

Evaluation of Step by Step's Restorative Transition Circles Program

Final Report

January 2014



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Overview

This report evaluates the Restorative Transition Circles Program led by the Volunteers of America's Step by Step Program from September 2012 to December 2013. The Restorative Transition Circle Program provides an opportunity for women coming out of incarceration at Monroe Correctional Facility (MCF) or transitional housing to reconnect and have effective, healthy conversation with their families and supporters prior to their release. Facilitators assist the woman (called the Core Member) and her supporters in discussing pains, frustrations, issues, and strengths in their relationships. Through two pre-release restorative circles, the group decides on a transition plan and sets goals and boundaries for themselves and the Core Member. After the Core Member is released, follow-up circles are conducted to check in with all participants.

The findings from this evaluation are very promising. While the program did not receive as many referrals and was not able to complete as many circles as originally hoped, the circles that were conducted were given outstanding reviews by participants. Nineteen referrals were received between September 2012 and October 2013, and 16 restorative circles were conducted for a group of 10 Core Members through December 2013.

Participants responded on surveys that they were highly satisfied with the circles and felt they helped their families heal. The Core Member and other participants felt more supported and confident in the Core Member's re-entry. Core Members were more willing to participate at the beginning of the program than their family members were, and they were also more confident that they would follow the re-entry plan. Nonetheless, all participants felt the process was beneficial and left feeling hopeful. Post-release, Core Members faced common challenges in the community but were able to use their supports to work towards their goals.

Programmatically, staff often found it difficult to coordinate the schedules of some participants but made many attempts in all cases. They also found it difficult to follow up with Core Members after release due to a lack of contact information or availability. Circle groups felt more confident about the re-entry plan if they were able to have two circles before the Core Member was released. Most Core Members wanted to have post-release follow-up circles, but such circles were only conducted for two women because others wanted more time to meet goals or to take care of basic needs. Finally, most Core Members were connected with mentors, but staff found it difficult to connect them with case managers, since such programs had limited availability, funding, and scope.

Some Core Members, mentors, and facilitators were interviewed for this report. None of the Core Members interviewed had been arrested since their release, and all continued to feel that the circles had a positive impact on their lives. Mentors felt the program helped them to better understand their mentees and help them in their transition. Facilitators very much appreciated the courage participants had to participate in this highly-emotional process. Suggestions were offered for how to improve and expand the program and apply the techniques to other contexts.

Despite logistical struggles, program staff were diligent in their efforts to recruit participants and schedule circles. Their efforts proved extremely worthwhile, as the circles conducted were beneficial to Core Members, their families, and their supporters in both the short-term and in their entire re-entry process.

Program History and Report Scope

The Restorative Transition Circles program was originally funded in 2009 through a partnership between Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) and the Catholic Family Center in Rochester, NY. These circles have always been based on the model of Huikahi Circles developed by Loren Walker. The circles are facilitated by one lead facilitator, who directs the conversation. The co-facilitator observes, listens, and comments when appropriate, also taking notes. If there is more than one circle for a group, the same two facilitators are assigned to all their circles.

Originally, the program solicited referrals through Catholic Family Center's work with women at the Orleans Correctional Facility, but they ultimately received very few referrals. This was, at the time, called the Re-entry Family Circles Program. In 2011, a revitalized pilot program began through a new partnership between PiRI and Step by Step, an established program which offers workshops and support to women at risk of incarceration or re-incarceration. A Coordinator was hired by Step by Step for the pilot program. This report focuses on this latest incarnation of the program. The program's name was later changed to "Restorative Transition Circles Program" to allow for referrals from women in transitional housing as well as the correctional facility.

The grant period for the Restorative Transition Circles program began in September 2012 and ended in December 2013. The program continues to operate, but this report only covers circles conducted and referrals received during the active grant period. The evaluative components of the project were established later, so the survey data in this report spans February through December 2013, while case note data span the full grant period.

Process Description and Definitions

Women who participate in Step by Step workshops at Monroe Correctional Facility or at transitional housing programs are informed about the Restorative Transition Circles Program by workshop facilitators. They then complete a referral form for the program if they are interested, and the program Coordinator and applicable staff at the facility coordinate the circles.

Women referred to the Restorative Circles Program are referred to as "**Core Members**," family attending the circles are called "**Family Members**," and anyone else is referred to as "**Other Participants**." The Restorative Transition Circles Coordinator at Step by Step is responsible for scheduling, circle facilitation, and service coordination for Core Members. Others who facilitated the circles are referred to as "**Facilitators**." These facilitators were associated with Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) and were all volunteers.

The first step for the Restorative Transition Circles **Coordinator** after receiving a referral is to conduct a "**pre-circle meeting**" with the Core Member. The Core Member discusses why she wants to have a circle and who she would like to invite to the circles. Core Members were welcome to invite anyone, including case managers, family members, counselors, children, significant others, and members of their religious community. The pre-circle is also used to help the facilitator understand the issues to be addressed at the circle and to get the Core Member to begin thinking about the conversation. Then, the Coordinator reaches out to the requested participants to assess their willingness to participate and to schedule the first circle.

Ideally, individual pre-circles are conducted with all of those who agree to participate in the Restorative Circles. At these pre-circles, facilitators speak with each participant about the issues that they would like to discuss at the circle and their role in the Core Member's life, giving each individual an opportunity to speak with the facilitator privately prior to being in a group. This also helps the Coordinator/facilitator better understand the dynamics of the relationships in the group. The Coordinator also works closely with Correctional Facility or transitional housing staff to determine if everyone invited is able to be admitted. If not, this is discussed with the Core Member, and new plans are made.

When it was not possible to meet in person with all participants, the Coordinator would attempt to speak with them on the telephone for the pre-circle. The Coordinator sometimes got input from family members who could not attend the actual circle (due to being out of the area, for instance) and contributed input on their behalf during the circle.

After the Core Member's pre-circle, the Restorative Circles Program Coordinator also attempted to connect each Core Member with a mentor and a case manager to assist in her re-entry. The mentors were volunteers with either the Judicial Process Commission (JPC) or the Safer Monroe Area Re-Entry Team (SMART). The Coordinator worked with the Monroe County Re-Entry Task Force in order to provide case managers for some Core Members. The Coordinator would often try to connect Core Members with other resources in the community, based on her individual needs. Additionally, all Core Members were encouraged to participate in Step By Step's workshops and programming, before and after their release. These workshops focus on self-esteem, empowerment, and goal-setting and are meant to aid in the Core Member's re-entry by providing positive activities, opportunities for increase self-awareness, and a positive support network. The hope is to prevent re-incarceration and the behavior that led to incarceration.

The next phase of the Restorative Circles Program is to conduct the pre-release Circles within the Correctional Facility or transitional housing. Originally, the goal was to conduct one pre-release circle and one post-release follow-up circle for each Core Member. Facilitators realized, though, that the process worked better if there were two pre-release circles with different foci. Thus, as of October 2013, the goal was to conduct two pre-release circles per Core Member. The first, the "**Restorative Circle**," would focus on healing relationships and fostering effective communication among participants. The second pre-release circle would focus on the Core Member's plan for returning back to the community after release. This is referred to as the "**Transition Circle**." If a group only had one pre-release circle, this is referred to as a "**Combination Restorative/Transition Circle**." Oftentimes referrals were received too close to the Core Member's release date to make it possible to conduct two pre-release circles, so most of the pre-release circles after October 2013 were also a Combination Restorative/Transition Circle.

Then, a post-release **Follow-Up Circle** would be conducted. These could be held in any convenient location, such as a local church or library or at buildings owned by Step by Step or Partners in Restorative Initiatives. Interested groups could participate in multiple post-release Follow-Up Circles.

Also, it is important to note that transportation services (via taxi cab) were offered to participants to help them more conveniently get to the circles.

Evaluation Overview

To evaluate this program, Step by Step partnered with the Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI), a non-profit research center that is part of the Rochester Institute of Technology's Department of Criminal Justice. Researchers developed surveys for participants to take at the end of each circle. They also worked closely with the program Coordinator to collect case history information for the referred women. Finally, phone interviews were conducted with available Core Members and mentors, and a focus group was conducted with facilitators and the program Coordinator. Data from these surveys, case notes, and interviews form the basis of this report. Research methodology is specified in applicable sections in this report.

Referral Process

The Restorative Transition Circles Program originally intended to receive referrals only for women who were participating in Step by Step workshops at Monroe Correctional Facility. The facilitators of the workshops gave an overview of the program to the workshop participants and invited them to fill out a referral form if they were interested in the program. The program received fewer referrals than originally expected and thus began soliciting referrals from two women's transitional housing programs in Rochester: the Jennifer House and Liberty Manor. Only three referrals came from these programs, none of which resulted in any restorative circles. Towards the end of 2013, they began to experience a further lack of referrals from the Step by Step workshops, possibly because many prior referrals had been encouraged by a staff member who left Step by Step. The Restorative Transition Circles Coordinator then reached out to a counselor at the jail for direct referrals, and a few were received that way.

Between September 2012 and December 2013, the Restorative Circles Program received 19 referrals. Sixteen of these referrals were for women who were incarcerated at Monroe Correctional Facility, and 3 were for women in transitional housing at either at Jennifer House (2 referrals) or Liberty Manor (1 referral). Of the 16 women who were referred while incarcerated, 8 were in the Step by Step program at MCF, 7 were referred by a counselor at the jail. It is not known whether one was in the program or not.

It seems imperative for program staff or counselors to advertise the program effectively to women; if done, many women are interested. More interest is garnered if a prior program participant can talk about her experiences to a group. It seems that with the amount of work staff and counselors already have, it is sometimes difficult for them to fully and properly explain the program, resulting in information not getting passed to potentially-interested women. Suggestions for ways to better solicit referrals are included later in this report.

Timeline of the Circle Process

The first circle was held in November of 2012, and the most recent was in December 2013.

The women referred were serving incarceration sentences that averaged 6.7 months in length, ranging from 2 to 13 months (n = 10; 9 referrals had no information provided). On average, referrals were received about 3 months prior to their release dates (average=92 days, n=15), ranging from 8 to 193 days before release. Only three Core Members were able to complete two

pre-release circles. All of these women had been referred at least 115 days prior to their releases (average=142, n=3).

The first pre-circles were completed, on average, 20 days after receiving the referral, ranging from 3 to 90 days (n=18, median=13 days).

The first pre-release circles (either a Restorative or Combination Restorative/Transition Circle) were completed, on average, 65 days after the referral was received (ranging from 39 to 146 days, n=10). The first pre-release restorative circles were held an average of 41 days after the first pre-circle (ranging from 20 to 56 days, n=10). The first Restorative Circle was, on average, held 59 days before the Core Member's release (n=9, ranging from 11 to 120 days).

Thus, it took on average about 2-3 weeks after the referral to complete the first pre-circle with the Core Member. It usually took the Coordinator about 6 weeks after meeting with the Core Member to contact all the invited participants, conduct pre-circles with them, and schedule the first circle with them and the jail. These first circles were held approximately two months prior to the Core Member's release.

As would be expected, groups usually could not complete a second pre-release circle if the referral was received close to the Core Member's release date. For the three women who completed a second pre-release circle (the Transition Circle), these were held about 1-3 months after the Restorative Circle (28, 42, and 98 days; average=56 days) and 3-10 weeks before their release dates (18, 22, and 69 days; average=36 days).

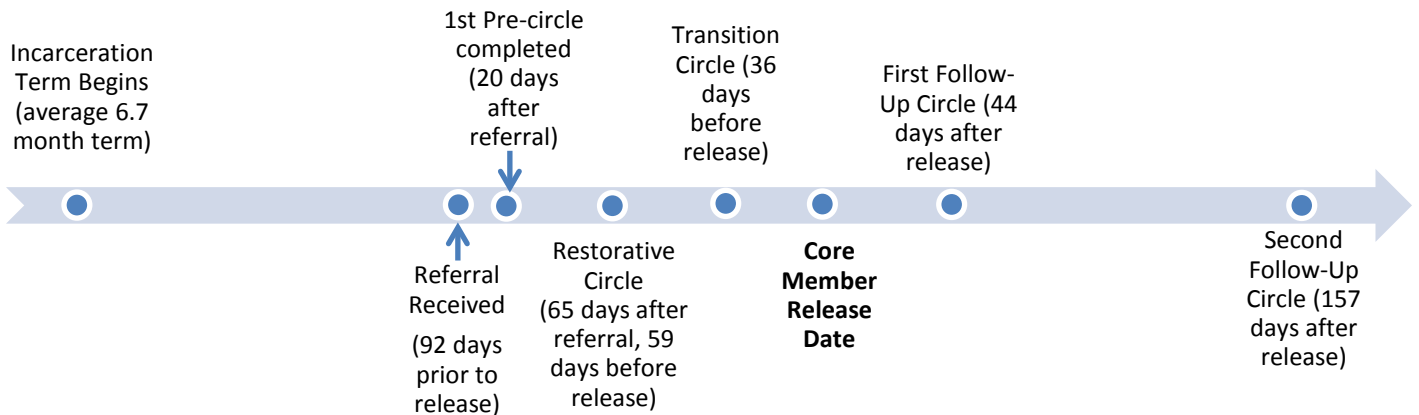
Two of these same Core Members had post-release Follow-Up circles 27 and 60 days after their releases. Participants at both circles requested additional follow-up circles, one of which has been conducted. This second follow-up circle was conducted 97 days after the first follow-up circle, and thus 157 days after the Core Member's release. To date, two Core Members are still incarcerated and thus could not have had Follow-Up Circles. At least two others moved out of the area after being released.

Finally, the longest span of time for which a Core Member participated in the Restorative Circles program was 39 weeks (from referral date to second follow-up circle date). Step by Step and the Restorative Transition Circles Coordinator are still in occasional contact with many Core Members, even if they have not completed circles recently.

According to facilitators, the circles averaged approximately two hours in length, with the post-release circles running longer than any others. This is to be expected due to the regimented schedules at the jail where the pre-release circles were held. The Circles ranged from approximately 90 to 180 minutes in length.

Figure 1 shows a summary of the average time between steps in the Restorative Circle process, which should be useful when outlining expectations of the process in the future.

Figure 1: Average Timeline of Circle Components



Referred Cases That Did Not Complete Any Circles

Of the 19 total referrals, two were disapproved for the process, and seven women were approved but were eventually unable or unwilling to follow through with a circle. All of the reasons for which some referred women did not complete any circles were:

- The referral was received too close to the woman’s release date, and it was not possible to schedule a pre-release circle in time.
- There were extreme difficulties in contacting and/or scheduling a circle with the Core Member and/or Family Members.
- Those the Core Member wanted at the circle were not allowed entry into the jail, and the Core Member did not want to attempt to do a Circle on the outside. (Those with recent criminal history could not be admitted to the jail, nor could minors after October 2013.)
- The Core Member simply “changed her mind about wanting a circle.”
- The Core Member was not allowed, as per transitional housing staff, to hold the circle with the people she wanted to invite, so the circle was called off.

Number of Circle Activities Completed

Out of the 19 original referrals, 18 Core Members completed a pre-circle. The one referral that did not complete a pre-circle did not do so because the transitional housing staff would not allow the people she wanted to invite to attend the circle, and the Core Member decided not to move forward with the program.

In addition to the pre-circles conducted with Core Members, the Restorative Transition Circles program Coordinator also made multiple attempts to hold a private pre-circle with every Family Member and Other Participant who intended to participate in the program. This was either done in person or on the phone. Only two family member participants did not have pre-circles because they did not have a phone or did not return the coordinator’s phone calls. When a phone or in-person pre-circle was not possible before the date of the circle, the coordinator would conduct a very brief pre-circle just prior to the participant’s first circle. Any participant whose first circle was not the Core Member’s first circle also had a pre-circle.

Thus, the circle process, intentions, and goals were explained to every participant in private with the facilitator prior to their participation in the circles, giving them a chance to discuss and process what they wanted to say and what they should expect.

This is particularly noteworthy because it means that pre-circles were conducted with at least the number of people who participated in the Core Members’ first circles and the 18 referred Core Members. There were ten “first circles” in total, with approximately 22 family members and 30 “other participants” at these circles. More pre-circles may have been conducted with individuals who intended to participate but ultimately did not. Still more pre-circles may have been conducted for new participants before the Core Member’s Transition Circle or Follow-Up circle. Therefore, at least 70 separate pre-circles were conducted.

In total, 10 Core Members participated in circles, along with approximately 31 Family Members and 45 Other Participants. In general, there were 2 facilitators, between 3 and 8 participants, and the Core Member at each circle. Table 1 below shows the number of participants broken down in different ways. The totals displayed below count every participant at every circle, so those that participated in multiple circles will be counted more than once. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the Coordinator had to orchestrate at least 81 different schedules throughout the duration of this program.

Table 1: Participant Counts

Total # of participants at all Circles	81
Total # of Core Members	10
Total # of Family Members	31
Total # of Other Participants	45
Total # Participated in Restorative or Combination Restorative/Transition Circles	52
Total # Participated in Transition Circles	12
Total # Participated in Follow-Up Circles	17

In all, 10 women had at least one pre-release circle with their invited participants. Six circles were a combination of restorative and transition planning. Four Core Members had circles that were strictly Restorative Circles, and 3 of those 4 women also had a second pre-release circle (the Transition Circle). Facilitators are planning to schedule a Transition Circle with one Core Member after this report is completed, closer to her release date in April 2014.

Five of the women who had done pre-release circles did not complete any post-release follow-up circles. Reasons for not moving forward included:

- Difficult to get in touch and/or schedule with Core Member post-release (lack of stable contact information)
- Core Member is waiting to feel “settled” or to achieve more personal goals
- Core Member moved out of the area
- Core Member was incarcerated on other offenses out of the area

The two women who had two pre-release circles also completed follow-up circles. One, in fact, has now had three post-release follow-up circles (though we only have data for two).

Overall, there were 16 total circles conducted for a group of 10 Core Members. Table 2 summarizes all of the activities conducted between September 2012 and December 2013.

Table 2: Number of Circle Activities Conducted

Type of Activity	Number Conducted	Number for which data available
Referrals Received	19	19
Pre-Circles conducted with Core Members	18	14
Pre-Release Combination Restorative/Transition Circles	6	3
Pre-Release Restorative Circles	4	4
Pre-Release Transition Circles	3	3
Post-Release Initial Follow-Up Circles	2	1
Second Post-Release Follow-Up Circles	1	1
TOTAL ACTIVITIES	53	45
TOTAL FULL-GROUP CIRCLES (not referrals or pre-circles)	16	12

Descriptions of Core Members' Strengths, Needs, and History

After conducting the pre-circles, facilitators completed a form to describe each Core Member's case. The case description form is provided in Appendix A. Out of the 18 women with whom pre-circles were conducted, 14 case descriptions were provided by program staff. Case descriptions for two women are not available because the reporting form was not available at the time the pre-circles were conducted, and the other two case descriptions were not completed due to the Core Member deciding not to continue with the program. All Core Members who had Restorative Circles had pre-circles and case descriptions provided.

Some women for whom case descriptions were provided did not complete circles, and some did. Nonetheless, available information from all 14 case descriptions is provided here in aggregate to get a broad sense of the reasons women were referred to the program.

Criminal Justice Status

For the most part, we do not know what crime the women were incarcerated for at the time of their referrals. We do know that two of the 19 referred women were incarcerated for probation violations, two as part of drug court sentencing/violations, one for an unspecified felony offense, one for a DUI (Driving Under the Influence), and one for petit larceny. They were serving sentences between 2 and 13 months long, with an average length of 6.7 months (n=10).

Demographics

Five of the women with case descriptions were Caucasian, three were African-American, and the race/ethnicity of six is unknown. None were Hispanic, though the ethnicity of seven is not known. Eight of the 19 women referred had no information provided on age. Of the rest, 5 women were in their twenties, 3 were in their forties, and 3 were in their fifties. The youngest reported age was 21 years old, and the oldest reported age was 53 years old.

Children

Out of the 13 women for whom information was collected, 12 had at least one child. Eleven women had at least one child currently under the age of 18, while 3 women had children who were all adults.

Housing

Home zip codes were provided for 11 women. All but one of them lived in the City of Rochester (prior to incarceration). Upon release, four of the women planned to return to stable, long-term residences they had prior to their incarceration. Another five had firm plans to move in with family upon release, and two had spots in transitional housing. Three reported tentative housing plans when the case description was written. Information was not provided for 6 Core Members.

Employment and Education

At least 6 of the women had a history of employment. Many wished to attend school upon their release. Some wanted to obtain their GED, but most wanted to begin or continue taking college courses. Some expressed concern about how their criminal record would affect their ability to attend college or obtain employment in certain fields.

Substance Use/Abuse and Mental Health History

Eleven out of the 14 for whom information was provided reported a history of substance use, though several have been sober for long periods of time in the past. Some reported using but not abusing some substances. Many, but not all, of the women had mental health concerns, including trauma, addiction, and anger issues. Some reported diagnoses of personality disorders, anxiety, and depression. Many were seeking support and mental health counseling upon their release from incarceration, though not all had been in counseling before. Some mentioned changes they have made since coming to jail in how they deal with situations.

Mentors and Case Managers

It is often quite difficult to connect ex-offenders with appropriate mentors, as volunteer mentors are hard to come by. It is noteworthy that over half of the referred women had mentors assigned. Out of all 19 referrals, 9 of the women had a mentor assigned, 8 of whom were assigned prior to the Core Member's release. Four women did not have an assigned mentor, and data is missing for 6 women. Eight out of the ten women who completed any circles had a mentor, so one referred woman had a mentor assigned but did not complete any circles. Only 2 women definitively have a case manager assigned from the Catholic Family Center's Monroe County Re-Entry Task Force, as the program has very limited availability to accept case management referrals from the Restorative Transition Circles program.

Reasons for Wanting Restorative Circles

The 14 case descriptions all included the primary reasons the Core Members wished to participate in the Restorative Circles program. As would probably be expected, many of the women wanted to reconcile issues with at least part of their families so they could be more involved in one another's lives (8 of the 14 specifically mentioned this). One woman specifically wanted to clarify what types of relationships she would have with certain people after release and to seek their forgiveness for past harm done. At least three women wanted to discuss with family how much they have changed during their incarceration and/or substance

abuse recovery efforts. Four of the women sought to understand how their children or other family members were affected by their behavior and incarceration. One Core Member wanted to help her family understand her struggles with addiction. Many wanted to have deeper and more communicative relationships with people in their family, even though they were already relatively close. The Core Members reported a goal of these circles was to help reach many goals, including finding housing, establishing counseling and other support systems, obtaining employment, and pursuing educational opportunities upon release.

Pre-Program Relationship Status and Support Networks

The case description form requested descriptions of the Core Members' relationships with family and other supporters. These, as expected, varied widely. Some women had strong and supportive relationships with their family members, but they needed to clarify roles, define boundaries and rules, discuss emotional issues, and heal wounds. Other Core Members had more estranged relations with Family Members. In such cases, those family members were often resistant to participating. Other Core Members had experienced trauma in their past that they wished to finally address with family members to whom they were relatively close.

The Core Members all reported having at least some support networks in place. Some had family or friends they considered their strongest supports, while others had the support of mentors, case workers, social workers, mental health clinicians, recovery sponsors, church members, and others in the community. Almost all planned to strengthen their support networks after release, especially by accessing counseling and other services within the community.

Survey Analysis

Methodology and Interpretation

Next, we look at the surveys completed by each participant after every circle and the notes from facilitators. The survey forms are included in Appendix B. Each type of participants took a slightly different survey, depending on whether they were a Core Member, Family Member, Other Participant, or Facilitator. Also, the surveys given at pre-release circles were slightly different from the surveys given at post-release follow-up circles, though many questions are matched across survey types.

Participants chose a response on a five-point scale as to how strongly they agreed with prompting statements. In coding the results, 1 was equivalent to Strongly Agree, 2 to Agree, 3 to Neutral, 4 to Disagree, and 5 to Strongly Disagree. We used these values to calculate averages, so the closer the average is to 1.0, the more participants, on average, agreed with the statement. The closer the average is to 5.0, the more participants disagreed with the statement.

Ideally, if the same participants were present at each of a Core Member's circles, we would be able to see how each participant's attitude changed over time by analyzing their survey responses. However, most participants did not attend multiple circles, and some attended their first circle after the Core Member's release. This was often due to difficulties in scheduling, variations in willingness of participants, and unforeseen conflicts. As a result, we cannot say

how particular individuals – besides the Core Member – felt over time. We analyze the surveys in aggregate, though, to see if any trends are apparent over time or between the groups.

Finally, there was a relatively small number of surveys conducted. Thus it is rare for differences between surveys or groups to be statistically significant. Nonetheless, the results shown here are promising and indicate that participants were very satisfied with the Restorative Transition Circles program, no matter how many circles they attended.

Questions Common to All Participant Surveys

There were six questions asked on all participant surveys (but not on facilitator surveys). Those questions ask Core Members and participants how they felt about the circle they just went through. Table 3 shows the average responses to these six questions across all circles, in total and broken down by participant type.

Table 3: Average Responses to Questions Common to All Surveys

(A score of 1.00 corresponds to “Strongly Agree”, 2.00 to “Agree”, 3.00 to “Neutral,” etc.)

Prompting Statement	Overall Average Response (n = 62)	Core Member Average Response (n = 11)	Family Member Average Response (n = 22)	Other Participant Average Response (n = 29)
I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.	1.29	1.27	1.27	1.31
I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.	1.27	1.27	1.26	1.28
The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.	1.37	1.18	1.35	1.45
I wanted to participate in the Circle.	1.35	1.00	1.61	1.28
The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.	1.35	1.18	1.30	1.45
What I shared was heard by others in the circle.	1.38	1.18	1.30	1.38

Summary of Responses: Questions Common to All Surveys

As you can see, the participants, on average across all circles, agreed or strongly agreed with every statement, indicating high levels of satisfaction with the Circle process. Responses varied the most among participant types when asked if they wanted to participate in the circle. Core Members agreed much more strongly that they wanted to participate in the circle than Family Members did. In fact, the difference in average response between the Core Members and Family

Members was statistically significant at a 99% confidence interval (significance = 0.001). (In other words, there is greater than a 99% chance that the difference between Core Members and Family Members was due to something other than chance variation in how people responded.)

Similarly, Other Participants were significantly less likely than Core Members to want to participate in the circle (at a 95% confidence interval, significance = 0.030). This difference is less severe than that between Core Members and Family Members, but it is clear that Core Members were the most likely group to want to participate. This makes sense because Core Members requested the circle in the first place and selected those who would be invited.

The only other statistically significant difference between groups across all surveys for these first six questions was that Other Participants felt less strongly than Core Members that what they shared in the Circle was heard by others (95% confidence interval, significance = 0.049).

Across all circles, Family Members and Other Participants did not significantly differ from one another in how they responded to these first six questions.

Pre-Release Restorative and Combination Circles Surveys

Next, we break down survey results by type of circle. We start with the pre-release circle surveys that were done at the Core Member's *first* circle while in jail, which was either a Restorative Circle or Combination Restorative/Transition Circle. There were 10 "first circles" conducted. Four were strictly Restorative Circles, and 6 combined the Restorative and Transition Circles. Because the surveys were not prepared until February 2013, surveys were completed for 7 of these "first circles." In total, there were 6 Core Members, 15 family members, and 11 "other participants" surveyed regarding the Core Members' first circles.

Again, the first six prompting statements were the same on all surveys. Then, each type of participant (Core Member, Family Member, or Other Participant) had slightly different sets of statements to respond to. Table 4 summarizes the average scores for each question, indicating which participants were asked each question.

Table 4: Aggregate Responses to Pre-Release First Circle Surveys

Prompting Statement	Participant Type Asked	Overall Average Response	Core Member Average (n=6)	Family Average (n=15)	Other Participant Average (n=11)
I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.	All	1.22 (n=32)	1.33	1.20	1.18
I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.	All	1.22 (n=32)	1.33	1.20	1.18
The circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.	All	1.31 (n=32)	1.33	1.33	1.27
I wanted to participate in the circle.	All	1.34 (n=32)	1.00	1.60	1.18
The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.	All	1.31 (n=32)	1.33	1.27	1.36
What I shared was heard by others in the circle.	All	1.31(n=32)	1.33	1.27	1.36
Core Member: At least one of my family members shared meaningful information during the Circle.	Core Member	1.17 (n=6)	1.17	N/A	N/A
Core Member: The circle has provided me with a better understanding of the impact that my incarceration has had on my family. Family: The circle helped me to better cope with the incarceration of the core member.	Core Member & Family Members	1.43 (n=21)	1.33	1.47	N/A
Core Member: The circle process helped me to better understand how to continue the healing with my family.	Core Member	1.50 (n=6)	1.50	N/A	N/A
Core Member: The circle process helped me to better understand how to best spend the rest of my time in jail.	Core Member	2.00 (n=6)	2.00	N/A	N/A
Core Member: I was able to give adequate input into the development of my own re-entry plan. Family/Other Participant: My input was used in the development of the re-entry plan.	All	1.68 (n=28)	1.20 (n=5)	1.57 (n=14)	2.11 (n=9)
The re-entry plan is clear on what must be done in order to be successful.	All	1.79 (n=29)	1.40 (n=5)	1.57 (n=14)	2.30 (n=10)
Core Member: I will follow the re-entry plan. Family/Other Participant: I believe the core member will follow the re-entry plan.	All	1.85 (n=27)	1.00 (n=4)	1.86 (n=14)	2.22 (n=9)

Prompting Statement (continued...)	Participant Type Asked	Overall Average Response	Core Member Average (n=6)	Family Average (n=15)	Other Participant Average (n=20)
Core Member: There are people who want to support me throughout my re-entry. Family/Other Participant: I will support the Core Member throughout her re-entry process.	All	1.25 (n=28)	1.20 (n=5)	1.21 (n=14)	1.33 (n=9)
Core Member: I am better prepared for re-entry into society. Family: The Circle helped to better prepare me for the core member's re-entry.	Core Member & Family	1.33 (n=18)	1.00 (n=4)	1.43 (n=14)	N/A
Family/Other Participant: I better understand what the core member is feeling.	Family & Other Participants	1.42 (n=26)	N/A	1.33	1.55
Family/Other Participant: The Core Member was open to my input.	Family & Other Partic.	1.31 (n=26)	N/A	1.27	1.36
Family: I now have a better understanding as to what I can do to aid the core member in her transition.	Family	1.53 (n=15)	N/A	1.53	N/A

Summary of the Surveys from the First Pre-Release Circles

There are a few interesting results that this reveals about the first pre-release circles. First, all participant types for the first pre-release circles agreed with all of the statements, but to different degrees. The following differences in average response were statistically significant at about a 95% confidence interval for participants at the Core Member's first circle:

- Core Members wanted to participate in the circles more than their Family Members did (significance = 0.014).
- Other Participants felt less that they were able to give input into the re-entry plan than Core Members did (significance = 0.035). They all still largely "agreed" that their input was used in developing the plan.
- Core Members felt significantly more confident that they would follow the re-entry plan than their family members thought they would (significance = 0.001).
- Other Participants were also significantly less confident than Core Members were that the Core Member would follow the re-entry plan (significance = 0.001).
- Core Members felt more prepared for their re-entry than their family members did (significance = 0.028).
- Core Members felt the re-entry plan was clearer than Other Participants did (significance = 0.047), and Family Members also felt the plan was clearer than Other Participants did (significance = 0.014). This may be because many groups did not get a chance to really develop a re-entry plan at the pre-release circles. Also, many Other Participants were case workers who have experience in re-entry and thus may know better than Core Members or Family Members how clear a plan should be.

Several respondents wrote comments explaining that that they responded “neutral” to questions about re-entry planning because the group did not work on the re-entry plan very much at that first circle. Some expected to work on the re-entry plan at a future circle, while others were unsure when it would be planned. This may help explain why statements about the re-entry plan were agreed with less than other statements.

All that said, since a score of 1.00 means “Strongly Agree” and 2.00 means “Agree,” all participants agreed with most of the statements, indicating a high level of satisfaction with these first circles for all participants. All participants felt satisfied with their participation in the circle, that the circle was a safe place to share concerns, and that they had a fair opportunity to contribute and be heard. The circle helped everyone understand each other more and cope with the effects of the Core Member’s incarceration.

Pre-Release Transition Circles Surveys

Next, we look specifically at the survey responses following Transition Circles. There were three pre-release “second circles” (Transition Circles) conducted. Surveys were available from those three Core Members, five family members, and nine other participants. Ideally, participants at the Transition Circle would be the same people who participated in the first Restorative Circle. However, this was not necessarily the case (except for the Core Member), so for some Family Members or Other Participants, the Transition Circle may have been their first circle participation. Table 5 shows the average responses from Transition Circle participants.

Table 5: Aggregate Responses to Pre-Release Transition Circle Surveys

Prompting Statement	Participant Type Asked	Overall Average Response	Core Member Average (n=3)	Family Average (n=5)	Other Participant Average (n=9)
I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.	All	1.41 (n=17)	1.33	1.40	1.44
I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.	All	1.35 (n=17)	1.33	1.40	1.33
The circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.	All	1.41 (n=17)	1.00	1.40	1.56
I wanted to participate in the circle.	All	1.35 (n=17)	1.00	1.80	1.22
The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.	All	1.41 (n=17)	1.00	1.40	1.56
What I shared was heard by others in the circle.	All	1.53 (n=17)	1.00	1.40	1.78
Core Member: At least one of my family members shared meaningful information during the Circle.	Core Member	1.00 (n=2)	1.00 (n=2)	N/A	N/A

Prompting Statement (continued...)	Participant Type Asked	Overall Average Response	Core Member Average	Family Average (n=5)	Other Participant Average
Core Member: The circle has provided me with a better understanding of the impact that my incarceration has had on my family. Family: The circle helped me to better cope with the incarceration of the core member.	Core Member & Family	1.71 (n=7)	1.00 (n=2)	2.00	N/A
Core Member: The circle process helped me to better understand how to continue the healing with my family.	Core Member	1.00 (n=2)	1.00 (n=2)	N/A	N/A
Core Member: The circle process helped me to better understand how to best spend the rest of my time in jail.	Core Member	1.33 (n=3)	1.33	N/A	N/A
Core Member: I was able to give adequate input into the development of my own re-entry plan. Family/Other Participant: My input was used in the development of the re-entry plan.	All	1.69 (n=16)	1.00	2.00	1.75 (n=8)
The re-entry plan is clear on what must be done in order to be successful.	All	1.47 (n=17)	1.00	1.60	1.56
Core Member: I will follow the re-entry plan. Family/Other Participant: I believe the core member will follow the re-entry plan.	All	1.88 (n=17)	1.33	1.80	2.11
Core Member: There are people who want to support me throughout my re-entry. Family/Other Participant: I will support the Core Member throughout her re-entry process.	All	1.29 (n=17)	1.00	1.40	1.33
Core Member: I am better prepared for re-entry into society. Family: The Circle helped to better prepare me for the core member's re-entry.	Core Member & Family	1.50 (n=8)	1.00	1.80	N/A
Family/Other Participant: I better understand what the core member is feeling.	Family & Other Partic.	1.50 (n=14)	N/A	1.60	1.44
Family/Other Participant: The Core Member was open to my input.	Family & Other Partic.	1.57 (n=14)	N/A	1.60	1.56
Family: I now have a better understanding as to what I can do to aid the core member in her transition.	Family	1.60 (n=5)	N/A	1.60	N/A

Summary of Pre-Release Transition Circle Surveys

Clearly, the three Core Members who had a second pre-release circle were very satisfied with the process. Both either strongly agreed or agreed with every statement, except one Core Member skipped several questions. Because there are only three respondents, though, we cannot really generalize these findings.

One of the Core Members did not have any family members present at the Transition Circle, so the Family Member results shown here are for the family members from the other two circles. Interestingly, Core Members did not respond significantly differently from their Family Members on any question at these Transition Circles.

The 9 other participants consisted of 3 mentors, 2 Step By Step staff members, 2 members of the Core Member's religious community, one therapist, and one "other."

Other Participants agreed less than Core Members that the contributions of professional staff were beneficial (significance = 0.013). Other Participants agreed less than Core Members that what they shared was heard by others in the circle (significance = 0.008). They agreed less than Core Members that their input was used in developing the re-entry plan (significance = 0.020) and that the re-entry plan was clear (significance = 0.013). Other Participants did not respond significantly differently from Family Members, but their opinions were in general slightly less positive than those of Family Members.

At first glance, it seems that the Other Participants felt less satisfied with the Transition Circle than Core Members or Family Members. However, when we consider that many of the Other Participants did not know the Core Member for very long, that this was the first circle they attended, and that many are professionals with experience in re-entry, we see that we must take these inferences with a grain of salt.

There are a few noticeable differences in responses between the "first" Circles and the Transition Circles. First, respondents overall felt they were able to contribute more to the re-entry plan during the Transition Circle than they did after the first pre-release circle (which for some was their only pre-release circle). Core Members felt that they knew better how to spend the rest of their time in jail, and they felt the re-entry plan was clearer after the Transition Circle. Thus, it does seem important to set the time aside to specifically develop a re-entry plan.

Second, Core Members responded more similarly to their Family Members at the Transition Circles than at the "first" circles. We cannot really infer why this might be true, though it may be that those family members who were able to schedule multiple circles were more responsive in general and "on the same page," so to speak, with the Core Member. It could also be that going through the Restorative Circle helped the Core Member and her Family Members to get "on the same page."

Pre-Release Circle Additional Comments

There were “additional comments” provided on five of the eight Core Member pre-release circle surveys. One Core Member offered thanks and hoped everyone would stay in touch. Another expressed that the circle “really helped me with my family and all that I want to accomplish.” Another expressed similar sentiments, adding, “I feel a lot more confident leaving jail.” Finally, one Core Member thought the pre-release circle provided an opportunity for a specific family member to speak her mind and found that helpful.

When asked if they had any additional comments, seven Family Members responded as follows:

- “I think it was very good to let [the Core Member] know what is expected of her when she gets out and what she expects of us. Also was good for her to set goals to achieve and boost her confidence”
- “I wish [the Core Member] would have shared a little more on what her triggers were so that we were better prepared to make sure they are [minimized]”
- “Thank you so much! This benefitted me and my family immensely!”
- “I wish the best for [the Core Member] and pray for her to change people, places, and things.”
- “This is a wonderful program. I am so happy that [the Core Member] was able to experience it and me also thanks so much”
- “I hoped the circle will be a better plan and hope other people to”
- “The circle was well facilitated. The environment created was comfortable for open communication and sharing of feelings and thoughts.”

Family members were grateful for the program and felt cautiously hopeful that the Core Member would continue on the right path. They felt the circles were facilitated very well.

“Other Participants” were asked what their relationship was to the respondent. Most of them were Step by Step staff members (26%), a therapist or counselor (26%), mentors (21%), a member of the Core Member’s religious community (10.5%), or “other” (15.8%).

When asked if they had any additional comments, Other Participants provided 7 comments in total. Two praised the facilitation of the circle. Two others explained why they felt the program was beneficial: “to begin communication between the family members and friends.” The circle helped the Core Member clearly see the good qualities she has “that point her toward success.” Two other participants stated they would follow up with the Core Member regarding topics discussed at the circle, such as discharge planning, housing, and programs. Finally, one participant suggested facilitators “ask the core member to also name a strength for herself.”

Post-Release Follow-Up Circles

Two of the three Core Members who completed two pre-release circles (Restorative and Transition) also completed post-release follow-up circles. The Family Members and Other Participants for the follow-up circles were not necessarily the same as those for the pre-release circles. One Core Member’s follow-up circle consisted of 8 “other participants”, two facilitators, and herself; most of the other participants were part of her religious community. For the other circle, there was 1 facilitator and 3 family members in addition to the Core Member. Surveys were not completed at this circle, except for one Other Participant. That group, however, had a

second follow-up circle three months later, for which surveys are available. The same participants from the first follow-up circle attended this second follow-up circle.

Because of the low number of follow-up circles conducted (three in total), we analyze all follow-up circle data together, as shown in Table 6 below. Note that the prompting statements differ from those on the pre-release circle surveys.

Table 6: Responses to Post-Release Surveys for Follow-Up Circles

Prompting Statement	Participant Type Asked	Overall Average Response	Core Member Average (n=2)	Family Average (n=3)	Other Participant Average (n=9)
I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.	All	1.31 (n=13)	1.00	1.50 (n=2)	1.33
I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.	All	1.29 (n=14)	1.00	1.33	1.33
The circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.	All	1.43 (n=14)	1.00	1.33	1.56
I wanted to participate in the circle.	All	1.36 (n=14)	1.00	1.33	1.44
The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.	All	1.36 (n=14)	1.00	1.33	1.44
What I shared was heard by others in the circle.	All	1.36 (n=14)	1.00	1.33	1.44
So far, the Core Member has (or I have) been successful in following her (my) re-entry plan.	All	1.69 (n=13)	1.00	1.67	1.88 (n=8)
Family/Other Participant: I have supported the core member in her re-entry process. Core Member: I am supported in my re-entry process.	All	1.79 (n=14)	1.00	1.67	2.00
The Circle process has contributed to a positive transition into the community for me/the core member.	All	1.50 (n=14)	1.00	1.67	1.56
Family: I have been involved throughout the core member's re-entry process.	Family	1.33 (n=3)	N/A	1.33	N/A
Family: I feel that I have been supported throughout the core member's re-entry.	Family	1.50 (n=2)	N/A	1.50 (n=2)	N/A
Family/Other Participant: I am happy that I participated in this program.	Family & Other Partic.	1.42 (n=12)	N/A	1.33	1.44

Summary of Trends in Post-Release Circle Surveys

Core Members and Family Members did not respond, on average, significantly differently from one another, nor did Family Members and Other Participants. There were, however, several statistically significant differences between Core Members and Other Participants. This may be because many of the Other Participants that attended the one follow-up circle had just become involved in the core member's life, and it was also the first circle they participated in. The statistically significant trends found were as follows:

- Core Members were more satisfied with their participation in the circle process than Other Participants were (significance = 0.081).
- Core Members agreed more that they were given a fair opportunity to contribute their input than Other Participants were (significance = 0.081).
- Core Members felt safer to express their concerns than Other Participants did (significance = 0.051).
- Other Participants felt the contributions of professional staff were significantly less beneficial than Core Members did (significance = 0.035).
- Other Participants agreed less than Core Members that what they shared was heard by others in the circle (significance = 0.035).
- Other Participants felt very significantly less that they have supported the core member in her re-entry than the core member *felt* supported through her re-entry process (significance = 0.003). This may be because many Other Participants had just recently met the Core Member.
- Core Members agreed significantly more that the circle process contributed to a positive transition into the community for themselves than Other Participants thought it did (significance = 0.013). This may be due to the Other Participants being less familiar with the circle process.

Post-Release Circle Survey Additional Comments

There was space on the post-release follow-up circle survey for additional comments. A Family Member felt the circles were “very successful and helpful” and hoped to continue to have circles. A Core Member felt the facilitator was “a very sweet person who has helped out my family.” She expressed appreciation for the Step by Step program in general, stating, “If it wasn't for them coming to jail to help out us women, I don't know where I would be.”

A facilitator remarked, “It was fantastic to see the participants again. The circle format was a little different, but I find that the family shared more deeply and in an even more considered way than in the past.”

Survey Response Changes Over Time for Circle Participants

With this small amount of data and because participants did not necessarily attend every circle with their Core Member, it is difficult to ascertain trends over time from the survey data. However, it does seem that as Core Members had more pre-release circles, they felt they knew

better how to spend their time in jail. Core Members remained very confident throughout the process that they would (pre-release) and were (post-release) following the re-entry plan and that the circles helped ease their transition back into the community.

Survey responses did not, for the most part, change in any noticeable or significant way over time (i.e. date) or type of circle. Participants and Core Member were simply satisfied with the entire process, no matter when the circle was or what type of circle they had.

However, there is a weak correlation for Other Participants’ responses only over time. They agreed less that what they shared in the circles was heard by others as time went on ($r(27) = 0.400, p < 0.05$). We cannot say why. It may be something about the circles themselves, or about the types of participants involved as time went on, or any other reason one can think of.

Facilitator Surveys

There were two Restorative Circles Facilitators at every Circle, but one facilitator at one Circle did not truly facilitate and thus did not complete a facilitator survey. Two others did not return surveys, but there is at least one facilitator survey response from each circle. Facilitators took the same survey no matter what type of Circle it was. Facilitators often facilitated multiple circles, with the program Coordinator co-facilitating almost all of them.

The facilitators’ survey only had four prompting statements and left much more space for additional comments than participants’ surveys did. Table 7 shows the results of the facilitator surveys, averaged over all Circles and broken down by each circle type.

Table 7: Average Facilitator Survey Responses

Prompting Statement	Average Response for all Circles (n = 19)	Average Response Pre-Release Combo Circles (n = 6)	Average Response Restorative Circles (n=5)	Average Response Pre-Release Transition Circles (n = 5)	Average Response Follow-Up Circles (n = 3)
I am satisfied with the participation of the group members during the circle.	1.37	1.33	1.20	1.80	1.00
The group members were given a fair opportunity to contribute their input.	1.21	1.17	1.00	1.60	1.00
The circle provided the group members with a safe environment to share their concerns.	1.05	1.00	1.00	1.20	1.00
Things that were shared in the circle were heard by others.	1.33 (n=18)	1.50	1.20	1.50 (n=4)	1.00

Trends in Facilitator Surveys

The facilitators' responses, overall, were very positive and had little variation. There were no evident correlations as to how facilitators responded after pre-release circles compared to post-release circles. Facilitators' responses also did not change in any consistent way over time or by circle type. The only possible trend is that facilitators agreed slightly less with all statements after the transition circles compared to restorative or post-release circles. More data would need to be collected to ascertain why this is so or if it is simply due to chance.

Facilitator Open-Ended Responses

When asked for additional comments or concerns, facilitators often addressed many issues and what themes were covered at the circle. Some circles focused on allowing Core Members and participants to process what it was like that some invitees did not attend the circle. Many were already aware of the struggles and issues in their relationships, but they used the time to actually discuss it in healthy ways. It gave the participants a chance to think differently about these issues. Many of the facilitators' comments shed light on the logistical difficulties of conducting the circles, the difficulties in actual facilitation, and the importance of service connectivity and case management.

Some selected quotes from facilitators follow:

- “This circle process was amazing – it was such a supportive and encouraging circle for the core member. Her current needs for support (transportation, conversation/emotional support, spiritual support, accompaniment to AA/NA meetings) were discussed and members of the circle offered what and when they are available to support her. In a post-circle conversation over food, one supporter mentioned connecting the core member with a lawyer and a doctor... she knows to see if these professionals can address other frustrations of navigating different systems... This highlights the importance of networking the core member not only back into society with her supporters, but also the importance of connecting/networking the core member into services...on the outside. It seems important to have service providers/case workers take part in the follow-up circle as much as they can.”
- “The most important outcomes were that the family member was heard and the Core Member was able to get clarity on the Family Member's needs. There was a very tense atmosphere going into the circle. The mood was different leaving the circle, and though we really only got through the first part of the conversation (the Family Member had to leave for a prior appointment) it seemed that we needed that much time... to dialogue around the impact of the incarceration and addiction.”
- “A number of family members could not attend as they were out of state. Those that could be reached by phone we collected input from. The request from the [core member's] daughter (not present) led to an important discussion about the CM's choices in relation to men. This was a beautiful circle - the Core Member & supporters really were open and honest. It was very easy from a facilitation standpoint.”
- “I think it went well overall. At times it was a little clunky and I may have missed some points. I think I will get better with practice.”
- “Sometimes difficult to keep focused - I think this was partly because there was a chunk of time between the 1st & 2nd circle & still a lot of healing to do.”

- “Helpful co-facilitation! I really appreciated my co-facilitator asking participants to repeat or summarize what they’d heard.”
- “It took about 20 minutes for us to be let into the visitation area and the process had to be done by a certain time. Despite the time constraints we got through all the restorative elements. The atmosphere was positive – not what we were expecting.”
- “The process worked for the participants. The mother had important issues that she wanted her daughter to hear. She was non-judgmental and gave her daughter a lot to consider as she prepares to leave jail. The elephant in the room was her father who promised to come and did not. The Core Member has serious issues with her father – it was difficult for her to get beyond this absence....”
- “I need some help with the transition process – sorry!!! I’m wondering if it is useful to explain possibilities on how the circle can be used or possible outcomes? [The other facilitator] did a wonderful job. She always asks wonderful follow-up questions. The family contribution was beautiful.”
- “Difficult! Family dynamic not kindly suited to jails. Not sure how we could have changed the format to suit the needs of the participants.”

Core Member Case Notes and Progress Summary

In addition to conducting the Restorative Circles, the Coordinator connected Core Members to services, mentors, and case managers, and all but three of the referred Core Members attended Step By Step workshops in jail as well. We provide, in this section, a summary of the qualitative notes regarding the Core Members’ service connectivity and general progress. Information is only provided in aggregate to avoid potential identification of any one individual.

At each Core Member’s first pre-release circle, notes were taken regarding the Core Member’s achievements while incarcerated, her strengths, and what she can do to make things right with her loved ones and herself. Most groups also outlined a transition plan, including steps to secure housing, seek counseling, restore relationships with family, and other priorities. Such case notes are available from six of the Core Members’ first circles and one from a follow-up circle.

The groups outlined many achievements made by the Core Members during their time in jail. Common achievements included gaining higher self-esteem and self-awareness, participating in groups while incarcerated that helped them grow, developing new coping tools such as using journals and anger management skills, learning to react differently to situations, and listening differently. The Core Members seemed gained self-confidence and methods for achieving their personal goals. Also, some were happy that they put some plans in place for their re-entry. There was a strong sense of hope, persistence, and confidence evident in the way Core Members portrayed their accomplishments, and they believed they had the rights tools, supports, and attitudes to reach their goals after release.

The groups also identified the various strengths they felt the Core Members had. This, of course, varied widely depending on the individual. A theme of hope pervaded the responses, again portraying a confidence that the Core Members had made lasting changes in their outlook or

behavior and that the Core Member would achieve her post-release goals. Some examples of strengths included:

- Intelligence, wisdom, and good communication skills
- Ability to encourage others, helping and being concerned about others, loving
- Having inner strength, optimism, confidence, humility, spirituality, and self-respect
- Having the dedication and courage to reach goals and the honesty and humility to ask for help when needed (self-advocacy)
- Perseverance, a strong spirit, and enthusiasm

Next, group members identified ways the Core Member could “make things right” for her family and herself. Common themes included:

- Outlining rules or behavioral expectations (for both the Core Member and family)
- Continuing to understand the effect of one’s behavior on others
- Discontinuing destructive or unhealthy relationships
- Maintaining or creating supports (counseling, mentoring) and taking medications
- Taking things one step at a time and remembering accomplishments
- Expectations for contributing to their households and/or community through work, income, family support, etc.
- Having the Core Member prioritize her own needs over what others ask her to do
- Remembering that people love and support the Core Member

Then, a transition plan was identified for most circles, though some circles were primarily focused on communication and healing and thus did not get to make a firm transition plan at this stage. Those who did make transition plans identified, for instance, who would pick them up on the day of release from incarceration, where they would live upon release, and how they would go about finding their own housing. Plans included, for some, longer-term goals such as regaining custody of their children and starting one’s own business. Another woman made plans to obtain her GED while attending a culinary training program.

Plans were also established by most women to continue seeking mental health or substance abuse treatment. They made specific plans to pick up medications, attend appointments, establish counseling sessions, and attend support groups. Some also identified ways to work on their physical health, such as setting up doctor’s appointments, going for walks, and maintaining good nutrition. Core Members identified ways to work on or maintain their self-esteem, which included personal care activities, journal writing, and setting up organizational schemes.

The Core Members all identified people or programs that were going to be their key supports in their re-entry and/or recovery, including defining the roles and expectations of those supporters (i.e. who the Core Member should call in given situations). Most intended to continue attending Step By Step workshops.

Finally, group members also set dates and/or expectations for future circles. Some discussed who they would encourage to attend the follow-up circle.

Post-Circle Follow-Up Notes

There was a wide variety of reasons that some Core Members did not complete follow-up circles after their release. These usually had to do with an inability to contact the family members or the Core Members after their release – a common problem in working with those in re-entry. One Core Member who completed a pre-release circle had to serve additional jail terms in other localities for prior charges, and another could only be reached through a social worker who was not responsive to the coordinator's calls. Another moved out of the area to live with family, and another did not have contact information with which the Coordinator could follow up.

Those whom the Coordinator could contact to schedule a follow-up circle often wanted to wait for more time to pass so that they could get settled after their release. Core Members often had many demands upon release, and it was difficult for them to prioritize the circles among their other concerns.

Researchers and project coordinators will consider ways by which a smoother transition can be made to encourage Core Members to have follow-up circles. Core Members may not feel like they have accomplished enough to be ready to do a follow-up circle, so it may be worth having a portion of the pre-release transition circles be devoted to developing a realistic timeline for goals that can be accomplished in a month or two after release, before the first follow-up circle.

Step by Step staff did, despite these obstacles, keep in touch with many of the referred Core Members. One Core Member had gotten a job after release but wanted to wait to do a follow-up circle. Another was addressing medical concerns and making full use of the services available to her. One Core Member is struggling to afford rent and to keep in touch with her original mentor, but she has been persistent and a strong self-advocate. She got a new mentor who has been a good support and also got a case worker through the Catholic Family Center's Re-Entry Task Force. She was interested in a follow-up circle but wanted to get more settled first. Another Core Member was proud to say that she decided to not live with her boyfriend and to instead live with her sober sister and later a friend. She struggled with usual issues such as a sanction from social services, but she managed to set herself up with mental health and physical healthcare appointments. She still attends Step By Step workshops and has a healthy support system. Another referred Core Member never had a pre-release circle and was released too soon from the referral date to be connected with a mentor or case worker. Coordinators tried to schedule a circle three times, but family conflicts made it impossible. Despite these struggles, the coordinator reports that she is "doing well," has good support, and has enrolled in classes to further her education. Finally, one Core Member successfully served time in two separate jails for charges acquired prior to her referral. She is now living out-of-state and reportedly has gained employment. She is still in sporadic contact with her mentor.

In summary, many of the Core Members were still interested in having further circles, but they have struggled to coordinate family members' schedules, achieve their goals quickly enough, and maintain stable contact information. The program Coordinator made diligent efforts to schedule circles, even interviewing out-of-state family members over the phone so their input could be offered at the Circles. In the end, though, it is difficult to coordinate so many people, especially when some are not fully stable and so many are busy with pressing priorities.

Focus Groups and Interviews

To assess in more detail the effects of the Restorative Circles program and to get input from participants about what the program did well and how it could be improved, semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with several mentors and several Core Members. Facilitators were also interviewed in a focus group regarding how the program went and what they learned in the process. We discuss each of these in turn.

Core Member Interviews

Six of the eight Core Members who participated in circles consented to be interviewed by the researcher over the phone. Three interviews were ultimately completed. The outline of the Core Members' semi-structured phone interview is included in Appendix C.

Referral Process and Reason

All Core Members interviewed had been referred to the Restorative Circles program through their participation in Step by Step workshops at Monroe Correctional Facility. One specifically referred herself to the program after another woman in the workshop spoke about her experience with the program.

Two of the Core Members wanted to talk with their immediate family members about the effects of their past behavior, lifestyles, and addiction. The other wanted to “be on the same page” as her family when she got out.

Healing Relationships & Other Circle Discussions

They all reported tremendous appreciation and success from the circle program in terms of helping them in their relationships. One woman had a fairly “horrible” first pre-release circle due to the only attendee “bringing a lot of resentment and anger” to the circle. Thankfully, she went on to have another pre-release circle with different people and a follow-up circle with still more supporters, which were far more positive.

During the circles, all of the women felt initially nervous, either because they were not sure what the other participants would say or because of having non-family members involved in family conversation. They tended to feel better as the conversations went on – except for the one woman's first circle – and left feeling positively overall. One Core Member was pleasantly surprised to find that their family members did not “lash out” or dismiss what she said because they had “heard it all before.” The one woman who had a rough first circle reported feeling angry after the first one. After the second, attended by those who had supported her throughout her incarceration, she felt “very happy, loved, supported, and very hopeful.”

Additionally, they felt their family members and other participants were comfortable in the circles. Core Members spoke highly of the skill of the facilitators in creating a safe environment for difficult conversations.

While some groups discussed the Core Member's criminal behaviors, others focused on their needs (i.e. for support, transportation, boundaries, etc.). Overall, they were very happy that their family members “got to say what they'd been holding in [and] how they were feeling.”

All three Core Members specifically mentioned feeling disappointed when certain individuals did not come to the circle or, in the one case, that the person who came was not participating in the intended spirit of the circle. One had a daughter she hoped could attend, but she was young and unwilling to “talk about family stuff” among strangers.

Most Beneficial Aspects

Core Members felt the most helpful aspect of the program was that every person had a turn to speak and to apologize or express pain. They also found it helpful to agree on a re-entry plan. It helped Core Members know what was expected of them when they were released and how to work towards their goals. They were able to discuss with supporters what level and types of commitments those supporters could make to assist the Core Member, and what they needed from the Core Member. It was helpful for all to specify times and dates for tasks post-release.

The Core Members all felt the circles were instrumental in helping to work on their relationships and to plan their re-entry. The effects have been tangible for many months for all of those interviewed. The circles “made it easier to come home,” as one woman said. Another said, “I can converse with my children now without feeling guilty, arguing, bickering.” She felt the circles improved her family’s communication skills, which they continue to use to this day. She felt she “needed a stepping stone to be able to do it and be honest with my kids about what I’m going through” and did not feel she could have had this type of conversation on her own. Another Core Member felt the circles helped improve her relationships with people who were new to her life. The people who participated in her circle have collectively supported her in a number of ways since her release (transportation, attending religious events, babysitting, etc.), and she felt that if she had not done the circle, she would never have felt comfortable being so close and trusting of them.

Mentoring Relationships

The Core Members interviewed had a mentor assigned at one point, though their mentoring relationships varied greatly. One woman credited her mentor with “never letting go of me.” She was grateful that her mentor stood by her when she was going through difficult times and that she called her nearly every day. In contrast, another Core Member had an “awkward” and disconnected relationship with her mentor, which did not continue post-release. The other had a mentor with whom she lost contact. She was assigned another mentor with whom she had a better relationship, but ultimately they had ideological differences that resulted in a lack of contact as well. All of their mentors had attended at least one circle. The two who lost touch with their mentors wished they had better relationships but did not feel too severely hurt that it did not work out.

Re-Entry Planning & Successes To Date

All Core Members felt that they had ample input into their own re-entry plans. One in particular did most of the planning herself because the counselor at the jail was out on medical leave. All Core Members felt well-prepared on their release dates. One felt the planning done at the circle

helped her not be afraid when she was released. She successfully followed through with a plan to enroll in outpatient treatment. Core Members did not encounter much that was unexpected, except one thought her mentor would help more in her re-entry. Another thought she was serving a concurrent sentence for another charge, but actually she still had to serve more weekends in jail.

All of the Core Members interviewed are currently in stable housing with family, though one is working hard to move somewhere else with her child due to it not being a healthy environment.

For the most part, the Core Members felt their re-entry has lived up to their expectations, though they each reported several struggles. One stated that she gets easily overwhelmed, having been gone so long and still trying to get a grip on her life, belongings, and stability. They felt the circles helped them stay on track with their re-entry plan and conceptualize it better. They all know of resources available to help them reach their goals.

The Core Members reported that the Step by Step workshops at the jail were quite effective, though none had participated with Step by Step since getting released. One felt the workshops helped her “get in touch with myself a lot” and thus were good preparation for the circles. Another felt that it provided a good support network such that she could keep in touch with friends and find out about opportunities in the community.

Feedback on the Process and Facilitation

All Core Members said they would recommend this program to others. One advised that whoever participates in such circles should “be prepared to talk about anything and everything.”

Finally, the Core Members felt the scheduling worked well and that the format and organization of the circles was “perfect.” They all commented that the circles “flowed” well, referencing specifically the questions asked and how the time was organized.

Mentor Interviews

The Program Coordinator asked mentors if their phone numbers could be released to the researcher for interviews, and eight consented. In the end, phone interviews were conducted with four mentors, all of whom had participated in one circle each. The outline of the Mentors’ semi-structured phone interview is included in Appendix D.

Prior Experience with Counseling or Mentoring

The mentors had varied backgrounds. One works in the Correctional Facility, one is a social worker who works with women in re-entry, and one is currently obtaining her master’s degree in social work. Another really did not have any experience but simply wanted to help someone. They all wanted to help other women live better lives. One said, “A lot of us are products of our environment. Some of us escape it, but not everyone will. The ones who escape came in contact with people who offered that opportunity. They had to trust someone.” That is the role she hoped to play as a mentor.

Importance of Maintaining Communication

Most of the mentors interviewed have mentored or counseled multiple female ex-offenders. They often found that maintaining consistent communication was the biggest barrier to a successful mentoring relationship. When people get released from jail, they often lose touch with their mentors. One mentor felt that people really have a vision for how they will change while they are incarcerated, but once they have their freedom back – and all the frustrations that go with it – old habits start again. They often feel too busy to reach out to their mentors again.

How the Circles Were Valuable to Mentors

All mentors found the circle process to be of tremendous value. First, they felt it provided them with a better understanding of the dynamics at play in their mentee's life, especially within their family. It made it easier for the mentors to address the larger picture of the mentee's struggles. Also, meeting the mentee's family members gave them insight into why the Core Member behaved in certain ways. Third, it helped mentors understand what the mentee needs structure in and what things really bother her that she does not usually talk about. One mentor felt it was "enlightening" to learn about sensitive topics so that she could be mindful of those topics with her mentee.

All of the mentors felt that the other participants in the circles valued their presence and input. Most of them felt their role was to observe, listen, and learn what the Core Member and her supporters go through. Some felt more involved in the group process, trying to connect what participants said and clarify statements. They all felt their role as a mentor was largely to encourage their mentee to do the right things.

Difficult Aspects of the Program

The mentors reported several difficulties with the program. One pointed out that the circles are particularly difficult if children are present. Having a child present revealed, for one mentor, much about the family dynamics and the burden the child takes on, and she felt the circle process gave a healthy outlet for the child to speak her mind. Nonetheless, having children present who are too young distracted the groups from the circle process.

Mentors also found it difficult when the group got "a little emotional" and people spoke out of turn. Finally, they acknowledged that, often, the Core Member does a lot of work on understanding herself while incarcerated, but the family members may not have done such work and instead have continued prior behavioral and cognitive patterns. They recognized that it sometimes created tension if the family members were not as collected or self-aware as the Core Member.

One mentor found trust to be the hardest aspect of the program. She felt trust was a prerequisite to open conversation and would be ultimately relieving and beneficial to participants. She saw such relief when her mentee cried during the circle, sharing thoughts buried deep inside and telling people, "I'm hurt, I'm wounded, I'm torn, and I need to be helped." The mentor felt the circle gave an opportunity for her to open up. "It helped her but probably hurt too."

Another mentor felt the most difficult part was logistical. When they arrived for their circle, the jail was short-staffed, and they had to send for more officers to supervise the circle. Thus, their circle was delayed by over an hour, but fortunately they were able to still hold it.

What Worked Well at the Circles

The mentors felt that the re-entry planning portion went particularly well. They got to address simple plans that are easily forgotten in the process of re-entry, such as purchasing the Core Member a pill organizer and calendar. One mentor with clinical experience felt this was crucial so that the Core Member does not “easily get thrown off” by such basic needs in the midst of making so many new decisions after release.

They all felt that having each person talk in turn was highly beneficial and allowed for positive and effective communication. One felt everyone involved was “able to receive some things and give out some things” and exhibit a “great effort to understand [each other].” The circles also helped everyone learn communication skills and boundaries. One mentor commented that having a note-taker present was beneficial because it helped hold participants accountable to the tasks that they agreed to take on to support one another.

Reasonable Goals and Preparing for Re-Entry

The mentors spoke about helping the Core Members and their families set reasonable goals for their re-entry. For instance, one felt that if a Core Member has been incarcerated for a year, she has not even had to cook her own food or decide when to go to sleep for a very long time. She felt that family members cannot possibly expect to just give her children back to her on the day of her release and expect her to successfully take care of the children immediately. She felt it was very beneficial to discuss giving the Core Member time to adjust to life on the outside before throwing a mountain of new responsibilities on her, even if family members are stressed and counting the days until her release.

One mentor felt that the women need to “be prepared for not sticking to the plan” and to have alternative strategies ready when something goes wrong. They felt the Core Members need to fully understand the consequences of their actions, such as choosing to abuse substances again.

One mentor was confident that even though her mentee did not make the best decisions when she was released and they lost touch, simply having the conversations at the circle about “what is beneficial to her well-being and health” would stay with her and get used productively.

Ways to Improve the Program

Mentors suggested some ways to improve the program. One felt that the family or other participants should be better-prepared during the pre-circles so that they know what type of conversation to expect and are prepared to successfully enter the jail. She felt it would be beneficial for the Coordinator to call each participant a day before the circle, reminding them of the appointment time and the need for identification.

One mentor suggested the program be offered for incarcerated men as well, though she recommended that facilitators and the Program Coordinator receive training on how to work specifically with men, acknowledging different communication and anger management methods.

Another mentor suggested that contracts and incentives for the Core Members may improve long-term follow-through with the program and goals. She felt dates should be scheduled for post-release circles during the pre-release circles, even if they end up changing. Another mentor suggested the first follow-up circle be held very soon after release, perhaps two weeks, to simply check in. The Core Members could also break down their goals into personalized phases, which may help with people feeling ready to do the follow-up circles. She felt providing small, tangible incentives, such as bus passes or food baskets, would help get people to attend. She felt coordinators have to “acknowledge the mindset of the individual” – that tangible assistance and incentives will get them to show up far more readily than simply wanting to improve their relationships. Then, she thought, participants would advertise the program through word of mouth, saying, “They really help you if you stick with it,” meaning they provide both tangible and emotional support. This mentor felt that only the Core Member needed to be offered incentives; the others would “just have love and passion” to be there.

Finally, the mentors recommended, if it was at all possible, to have the Core Member “on the same side of the glass” for the circles. They felt it would facilitate comfort and honesty.

Discussing and Reflecting on the Circles Afterwards

The mentors felt that the circles definitely helped their mentees and their families. One worked extensively with the mentees afterwards and got to see them process the emotions that were brought up at the circles. She helped them assess their tools and develop new tools to process what they had experienced. Another mentor who talked with her mentee after the circle stated it improved the relationship between the mentee and her young daughter who attended the circle. Her mentee spoke about how emotionally challenging it was but that it was beneficial. The mentee did not feel that she could have had that conversation on her own. Another saw her mentee a few days after the circle and reported that she “was still on cloud nine from the circle. She was glad to have all the people she had the most respect for there.” She has not specifically mentioned the circle since then, but “has been talking about doing the right things.”

They felt the circles were challenging for all involved, but the challenge was necessary for growth and progress. For instance, one family member was particularly scolding of a Core Member. The mentor found this to be somewhat beneficial, as the mentee needed to hear the truth, but she also felt like the mentee’s “self-esteem was a little broken.” The circle managed, though, to “lift her spirits” by having everyone express how highly they thought of her. She felt it was useful not to “sugar coat” the difficult things, and it is important to “productively get the point across.” One mentor also noted that the circles revealed her mentee’s “triggers” – words or actions that family members said or did that would cause the mentee emotional distress. She worked with her mentee on diminishing her negative reactions to those triggers. She was able to work with the Core Members via role playing to practice handling comments like, “You’ve said this all before.” She reminded them that they are different women than they were a year ago.

One mentor felt that she learned a tremendous lesson in her mentoring and counseling: “I can’t take responsibility for the failures or successes of any of my clients.” She felt that she would always try her best to help, but she learned quickly that if a person fails, it is for many reasons; if they succeed, that person assuredly did far more work than anyone else could have done for her. Another felt hurt by her mentoring experiences. She felt she did not have enough support to successfully mentor, and was even scolded wrongfully by the mentoring agency for something she did not do. She felt mentors must go into mentoring acknowledging that it might not work out how they expect it to.

Facilitator Focus Group

A focus group was held with three Restorative Circles facilitators, one of whom was also the Program Coordinator. The outline for this focus group is included in Appendix E.

The Program Coordinator had facilitated or co-facilitated almost all of the circles and was in the most contact with the participants. The other two facilitators facilitated or co-facilitated a few circles each. One also worked with many of the Core Members through Step by Step.

Primary Purpose or Successes of the Circles

One facilitator felt the circles were a fantastic way to “give people an opportunity to have conversations that they have not been able to have or were afraid to have,” opening up communication in their relationships. She felt the transition planning was crucial but somewhat ancillary to the primary objective of healing relationships. This corresponds with much of what the Core Members stated themselves.

What Makes Women Interested in this Program?

We asked facilitators for any insight they had into how women who were interested in doing these circles were different from women who were not. They felt that the women in the circles “seem to have more of a long-term vision. Other women are focused on more immediate concerns, like when they’re getting out and what is happening with their charge.” Women who are not interested in the program often have more anxiety and less acceptance of their incarceration and own reality. They guessed it may have something to do with the various programs women are in.

Also, some of the Core Members had been through institutions and programs before, such as jail or rehab, and they are “ready to get their life straight now.” For instance, now that they have achieved sobriety, their next priority might be a career and caring for their children. Many were, for the first time, in a position where they could actually plan for the future. They seem “to look ahead in a different way” than women who were not interested in the program. All of the women who participated wanted to show their supporters how they have changed in behavior and attitude, and family members often say they do see that change.

Who Core Members Invited & Topics of Discussion

We asked what the circles primarily focused on. The facilitators emphasized that it is a very self-directed process such that the conversation changes based on the participants. One circle

focused on the Core Member's relationships, another on her motivations and history of theft. Many circles focused on the Core Member's substance abuse and how it affected their relationships. Sometimes, the family members are the ones who actually get the person arrested. The facilitators found it helpful to see what the family members are concerned with, which was not always the Core Member's offending behavior. Many participants acknowledged that it was not about the criminal behavior so much as it was about the behavior's consequences (going to jail) preventing the women from meeting her goals or responsibilities.

For some Core Members, the circle was not about repairing relationships, but rather about setting boundaries. They needed to feel secure and not guilty about expressing what they needed to make better decisions.

According to facilitators, a common problem that was brought up in the circles was that family members felt the men in the Core Members' lives were bad influences. They felt the Core Members truly needed to hear this, and they received it well. They were pleased to see that the families were "committed to being honest."

The facilitators noticed that Core Members rarely invited their significant others; instead, they seemed to be more concerned about their family relationships and knew their family members did not approve of their partners. The Program Coordinator would often suggest doing separate circles – one for the family and one for the significant other – so there was not tension among the group members in addition to tension between the Core Member and group members.

The facilitators discussed the difficulty Core Members had moving on from the absence of people they invited. The facilitators felt they had to spend a lot of time helping the Core Member process and move on from these absences, instead of focusing on who was actually there. Perhaps there is a way to better help Core Members prepare for the possibility that someone might not show up, prior to the circle.

Comfort of Participants: Who is Really Prepared for the Circle Work?

Facilitators stated that whether or not participants felt comfortable at the circles depended on the person. They guessed that participants came, even if they were uncomfortable, as a sign of support. They acknowledged that the Core Member is already in the worst situation she could be in, so her stakes may be lower than those for her family members. Family members often feel like they have to remain collected, and thus they may avoid the discomfort of being there. Many are willing to be a support for the person but are uncomfortable coming to the jail or having this type of dialogue.

Many times, "The Core Member has done the inner work and is willing to be vulnerable. Family members sometimes have not done the inner work yet, so it might be the first time they have been asked to be open and honest, especially among the family." This observation was also made by mentors.

The jail setting of course provided some discomfort. Nobody was allowed to leave the circles to use the bathroom, for instance. They felt the guards at the jail were very welcoming, supportive, helpful, and kind. They also felt it would be helpful to actually sit in a circle, as the Core

Member is always behind some type of barrier, making it “more like a panel.” Again, this observation was reiterated by the mentors. The facilitators always notice a more relaxed, equal atmosphere at the follow-up circles. Facilitators also noticed that people are usually more willing to share their thoughts in a second circle than they are in the first, probably because they know what to expect.

Clarity as an Outcome

Facilitators felt that clarity of expectations was a very powerful outcome of these circles. The conversations helped clarify how people felt, what was going to happen, and what everyone expected to happen. It provided “more understanding rather than assumptions, especially in terms of child care.” This can help individuals not give up when things occur differently from how they expected.

A facilitator mentioned that one woman, after release, relapsed and got back together with her significant other – the two exact things she thought her family would push her away for and what they discussed at the circle. The Core Member was surprised to find that they did not react in this way. The circle may have given her more confidence that things would work out and that they would work through the struggles. They felt that the circles can be a painful reality check, but it is useful to hear some things before getting released than on the day of release.

What Facilitators Learned

One facilitator felt she learned through facilitating that there is more than one outcome that can be hoped for or expected. She learned to “go in without expectations,” because many small things happen in the circles that may not be quantifiable but are nonetheless tremendously beneficial to the participants. As a program, “We struggle with trying to tap into that instead of just focusing on the quantitative goals.”

The facilitators felt moved when individuals could express their perspectives or be heard by others. They were also happy to see certain people simply show up to these circles after having been estranged from their family members.

The Program Coordinator felt the most moving aspect for her was that people actually ask to participate in the program and have the courage to go through with it. All facilitators acknowledged how difficult it is for anyone to confront the most serious issues among their family and supporters and were genuinely amazed at how ready people were to talk. “Every time we do a circle,” she said, “there’s always tension in the family... and then there’s always a moment when there’s one person who is holding something in and all of a sudden they share it.” She emphasized how important it was for people to be willing to share their thoughts, otherwise it undermines the process.

Expanding Facilitators’ Perceptions of Participants

We asked if facilitating these circles changed how the facilitators viewed the participants. Only the Program Coordinator had meaningful contact with the participants prior to the circles. She

felt that “most family members were irritated immensely prior to the circle. After they did the circle, I had much more understanding of why they were so judgmental of the person, why they did not answer the phone, etc.” She felt the participants were wise and had been through so much. Many were, in the end, very forgiving and nonjudgmental. Other facilitators felt they did not see much of a change but rather a “continued admiration for what they’re doing and what they’ve been through.” They felt “in awe of their courage, strength, and ability to do it all.”

While facilitators sometimes wished participants had brought up or discussed certain topics in more length, they acknowledged that the fundamental belief in restorative practices is that “people bring their best self to the circles; maybe they don’t want to acknowledge some things in that light.”

What Facilitators Felt Needed Improvement

Facilitators enjoyed their experiences but felt they had much to learn. One felt she needed to gain “the courage to really do one,” as she had only been a note-taker and co-facilitator so far. She felt it took courage because facilitators need to be willing to be “up front” with participants. She felt confident that she picked up techniques through her co-facilitation. Another facilitator wanted to become more comfortable with silence and with not having an answer to every problem or question.

The program is considering a more formal system in which facilitators-in-training co-facilitate a certain number of circles and then move on to be the lead facilitator. They suggested that they can also practice by facilitating pre-circles.

They all felt they needed more training on the transition planning – knowing the resources in the community and how to help people create reasonable goals. They found it valuable to have someone knowledgeable in these areas in the room to be sure the expectations the group is setting are not too high or too low.

A challenge they faced was that every group requires slightly different facilitation models. They found it the most difficult to facilitate when just one family member attended the circle, along with clinical staff. It felt strange to them to talk about the emotional effects the incarceration had on participants, as most clinical staff were relatively unaffected. These conversations “often turn into a dialogue between family members and Core Member.”

Also, they found it difficult and potentially traumatic when a mentor brought up a “deep traumatic issue” that family members had not discussed yet. They felt the facilitators need to do a better job explaining to the mentors not to do this. They explained that circles were not a place to do therapy but to rather allow productive communication to occur, wherever it naturally leads.

They found it difficult to facilitate when people “veered off script” and spoke out of turn, as almost always happened. Sometimes facilitators need to let this happen, but at some point they need to know when to step in. They began using the “talking piece,” so that only the person holding it could speak at any time. At one circle, they wrote the agenda on the wall and felt that it helped the group stay on point. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that each group is different in

how and how much they want to communicate. They considered asking participants what type of circle they preferred to have (i.e. very structured or just free conversation). They also suggested planning an agenda at the pre-circles and then mailing it to all of the participants beforehand so they could be prepared for the discussion topics.

Finally, the facilitators discussed the value in asking people what guidelines they wanted to have for the circle. Usually participants offer concepts such as “honesty,” “confidentiality,” and “only one person speaks at a time.” Most of the time, the facilitators have to offer suggestions for guidelines, but sometimes group participants do offer their own. They considered changing the question to something like, “What guidelines could we adopt to help make this space different from everyday life?” They felt it was important to establish guidelines, as it sets the tone for the group and “serves as an insurance policy.” If someone violates a rule, they can point it out and say, “Remember, we all agreed to these.”

Improving Recruitment and Communication

Facilitators suggested ways they could recruit women to participate in the program. They felt it was crucial to have someone who already knows incarcerated women talk with them about the program. This could be a counselor or volunteer at the jail. This person could provide personalized insight for the woman as to how the program could be helpful to her. Also, having a woman who has been through the program speak about it to a group often seemed to help. She could help others understand the benefit and what to expect.

The facilitators felt it was important to acknowledge how hard it is to ask to participate in this program. Potential participants may fear having an “outsider” reach out to their family, for instance. They felt that people may have been worried that it would take too much time, conflicting with family members’ work schedules. Many participants did not realize that circles could be done at any hour of the day and that the program could provide transportation. Facilitators felt the transportation was crucial to overcome the inconvenience and get people to come, but it is quite expensive to hire taxis for participants.

Facilitators felt that the piece of the circles where they list and acknowledge the Core Members strengths was particularly helpful in getting people to open up. They also did this process with any children in the room, helping the children feel more comfortable.

The Program Coordinator hoped that there could be more direct and consistent communication with Core Members, rather than relaying messages through counselors at the jail. They hoped that referrals would come in more regularly (rather than going six months with no referrals and then getting four referrals at once). Finally, they would also like to be able to have minors come in to the jail for the circles. Some minors were allowed in, but when Step by Step began work with men, the jail stopped letting children attend circles. They hope to be able to have children at least 12 years old come in, as they felt the process is not as meaningful for younger children.

Tips for Other Restorative Transition Circles Facilitators

The facilitators offered tips for others who facilitate similar circles. These included:

- “Don’t have expectations about the outcomes of the circle or for the future. Just focus on the process. Once you have expectations, you put your own spin on the process in order to achieve that outcome.” They found this to be particularly important when pressured by supervisors, funders, programs, or others to achieve particular results.
- “Don’t give up” on trying to connect with people to participate. “It’s worth the effort to try to get the process going.” Do not get discouraged when things fall through and people do not get back to you. Try calling, writing letters, calling family, e-mailing, etc.
- “Be ready for the unexpected.” For instance, sometimes the jail just will not allow someone entrance. Sometimes a facilitator may end up being a babysitter instead, if a participant brings a young child.
- “The circle is what the participants bring to it. If they don’t bring much, don’t blame yourself. It may still have been meaningful even if you can’t see how.”
- Do peer practice and role play circles with other facilitators to practice the process and facilitation skills regularly. Sometimes it can be a long stretch of time between circles.
- Always have a co-facilitator for planning, note taking, confidence-building, accountability, and support for the lead facilitator.

Program Expansion to Other Settings

Facilitators could envision the program expanding in many areas, such as working with people returning to their community from juvenile detention facilities, suspension programs in schools, long term mental health treatment programs, or prisons. They hope to see their men’s programming expand as well. They acknowledged the model would have to change to fit the setting but felt it would be useful for anyone in transition. For example, if expanding to prisons, family members may live very far from the prisons, making it much harder for people to get there. They would also have to obtain the permission and consent of parole officers, who sometimes do not allow parolees to contact family members and may even need to be present for the circles. With any new context, there would be new challenges. Nonetheless, the facilitators saw the circle process as fundamentally valuable to people’s success when in transition.

Program Effects on Core Member Re-Offending

Criminal justice history information was obtained through post-release phone interviews with Core Members. This information was self-reported by three Core Members, as obtaining official arrest history records is rife with problems, including confidentiality issues and common inaccuracies in data. With the small number of referrals making it nearly impossible to detect changes in re-arrest rates, researchers decided that it would be more fruitful to obtain qualitative information from Core Members about how the circle process may have affected their offending behavior patterns post-release. One downfall to this approach is that Core Members who were stable enough to be interviewed are also probably the least likely to have been re-arrested. Nonetheless, their comments shed light on what successful re-entry is.

At the time of her referral, one Core Member was serving time as part of drug court. She had been arrested before for similar issues, but she had never served a long-term incarceration

sentence before. She served nine months for this most recent charge and was released nearly ten months ago. As of this report, she has not been arrested at all since her release.

We asked what was different this time compared to prior arrests. This young woman stated that this time she “actually tried and cared about what I was doing.” Before, she would get out and just repeat the same behaviors. She reported that at the time of the circle, she “wasn’t quite there yet.” She did not truly feel ready to make a change. After participating in the circle and reconnecting with her family, she felt far more confident and ready to change. She reported that their circle addressed extensively the reasons behind her getting arrested.

As for other accomplishments, this Core Member had held a job “for a little bit” but is no longer working due to a pregnancy. She is maintaining stable housing and the support of her family. Unfortunately, she had several deaths in her family soon after her release, which resulted in a short relapse. She promptly enrolled in outpatient treatment and is continuing there to date. She feels confident that she has the supports she needs from her family, significant other, a social worker, and her counselor at outpatient treatment.

The second Core Member found out, upon her release nearly a year ago, that she still had to serve a sentence for a crime she was charged with prior to the one for which she was serving time. Thus, even though she moved out of town, she recently began serving ten weekends for the prior charge. However, she has not been arrested for any new charges since her release in January 2013. She had been arrested and incarcerated several times in the past for similar charges but feels now she has truly changed her lifestyle. Her biggest personal accomplishment since her release has been to “start out with baby steps. I don’t worry, don’t stress. That’s a huge accomplishment.”

The third Core Member interviewed had a long history of arrests and a few incarcerations dating back to the 1980s, all related to insobriety. While she had a ten-year period of sobriety, she relapsed a few years ago. At the time of the circles, she was serving time as part of drug court, following a DWI conviction and a subsequent arrest for theft and its related violation of probation. She was released about seven months ago and has not been arrested at all. She felt that compared to prior incarcerations, she is now committed to sobriety. She is focused “on changing her life and becoming a better person.” This time, she has tried to “do something different” by attending rehabilitation programs in jail, participating in these circles, and attending counseling and programs in the community to better herself. With some medical concerns, she is unable to work at the moment but spends her time volunteering with her church, attending church, and attending counseling and several programs. She feels that maintaining her sobriety has been her largest accomplishment.

Some limited information on other Core Members was provided by mentors or Step by Step staff. For instance, one Core Member was immediately taken into custody by another county upon her release from Monroe Correctional Facility for a prior offense. When she was released from that county’s facility, she also had to answer to a charge in another state. Thus, she has moved out of the area, but she is still in occasional contact with her mentor, who reports she is doing well. The mentor says she even got a job while taking care of the court matters.

Finally, two Core Members who completed circles are still incarcerated at Monroe Correctional Facility at the time of this report.

While we do not know precisely how the circles affect recidivism rates among participants, it is clearly evident that the process enhances Core Members' confidence and ability to reach new goals they have set for themselves. Many of these women were already prepared for change; the circles helped solidify how it would happen and mend their relationships in the process. Many Core Members, mentors, and family members acknowledged seeing a change in their loved ones, both in attitude and behavior. All participants gained clarity in how they conceptualized both their relationships and the Core Member's re-entry plans. According to the Core Members we interviewed, it seems like the circles have a long-lasting effect on many Core Members' lives, teaching them and their families new, healthy, and effective communication skills.

Recommendations

This ambitious program faced many challenges in its second year of implementation, and yet there were numerous positive results achieved by both the program and its participants. In working with the re-entry population, coordinators took on the difficult task of trying to maintain contact with Core Members and to connect them with mentors and case management services. The following recommendations should be explored to increase effectiveness of the program, with full acknowledgement of the difficulties involved:

Formalize and expand the referral process:

Step by Step's Restorative Transition Circles Coordinator has worked diligently to solicit referrals, creatively seeking referrals from various avenues. Nonetheless, fewer referrals were received than expected. It may be possible to increase the number of referrals if more outreach is done to the target populations to explain the program and its successes. Perhaps referrals can be solicited from other similar agencies. Staff are already exploring some of these options.

It may be beneficial to require that referrals be submitted at least two months prior to the Core Member's release, so that two pre-release Circles can reasonably be scheduled.

It may also help to have those interested in the program complete a form to collect basic information for evaluation and case management purposes, including their name, date of birth, education history, substance abuse history (if any), mental health concerns (if any), family status, goals they have, who they want at the Circles, why they want a Circle, their arrest and incarceration history, support systems, strength of contact with those they want involved, release date, and other pertinent information. Currently, this type of information is collected in interviews between the Coordinator and the Core Members, but it may prove beneficial to more systematically collect this information.

Changes to the surveys:

Because many of the Circle participants "strongly agreed" with everything, it may be worth using an expanded scale to give more variation in responses. Using, for instance, a 1-10 scale

may provide more insight into how responses differed among participant groups and over time. This is a good problem to have because it means that people were satisfied with the process.

Also, some participants failed to complete the back side of the surveys. Future surveys should either fit all the questions on the front, staple two pages together (instead of printing on the back side of the page), and/or write a clear note to turn the page over at the bottom of the first page.

The “other participant” post-release circle surveys did not ask them to describe their relationship with the Core Member. This question should be added so we know what types of participants were at follow-up circles.

It may also be beneficial to ask how many circles the survey respondent has participated in before. This would help us interpret if participants and Core Members felt better about the Circles as they participated in more of them.

Re-analyzing the expectations of the program Coordinator:

Connecting those in re-entry to case management services and mentoring relationships is a major undertaking and depends heavily on the accessibility of services in a given area. In Rochester, there are very few agencies capable of accepting referrals for case management unless the individual is referred through a contract with a particular program. While it would be ideal to pursue a contract with case management services, this often requires ample funding per client. Similarly, reliable volunteer mentors are hard to come by, especially for this population.

With these considerations, expecting the program coordinators to connect all Core Members with services and/or mentors may be unreasonable. It seems as if the true value of the Restorative Transition Circles is to help Core Members heal wounds and strengthen relationships within their support networks. Emphasis can and should be placed on creating a reasonable transition plan, but coordinating re-entry services is itself a full-time job. Program coordinators should strongly consider how the Restorative Transition Circles can fit into re-entry plans, even if the Core Member is unable to connect to services. If true service coordination is desired, additional staff would be needed to lead such efforts, in addition to a formalized referral processes.

Setting Realistic Expectations for Circle Participants: Improving Follow-Up Rate

Many of those in re-entry set numerous goals for themselves after release. As basic as some goals seem, such as finding an apartment to rent or a part-time job, people often drastically underestimate the amount of time, resources, and effort needed to achieve these goals. The evaluator and program coordinator have discussed this issue at length, and the facilitators try to encourage participants to set reasonable goals with the Core Members. However, it is possible that more needs to be done to make realistic transition plans, if making such plans continues to be a goal of the Restorative Circles Program. It may be valuable to have additional sessions with relevant participants to outline this plan, and those sessions should include a professional who understands the difficulty of re-entering the particular community. This expert would be able to contribute information that would help stave off surprise setbacks post-release and would be able to help the participants set achievable goals. All too often it is the systems the Core Member is

trying to navigate that slow them down, and it is heartbreaking for the Core Member to blame herself or to be blamed by her supporters for an apparent “failure.” Setting more reasonable goals could, then, help Core Members feel ready sooner for a follow-up circle after release, as they could discuss tangible achievements within the first month or two of release. The first follow-up circle could also be scheduled two to three weeks after the Core Member’s release date, setting the tone for the group that it will happen.

Providing Tangible Assistance to Improve Follow-Up Rate

Upon release from incarceration, individuals are faced with many challenges, most of which revolve around meeting their basic needs for food, clothing, safety, and shelter. It is a well-known problem in re-entry that individuals are very interested in any programs while in jail, where they have the time, energy, and mindset to participate. When released, however, many do not continue to engage with these services. Depending on funding, providing tangible small incentives to Core Members (like a bus pass, food basket, or small gift card) may encourage them to participate with follow-up circles. While this should in no way be construed as a bribe and should be a small enough incentive that the restorative work is still the primary reason for attendance, incentives may help give people just enough extra motivation to pick up their phone and ask to schedule the follow-up circle. As one mentor pointed out, it “acknowledges the mindset of the individuals” who are struggling to make ends meet in the community. Expectations for what these incentives would be should be clearly established during pre-circles. Core Members should know that it is a small way to compensate them for their time, rather than intending to provide a support service beyond the restorative work.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results for the Restorative Circles Program are very positive. Despite scheduling and service coordination struggles, the Restorative Transition Circles Program seemed immensely valuable to all of those involved. Surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction with the program, offering family, friends, supporters, and Core Members a safe place to express their feelings, heal wounds, and create a supportive re-entry plan together. Participants felt their voices were heard, that they were safe to speak their minds, and that their opinions were valued. This speaks to the skill of the facilitators in navigating often difficult, long-term issues among participants. It also seems to help the Core Members increase their self-confidence, self-esteem, and establish support networks they may otherwise not have had upon their release. The Core Members interviewed all reported long-term effects in their relationships from these circles, and none had been arrested since their release from incarceration.

There are many ways that this program could be expanded upon and improved, as discussed above, but nonetheless the results are quite clear that Restorative Transition Circles can truly offer major benefits to those returning to our communities and to their loved ones.

Appendix A: Case Description Form

Client Name: _____

Please fill this out regarding the client. Write unknown if the information is unknown.

Release date: _____

Date of incarceration: _____

Current Offense(s): _____

Demographics

Race: __Black, __White, __Asian, __American Indian, __Other, __Unknown

Ethnicity: __Hispanic, __NonHispanic, __Unknown

Age: _____

Home zip code: _____

Case description:

Describe current family relationship:

Describe current support system:

----Please turn over for additional client information----

Additional Client Information:

Mental Health status/history:
Employment status/history:
Children:
Educational status/history:
Substance abuse status/history:
Addiction status/history:
Housing status/history:
Other:
For Janelle: Criminal history:

Appendix B: Circle Surveys

Core Member Survey – Pre-release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the Circle.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. At least one of my family members shared meaningful information during the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. The Circle has provided me with a better understanding of the impact that my incarceration has had on my family.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The circle process helped me to better understand how to continue the healing with my family.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

10. The circle process helped me to better understand how to best spend the rest of my time in jail.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

11. I was able to give adequate input into the development of my re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

12. The re-entry plan is clear on what must be done in order to be successful.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

13. I will follow the re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

14. There are people who want to support me throughout my re-entry.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

15. I am better prepared for re-entry into society.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

Please share and additional comments:

Family Member Survey – Pre-Release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. I better understand what the core member is feeling.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. The circle helped me to better cope with the incarceration of the core member.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The core member was open to my input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

10. The re-entry plan is clear on what must be done in order to be successful.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

11. My input was used in the development of the re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

12. I believe the core member will follow the re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

13. I will support the core member throughout her re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

14. I now have a better understanding as to what I can do to aid the core member in her transition.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

15. The Circle helped to better prepare me for the core member's re-entry.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

Please share and additional comments:

Other Participant Survey – Pre-Release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. I better understand what the core member is feeling.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. The core member was open to my input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The re-entry plan is clear on what must be done in order to be successful.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

10. My input was used in the development of the re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

11. I believe the core member will follow the re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

12. I will support the core member throughout her re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

Your Relationship to the Core member: _____

Please share and additional comments:

Facilitator Survey

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with the participation of the group members during the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. The group members were given a fair opportunity to contribute their input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided the group members with a safe environment to share their concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. Things that were shared in the Circle were heard by others.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

1. Number of participants (not including facilitators): _____
2. Length of Circle: _____
3. Number of pre-circle meetings: _____

Please provide any other notes on the Circle process, outcome, or any other related information (do NOT include names of individuals):

Core Member Survey – Post-release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the Circle.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. So far, I have been successful in following my re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. I am supported in my re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The Circle process has contributed to a positive transition into the community for me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

Please share and additional comments:

Family Member Survey – Post-release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the Circle.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. So far, the core member has been successful in following her re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. I have supported the core member in her re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The Circle process has contributed to a positive transition into the community for the core member.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

10. I have been involved throughout the core member's re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

11. I feel that I have been supported throughout the core member's re-entry.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

12. I am happy that I participated in this program.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

Please share and additional comments:

Other Participant Survey – Post-release Circle

We are interested to get your feedback on the circle process you just participated in. To help us best understand your experience, please fill out the following anonymous survey. The survey is voluntary, so you may skip any question or decide to not participate. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete. Please circle the response that most closely represents your answer. Thank you for your time.

1. I am satisfied with my participation in the circle process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

2. I was given a fair opportunity to contribute my own input.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

3. The Circle provided a safe environment in which I could share my concerns.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

4. I wanted to participate in the Circle.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

5. The contributions of professional staff were beneficial.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

6. What I shared was heard by others in the Circle.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

7. So far, the core member has been successful in following her re-entry plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

8. I have supported the core member in her re-entry process.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

9. The Circle process has contributed to a positive transition into the community for the core member.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

-----TURN OVER FOR REMAINING QUESTIONS-----

10. I am happy that I participated in this program.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

Please share and additional comments:

Appendix C

Core Member Semi-Structured Phone Interview Form

1. How did you get involved in the restorative circles program? Why did you want to?
2. General feelings about the circle process
 - How did participating in the circles affect you personally?
 - How did you feel when participating in the circles?
 - Effective in helping you to understand your next steps?
 - Were you happy with who came?
 - If you could go back, is there anything you would have liked to address that you didn't get a chance to in the circle?
 - Have your feelings about the circle process changed over time? Since referral? Since release?
3. How long were you incarcerated when you did the circle? Start date and end date?
4. What was your conviction for when you did the circles program?
5. Had you been **arrested** before besides the event for this incarceration?
6. Had you been **incarcerated** before? How long and when?
 - Was there anything different about your release this time compared to before?
7. Do you feel like the program addressed any of the things that resulted in you getting arrested?
8. Have you been arrested or convicted since your release? When? Sentence?
9. Current state
 - What accomplishments have you had since your release (including housing status)?
 - What challenges have you had since your release?
 - What types of supports do you have right now? Family? Church?
 - Are you active with any programs? SBS?
10. Re-entry plan
 - How involved were you in developing your re-entry plan?
 - How ready did you feel before getting released? (If unsure, offer 1-10 scale.)
 - Was anything different from how you expected in your re-entry?
 - Did the circles help you develop or stick to the re-entry plan?
 - Do you feel like there are resources available to you to meet your goals? Like what?
11. Support throughout the process
 - At any stage did you not feel supported? In what ways were you not supported?
 - Who supported you throughout the process? How did they show support?
 - What other support would be helpful?
12. Step By Step workshops
 - Did you participate in the SBS workshops while at MCF?
 - Have you participated in any SBS workshops after your release?
 - Would you say you found them to be effective, ineffective, or neutral? Why?
 - Do you feel like the workshops related to the circle process? How?
13. Role of the mentor –
 - Did you ever have a mentor you were working with?
 - When and how were you matched?
 - Did you see your mentor while in jail? After you got released?
 - How was your relationship with your mentor?
 - Was it useful to have a mentor? How? (role in your transition process)
14. Role of the case manager
 - Did you ever have a case manager? From where?
 - Did you work with him/her before release? After release?
 - How was your relationship with the case manager?
15. Role of family
 - Do you feel like the circles affected your relationship with family members? How?
 - Did your family members seem comfortable with the circle process?

- Do you feel like the circles helped your family members at all? How?
- 16. Role of other participants (including facilitators)
 - Do you feel like the circles affected your relationship with non-family participants at all? How?
 - Are the non-family participants from the circles still involved in your life?
- 17. General feedback on circle process – scheduling, set-up, timing, facilitation, etc.
 - How could the circles have been better? More helpful?
 - What was done well?
- 18. Would you recommend program to others?

Appendix D

Mentor Semi-Structured Phone Interview Questions

- How long and in what capacity are you involved in re-entry? How did you get involved with mentoring? Have you had other mentees or experience in this field?
- circle process
 - How many circles did you attend and when (roughly)?
 - Did you find the circle process valuable?
 - Did your feelings about the circle process change over time?
 - What was difficult?
 - What worked well?
 - What could organizers or facilitators do better to improve the process?
- role of family
 - Was your mentee's family involved in the circle process at all?
 - Is your mentee's family involved in general in her life?
 - Do you feel the circle process helped your mentee and her family?
- mentor's role in process
 - Did you feel valued during the re-entry circles?
 - What did you see as your role at the circles?
- re-entry plan (agency, follow-thru)
 - Was the re-entry plan worked on at your circle(s)?
 - *Has it been successful?*
 - *What has come up that either helped or hurt following the re-entry plan?*
- *core member receive support*
 - *Has the core member been supported in her transition?*
 - *Do you feel like the circle process increased her ability to rely on her support networks?*
- *structural (ease of transition, hand off, expectations, etc)*
 - *How did your mentee's transition into the community go?*
 - *What expectations did you have before she released? Did they match reality?*
- Is there anything you would have like to address during the circle if you could go back in time and do it again?
- feedback on restorative process
 - Did you feel that the restorative process you went through was of value? Why?
 - Did you feel like it was a good use of everyone's time and resources?
 - Did your mentee and you ever talk about the circle process outside of the actual circles? What themes were expressed?
- challenges to the process/program
- successes with the process/program

Note: Italicized text was not generally asked because mentors were not in touch with their mentees post-release.

Appendix E

Facilitator Focus Group Questions

- What did you learn as a result of facilitating these circles?
- What do you feel you still have to learn more about?
- Did you experience any changes in how you viewed the Core Members or participants?
- What tips do you have for other potential facilitators?
- core members
 - client selection –
 - describe the recruitment process
 - What characteristics do interested women have? Non-interested women?
 - What do you think could have increased the number of referrals?
 - How involved/engaged were core members in the program and plan – scheduling, follow-up, contacting participants, service connections, etc.?
 - follow up: have you been able to keep in touch? What have been the successful factors and difficulties?
- circle process
 - What do you see as the primary use of the circles? (for example, re-entry planning or offending behavior adjustment, both?)
 - Do the circles seem to address root cause(s) of the CM's offending behavior?
 - Did all participants seem comfortable? Did you notice any patterns as to how different people felt or behaved in the circles?
- role of family
 - How did family members respond when invited?
- Structural
 - What expectations did people have that were not met? How could that be addressed?
- Do you have any other constructive criticism for how the program could operate, facilitate, recruit, encourage, or do anything else better?
- What did the process/program do well that you think should continue or expand?
- In what ways could you see the program expanding?