



Living Skies Regional Council

The United Church of Canada
in Saskatchewan
www.livingskiesrc.ca



26 February 2022

To: Hon. Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety

Dear Minister Mendicino,

Living Skies Regional Council of The United Church of Canada writes to you on behalf of Circles of Support & Accountability (CoSA) Canada to ask for your public support for continued federal funding of this vital program.

Our Regional Council has long supported Parkland Restorative Justice, Prince Albert and The Micah Mission in Saskatoon through our mission support grant funds, our volunteers, and by sharing their education initiatives. We have benefited from CoSa speakers at our education gatherings, and believe that the communities we serve have benefitted from the presence of this program.

CoSA Canada addresses a critical issue affecting all our communities – the traumatic impact of sexual assault and other sex offences on vulnerable people and the crucial need for effective prevention strategies. By offering community-based, volunteer led circles to people convicted of sex offences who are designated high risk when released from prison, CoSA represents a vital link in re-integration programming for this population. CoSA may be the only option for those who have committed sexual offences released at warrant expiry to access support while being held accountable for their actions as they adjust to returning to the community.

The research is overwhelmingly clear: A 2018 study demonstrated that participating in the CoSA program significantly reduced sexual recidivism, lowering the risk for new sex offences by 88%. Twenty-eight studies in several countries show that CoSA dramatically reduces reoffending. Supporting and expanding CoSA prevents further sexual victimization.

CoSA's current operations can be maintained for a very small investment of \$2.5 million dollars annually. But other Canadian communities can benefit from CoSA's programs to reduce recidivism. With \$2.5 million, CoSA could expand its existing programs and launch new sites to meet increasing demand and prevent even more offences. This is a small expenditure that is likely to prevent a significant number of sexual assaults and victimizations in Canada. Funding CoSA Canada at \$2.5 million annually represents 0.15% of the current budget of Correctional Service of Canada, providing Canadians with an excellent return on investment.

Unless funding beyond March 2022 is secured, 25% of the 15 sites risk closure and the remaining sites face a reduction in programming. Approximately 100 individuals would no longer be able to receive our services. CoSA's impact and sustainability are on the line.

CoSA is a unique example of a community-based, non-profit organization that succeeds in meeting the measures contained in Bill C228 by having a proven approach and standardized, evidence-based programs that reduce recidivism, prevent further victimization and promote safe and healthy community reintegration of those who have committed sexual offences. Much of the hard work is done – but funding is needed to continue.

Living Skies Regional Council supports CoSA Canada's call for support for \$2.5 million dollars per annum in the upcoming Federal Budget. We believe this small but crucial amount will have a positive impact in keeping with the care and concern we hold for the hundreds of SK communities in which the United Church has a presence.

We look forward to hearing your response to our request.

Sincerely,

Rev Tricia Gerhard, chairperson: Living Skies Regional Council Executive, and Executive members: Ron Brandow, Linda Gunningham, Rev Kathleen James-Cavan, Rev Piotr Strzelecki, and Dave Whalley.