

Show notes:

Here are some important resources that could save a life, prevent a victim, and reduce future harm.

[Centre for Addictions and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#)

[Andrea Bevan](#) (Therapist, social worker, featured in this episode): 289-228-7317

[Alan Kaine](#) (Sexual Therapist): 905-578-4127

[Shalem Mental Health Network](#) is a faith-based, Ontario-wide network that provides responsive and preventive mental health support to individuals, families and communities.

[Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers \(ATSA\)](#), an international association of practitioners and researchers in the fields of sexual abuse, deviance, and related topics.

[Mental Health and crisis resources](#) from the Government of Canada

Ontario Network of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres,  
<https://www.sadvttreatmentcentres.ca/> .

*VO: This episode covers some heavy topics, including pedophilia and suicide. We don't go into details, but please take care as you listen. Also, please note that in the show notes, we have included resources for survivors of sexual abuse as well as those who have caused harm.*

*You are listening to UNDERCURRENTS. My name is Ken Ogasawara and I'm part of the Community Engagement team at Mennonite Central Committee in Ontario. This podcast is an ongoing experiment to find a new way to tell the stories coming from our community of partners, program participants, donors, and others.*

*Undercurrents is brought to you by Kindred Credit Union. Kindred's purpose is cooperative banking that connects values and faith with finances, inspiring peaceful, just, and prosperous communities. Kindred believes in and supports restorative justice and the conflict resolution it promotes in its operations and in its communities.*

*This episode is about John.*

**Ken:** Sorry to keep you waiting, Rick.

**Rick:** That's okay. Not that I owe it to you, but you're forgiven.

**VO:** *This is Rick Pauw. Rick works in MCC's restorative justice program, specifically with Circles of Support and Accountability (or CoSA as its called). CoSA consists of teams of volunteers and staff, supported by professionals, who meet with mostly men with histories of sexual offending to hold them accountable for their actions and support them as they reintegrate into the community after release from prison. The person being supported is called a "core member", and I mention this because you'll hear Rick use that term.*

*It's also a good reminder that the language of how we refer to these individuals, is important to CoSA and others working in the field. I heard one presenter at a conference discourage the use of the term 'sex offender' by asking rhetorically, "why are we labeling them the very thing we don't want them to be?"*

**Rick:** The very first core member I had, he had significant issues around drinking and when I first interviewed him in jail, which was at the time terrifying for me as the first time, and I heard his story, and my thought was, what chance does he have? Knowing that he's an alcoholic with a condition not to drink, and barely literate. So, I could not at the time see how this person. What can I offer for this person? I had no idea.

That just made me feel totally, and I'll say this now, totally inadequate. I also know that the person more terrified at the time than me, was him.

I will also say that he's still in the community. I still occasionally see him, and 20 years later we still look back at the early stories.-It's like, man, if they could make it, then anything's possible through support, accountability, community.

**VO:** *Support, accountability, and community are three elements that are both crucial and hard to come by for the men that Rick works with and he is very aware of the sensitivity of this issue.*

**Rick:** Hearing somebody say, "I have abused children," is a shock. It's not for me to forgive somebody who has abused another. It's a whole other question. It's for me to understand how to kind of support the core member in their struggle to deal with what they did, and to maybe ask more challenging questions and to do it in both a meaningful and rich and often really painful way. because without those conversations, there's a lot of continued burden of shame and unworthiness and not feeling like a real human being which doesn't help them then work towards a healthier and safer future and that can get in the way.

**Rick:** Talking about this work, there's a lot of triggers that can occur. So, for that, always with sensitivity and appreciation that my words could inspire some, it could make others feel traumatized, or it may invite some resurfacing of traumatic memories. So, I always have to be

aware of that, and I think that knowing that means that this has to be treated as how do we create safer communities.

**VO:** *How are we to feel safer and be safer, and how does CoSA do that.*

[Music break]

**VO:** *In Canada, there is no death penalty, and there is no life in prison. Regardless of the crime, at some point, the perpetrator will finish their sentence and be released back into the community. CoSA is in part, a practical response to that reality. CoSA asks, as Rick did, How do we keep our communities safe? How do we prevent more victims?*

*CoSA's origin story begins In 1994, with the release of a man named Charlie Taylor, who had finished serving time for multiple counts of sexual abuse against children. The city of Hamilton where Charlie was being released, was in uproar, and the media were having a field day.*

[News Clip]

**VO:** *Charlie's story could be its own episode, but to summarize, a Mennonite pastor by the name of Harry Nigh had the courageous idea to form a sort of support group for Charlie. Despite the backlash from the community, a small group of people from Harry's church created what we now know as a Circle, around Charlie. Despite the dire odds against him, Charlie, who had himself suffered sexual abuse as an orphaned child, now had the support he needed to break the cycle of abuse.*

*He died eleven and half years later of a heart attack, having never offended again.*

[Music break]

**VO:** *Nearly 30 years later, Vast amounts of research conducted over more than two decades have made clear that CoSA has significant impact in reducing recidivism. One prominent study from psychologist and researcher Dr. Robin Wilson showed an 83 percent reduction in sexual reoffending behaviour.. But when I mentioned this research to Rick, he admitted that he didn't like to rely on the numbers to gauge success.*

**Rick:** *I think the way in my day-to-day work, the way I measure is the difference we're able to make with the people we connect and again, if it's to be seen as a journey, how we move through that journey, say with integrity and with support, with accountability. I also know that*

the reality is the better we are in the way we commit to this covenant relationship, the less likely they are to reoffend.

There's parole officers, police detectives, therapists. A core member may be surrounded by people, and if there's a failure, the question becomes whose failure is it. I've since learned that it's a form of humility, might be Mennonite humility, is to say, "I really don't have that much control over another person's life to feel responsible for what they do. I would say we could make a huge impact because of the beauty of the profound relationships, but we are not their environment. We're part of their environment.

**John:** And, um, it was, uh, very difficult to, as a parent, separate the act from the person and, um, the person being my son.

**VO:** *This is John, which is not his real name. John, together with his wife, is part of the 'environment' that Rick refers to. John is talking about his son, Chuck.*

**VO:** *I asked John to take me back...what was Chuck like as a boy, as a young man? And of course the question that haunts many parents when a loved one causes harm... Were there any warning signs?*

**John:** And, um, I guess, uh, when I look in retrospect, he was the quietest of the three kids, but he was happy and content and all three of the children were good friends growing up. So as far as the overall relationship, I saw it as being very positive and very good, uh, for his childhood.

He was not happy in his marriage. Um, he had married a, a significantly older woman, interests were not the same. Um, I don't think they were on the same wavelength with a lot of things. And I began to see anxiety possible depression, eating disorders. And he did come to see us shortly after, um, birth of his first child and express to us that he wasn't sure if he was going to stay in the marriage. And, um, you know, this is something that, uh, kind of haunts me to this day because we kind of asked him to give it his best shot before making that decision. And, you know, I often wonder if we did the wrong thing by not saying, okay, leave the marriage.

**VO:** *Some time later, before his marriage ended, Chuck came to his parents with a shocking confession.*

**John:** He did come to us, um, prior 12 and did confirm to us that he had, um, a preference for younger girls.

**Ken:** *I think that I find that extraordinary that he would come to you with that. I mean, I just don't even know, like, how did you feel about that? Uh, how, what was that like sitting in the room? Can you walk me through?*

**John:** It was very difficult to hear, um, very difficult to hear because, um, I think anything that sort of deviates from your own sort of sense of morality, uh, it can be very hard to see violated in your children, And I guess the dealing with it, um, became a real challenge, uh, for my wife and I to accept the fact that he had this problem and issue. And was he going to be able to handle it long term.

And at that time going back a few years now, we have discussed with him his responsibilities as a citizen and discussed legalities at that time. And he assured us that things were under control. And even though it worried us so that we figured him as okay, but I could also tell that he was very unhappy with himself.

**VO:** *I asked John if he ever told Chuck he needed to seek professional help.*

**John:** It's, uh, it's very challenging when you have an adult child to give advice and, uh, see if it's been followed through one, you can also drive people away and I didn't want that to happen. I tried to give the best counsel that I could without turning him away.

I had some degree of confidence that he would not break the law and he would handle things that he would get some counseling and some help, but, um, ultimately it didn't turn out to be that way.

[Music break]

**VO:** *Several years went by. Then, early one morning, John received a phone call. He was told was that their son was to appear in court in 2 hours time and that they wanted John and his wife to be there to act as sureties to make sure Chuck appeared in court. He wasn't told what Chuck was being charged with.*

**John:** It was such a shock and a blow, and they couldn't give us any information over the phone. So I guess that day was a phenomenally difficult day to drive, uh, two hours to have a time to which we had no knowledge of what was going on. And it wasn't until I was able to speak to a, uh, um, what do you call the lawyer? Public defender, I guess is the name, um, at the courthouse prior to the actual proceeding, did I find out what had happened

**VO:** *Chuck had been charged with possession of child pornography.*

**John:** And, uh, I guess there is no words to really describe that day and the range of emotions that we were going through. Um, it's really, really hard to, as a parent, accept the fact that a child has committed a crime like this, but, uh, I knew it was imperative that he received support. I could just tell by looking at him, he was in a very, very bad place and, and knew that, uh, he had, um, obviously gone way beyond where he ever should've.

Um, anyway, it was, uh, the first day that this happened was extremely difficult, but I did not know that in pursuing her days to come, that, uh, things would even get more challenging. And, um, this was kind of a prelude to a disastrous time in our life.

Yes. Um, I guess the, the toughest thing after that court date was the fact that, um, he became suicidal and we, of course had when he got here to take them to get help right away And, uh, one of the caregivers that we took him to, um, was, had diagnosed him as very, uh, prone to the become a suicide victim. And, uh, so we had actually sign papers that we would provide suicide watch, um, with, um, him at home. Otherwise he would be institutionalized that day.

And so for a long period of time, um, under doctor's care, uh, he was, um, very, very volatile in terms of his emotions.

I don't know if there can be anything worse as a parent than knowing that you have a child who is hurting so badly that they want in their life.

**VO:** *Chuck ended up serving 13 months in prison. Part of his sentence was served at the Ontario Correctional Institute (or OCI) which has a mandate to provide treatment to provincial male offenders in the areas of general criminality, sexual offending, substance abuse, and anger management. Chuck made the most of his treatment there and by the time he finished his sentence, his parents could see the difference. There was one area in particular in Chuck's life that John saw a marked improvement.*

**John:** Well, one of the things that started at OCI is the spiritual. And that continued with COSA as far as COSA is concerned, one of the benefits is, uh, to the maintenance and help in the spiritual being. And that has been fantastic.

**VO:** *I'll jump back to Rick for a moment because I was surprised when I heard that spirituality was something that Chuck had learned at OCI. I guess the words "Ontario Correctional Institute" did not inspire images of spiritual awakening, but Rick's explanation made sense.*

**Rick:** Spirituality is at its best when it's transformative. And when are people most transformed by spirituality? In times of crisis. It's amazing with Core members, how many of them talk about finding God or finding Jesus, so many of them it's been when they've been in jail.

**VO:** *Meanwhile John was finding other benefits to CoSA, which built on the treatment given at OCI.*

**John:** Cosa's, fairly, uh, holistic in that, um, it offers an opportunity to develop other interests. And, uh, our son has never been terribly creative, but there was a creative component where they experiment with things like music and painting and, and whatnot and, and poetry. And so that whole domain of the human being, I think, needs to be, um, nourished and helped. And that's been a big help. The other thing is that there is a way to positively talk with other people who have similar issues and how they are coping and they help each other in that way.

I know that he wants to be better. He never wants to hurt someone. He never wants to go to prison, they gain, and he will do everything in his power to avoid it. And unfortunately it took incarceration for our son to realize what he wanted out of life. And, um, it's unfortunate that that's what it took.

**John:** And we certainly have a great deal of loss still with, um, his two children not being in his life. Um, certainly has to some degree affected our life as well. And, uh, that's, that is perhaps one of the toughest things that, uh, all three of us deal with right now. And, um, I'm hoping that day will come when his two children, uh, we'll accept him back into their life. They have accepted his apology and they have forgiven him, but at this point they don't want to have a regular involvement with him in life. And that is absolutely devastating.

But, um, it certainly is one of those things now that you think back to childhood, to early adulthood, all that type of second guessing, did we have a negative impact on him in some way. Had we been more proactive and knew about some of the help sources that are out there. We may have been able to help him to not offend, and I will always have to live with that guilt that maybe we didn't do enough in the early stages, because we didn't realize the severity.

And even the smallest indicators, if a parent is seeing some things get professional help. I mean, even if it's as simple as talking to your family doctor who may be able to lead you to the appropriate resources, these things can turn out happier for your child than it did for hours.

**VO:** *John and his wife still carry a weight...the weight of what-ifs and second-guesses; the pain of regrets and doubt. Much like their son, John and his wife are learning to come to terms with the past, with their relationship with their son and what he has done. They are fortunate to have the support and of all of their children, as Chuck's brother and sister and their families have stood by him.*

**John:** Recovery, I think goes hand in hand with a personal commitment, uh, that he has to have and self discipline that is still I think, developing. a Um, ultimately we would hope for him that, um, he would be happy that he can forgive himself to find inner peace, to be law abiding, to find a meaningful job, to continue the good counseling and medication support support from groups like Cosa, that he might be able to make new friends and positive ones and some new personal interests and hobbies, and develop a strong sense of self discipline, and that he have his boys back. That's a very long and hard road and, uh, to achieve all of those things. And it will take a lot of perseverance to do that. And people along the way to assist, I feel somewhat optimistic that all of those things can be achieved, but it certainly is going to take a lot of work on his behalf.

**VO:** *Ultimately, John speaks with a sense of guarded hope, not just for his son, but for others like him, who have struggled for years in silence.*

**John:** These people would come out, need new connections, new interests, new spiritual awakening, and support from people they respect and the people running this organization need a huge pat on the back for what they're doing, because it is, has made a significant difference, um, post incarceration, uh, for our son.

**VO:** *In the second and final part of this restorative justice story, we hear from Andrea Bevan, a social worker and therapist who specializes in working with those with sexual disorders, and their families. We'll also hear from Chuck himself.*

*I want to thank John and his wife for sharing this very personal and emotional story with me. Your resilience, love, and strength through unimaginable challenges redefines parenting for me, and it's something we can all learn as citizens of our community. Thanks also to Rick Pauw and the Restorative Justice team at MCC, and of course the circle of volunteers who support - and hold accountable - Chuck and many others like him. Your empathy, compassion, and persistence in treating all people in a good way, is inspiring.*

*I want to thank you, too, listener, if you've made it this far. I know this was a challenging story to hear, and not everybody is ready to hear it. If you feel moved to step out in a radical way by volunteering with CoSA, you can find more info in show notes.*

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