact that many of them face mental illness, disability (often undiagnosed) and addiction issues as well as social disadvantage . These challenges can significantly hinder efforts towards social reintegration and increase social isolation and alienation, both recognised risk factors for reoffending (Farmer, Beech & Ward, 2012). Structural factors found to be important are:

- **Social stigma and public alienation:** The difficulty of dropping the label of sexual offender and the social rejection attached to it can produce ongoing anxiety of being recognised, the desire to remain anonymous or be continuously cautious in social interactions. This issue can be enhanced by unwanted media attention.
- **Difficulty finding and maintaining accommodation and employment.** A large proportion of the participants in the study were moving frequently between various accommodations and experienced a fear of being evicted. The majority were also unemployed, some of these had been deterred from seeking employment because they were afraid of questions that would require a disclosure of their offence.
- **Limited support and loss of family and friend relationships.** This leads to social isolation and is particularly an issue for people with an intellectual disability for whom building relationships can be challenging. Social isolation is also enhanced when people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour need to settle in unfamiliar settings after leaving custody. This seems to be particularly the case in Ireland where individuals are either unable to return to their hometown or choose not to because of the damage caused by their crimes.
- **Strict social controls coming from the criminal justice context.** Restrictions around movement, employment or social interaction can, under certain circumstances, work as stressors for individuals.

It has been estimated a great proportion of PACE clients have a disability or addiction issues (p.4)


Personal change - hope, self-regulation agency
Increased perspecive on offending behaviour
Increased motivation to avoid reoffending
Building human capital reaching personal development
Treating offending related factors understanding the harmful behaviour and core beliefs related to it
Increased well-being
Increased confidence of not reoffending in the future
Increased social skills
Building social capital creating positive environments
Building relationships with the community
Building relationships with stakeholders
Improving relationships with important others

6 Findings

6.1 Overview

Incorporating both risk-based and strengths-based approaches into rehabilitative programmes implies that the measurement of impact needs to review success through a wider array of metrics than just recidivism. Recidivism rates are still crucial but are not enough, since they do not capture progress in desistance, a more complex process that includes but is not limited to reoffending. Measures of success can include factors such as social capital, human capital or motivation to desist. The measures used in this research to assess programme outcomes were: recidivism rates, participant motivation to avoid reoffending, attitudes towards perpetrators of sexual harm and achievement of a number of factors related to quality of life. These are summarised in the chart below:

Research conducted with PACE programme participants showed that within this group, there are individuals with high levels of needs who are in highly vulnerable conditions. For these individual's full reintegration in the community may not be a possibility even when personal change has taken place. The criteria to assess change in the desistance process needs to be able to assess change in the distance travelled by measuring soft outcomes on a small scale. As said by one PACE staff member, for some clients "simply being able to survive another day is an achievement in itself" (PACE staff member, p. 208). Understanding the subjective experiences of PACE clients was necessary in order to better understand the nuances on their journey towards desistance.

Participants from all three programmes were highly satisfied with the support received and reported having experienced positive or very positive personal and life changes since their involvement with the programmes, **with a vast majority of them (94.5%) attributing this to their engagement with PACE.**

This was the case as well for those who were initially resistant to taking part in the programmes as well those initially positively predisposed to the programme. PACE acted as 'hook for change', gradually shifting their perception and openness to change. The changes experienced by participants were described as feeling increased support, social connection, social skills and personal development. For the participants;

- Foothold was about support – and was considered generally to be a project that went beyond their expectations.
- Safer Lives was commonly considered to be a space that allowed participants to explore and understand how their lives had contributed to the offending behaviour and to work with their behaviours, emotions and feelings.
- CoSA was perceived by participants as providing a possibility to have a 'sense of normality and a feeling of acceptance'.

(p. 49, 79,128 & 248)

6.2 Overall Positive Change

All participants reported having experienced positive or very positive personal change (See Table 3) and gave credit to the PACE programmes on having helped in this journey. This was particularly the case for Foothold where "most participants attributed personal changes directly to the help an encouragement of the support worker" (p.260).

TABLE 3: EXPERIENCE OF PERSONAL CHANGE ACROSS ALL THREE PROGRAMMES

EXPERIENCE OF PERSONAL CHANGE

Ratings	Foothold	Safer Lives	CoSA	Total
Positive	50%	28.6%	60%	44.5%
Very positive	50%	71.4%	40%	55.5%

There were various ways in which this personal change was experienced. Participants spoke about: feeling more confident, learning to accept and like themselves more, having lower levels of anxiety, feeling calmer in dealing with life and feeling more positive about things generally. Having no work or educational engagement after custody and having very limited social contact can cause significant stress for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour who have just left custody, and as stated previously this can be connected to an increase in the risk of recidivism.

Research has found that, in the early stages of desistance, offenders frequently experience dramatic psychosocial changes (Healy, 2012, 2015). Hope for the future, agency, strengthening of positive personal identity, belief on the capability to exercise control over one's life have all been recognised as important factors in the desistance process , and are all among the changes identified by the group of participants involved in this study. The quote below illustrates the impact the programme had on an individual in developing a stronger personal identity:

"I look at mistakes in my past and try to do whatever is needed to grow and to move on. The group reminds me indirectly how important that is. I am growing and I feel I am moving away from that person I was before into the person more akin to who I feel I truly am. A greater understanding of my mistakes and the negative consequences of them means it becomes quite easy to leave that earlier person behind."

Geoff, CoSA

Participants also discussed how the programmes supported them to develop increased perspective and deepen their self-awareness. Through the treatment programme, they gained a better understanding of their feelings and the abuse suffered in their own life, learning to express emotions that had not yet been processed, understanding anger thresholds and developing coping mechanisms. These new skills led to them feeling more in control and able to 'manage day to day aspects and to handle emotions' (William, SL, p.292). This experience is well illustrated by the following quote:

"Things happened me when I was young and I never dealt with them. And I reckon that was part of me that I did re-offend… I never dealt with something that happened to myself and I feel now that I am dealing with it"

Warren, Safer Lives

For some participants engagement with the treatment programme meant they were able to deepen their understanding of the offence and the core beliefs underpinning their behaviour. One Safer Lives participant, for instance, outlined how participation in the programme had 'opened up' his ideas and make him 'look deeply into sexual beliefs' (John, Safer Lives, p.292). This experience was outlined by other participants:

"I am mentally much better, I have peace of mind, an understanding of the abuse I suffered myself and my anger from it. I've learnt how to cope with it. I can't change things, I'm guilty of what I done, always will be".

Peter, Safer Lives

"I gained an understanding of my offence. I had never spoken with anyone before and I didn't know why I'd done it. I don't hate myself now".

Niall, Safer Lives

Safer Lives and CoSA were also described as being useful in that they assisted participants to learn to integrate other's points of view into their own decisions and to 'look outside the box':

"They know the experience of what's going on for you and then they go to their own experience which gets you to have a look outside the box".

Ben, Safer lives

"…talking about things, it helps me and you know they bring a different perspective and they ask questions and get me thinking and they suggest 'You know, maybe you should do this and maybe you should think about that".

Jim, CoSA

"I've changed to a great degree. Safer Lives put together the pieces of the jigsaw for you. Talking about it with others, sharing the experience made it more real".

Kevin, Safer Lives

The possibility to see others' perspectives was interpreted by some as a journey towards openness to change in which they learnt how to move "from an angry response to the acceptance and appreciation of others' opinions… [to] a fuller understanding of their own vulnerability and the need to remain socially aware"(p. 239).

All three PACE programmes have the objective of helping participants to take control of their offending behaviour. Some participants articulated this as understanding that behaviour is an individual choice, developing enhanced confidence in their ability to change behaviours or taking ownership for actions in the past:

"I was looking at the outside world and blaming the circumstances of my life for finding myself in the place where I was. That is where I was. And my experience now is that where I am now and where I have been at any particular point in my life, is the result of my own interaction with the outside world and how I was in myself in terms of that interaction"

Ben, CoSA

"I can feel myself in the same place I was when I did offend... I can choose not to do anything; that I can say no. I feel I've control ... it's a place I've come to, I've realised it myself. It's very tempting to use the difficult circumstances I was in to justify what I did. I found it difficult at first to take on ownership of what I'd done... now I'm taking responsibility for what I did. I chose to do it. Because I've been in a similar mindset since then and I said no. That showed me that I made that choice..."

Michael, Safer Lives

The increased sense of responsibility and ownership was expressed by one Safer Lives participant, who, when talking about his story of offending, commented:

"It's something that I'd dread, I don't want it to happen. I'm responsible for that though, I learned that from Safer Lives… it's me responsible If I offend or not offend because it's me that has the control at the end of the day. Nobody is going to do it for me"

Max, Foothold/ Safer Lives

In some cases, participants also displayed behavioural changes that were in line with increased levels of agency and pro-social choices, such as avoiding certain places, cutting down their alcohol consumption, opening up about feelings with others, reaching out for help from support services, engaging in distraction techniques (i.e. physical exercise) and structuring their days. Participants also reported increased levels of hope, with 83.3% of participants saying they felt more hopeful about the future since their involvement with the programme. While acknowledging feelings of fragility and uncertainty around social and personal challenges that were before them, the participants also expressed having gained a sense of moving forward, which was very valuable to them.

6.3 Wellbeing

Research has found that "desisting general offenders describe their states of mind more positively and suggests that the transition to desistance is associated with enhanced wellbeing"(Healy, 2016)(p. 275). To assess participant wellbeing participants were tested with the Warwick – Edinburg Mental Well-being Scale which was applied at two different times during the study. The mean score of the test showed results to be higher 6 to 9 months after engagement with the programmes. Notably, there were specific items that were consistently highly rated in two of the interventions. For Foothold, these were: 'I've been feeling close to other people' and 'I've been able to make up my own mind about things' , and for Safer Lives this was: 'I've been feeling useful'.

TABLE 4: WARWICK - EDINBURGH MENTAL WELLBEING SCALE (WEMBS)

	FOLLOWING 1ST INTERVIEW	FOLLOWING T2 2ND INTERVIEW	INCREASE/DECREASE + OR -
Overall mean	51.6	55.9	+4.3

18 participants were tested on first and second interview. Highest score in the scale is 70, lowest is 14, with higher scores indicating higher levels of well-being- Midpoint is 42.

6.4 Building Social skills

The improvement in social skills was a recurrent theme for PACE participants. They expressed feeling less shy, less anxious or experiencing less fear when meeting new people as a result of engaging with the three programmes. They also reported an increase in learning how to cope with the anxiety of being recognised, being more willing to engage in conversations, having improved ability to understand other people's needs, being better able to talk to family members and to communicate what was going on in their lives.

> **"(CoSA) looked at me as a normal person. I came out of my shell"**
>
> John, CoSA,

Regular interaction with Foothold Support Workers, as well as the possibility to go out with them in public was said to help increase their confidence in their ability to be more socially engaged. Participants of the programme said the "support workers helped them learn how to do things they could not do themselves" (p.222) which included learning how to cope with being in social or public settings. This outcome also noted by CoSA participants who claimed "their greatest success/achievement was feeling more confident socially in terms of meeting and dealing with people and being better able to handle social situations" (p.237). For Safer Lives, participants reported having increased their ability to trust and developing more respect for others.

6.5 Building Relationships with Support Workers, Facilitators & Volunteers

Research has found that professional relationships in treatment can influence the desistance process in different ways. This can happen through practical support (Burnett and McNeill, 2005), pro-social modelling (i.e. negative/positive reinforcement or confrontation) (Trotter, 2009) or through therapeutic supportive climates with the potential of enhancing the participants engagement with programmes (Bowden, Glorney and Daniels, 2017).

For participants involved in the study, the relationship with the Foothold Support Workers was especially meaningful. They reported increased feelings of connection and support as well as less anxiety and stress. Most of the participants of Foothold had not developed relationships beyond this contact which stressed the relevance of the interaction with the programme workers, as pointed out by one of the participants:

> **"I've no friends… I would be lost without it [Foothold]. If it wasn't for Foothold, If I didn't have them I would've had no one… It's beyond a million times… It's not just emotional support, like if you have a problem, [Support Workers] will help you try and find a solution… They will go beyond…"**
>
> William, Foothold

For most participants of Safer Lives the weekly regular meeting was a space that would help them get through the week. The impact was described as feeling an increased sense of security and feeling that they were in a safe space:

> **"There's a lot of support because I really feel it's the only place I can really offload… things I can bring to the group I can't speak to anyone else about and I really benefit from that. It really helps me a lot you know, because I am not keeping everything bottled up"**
>
> George, Safer Lives

Most CoSA participants also felt they had been able to create strong social bonds with volunteers, even though it had, at times, been slow and difficult to build trust, especially in regards to sharing information.

For some participants, the social outings with the group of volunteers were the only regular social contact and provided a coping mechanism to help them deal with "the anxiety and stress of not being able to live normal lives" (p.238).

6.6 Improved Relationships with Important Others'

94.4% of participants involved in the follow-up interviews 6 to 9 months after engagement with the three programmes had experienced an improvement in their relationships with important others. Participants talked about how family and friends noticed and appreciated the positive changes they had made and how this awareness had led to a gradual and slow process of building trust. They also expressed feeling more able to talk freely to their families and to reflect on their thinking about relationship issues.

However, not all participants were able to improve in this aspect of their lives, as some of them had experienced a loss of relationships due to their conviction, meaning family members were not willing to maintain contact.

TABLE 5: CHANGE OF SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS IN PARTICIPANT'S LIVES

RATINGS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Very positive	33.3%
Positive	61.1%
No change	5.6 %
Negative/Very Negative	-

6.7 Building relationships within the community

There were mixed experiences relating to the increases in involvement in the community, with 44.4% (See Table 6) saying there had been 'much more' to 'a little more' community involvement, and the remaining perceiving 'no change at all' or 'not too much change'. CoSA clients had the highest ratings in this regard.

TABLE 6: CHANGE OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

RATINGS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Much more	33.3%
A little more	11.1%
No change	27.8%
Not much	22.2%
Not at all	5.6%

Mixed outcomes in this area reflected the difficulties and complexities of reintegration for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. There is a tension for participants between letting themselves be seen in the interaction with the community and a fear of disclosing their past history and facing the consequences of doing so. In this worst case this could end up in threats, attacks or derogatory name calling. As one of interviewee described - "I am kind of walking a tightrope" (William, CoSA, p.248).

These results showed positive change had happened since involvement with the three programmes but also highlighted the limitations of the PACE programmes in this regard and indicated greater changes in community attitudes are needed for real reintegration to happen.

Other contextual factors were also found to play a role in this area, some participants had already had poor contact with the community before conviction due to various reasons (e.g. addiction issues). Some others who had an intellectual disability, have had difficulty forming healthy relationships. "The results must be interpreted with reference to the individual and their context. A participant stating that community integration improved a 'little' may signify an enormous change for that person if starting from a level of 'none at all'" (p.249).

"Limited social contact, no job, too much time on my hands led to negative thinking. I'm much improved and the low moods have become less and less"

(Jim, CoSA)

6.8 Promoting attitudinal change towards perpetrators of sexual harm

Attitudinal change in stakeholders is not usually considered a measure of success in literature for rehabilitative programmes. However, relational aspects and the role of stakeholders have been recognised as playing a role in assisting desistance (Rex,1999; Maruna, 2001; Farrall 2002; Healy, 2015; Farmer et al., 2015). Furthermore, attitudes may also be crucial in the process of new identity formation, a process that takes place not only through the perception that we have of ourselves but also through the perception that others have of us (McNeill, 2014). Negative attitudes (e.g. stigma and rejection) have the potential to frustrate personal changes experienced by people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour.

Nearly half (43%) of stakeholders experienced a positive change in attitudes towards people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour. They mentioned becoming more understanding of the reasons why people offend, being able to see beyond the offence and consider the consequences it had for the individual as well as the barriers they faced to reintegrate into the community.

Particularly important was to note the attitude change in CoSA volunteers, since they are non-professionals and are members of the wider community and, represent, in this sense, a gateway for community reintegration. 44% of volunteers reported feeling more positive, with some of them expressing they had been able to meet the person beyond the offence, as one of them stated, the programme had been a reminder that: "people are human first and other things layer on top of that" (Volunteer, p.343). Or as pointed out by another volunteer, understanding the 'greyness of crime' was something that had developed, which led to the reconciliation of the reality of the offence and the human side of the person behind it.

For the programme participants, however, the perception of stakeholders attitudes towards them was overall positive, and for some, extremely meaningful as they felt they were being treated with unexpected high levels of respect and humanity.

It has been estimated a great proportion of PACE clients have a disability or addiction issues

6.9 Decreasing Motivation to Reoffend

Both motivation to desist and participants' confidence of not reoffending in the future were measured in the research. This was based on the fact that "continuing or improved motivation to avoid reoffending is a key success indicator" (p. 318) for rehabilitation programmes and an indicator that has shown "strong correlations with actual behaviour even over long periods of time" (Burnett and Maruna, 2004).

All participants felt confident about not reoffending in the future after 6 to 9 months of engagement with any number of the three programmes, with 72% of them rating their confidence at the highest compared to 55% in the first interview (See Table 7). Participants also thought the three programmes were highly successful at helping them with this. Personal change and learning to manage behaviours were two of the main factors mentioned as influencing this.

This finding was consistent with the findings that this particular study group have a small recidivism rate in comparison to other offence types (Hanson and Bussiere, 1998; Department of Justice, 2009a, p. 3; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Hanson and Morton Bourgon, 2009; O'Donnell, Baumer and Hughes, 2008) . However, these results need to be interpreted in the light of evidence showing people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour have longer reoffending timeframes.

Importantly, most participants (83.5%) claimed that the personal and life changes experienced as a result of involvement with the programme had had a strong influence in their motivation to avoid reoffending – for Foothold participants this was attributed, in the main, to the Support Workers helping them to feel happier and more positive.

For Safer Lives participants, this was attributed to them being able to learn how to cope with the label of sex offender, having a better understanding of themselves, having an improved ability to manage their behaviours and also seeing others' progress in the journey.

TABLE 7: PARTICIPANT VIEWS ON CONFIDENCE ON NOT RE-OFFENDING IN THE FUTURE.

	1ST INTERVIEW	FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW (AFTER 6 TO 9 MONTHS)
Very confident	55%	72%
Quite confident	27%	28%
Unsure	18%	
Not very/ not at all confident	-	-

TABLE 8: SUCCESS OF PROGRAMMES IN HELPING TO AVOID REOFFENDING RATED BY PARTICIPANTS (SCALE 1-10)

FOOTHOLD	SAFER LIVES	COSA	OVERALL AVERAGE
9.4	8.7	6.7	8.3

Levels of motivation to desist were also positive. 91.9% of participants reported feeling able to move away from crime and 100% wanting to move away from crime. CoSA participants had the highest ratings of motivation to desist, which suggest they are at a later stage of the process when compared to those in Safer Lives and Foothold.

These findings on motivation to desist are similar to those found in other studies conducted with general offenders (See Table 9). However, PACE participants were significantly more likely to say 'Not at all' when asked if they would take an opportunity to reoffend with few risks than in other studies (Healy &O'Donnell 2008; Burnett 2004), where approximately half of offenders, wanted to stop reoffending.

It has been estimated a great proportion of PACE clients have a disability or addiction issues

TABLE 9: MOTIVATION TO DESIST COMPARISON

MOTIVATION QUESTIONS	FARRALL (2002)	HEALY & O'DONNELL (2008)	PACE RESEARCH (2018)
Want to move away from crime (very much)	95%	94.5%	100%
Feel able to move away from crime (very much)	89%	84.9%	91.9%
How likely not to reoffend (Not at all)	-	60.3%	79.1%
How likely not to reoffend (Not at all)	-	52.1%	91.9%

6.10 Summary

This section aimed to outline those changes reported by participants of the PACE Prevention programmes that are known to play an important role in desistance.

The three programmes were shown to be highly meaningful and useful in terms of positive personal changes, wellbeing and social connectedness, which in turn was reflected in increased levels of motivation to desist and confidence of not reoffending in the future.

Confidence, hope, self-acceptance, greater understanding of past actions, self-awareness and increased agency were identified factors that worked in tandem helping participants to feel more capable of managing behaviour.

More importantly, was the possibility of having regular social contact and support through facilitators, volunteers and support workers, which is key for people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour, who are at a high risk of social isolation. However, findings also reflected the limitations of rehabilitation programmes in regards to social integration, where other factors relating to the complexities of establishing strong bonds within the community play a crucial role.

This may also reflect the fact that CoSA is a voluntary programme, which implies there is already an intention of change in participants. Participation in all Prevention Services is voluntary even if in some small number they have been court mandated to attend treatment. Treatment isn't possible without a willingness to participate.

7. Key Lessons

Research on the three PACE Prevention programmes also found a number of important lessons that contribute to the understanding of the services. This section briefly outlines these.

7.1 Accountability for the Future

Accountability is one of the central aspects of all PACE programmes. Even though, CoSA is the only programme to address it directly within the programme syllabus. Foothold and Safer Lives achieve this goal by engaging participants in a process where they are held accountable by facilitators, peers and support workers for their current lifestyle and choices.

The approach of PACE programmes to accountability takes form in three different ways: accepting the conditions and regulations of the programmes, exploring past offences through therapeutic mechanisms and being open about information on choices taken in their life with stakeholders.

Accountability is considered a key feature of the PACE Prevention Services, as it encourages reflection that extends beyond past actions to future behaviour. It allows for participants to take increasing amounts of responsibility for their lives, and for trained volunteers and support workers to identify potential high risk situations.

In the case of CoSA, where accountability takes place through an agreement of openness about any risks arising in the process, volunteers claimed that building a strong relationships with the core member led to a better understanding of potential reoffending threats, and that the "circle gave the core member the opportunity to discuss pertinent issues regarding possible reoffending in a way they probably felt unable to do with others and provided ways of dealing with those issues" (p. 297).

7.2 Programmes Interconnectedness and the Importance of Flexibility

Prevention Service participants are involved initially with one service, either Safer Lives, Foothold or CoSA. They are referred to these services by their supervising Probation Officer. Participants were not necessarily involved in more than one programme, but when this occurred, it proved to be very positive. It was noted that each programme addresses different but interconnected needs, which together had the potential to amplify benefits from other programmes. Two Foothold and Safer Lives participants referred to the importance of this interconnectedness for their progress:

> **"Foothold and Safer Lives definitely work together. I'm the 'man in the mirror'. I have to look at myself and I've got to know myself in the last two years. At [NUMBER] years of age, I am now a better person".**
>
> Ben, Foothold/Safer Lives

For others, the joint work meant that issues brought up in one programme could be talked through in the other, **mutually reinforcing efforts**. As one participant stated:

> **"The likes of [Foothold support workers] are a great help because if I've an issue in Safer Lives… They explain it, 'They're doing this or that. 'I don't agree with that'. 'Well maybe have a look at it this way'… I certainly couldn't do without them both, I had no hope when I started the programme".**
>
> John, Foothold/Safer Lives

These mechanisms included the Life Story and the Offence task, both part of Safer Lives therapeutic work. Life story consists of a detailed document on the lives and challenges of participants. The Offence task is an exercise that explores the context in which the offending behaviour took place, promotes insights on factors that played a role in it and seeks to enhance the sense of responsibility or ownership for past actions.

In some cases, programmes complemented each other when **addressing the same issue from different perspective**, equipping participants with more resources to tackle challenges. This happened, for instance, with accommodation issues, where Foothold would provide practical support (i.e. rent allowance applications) and CoSA would give a space to learn skills for apartment hunting and open up regarding their worries about it.

Engagement in more than one programme was also reported to be important for participants who would establish different levels of trust with peers, facilitators, support workers and volunteers. Building trusting relationships is particularly difficult for participants, and involvement in more than one programme **increased the variety of settings and people in which trust and support could happened**:

> **"I'm happier now [doing both Foothold and CoSA]… just to say, if I'm struggling like that sometimes, I mightn't say it to the lads in Foothold but I can say it to them [Volunteers]".**
>
> Brian, Foothold/CoSA

Involvement in more than one programme, also allowed stakeholders to be informed on a client's life, and pick up on situations of potential risk on time, which helped to enhance the risk monitoring functions of programmes.

These points are made with acknowledgement that the engagement with the programmes is flexible and decided according to individual need. While some participants may need three programmes some others may wish to engage in only one. Recommendations for programmes depend on many factors including the relevance of the programme and timing – making sure the individual is at the right stage to effectively engage with it. Foothold, for instance, has been seen as invaluable for participants who have no supports or nowhere to go after having left custody, whereas CoSA is very relevant for people with no social contact, who are very isolated and are stable in their accommodation.

7.3 Challenges for Services and Clients

Employment and accommodation: are still significant challenges for clients mainly because of factors that are out of the PACE Support Workers control. The majority (11 out of 13) of participants did not engage with employment during the research period. 4 out of 7 Foothold participants were able to find accommodation, and 3 of them were living in the same place by the follow up interview. Difficulties were mainly attributed to stigma and negative attitudes towards the offence type in the labour and housing market.

Avoiding dependence on services: for some participants these programmes represent the only or one of the few supports they can avail of. Severe isolation and the difficulty to reintegrate in the community implies that some participants will need ongoing support. This is especially the case for individuals with intellectual disability.

Achieving integration beyond supports: even though participants report increased levels of support, this came mainly from workers, peers, facilitators and community volunteers. Meaningful social interaction beyond this has proven to be a difficult challenge to overcome.

Bringing about change in core beliefs and finding adequate measures for this: individual core beliefs are difficult to get to and are vague concepts. Triggering change in these deep rooted aspects and being able to assess how successful individual treatments are being in this sense represent a challenge for services.

Finding the right time for clients to engage with programmes: There is no evidence-base practice that informs at what stages or when it is best for a client to get into programmes. This needs to be built up together with practitioners. In some cases, Foothold clients are not yet ready to participate in Safer Lives. Similarly, for some clients, engagement with CoSA is only possible after they have engaged with the other two programmes. However, for others particularly those with no supports beginning CoSA before the therapeutic work has been valuable, which shows there is no clear route for timing of interventions.

8. Conclusion

Overall, PACE programmes were successful in assisting people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour in the process of building social and human capital, particularly in regard to perceived support and personal development, which in turn, was also reflected in their decreased levels of motivation to reoffend.

The evaluation acknowledged that external barriers to desistance can undermine the progress made towards social reintegration, and that post programme supports potentially need to be extended to continue the work done in the programme.

Measuring success in desistance programmes needs to be sensitive of small changes, and closely tied to the personal journeys experienced and the narratives that are built up around these journeys. As "desistance theory suggests, there may not be an ultimate 'moment' of success, but rather the ongoing process of avoiding reoffending. The black statistic on the white page that indicate reduced recidivism are highly meaningful in so far as they speak to less victims, the ultimate aim of the programmes" (p. 400).

This research has sought to provide a more in-depth narrative on the experience of participants and to provide evidence on the efficacy of the assisted desistance model as applied by PACE within Ireland.

This research indicates this model is effective, and should be extended to engage more participants - improving their lives and creating safer communities.

9. Research Recommendations

9.1 Foothold

Putting in place a national strategic policy for accommodation issues: this is by far the most pressing need for Foothold. There is a need for existing national policy in relation to offenders accommodation to be put into practice and for legislation to clarify the role of local authorities in this sense.

Providing additional resources to expand the service: Foothold represents an invaluable support for high risk, high need clients. Additional resources would allow for more personnel, and inclusion of more clients, as well as giving staff more time to work on the clients social and practical skills.

9.2 Safer Lives

Enhancing administrative supports, information technology and training. Programme facilitators would greatly benefit from administrative support. Facilitators currently spend most of their working week with clients and in group sessions. Additional supports would allow staff, for instance, to file clients' documents in a more accessible way using technological systems.

Implementing protocol for connecting with significant others. It is recommended that adequate resources are supplied to implement a protocol, currently under development, for meeting with clients' partners/ significant others. This is likely to support Safer Lives effort to involve important others in bringing about change in clients.

Specialised work with intellectual disability and personality disorders. PACE staff and probation officers spoke of a high incidence of such issues in the area of sexual offending. Necessary resources are needed to facilitate specialised work in this area to take place.

Introducing a maintenance group post-prison (for those who are not doing Safer Lives). There is a recognised need for perpetrators of sexual harm leaving custody who are not participating in Safer Lives to get some form of rehabilitative help in the community.

9.3 CoSA

Mainstreaming and extending the programme beyond Dublin and providing funding for a further three years. It is recommended that funding is supplied to CoSA for another three years to give the programme a chance to fully prove itself and to conduct further research to assess its long-term effectiveness in core members.

Recognising the Coordinator's role and level of responsibility. Currently, one coordinator manages the entire CoSA programme. It is recommended more resources are provided to fund another coordinator if CoSA is to expand. One CoSA coordinator can only set up a maximum of two circles at a time and circles take between 2-4 months to set up.

Remaining true to core CoSA principles: Regular engagement and good communication with partner agencies is recommended, however it is important not to get overly involved in managing risks (i.e. accountability) but also to focus on the social inclusion aspect of the programme.

Engaging in continued planning toward national expansion. Increasing and improving communication between agencies as multi-agency partners are necessary for CoSA to succeed. The lesser availability of Gardaí (they see clients less frequently than probation officers) may have implications for public protection in terms of less Outer Circle participation if expanding nationally. The roles of Probation officers and Gardaí need to be carefully considered if this is to happen.

Continuing with PR and public education: it is recommended to continue to educate and inform the public in Ireland. For CoSA to continue recruiting successful numbers of volunteers and getting the message to the wider public is important to keep the positive message alive.

9.4 List of tools used in research

- **My Life Questionnaire** (Mann & Hollin, 2010): self-report measure using five-point Likert Scale to identify schemas in sexual offenders.

- **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale** (NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh,2007): it measures mental wellbeing focusing on positive aspects of mental health. It has been considered to be helpful in the evaluation of rehabilitative programmes.

- **Life Satisfaction** (Healy, unpublished)(Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD): it measures wellbeing in relation to material living conditions and quality of life, based on the 11 topics of the OECD Better Life Index research.

In addition to the above psychometric tools, versions of the following surveys were used:

- **Motivation to desist scale:** four question survey adapted by Farrall (2002) from Brunnett's (1992) original version.

- **Modified form of Maruna and King's (2009) survey on public attitudes towards people with convictions for harmful sexual behaviour:** including belief in redeemability and levels of punitiveness.

This can happen for various reasons for example having completed the Building Better Lives programme in prison or their treatment needs being assessed as not suitable for the programme.

> **The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.**
>
> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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