



Washington County Community Circles, Inc.

*“Repairing harm to victims, holding clients accountable
and building a better community”*

7064 S. West Point Douglas Road
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Recidivism Analysis for WCCC, Inc.

Prepared by Katie Schurrer 8/9/2017¹

Table of Contents

Recidivism Analysis for WCCC, Inc.	1
Background	1
Washington County Community Circles, Inc. Goals	2
Research Questions and Key Measures.....	2
Recidivism Results Summary	3
Overall findings:	4
New Conviction Rates Over Ten Years.....	4
Nature of New Convictions	4
Frequency of New Convictions	5
Appendix	6
Methodology.....	6
Scope of Analysis – Sentencing Circle Cases & Clients	6
Organizational Approach, Rather than Analysis by Community	6
Use of a Comparison Group.....	6
Data Sources	7
Clients.....	7
Included Targeted Misdemeanors.....	7

Background

Washington County Community Circles has been actively responding to crime and conflict, through the Restorative Justice Circle process, in Washington County since 1997. Until WCCC, Inc. was incorporated in 2005, the volunteer-run organization focused on stabilizing the organization and expanding knowledge of Circles and on increasing the caseload. As WCCC has

¹ Prepared by Katie Schurrer in consultation with WCCC, Inc. Board of Directors.



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grown, all areas of the organization have been subject to more structure and review, including policies, forms, and especially on the effectiveness of the process in meeting its stated goals: repairing harm to victims, holding clients accountable, and building community.

In 2013, the Data Management Committee, with the Board of Directors, determined a comprehensive Process and Outcome Evaluation was needed. In 2014, the Board of Directors discussed the goals of such an evaluation, including the types of information they wished to learn. Based on that discussion, Data Management Committee Chair and program evaluator Katie Schurrer prepared this Evaluation Plan. The plan describes the goals, measures, methodology, and timeline for the evaluation.

Washington County Community Circles, Inc. Goals

Washington County Community Circles, Inc. (WCCC) is an organization that addresses issues surrounding incidents of conflict and crime in Washington County. The primary participants are community members who volunteer their time on cases with clients generally referred from the court system. One of WCCC’s primary goals is to empower communities - the people affected by crime and conflict - to actively participate in the response to violence and social problems.

The basis of the evaluation starts with the organization’s goals for Sentencing Circles, which include:

1. *Holding clients accountable for their actions*
2. *Repairing harm to victims and community*
3. *Building a better community*

This report analyzes these goals focusing on recidivism, acknowledging that future criminal behavior demonstrates failure of all three of these goals.

Research Questions and Key Measures

The following research questions and key measure related to recidivism are:

1. Are rates of recidivism low for Sentencing Circle clients?
 - a) Measure: Re-conviction rates² for Sentencing Circle clients (goal below 20% within 2 years after acceptance)

² A re-conviction is defined as follows: the offense date has to be **after** the client’s date of admission to Circle. Probation violations alone are **not** considered “new” offenses.



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The key measure includes analysis of the occurrence and frequency of new offenses (whether a new conviction exists, as well as the number of new convictions). Recidivism was tracked at yearly intervals from the date of acceptance by Circle.³ New offenses included felony, gross misdemeanor, and targeted misdemeanors (see list in Appendix) in Minnesota. The inclusion of these different levels of offenses captures most crimes and exclude new offenses for low-level misdemeanors such as disorderly conduct. Conviction data is deemed the least biased and most accurate measure of recidivism.

In addition to recidivism, Circle client outcome is analyzed through the following research question and key measure:

2. Do clients successfully complete the Circle process?
 - a) Measure: Percentage of clients who successfully complete (i.e. graduate) Circle (goal 65%)

Recidivism Results Summary

There were 115 clients who were accepted into Circle before 2015. Of the 115 clients, there was sufficient information to collect recidivism for 89 individuals.⁴ Of those, 93% were referred through a Sentencing Circle.

Type of Circle	#	%
Sentencing	83	93%
Support	2	2%
Other	4	2%
Total	89	100%

³ “Admission to Circle” is defined as acceptance to Circle.

⁴ Due to inconsistent record keeping early in WCCC’s history, name, date of birth, acceptance date in Circle, and the original case number were not consistently available. Also, some of the cases were for groups rather than individuals and therefore recidivism cannot be calculated.



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Overall findings:

- **Approximately one in ten (11%) Circle clients are convicted of a new crime within two years. This is lower than the WCCC goal of 20%.**
 - This includes clients who do not successfully complete Circle. Of the nine clients with new convictions, 6 were Circle clients who did not successfully complete Circle.⁵

- **The impact of Circle appears to last over time.**
 - Most (65%) Circle clients had at least 5 years of at-risk time. Over seven in ten (72%) of those clients were conviction-free after five years.
 - There were 23 Circle clients with at least 10 years of at-risk time. Less than one-third (26%) of those participants had a new conviction within ten years.

New Conviction Rates Over Ten Years

The following table demonstrates the conviction recidivism rates for each year for the participants with the required at-risk time.

	1 Yr	2 Yrs	3 Yrs	4 Yrs	5 Yrs	6 Yrs	7 Yrs	8 Yrs	9 Yrs	10 Yrs
Conviction Free	92%	88%	82%	76%	72%	67%	68%	62.5%	66%	74%
New Conviction	8%	11%	18%	24%	28%	33%	32%	37.5%	34%	26%
N	86	81	74	72	60	51	44	40	32	23

New conviction rates for Circle clients before and after incorporation were similar at 12% new conviction rate in two years for those starting Circle 2008 or later and 10% for those starting before 2008.

Nature of New Convictions

Focusing on the key measure of new convictions within two years, analysis was completed on the nature of the new convictions.

⁵ The best measure of success is to analyze all clients – whether or not they completed Circle – to evaluate the impact of the Circle on the participants, which is the primary measure noted.



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- For the nine clients with new convictions, the most serious offense level was typically a gross misdemeanor (44%) or misdemeanor (44%), with one client being convicted of a felony.

The most serious offense type was typically a DWI (44%), followed by Person (33%), and then theft (22%).

Frequency of New Convictions

The average number of new convictions, for the nine clients with a conviction within two years of Circle acceptance, is 1.7 and the median is 1 conviction. One client, who did not successfully complete Circle, had five convictions within two years.



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Appendix

Methodology

Scope of Analysis – Sentencing Circle Cases & Clients

While WCCC handles criminal and non-criminal cases, the substantial majority of cases (80% through 2013) are Sentencing Circles. These are the cases on which the evaluation will focus. This analysis includes all Sentencing Circle clients the organization has worked with since 1998, with a particular analysis of those clients who started with the organization after 2008 when WCCC was incorporated as a nonprofit.⁶

Organizational Approach, Rather than Analysis by Community

An organizational-level approach is used to analyze recidivism rates. This approach focuses on an aggregated group of Sentencing Circle clients, rather than looking separately at each of the three communities (Cottage Grove, Stillwater, Woodbury). Additionally, because the total number of clients is small, any evaluation of one community may not be statistically significant or reliable. Where possible or compelling, descriptive information may be provided by community.

Use of a Comparison Group

A comparison group, while preferable, is not feasible at this time for multiple reasons. First, not enough is known about the history and factors of the WCCC clients. Without detailed information about personal characteristics (e.g. race, age, socioeconomic status) and criminality characteristics (e.g. criminal history) the validity of any findings could be significantly and legitimately questioned. Second, the purpose of this evaluation is to provide a baseline assessment of the three goals within a reasonable amount of time to demonstrate the organization’s effectiveness. While comparing outcomes would be best fulfilled by comparing WCCC clients’ (i.e. the treatment group) outcomes to similar offenders who did not receive Circle (i.e. the control group), that is a secondary goal that does not override the necessity to complete the current evaluation of WCCC clients’ effectiveness.

If possible, general comparisons may be used to other studies, with proper caveats and explanations.

⁶ While ideally all participants would be included, records for previous clients (including criminal record information) are not reliably available. Additionally, the organization was incorporated in 2008, and all clients from that point on should reflect the work of WCCC as an incorporated entity.



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Data Sources

Clients

Information on clients will be obtained from:

- Surveys
- Independent data sources (Minnesota Court Information System - MNCIS)
- Circle client database

Data were collected in early 2016. Each participant’s at-risk period was calculated from their date of acceptance (i.e. recidivism within one year of acceptance could be in 2002 or 2012, depending on the participant’s acceptance date).

Included Targeted Misdemeanors

Misdemeanors included for recidivism include “targeted misdemeanors” as defined by Minn. Stat. § 299C.10, subd. 1(e). A table of targeted misdemeanors is included below:

Statute Number	Offense Title
169A.20	Driving While Impaired
518B.01, 629.75	Order for Protection Violation
609.224	Assault 5th Degree
609.2242	Domestic Assault
609.746	Interference with Privacy
609.748	Harassment or Restraining Order Violation
617.23	Indecent Exposure