

Executive Director Report for CoSA Canada AGM 2025

During the past year, CoSA has endured some difficult news which was offset somewhat by some encouraging new developments. To begin with, a decision was made by the Mennonite Committee of Alberta to cease funding the CoSA site in Calgary in the Spring of 2025. While we said farewell to the Coordinator, Ken Grahlman, with the closing of the site in Alberta, CoSA Canada was very pleased to welcome Ken as a new Board member on the CoSA Canada Board of Directors. Efforts were made to find a new host for the CoSA program in Alberta with the Mustard Seed, an organization that would be a good fit for CoSA in light of the latter's support for offender community reintegration programs. Initial discussions were positive, and further efforts are expected to continue in 2026. On behalf of CoSA Canada, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ken who was successful in his bid to secure employment with the Mustard Seed last May 2025.

Last Fall 2024, CoSA Canada applied for funding to Public Safety Canada following a call for Applications under the National Crime Prevention Strategy. Unfortunately, despite best efforts to respond with considerable flexibility and creativity, our proposal was not approved. At the same time, CoSA Canada was developing a funding proposal to Public Safety to support CoSA programs in Hamilton and York region of the GTA. These efforts were made in direct response to the termination of funding announced by the Mennonite Committee of Ontario (MCCO) for the CoSA sites in Hamilton, Kitchener/Waterloo and Toronto. You may recall that CoSA Canada had several encouraging discussions with Public Safety officials to consider funding options to support CoSA following the closures of the three CoSA sites operated by MCCO. CoSA Canada collaborated with the St Leonard's Society of Hamilton (SLSH) and the John Howard Society York Region (JHSYR) during the past summer in the preparation of the funding proposal. The SLSH is the current host of the CoSA site in Hamilton while the JHSYR is the proposed new host of the CoSA site in York Region. St. Leonard's Society of Hamilton made the decision to sponsor the CoSA Hamilton program shortly after the decision by MCCO to end its funding. CoSA Canada made a commitment to work together with St. Leonard's to ensure the long-term sustainability of the CoSA program in Hamilton. At the time of this report, we have not yet received a response from Public Safety.

Following several months of planning and preparation, the CoSA Moncton site officially opened its doors in the summer of 2024 with new funding from the government of New Brunswick. Unfortunately, the sponsor organization, Threshold Ministries, made the difficult decision to end its involvement as host of CoSA last Spring. As a result, CoSA Canada has been engaging with the John Howard Society of Southeastern NB (JHSENB) throughout the past summer to take over as host of the CoSA Moncton site. These efforts have the full support of NB government officials. We remain hopeful that the JHSENB will agree to host the CoSA site.

In my last AGM Executive Director report, I noted that the 2-year Virtual Circles project was underway and that despite some early development challenges, the program was well on its way to delivering on many of its goals and objectives. I am very pleased to report the Virtual Circles program had achieved significant success during its second and final year of operation. For example, during the second year the program was working with 22 core members who were supported by 27 volunteers. The program clearly played a key role for these core members who would not normally have had the opportunity to receive support because a CoSA site was not available to them. I want to acknowledge the high-quality advice and support offered by a group of very dedicated individuals who sat on the Virtual Circles Advisory Committee. They included the following individuals: Lee Seshagiri, Pamela Yates, Kailey Roche, and Denys Scully. The success of the program was due to the dedication and commitment of the two program Coordinators, Joy Steem and Sheila van den Heuvel-

Collins. I want to thank them both for their exceptional work on this project and their belief that Virtual CoSA should be very much an integral component of the CoSA model going forward. As Sheila noted recently regarding the future of Virtual CoSA and her ongoing efforts to secure funding, *'That dream isn't dead yet'*.

During the past year, there has been some exciting new developments happening in South Saskatchewan lead by the Site Coordinator in that community, Charles Kooger. Charles has been approached by the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC) to help establish a CoSA site operated by the FHQTC. This would mark the first time for CoSA where a local site would be operated by an Indigenous organization for an Indigenous offender population. The objective would be to initiate a fully self-sustaining and independent CoSA program through the FHQTC that follows the national CoSA model and principles. If approved, Charles would be expected to offer support, consultation and training using his expertise and relying on the CoSA manual of best practices and procedures.

Recently, CoSA has been approached by South Korean government officials to help them celebrate CoSA South Korea's 10th anniversary and to speak on a panel at LIGHT of the WORLD which is a Faith-Based Restorative Corrections Conference scheduled for November 4-7, 2025 in Seoul. CoSA Canada will be represented by Board Member, Susan Love and the Chair of the Board, Eileen Henderson who were asked to focus on the relationship with the faith community and how CoSA has changed since it was first implemented.

I want to also express my appreciation to Susan Haines for her excellent leadership as Executive Director of the National Organizations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ). This national network represents the interests of all criminal justice and corrections partners working for a common cause whether it be focussed on policies, programs/funding or advocacy affecting our work in the community.

I would like to thank all CoSA site Coordinators and their volunteers for their work in supporting Core Members throughout the past year and for leading and supporting the work of CoSA across the country. I would also like to thank members of the Board of Directors of CoSA Canada, particularly the Executive Committee for their expertise, guidance and commitment to the work we do with Core Members.

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the Chair of the Board, Eileen Henderson. Eileen, as always, has been a constant support for me as we continue to face significant challenges especially in achieving sustainable and secure funding. I am always most grateful for her unwavering dedication, commitment and belief in the work of CoSA.

In closing, as we continue to experience the strain of fiscal pressures across all sites, I am constantly reminded of the need for CoSA. Supporters of CoSA know full well there is a better way to protect the public than by seeking punitive, vengeful responses to high profile incidents of sexual crime. We should never give up hope on the vision that was created over 30 years ago in Hamilton! We owe it to those individuals who knew they were on to something great and to the communities they were trying to protect.

Cliff Yumansky