

'Why Wouldn't You Have a Circle?'

An Evaluation of the Glebe House Circles Pilot

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The research has been conducted independently and the views of the authors remain their own. Approval to undertake the work was obtained from the Institute of Criminology's Research Ethics Committee.

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1.0 Evaluation Summary

Glebe House delivers a residential therapeutic programme for young men between the ages of 15 and 18 with a known history of harmful sexual behaviours. Glebe House is run by a Quaker charity, the Friends Therapeutic Community Trust (FTCT), and has been operating for more than 50 years. This report is about a recent development at Glebe House: the ambition to provide Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) for young men moving on from the residential programme. A Circle comprises a core member (the ex-resident) and a group of local community volunteers. The purpose of the Circle is to provide the core member with a supportive social network that enables successful re-integration into the community while managing the risk of further sexually harmful behaviour. The impetus for the development of Circles at Glebe House comes from the desire of trustees and staff that residents move on from the programme in a positive and well-supported way.

The FTCT commissioned this study with the overall aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the Circles project in its pilot stage and to make recommendations for the continuing development of the support provided to young men making the transition from Glebe House to the community. The specific objectives of the study, as agreed with the FTCT at the outset of the work are to:

- Inform the development of the service provided by Glebe House to young men making the transition to life after the residential programme.
- Identify the extent to which Circles support young men in their transition from Glebe House.
- Collect robust data (including information about the core member such as social circumstances and offending) about the pilot Circles to contribute to any future substantive evaluation and to integrate with evaluations of similar Circles projects elsewhere in the UK.

This study draws on semi-structured interviews and data from Glebe House records. These data were supplemented by information gathered from informal interaction at visits to Glebe House and at meetings with Circles coordinators and volunteers. A total of 55 interviews were conducted. The interviewees comprised: 8 young men, 5 Circles coordinators, 14 Circles volunteers (9 of whom were interviewed individually as well as in a group), 9 external professionals, and 3 Glebe House staff members. Some participants were interviewed on more than one occasion.

The findings from the study are:

- Glebe House transitions work is valuable and increasingly well integrated into the programme. The good relationships that young men built with transitions staff at Glebe House were sustained in the community. Transitions staff have a thorough knowledge of the young men and approach their work with flexibility, imagination, good humour and care. They are highly regarded by Circles staff.
- Circles of Support and Accountability are a good fit for the Glebe House programme. The Circle offers support, social interaction and positive role models at the vulnerable time of transition. Young men leaving Glebe House are familiar with the routine of sitting and talking with adults and, in this respect, are better prepared for Circles than many prospective core members. Circles are a particularly good fit for Glebe House as both institutions are informed by a Quaker ethos of social action reinforcing the importance of relationships, community and collective responsibility.

- Circles support young men who leave Glebe House. Circles constituted a space where they could talk and discuss problems, and where they were heard. Relationships within Circles were often (although not always) characterised as trusting, warm and friendly. The activity element of Circles built relationships and enabled the young men to try new leisure pursuits. Circles also offered practical help and guidance in areas such as housing, money management and employment.
- The accountability and broader risk management work of Circles is shaped and constrained by the approach of the core member. Sometimes young men used the Circle to talk about disclosure, new relationships or family troubles; sometimes they were happy to engage in exercises about risks and triggers. However, on other occasions they avoided or deflected attempts to discuss difficult issues. More could be done to prepare young men and volunteers for the accountability aspect of the Circle.
- Lack of certainty about the young man's move-on accommodation delays Circles planning, but a robust housing plan does not guarantee that a Circle will be set up. In some places and at some times, despite the best efforts of Circles providers, a lack of volunteers means that a Circle cannot be established.
- Glebe House transitions staff work well with Circles providers. There is respect and goodwill on both sides, as well as learning and experience gained from early Circles. However, a more formal protocol for the transitions process would be beneficial, complementing the relational aspects of the work.
- It has not yet proved possible to set up and run a bespoke Circle from Glebe House and coordinating such a Circle would be a considerable challenge. However, local providers do not have the capacity to establish a Circle wherever and whenever one is requested and, given current funding uncertainties, their capacity may shrink rather than grow.
- Circles are a logical first choice for young men leaving Glebe House but cannot be guaranteed in every case. In the absence of a Circle, there is merit in exploring other voluntary sector projects and programmes that could support a young man in his new place.
- The transitions phase where there is no Circle (or where the Circle is late to be established) would benefit from greater structure, including points of review and evaluation that mirror those created by a Circle. This would improve the flow of news and information between transitions staff, young men and the professionals working with them.
- The young men in the study were asked whether they would recommend that everyone leaving Glebe House was provided with a Circle. All those who had experienced a Circle said that they would, including one who replied '*Why wouldn't you have a Circle?*' This study identifies the merits of Circles for ex-residents, highlights some options for developing the transitions work, and suggests ways of building on this research.

2.0 The Context for the Research

Glebe House delivers a residential therapeutic programme for young men between the ages of 15 and 18 with a known history of harmful sexual behaviours. Glebe House is run by a Quaker charity, the Friends Therapeutic Community Trust (FTCT), and has been operating for more than 50 years. This report is about a recent development at Glebe House: the ambition to provide a Circle of Support and Accountability (Circle) for young men moving on from the residential programme. A Circle comprises a core member and a group of local community volunteers. The purpose of the Circle is to provide the core member with a supportive social network that enables purposeful re-integration into the community while managing the risk of further sexually harmful behaviour.

The organisation Circles UK supports the development and effective operation of Circles in England and Wales. Circles UK works with a network of local providers responsible for recruiting and training volunteers, liaising with statutory services, setting up Circles and monitoring their progress. There is a local provider for every part of England and Wales but, in practice, Circles are much better established in some places than in others. The concept of the Circle has strong Quaker roots and, therefore, was familiar to FTCT trustees. The role of British Quakers in transferring the concept of Circles from Canada to the UK and persuading the Home Office to support a number of Circles pilots is told in Nellis (2009). The first UK Circles were established in the early years of this century.

Money from the National Lottery combined with continuing financial support from the government funded the expansion of Circles in the UK. Of particular relevance to the Glebe House work, Circles UK received funding to develop its work with children and young people. Circles for young people combine meetings and discussion with opportunities for social activities in the local community. The needs, circumstances and risk levels of the young person shape the support and accountability work of the Circle.

Local Circles providers are funded through contracts with the Probation Service to run Circles, fees charged to organisations like Glebe House who purchase a Circle, and from charitable grants and donations. The recent National Probation Service decision to cut funding for Circles (Circles UK 2018) is a concern for all providers and a particular threat to those most dependent on this funding stream.

Circles are a relatively new way of responding to issues (such as risk and social isolation) associated with the community supervision of people whose behaviour has caused sexual harm but there is a growing body of literature about their implementation and effectiveness (for example, see Hanvey et al 2011, Thompson and Thomas 2017 and Elliott et al 2018). There is, as yet, limited empirical evidence of the impact of Circles on recidivism and reoffending. Reviews of outcome evaluations are cautiously optimistic about the effect of Circles (McCartan et al 2014, Kitson-Boyce 2018, Hanvey 2011, Clarke et al 2017) but note methodological limitations including the absence of control groups, small sample sizes and short follow-up periods. Circles researchers face other difficulties too: Circles vary in their delivery, there is no easy way of isolating the effect of the Circle from other influences on the core member and the very existence of the Circle (through increased supervision) may increase the likelihood that further offending is detected. Elliott and Beech (2013) drew on this outcome evidence to conclude that Circles were modestly cost-beneficial. They noted the complexity of calculating the costs of sexual reoffending, observing that their analysis would have

shown a much larger cost benefit had they included nontangible effects of sexual abuse on victims and victims' families.

Circles research has also explored the perceptions, motivations and experiences of core members, volunteers and professionals (Almond et al 2015, Thompson and Thomas 2017, Philpot 2011) and illustrated the tension in Circles between support and inclusion, surveillance and risk management. Tomczak and Thompson (2017:6) argue that Circles are a form of inclusionary control '*providing objective or subjective advantages to (ex-)offenders in their life trajectories, while accepting and working within or alongside the carceral net*'. Professionals (like probation officers) value the role that Circles play in public protection work (Thompson and Thomas 2017).

Circles are also identified as compatible with desistance-focused approaches to practice (McNeill and Weaver 2010) which seek to build social capital and enable community re-integration. Weaver (2014) argues that work with high risk offenders in the community must build on people's strengths and provide opportunities for social participation.

The impetus for the development of Circles at Glebe House comes from the desire of trustees and staff that residents move on from the programme in a positive and well-supported way. The Circles project is the most recent of a number of measures intended to improve the experience of leaving Glebe House, drawing on recommendations based on longitudinal research findings (Boswell et al 2014; Boswell et al 2016).

Glebe House employs two staff (the transitions team) who are responsible for the operation of the Circles project and have the broader task of supporting the young man in his transition from Glebe House to his new home. They are involved in preparation meetings with the young man, his leaving care workers and social workers, and they maintain contact with him for 18 months after he moves on. More recently, the responsibility of the transitions team has expanded to include the independence work that takes place when a resident leaves the main house to live in the Glebe House bungalow.

3.0 The Research Process

3.1 Aims of the Study

The FTCT commissioned this study with the overall aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the Circles project during its first year and to make recommendations for the continuing development of the support provided to young men making the transition from Glebe House to the community. The specific objectives of the study, as agreed with the FTCT at the outset of the work are to:

- Inform the development of the service provided by Glebe House to young men making the transition to life after the residential programme.
- Identify the extent to which Circles support young men in their transition from Glebe House.
- Collect robust data (including information about the core member such as social circumstances and offending) about the pilot Circles to contribute to any future substantive evaluation and to integrate with evaluations of similar Circles projects elsewhere in the UK.

3.2 The study methodology

This study draws on semi-structured interviews and data from Glebe House records. These data were supplemented by information gathered from informal interaction at visits to Glebe House and at meetings with Circles coordinators and volunteers. Interviews were conducted with Glebe House residents and staff, Circles staff and volunteers, and external professionals involved with the young men.

These methods were chosen on the basis that they were likely to generate relevant findings and were practical, manageable and ethical in the context of the research schedule and budget. The initial proposal for the study was agreed and ethical approval obtained in May 2016. The project was originally intended to run for a 12 month period, but this timescale was subsequently extended in order to capture the experience of a larger sample of young men and in response to the finding that, in many cases, it took a number of months post-departure to establish a Circle.

3.2.1 *The Young Men in the Sample*

The study follows the progress of eight young men who left Glebe House between May 2016 and September 2017. These are eight of the nine residents who completed the Glebe House programme and made the transition into the community during this time period. (The ninth young man left Glebe House for a highly supported residential placement outside the UK. Given his circumstances a Circle was not considered and he is not part of this study's sample.)

Table 1 introduces the young men in the sample, provides basic information about their transition and gives the timing of the research interviews. Each young man has been provided with a pseudonym.

The first interview with each young man was planned to be close to his leaving date on the basis that he would know about his move-on plans and be able to look ahead to the start of the Circle. However, Table 1 shows that some young men were still at Glebe House weeks after their first research interview. This was a consequence of uncertainty about move-on accommodation (see Section 4.1). By contrast, Lewis left Glebe House before being interviewed and his first interview took place in his new home town.

Table 1: The Young Men in the Sample

	Leaving date	Age at leaving	First interview (at Glebe House)	Second interview (in the community)	Time between first and second interview	Circles provider for home area	Circle set up
Jordan	31/5/16	20	24/5/16	22/9/16	4 months	Area B	Yes
Ryan	22/8/16	19	17/8/16	1/2/17	5 months	Area B	Yes
William	30/9/16	18	17/8/16	19/4/17 and 30/11/17	8 months and 15 months	Area A	Yes
Harry	23/11/16	18	13/10/16	22/6/17	8 months	Area D	No
Lewis	28/2/17	18	31/3/17	5/10/17	6 months	Area D	No
Jake	12/7/17	19	10/7/17	15/5/18	10 months	Area C	Yes
Michael	8/8/17	20	10/7/17	21/2/18	7 months	Area A	No
Adam	12/9/17	18	19/6/17	10/4/18	10 months	Area C	No (this Circle was set up after the end of fieldwork)

The original intention was that the second research interview would take place in the new home area around four months after leaving. This timing was set on the basis that the Circle would have been running for around three or four months, and the researcher would visit the young man and also have chance to meet the Circle coordinator and volunteers. However, most young men did not leave Glebe House and start a Circle immediately. The gap between first and second research interviews grew to take account of the period of waiting to see whether a Circle would be established or not. William’s second interview took place when his Circle was just on the point of starting. The extension of the study time period allowed for a third interview with William at a time when his Circle was well established.

3.2.2 Circles coordinators and volunteers

Circles coordinators and volunteers were supportive of the research and generous with their time. Glebe House transitions staff passed the coordinators’ contact details to the researcher who then made contact by phone and email. Coordinators played a crucial part in the fieldwork by identifying a suitable date for the research visit and inviting volunteers to meet the researcher. The researcher met the Circles volunteers in a group and then offered volunteers the chance to participate in a one-to-one phone interview. Some volunteers provided their contact details but did not reply to telephone or email messages seeking to set a time for the follow-up interview. As Jake’s Circle was set up at the end of the fieldwork period, there was little time to arrange and chase up telephone interviews with volunteers. Table 2 sets out the interviews with coordinators and volunteers.

Table 2: Research Interviews with Circles Coordinators and Volunteers

Circles Provider	Coordinator and volunteers	Date of interview	Visit or telephone
Area A	Coordinator 1	19/4/17	Visit
		30/11/17	Visit
		9/5/18	Telephone
	Volunteer group	30/11/17	Visit
	Volunteer 7	3/1/18	Telephone
	Volunteer 8	5/1/18	Telephone
Area B	Coordinator 2	23/9/16	Telephone
	Coordinator 3	21/9/16	Visit
		28/4/17	Telephone
		25/7/17	Telephone
	Coordinator 4	1/2/17	Visit
		31/7/17	Telephone
		26/1/18	Telephone
	Volunteer group	21/9/16	Visit
	Volunteer 1	12/5/17	Telephone
	Volunteer 2	17/10/16	Telephone
	Volunteer 3	20/10/16	Telephone
	Volunteer 4	29/5/17	Telephone
	Volunteer group	1/2/17	Visit
	Volunteer 5	12/9/17	Telephone
Volunteer 6	18/9/17	Telephone	
Area C	Coordinator 5	17/10/17	Telephone
		21/5/18	Telephone
	Volunteer group	15/5/18	Visit
	Volunteer 9	23/5/18	Telephone

No circles were established in Area D and, consequently, there are no interviews with staff or volunteers from this provider.

3.2.3 External Professionals

Professionals working with young men in the community are involved in the transitions process and have a perspective on the impact of the Circle and the quality of Glebe House's transitions work. Contact details for relevant professionals were passed on by the young man or obtained from Glebe House records. Initial contact was then made. The professionals were given information about the research and the researcher confirmed that the contact was being made with the consent and cooperation of the young man.

It was not always possible to get beyond office reception systems to speak to the professional. Some never responded to phone messages. Some professionals were not willing to participate. Others, clearly very busy, set dates to speak but then cancelled or rearranged. There was more time to follow up professionals working with the young men who left at the start of the project period. It was also easier to engage professionals whose young man was part of a Circle.

Table 3: Interview with External Professionals

Young Man	Professional	Job Title	Date of Interview
Jordan	Professional 1	Leaving Care Worker	27/6/17
	Professional 2	Probation officer	26/1/18
Ryan	Professional 3	Leaving care worker	6/9/17
	Professional 4	Probation officer	14/7/17
William	Professional 5	Probation officer	13/6/17
	Professional 6	YOT worker	23/6/17
Jake	Professional 7	Leaving Care Worker	21/5/18
Lewis	Professional 8	Housing Support Worker	30/11/17
Harry	Professional 9	Leaving Care Worker	22/6/17

As Table 3 shows, nine professionals (working with six young men) agreed to take part. These nine professionals included leaving care workers, housing support workers, probation officers and youth offending team practitioners. Five of them had met the young man before he left Glebe House, the other four had become involved during the transition period. None of them had previous substantial involvement with Circles, although two of the probation officers had supervised older offenders who had been, if only briefly, Circle core members.

3.2.4 Glebe House

The study also gathered data from interviews with Glebe House transitions staff and with the Glebe House director. This interview data was supplemented by information gathered informally from transitions staff throughout the pilot period.

The data from Glebe House records provided biographical information about the young men, along with assessments of risk and need.

3.3 Reflection on the study process

3.3.1 Anonymity

In line with ethical research practice, all research participants were assured of anonymity. The challenge (as in all studies that interview a small number of people who know each other well) is that each young man's distinctive circumstances are very familiar to Glebe House staff and Circles workers. Giving him a new name is not sufficient to obscure his identity from people who work with him. Similarly, the identities of Glebe House staff are no mystery.

In this report, no one's real name is used. On occasions the report includes a quotation or an opinion not directly attributed to a specific interviewee in order to safeguard confidentiality.

3.3.2 The Fieldwork Schedule

The initial fieldwork schedule assumed that young men would begin a Circle soon after leaving Glebe House. This was not how things worked out in practice and the fieldwork schedule was adjusted with the aim of meeting the young man (and local Circles staff) at a time when they could usefully reflect on their experience. This meant that some young men were not interviewed until several months after leaving Glebe House. The structure for fieldwork also meant that there were no interviews with Circles staff in Area D, as no Circles were established in Area D. With the benefit of

hindsight it may have been advantageous to arrange interviews with young men every six months after their departure from Glebe House rather than waiting for particular moments in the life of their Circle. Similarly there would have been merit in seeking to interview Circles staff in Area D to learn more, from their perspective, about the barriers to setting up Circles.

4.0 Research Findings

4.1 Leaving Glebe House

Seven of the eight young men in the sample were interviewed at Glebe House a few days or weeks before they left. It did not prove possible to plan an interview with the eighth resident before he moved on, and his first interview took place in his new home town about a month after his departure.

All eight spoke positively about their experience at Glebe House. Jake said that Glebe House had *changed his life*. Michael, in more subdued style, said that *everything here is good*. Lewis, least positive at the time of interview, acknowledged that he had liked some relationships with lads and staff.

In keeping with the findings of the longitudinal study (Boswell et al 2014), the young men spoke warmly of their relationships with staff, particularly with therapists and key workers. William explained that the therapeutic work had been *difficult but helpful*. Interviewees spoke with pride about obtaining qualifications and explained that it had been great to live somewhere where there was a lot going on and always people to talk to.

Little about life at Glebe House was identified negatively. Interviewees spoke about the inevitable frustrations of community living, and occasional annoyance and irritation with other community members.

The eight young men expressed mixed feelings about the prospect of leaving. Michael was the most concerned, explaining that he felt *anxious* as he had *not lived independently for some time*. Almost everyone else echoed this sense of anxiety and nervousness, but coupled this with a sense of excitement and anticipation. Harry said that he was *looking forward to it, but daunted*. Jordan said *I can't wait to leave. Leaving will be difficult, but I'm ready*. Jake, William and Adam all made the point that moving to live alone, having been used to being surrounded by people at Glebe House (and before that in care or custodial settings) would be strange. Ryan, who was leaving Glebe House facing possible criminal charges and uncertainty about his immediate future, simply said that he did not really know what he felt about leaving. His feelings were *in a mix*.

Table 4 summarises the state of the young men's move-on plans at the time of their first interview. Despite the fact that the research interview was scheduled when departure from Glebe House was imminent, only five of the young men were sure about their future housing position (including Lewis who had already moved on). Jordan and Jake had visited their new homes, with Jake having had chance to stay overnight in his flat. The other three were still waiting for news about tenancies, although they had some idea of the plans being made on their behalf. Their move from Glebe House would follow swiftly when accommodation was secured, perhaps in a matter of days.

Finding and funding accommodation is the responsibility of the local authority that placed the young person at Glebe House. While there is often agreement about the county or city to which the young man will move, this can be slow to translate to a town or borough. There are a number of reasons for this: public protection processes, licence conditions, risk assessments, availability of suitable accommodation and the wishes of the young person were all identified in this study. For example, Harry considered more than one possible town before settling on his eventual destination and there

was much professional discussion about an appropriate base for Ryan before a decision was made about the hostel place.

Table 4: Move-on Plans

	Housing secured	Familiar with new town	Support in place	Family contact	Education or training plan
Jordan	Yes - house	Slight	Housing key worker Probation officer	Some	Looking for apprenticeship or work
Ryan	Yes – temporary hostel place	Some	Leaving care worker Probation officer	Some	Looking for work
William	Yes – studio flat	Slight	Leaving care worker YOT worker	Some	College course
Harry	Not yet – waiting for tenancy	Some	Housing support Leaving care worker YOT worker	Some	Looking for work
Lewis	Yes – one bed flat	Very little	Key worker Leaving care worker	No	Looking for work or college
Jake	Yes – one bed flat	Very little	Probation officer Leaving care worker	Some	Intending to start at college
Michael	Not yet – waiting for vacancy in supported housing Knows which town he will be in	Very little	Housing support Probation officer Leaving care worker	Some	Looking for work or college
Adam	Not yet – waiting for tenancy	Slight	Leaving care worker	Yes	Applying for college

It is usual for young people to leave Glebe House for a town that they know only slightly. The sooner the new home town can be identified, the more opportunity there is for Glebe House to plan a transition process that includes visits. Lewis, for example, moved from Glebe House to somewhere that was completely new for him. Prior to his move, he was able to make visits to the town, first with his keyworker and then on his own.

Six of the young men stated that there was nothing more that Glebe House should have done to help them move on. Ryan said *They've done as much as they can – even with the spanner I've put in the works'*. Jake would have liked more opportunity to spend time in his new flat before making his permanent move and Adam wanted his housing to be sorted out (although he acknowledged this might not be the responsibility of Glebe House).

Similarly six of the young men were satisfied with the move-on help that they had received from other professionals. Despite making the point that housing provision for care leavers was inadequate, Harry said *I think everyone is doing what they can and as fast as they can*. William felt that he had been on the receiving end of frustrating mixed messages about his move-on and thought that *other professionals should keep me in the loop more*. This significant lack of certainty about move-on accommodation has implications for all aspects of transitions planning including establishing a Circle.

At the point of the first interview, all eight young men were expecting to have a Circle as part of their transition from Glebe House. Everyone viewed a Circle as an additional and valuable source of support and as providing an opportunity for help and advice. No one explicitly talked about the accountability function of a Circle, but William did specifically mention the advantage of talking to people who knew his situation and would not judge. Everyone felt that they had a choice about accepting a Circle, with Michael adding that he had made this decision along with the professionals working with him. Adam agreed that the decision to opt for a Circle had been his, but reflected that it might have been harder to make the decision to decline Circle involvement. Interviewees also believed that they would be able to leave a Circle if they did not want to be part of it anymore.

The first four interviewees (that is, the first four in the sample to leave) explained that Glebe House staff had told them about Circles. Those in the second half of the sample said that they had been hearing about Circles since their arrival at Glebe House, and that conversations about Circles were part of general conversation. A couple of them mentioned ex-residents who were involved with a Circle.

The eight potential Circles were at very different stages of preparation. Jordan's Circle was established. All the volunteers were recruited and Jordan had met one volunteer and the Coordinator. William, Jake, Adam and Michael had also all met their Circles Coordinator and were expecting to hear more about the Circle. Jake knew that he was waiting for volunteers to be recruited. Michael expressed disappointment that he had heard nothing more about his Circle. Ryan, Harry and Lewis knew the least about the state of Circle planning.

The professionals who participated in this study knew that leaving Glebe House was a hugely significant challenge for the young men. They saw Glebe House as a structured environment where the young man was well known, able to talk openly about himself and provided with help and support. They contrasted this with the situation in the new place where the young man knew few people and had no regular routine of work or study. Professional 4 noted that isolation was often a problem for sex offenders and Professional 5 reflected on his experience of working with other young people who had spent years in residential care. *Young people who come out from therapeutic units tend to be closed off and restricted in their involvement in the community. Once they come out of therapeutic units the support can drop off completely and this can be really hard.*

Those professionals who had been involved in a young man’s final months at Glebe House were almost universally positive about the planning and preparation work. Professional 9 was least positive, specifically arguing that risk assessment and risk management work (around a young man’s contact with a family member victim) had been insufficient.

4.2 Establishing and Running Circles

Despite intentions and expectations at the moment of departure from Glebe House not all the young men in this study were to become a Circles core member. This section of the report describes what happened, exploring the reasons for this.

Table 5 provides the basic information about the start and the end of the Circles that were established.

Table 5: Circles

	Month of leaving	Circle established	Date Circle established	Date Circle ended
Jordan	May 16	Yes	Prior to leaving	July 17
Ryan	Aug 16	Yes	Dec 16	Jan 18
William	Sept 16	Yes	March 17	April 18
Harry	Nov 16	No	-	-
Lewis	Feb 17	No	-	-
Jake	July 17	Yes	Jan 18	ongoing
Michael	Aug 17	No	-	-
Adam	Sept 17	Yes (too late for this study)	May 18 (after the cut-off point for fieldwork)	ongoing

As Table 5 makes clear only Jordan had the experience of leaving Glebe House and almost immediately joining a Circle. Uncertainty about accommodation and an outstanding police investigation delayed the process of Circle formation for Ryan. When it was clear where his Circle needed to be, confirming volunteers and setting up briefing and training meetings required more time. For Jake and Adam the recruitment and training of appropriate volunteers proved a slow process.

William was in a rather different position. He was in contact with the local Circles coordinator prior to leaving Glebe House and (in line with the usual practice in Area A) was engaged in a mentoring-type relationship with the coordinator for the six months after leaving and before the Circle was established.

For Harry, Lewis and Michael, neither the local provider nor Glebe House were able to establish a Circle in the first few months after they left Glebe House. As time passed the young men changed their minds and concluded that they were no longer interested in being part of a Circle.

Each local Circles provider is different and has a particular approach to recruiting volunteers and establishing Circles. In Area B, Coordinator 3 and Coordinator 4 were able to draw Circle members from a pool of trained volunteers. Both felt that they had been extremely fortunate with the volunteers who were available to join new Glebe House Circles. Coordinator 3 assembled five volunteers for Jordan's Circle, including a mix of men and women, older and younger people, experienced and new volunteers. He said that *he couldn't wish for a better group of volunteers*. This point was echoed by Professional 2 who said that the Circle was made up of *exactly the right volunteers for Jordan – whether by accident or design*.

For Ryan's Circle, Coordinator 4 found that there were only three available volunteers (all women, two older experienced Circle volunteers and one young newly-trained volunteer) in the county. Despite this lack of choice, Coordinator 4 concluded that she had been *very lucky* as, together with Ryan, they formed a *good group*.

Coordinator 1 explained that in Area A the coordinator would get to know the core member in the community ahead of recruiting volunteers. The volunteers had to *be right* for the particular core member and Circles were not something that should be *churned out*. This was the approach followed in William's case. Coordinator 1 met William at Glebe House and then continued to support him during his first few months in the community. He recruited four volunteers to form William's Circle (a mix of men and women, including an older man with previous experience with Circles and knowledge of Glebe House and two young women university students involved in their first Circle). Glebe House staff and Professional 6 were initially concerned by the time taken to establish the Circle but subsequently impressed with quality of the one-to-one mentoring.

This Circles provider attempted to follow a similar process with Michael, but a Circle was not established. It proved hard to recruit suitable volunteers in Michael's home town and Michael's ability to travel was constrained by licence conditions. There was a possibility of a Circle in a town some distance away, but Coordinator 1 concluded that the group of available volunteers there *didn't feel right*. Rather than setting up a Circle *for the sake of it* the Circles provider (right at the end of the study fieldwork period) suggested that Coordinator 1 take on a one-to-one support and mentoring role with Michael. Glebe House agreed to this intervention.

Coordinator 5 (working with Adam and Jake) expressed the wish that the set up time for Glebe House Circles could be shorter. A number of factors cause delay. One is uncertainty about where the young man is going to live. It is hard for coordinators to make decisions about venues and acceptable travel arrangements without this information. Time and effort (both from Glebe House and from Circles providers) has been lost when a young man's move-on plans have changed unexpectedly.

Difficulties with volunteer recruitment also delay the setting up of Circles and this is significant even in cases where there is no doubt about the young man's new home town. Circles providers find it easier to recruit and retain volunteers in some places than in others. This study suggests a number of reasons for this, including the resources that Circles providers are able to allocate to this task,

whether Circles are already established in a particular area, and the extent to which the demographics of a particular area are supportive of volunteering.

The Circles coordinators were positive about the quality of information that they received from Glebe House through the referral process. They judged that Glebe House staff had an excellent knowledge of the young men. Communication with the transitions staff at Glebe House was good. Coordinators 1, 4 and 5 had visited Glebe House and very much appreciated the opportunity to talk to the potential core member and to learn about Glebe House's routine and ethos. They found it particularly helpful to see that residents were familiar with sitting and talking about feelings and events.

Coordinators liked working with Glebe House transitions staff, but identified the need for a more formal statement of the relationship between Glebe House and the Circles providers. Such a document would be flexible and responsive to each individual case, but provide greater clarity about timescales, roles, responsibilities, payment and information sharing. Coordinator 5 said that a memo of understanding would be needed *if I'm not here tomorrow*. Coordinator 2 and coordinator 3 requested formal feedback from Glebe House. Coordinator 3 said *Do they think we are doing a good job? I'd like to know this*.

Seven of the professionals who participated in the study were involved with a young man with a Circle. The professionals were all positive about the work of Circles and full of praise for Circles coordinators. Professional 6 said that the coordinator *did good work*. Professional 5 described the same coordinator as *clearly very skilled at his job*. Professional 7 said that the coordinator *is brilliant*.

The professionals were generally (although not universally) impressed with the volunteers too and felt that the young men benefited greatly from this contact with people from the local community. Professional 5 spoke about the way that volunteers acted as role models, providing the young man with examples of different approaches and ideas that he could draw upon. Professional 5 also talked about the distinctive contribution that volunteers make to the resettlement process as people who *invest their own time and effort when they don't have to*. As a result, the young man can see that he has *importance and worth*. Professional 7, offering the sole negative comment about a volunteer, explained that she had discussed her concerns with the coordinator and these were now resolved.

4.3 Life After Glebe House

As described in Section 3.2.1 each young man was interviewed again some months after leaving Glebe House. This interview provided a chance to learn more about his experience of transition, his perspective on his Circle (if one existed), and to catch up with his wider circumstances. Each interview provides no more than a snapshot of these circumstances, gathering data that reflect the situation, mood and confidence of the young man at that moment. Inevitably some interviews were conducted when life was going well for the young man, others took place at more difficult moments. Information gathered later, from Glebe House staff or from external professionals, supplemented this interview data.

All eight young men had positive things to say about life after Glebe House. Six (of the eight) said that they were doing well, one said that he was doing well *on and off*, another pointed to the difficulty of finding work. None reported having been in significant trouble with police or probation,

although one had received a probation warning for poor behaviour and another confessed to drinking too much alcohol on occasions.

All were adequately housed. Four lived in supported housing and, therefore, expected to move into independent accommodation in the future. Two were living on their own in privately rented flats and the remaining two had longer-term tenancies with social housing providers. Six young men had not moved since leaving Glebe House, although one of these was on the point of moving because neighbours had become aware of his convictions. Two had moved, one from a hostel to a privately rented flat and the other between rented flats because of a police objection to the location of his original accommodation.

In line with the findings of Boswell et al (2014), finding jobs or college courses was proving a challenge. One interviewee was working long unsocial hours in a fast-food restaurant and another had found a call centre job, although (as information gathered later in the study from professionals revealed) neither of these jobs were to last. A couple of other young men talked of occasional casual work and the remainder explained that they were finding it hard to find anything. One young man had a regular volunteer role where he felt appreciated and valued, but was frustrated by his inability to move on from this into paid work. One interviewee had secured (and was enjoying) a college course, but a couple of others had been refused places at college on the grounds of their background and potential risk.

All but one young man had some contact with his family. This ranged from consistent, practical and valued support, through more occasional contact by phone and awkward exchanges of messages, to volatile and disruptive contacts. One young man spoke of his Gran and said he wanted *to do well for her sake*. Another explained that it was difficult to visit his mother because of the cost of travel and the travel restrictions that were a condition of his licence, but he had some phone contact with her.

Those young men in work or at college had made new friends since leaving Glebe House. For others it was proving difficult to build a new social life; one said that *friends are for the future* and another observed that friendships were *slow to develop*. Seven of the interviewees explained that they were not in a committed intimate relationship, although two explained that they had met someone and were *seeing how it goes*. The eighth interviewee had recently ended a relationship but was remaining in contact with the young woman who was expecting their child.

When asked about worries, three young men mentioned relationship concerns (including meeting new people and the difficulty of disclosing background information to a new partner). Uncertainty about housing and problems managing money were also identified as problems.

All eight young men spoke positively about their on-going contact with Glebe House. Everyone was receiving visits from the transitions staff. Interviewees also spoke about visits from other staff, and the benefit of being able to phone up Glebe House. One interviewee spoke positively about returning for the fireworks evening, saying that he might like to continue to do this even when he had his own family. For the young men this continuing contact meant that moving-on from Glebe House was a process rather than an event. As Jake said, *I was there for two years, will take two years to move on*.

The Circles coordinators, volunteers and professionals interviewed for this study also reflected on the young men's life after Glebe House. They identified similar problems areas: housing, employment, making friends, forming intimate relationships and managing contact with family. Professional 8 spoke of the problems of managing money. *This stresses him out. He won't open his post.*

Volunteers, sometimes learning for the first time about the experience of leaving care or custody, were taken aback that the young men did not receive more help from statutory agencies. For example, members of Jordan's Circle were unhappy about the short term nature of his accommodation and supported him to secure something less temporary. Volunteer 2 said *he's gone from a therapeutic community to living on his own. I can't imagine how difficult that is for him.* Other volunteers noted the contrast between the environment at Glebe House and the reality of life afterwards. Volunteer 6 said that if there had been no Circle for Ryan he *would have had no one but hopeless family. Work friends could not offer this support.* Volunteer 9 struck a contrary note, suggesting that Jake had too many professionals providing an audience for his *life of fantasy.*

4.4 Having a Circle

This study has gathered data about the experience of four very different Circles. These differences arise from the particular approaches of the three Circles providers involved, the unique combination of volunteers recruited for each Circle, and crucially the personality and circumstances of each young man. A number of important themes arise from the data, but it is not possible to draw general conclusions about the impact of Circles on young men leaving Glebe House.

Attendance and Engagement

All four young men were participating in their Circle. There were few issues about missed sessions, unreliability or lateness. Jake, who at the time of the second research interview was asking for his Circle to end, nonetheless was attending as agreed and travelling some distance to do so. Volunteer 4 described Jordan as *always on time, always polite.* William also attended reliably, despite his feeling (at the time of his third interview) that his Circle was *coming to the end of its useful life.* He explained that he always *turned up* because he appreciated that other people were giving their time to meet him. His volunteers noted that his habit of arriving early was slightly frustrating their plan to meet without him to prepare before the start of the session.

The young men were cooperating with their Circles for a variety of reasons. They clearly wanted to avoid problems with professionals like probation officers and youth offending workers. William acknowledged that doing a Circle makes you *look good.* Jake explained that he was, in part, continuing with the Circle because he had agreed this with a Glebe House transitions worker. However, all four young men also identified the Circle as somewhere that they could talk and where people listened. During their time at Glebe House they had become used to talking about themselves, their lives and their concerns, and the Circle provided a small opportunity for this to continue. Jordan said *I'm used to having a lot of people around me at Glebe.* Ryan said *At Glebe you get used to talking to people. The listening aspect of Circles is good.* Jake, who was least inclined to be positive, said that one of the few good things about the Circle was the *listening when I rant.*

Professionals, coordinators and volunteers expressed surprise at the young men's reliable attendance. While expressing frustration about the complexity of work with Jordan, volunteer 4 acknowledged that he was *always on time, always polite.* Volunteer 6 confirmed that Ryan *always*

comes and gets on well. Professional 3 admitted that his prediction that Ryan would engage initially but then start missing Circle meetings had proved inaccurate. Professional 6 was initially concerned about the length of time it took to establish the Circle for William, but impressed with the way that Coordinator 1 kept him engaged.

Support, Challenge and Accountability

There was general agreement (between Circles and from young men, volunteers, coordinators and professionals) that the Circles were a source of support. This support included that inherent in talking and listening. Volunteer 7 said that the Circle provided William with *trustworthy* people. Volunteer 5 said, of Ryan, *we are there for him. We like him.* Ryan valued the Circle's supportive relationships. He confirmed that it was good to have the support and, as had been the case at Glebe House, the chance to talk.

Support from Circles also came in the form of advice and guidance about issues like friendship, work, benefits and debts. Circles provided practical help for young men who were hungry or broke. Ryan appreciated the chance to talk about how things were going and Jake enjoyed going out for a free meal. Circle volunteers were happy to offer this help, but pointed to the related frustrations and complexities. Volunteers working with Jordan and Jake felt that their good advice was often ignored or ineffective. Jordan's Circle judged him to be a vulnerable and damaged young man with support needs that far exceeded their capacity (as a group of volunteers meeting him once a week) to meet. Jordan himself was positive about the support he received from the Circle, saying *The help from the Circle is good – they have knowledge and get my point of view.*

Circles volunteers and coordinators expressed mixed views about whether these Circles had effective accountability and risk management functions. Across all four Circles there was a sense that the young men could, in a variety of ways, avoid discussion about difficult issues. Volunteers identified a number of ways in which this could happen, including the core member attending in a state of chaos or crisis, or the core member explicitly declining to talk about past behaviour. On other occasions, there seemed to be little material for the Circle to work with, either because the young man was not prepared to give a full picture of his circumstances or because there really were no accountability issues for the Circle to consider. Accountability issues that had been raised by Circles, if only in a limited way, included matters arising from family relationships, sexual relationships with new partners, and the accessing of pornography.

The young men themselves said little about the way that their Circle dealt with potential issues of risk and harm. As in their initial research interviews, their focus was on the Circle as a source of support. William said that it was good to be able to talk about difficult personal issues while Jake was unhappy that Circle meetings kept reminding him of the past.

The Circles volunteers were aware that they had only partial knowledge of the young man's circumstances and could only respond to information that the young man chose to reveal. Asked if the Circle was holding Ryan to account, Volunteer 5 said *you never know, you just hope you are.* Volunteers working with Jordan and Jake also knew that they were not always told the truth. Volunteer 9 said that the Circle was *absolutely not* providing an accountability function as it was not managing to talk about harmful sexual behaviour.

In all four cases the Circle coordinators, while acknowledging the frustrations and setbacks, judged that the Circles were successfully providing support and accountability. Coordinator 5 described Jake's Circle as doing a *smashing job* of working with its challenges and complexity. Coordinator 4 (referring to an incident that occurred after the second research interview with Ryan) described the Circles volunteers as *amazing and willing to continue* despite the evidence that Ryan had not been wholly truthful through the previous months. Coordinator 3 was disappointed that Jordan's volunteers concluded, at the 12 month stage, that the Circle had come to the end of its useful life and would not agree to an extension.

The young men's professionals also assessed the Circles as fulfilling their support and accountability functions. In their view, Circles were supportive because they provided routine, human interaction and shared social activities. The Circle was also a venue where honest and frank conversation was possible, although Professional 7 noted that such conversation sometimes left the young man feeling that he had been told off. The Circle functioned as a continuation of the therapy and group meetings that are part of life at Glebe House. For example, Professionals 5 and 6 were pleased that William used the Circle to talk about choices and dilemmas in new, and potentially intimate relationships.

Circles were able to undertake activities that the professionals judged to be valuable but fell outside their remit or resources. Professional 2 (a probation officer) expressed herself *really grateful* that the Circle enabled her to focus on offending behaviour because it dealt with benefits, housing problems and debts. Professional 5 (also a probation officer) liked the fact that the Circle provided an additional resource for support and help. However, Professional 1 sounded a note of caution speculating that, in the future, Social Services could use the existence of a Circle as a reason not to fund additional sources of support for care leavers.

Risk management issues were more prominent for some Circles than others. Some interviewees viewed future sexual offending as likely, for other interviewees this was a more distant possibility. There was not always agreement between Glebe House and local Circles providers about risk levels. For example, Coordinator 2 said *Our views on risk are different. [We] think he is higher risk than Glebe indicated*. Volunteers and coordinators voiced concerns about issues including: the use of the internet to meet sexual partners and view pornography, lack of victim empathy (including lack of understanding of the harm done to past victims), use of alcohol, and unresolved problematic family relationships.

The professionals' judgments about the risk issues in each case shaped their views about the Circles' accountability function. Professionals who were concerned about future offending risks valued the role of the Circle in gathering information and monitoring changing circumstances. For example, professional 3 was pleased that the Circle did not *shy away* from talking about past offending behaviour and asking difficult questions of the young man. On some occasions, young men would raise difficult issues (for example about alcohol or sex) in the Circle ahead of talking to their probation officer.

Circles volunteers, coordinators and professionals were not only concerned with risk of future offending. They also gave examples of the risks faced by the young men because of their vulnerability and personal and health difficulties. Ryan's volunteers were worried about the possibility of self-harm. Jordan's volunteers and coordinator felt that he was continually risking

recall to prison and his first experience of adult (rather than young offender) custody. Professionals spoke about difficulties caused by problematic family relationships, poorly handled disclosure of convictions and worries about the potential for self-harm.

Meetings and Activities

Circles for young people often include activities and outings alongside the traditional Circles format of sitting together and talking. This was the case for all four Circles in this study. Activities that involved food were particularly popular. Other activities included trips to do sport, see a play and visit a wildlife park. Jordan's volunteers found the activity side of the Circle a useful way of getting to know him. Volunteer 4 said that at activities he *looks happy*. Volunteer 3 agreed *we see more of the real Jordan on activities*. Jake frankly explained that the Circle's activity sessions were a welcome alternative to the talking sessions (when he felt that the volunteers could be *not very nice*). He explained that when a talking session went badly, he was still inclined to go the following week as it would be an activity session.

William's volunteers also judged that alternating activities with talking meetings was productive. It was good to have a break from the institutional feel of the regular Circles venue. However, one volunteer in this group was clear that the budget for activities was too tight, constraining the choice of things to do or leaving volunteers out of pocket.

Ryan's Circle engaged in the fewest activities, partly because Ryan was happy with the talking format and partly because of a shortage of things that everyone wanted to do. Exercise and healthy eating were identified (by volunteers) as an issue for Ryan, but he was reluctant to engage in any sporting activity. A Circle meeting at Ryan's flat for a cooking session was more successful.

Coordinators valued the activity element of the Circle and Coordinator 3 acknowledged the importance of funding for this. Activities played a part in engaging and incentivising young people to attend, but also contributed to goals like community integration. Coordinator 4 explained how the activity element of a Circle built confidence and self-esteem and, ideally, enabled the young person to find an activity to continue beyond the life of the Circle. Young people leaving Glebe House (in contrast to other young core members) were practised at sitting talking with adults, but still likely to benefit from involvement in outings and social events.

The Contribution of Glebe House Staff to the Circle

There was praise (from volunteers, coordinators and professionals) for the role that Glebe House staff played in supporting the Circles. Volunteers appreciated the information and training that they had received at the beginning of the Circle, although a minority suggested that this had been unnecessarily technical or academic. Volunteer 6 said *the whole point of Circles is that we're amateurs. We stand alongside as friends not professionals*. Volunteers generally saw the involvement of transitions staff in the Circle review process as a sign of Glebe House's commitment to former residents. Volunteer 4 said *It's important that [Transitions Worker] has kept in touch*. However, a couple of volunteers sounded more critical notes, asking whether Glebe House find it difficult to let go of young people and querying whether Glebe House staff are too slow to challenge and confront harmful behaviour.

Coordinators similarly praised the availability and responsiveness of Glebe House staff. They were impressed by how well the staff knew the young men, and by the understanding that they showed

of sexually harmful behaviour. One coordinator observed that transitions staff had attended more meetings than local professionals. Transitions staff were *exceptional* and their involvement *admirable*. Professionals who had met Glebe House staff at Circles briefing and review meetings were similarly positive.

Volunteers and Circles

The Circles volunteers in this study had become involved with Glebe House Circles for a variety of reasons. Some had actively chosen a Glebe House Circle; they either already knew of the work of Glebe House or volunteered after receiving information from the coordinator. Others were new to Circles, identified by coordinators as particularly suited to join the Glebe House Circle. Others still had not chosen the Glebe House Circle, but responded to the request or direction of the coordinator. As in the study by Almond et al (2015) they were involved with Circles for a variety of reasons: moral and altruistic; in response to personal experience of sexually harmful behaviour; and for personal development and work experience.

Circles volunteers were generally happy with the support and supervision they received from their Circles provider and, in particular, from the coordinator. Volunteers from the three completed Circles reported that relationships within the Circles had been warm and supportive (although one Circle noted that its dynamics improved when a volunteer withdrew). The role of volunteers in their early twenties was appreciated by older volunteers, coordinators and by the young men. Ryan explained that, with his youngest volunteer, *there is not so much of an age gap. We have things in common*. Volunteer 8 said that he was *really pleased* with the mix of people in the Circle, pointing to the fact that the younger volunteers were confident about issues like use of social media.

In line with the national picture for Circles (Almond et al 2015) the majority of volunteers were women. Young male volunteers were particularly rare. Professional 4, while impressed with the volunteers she met, observed that they were all women and suggested that, ideally, there would have been a gender mix in the Circle.

The study identified some points of tension and difficulty for volunteers. A minority of volunteers had issues with the way that the provider worked, in areas such as communication and information exchange. A couple of experienced volunteers felt that boundaries were set too tightly, limiting their ability to properly support the core member. These boundaries are set differently by each provider and include guidance about whether Circle members can use their own mobile phones to contact the core member, meet with the core member on a one-to-one basis and visit the core member at home. For example, Ryan's Circle had a meeting at his flat, something that was not possible for William's Circle.

Volunteers were particularly frustrated by guidance preventing them from meeting young men on a one-to-one basis. Volunteer 5 suggested that meeting the young man for a coffee could be a helpful way of extending the support available, particularly later in a Circle or when volunteers were busy with other commitments. Volunteer 9 argued strongly that the constraints placed on volunteers had hampered both the support and accountability functions of the Circle. In his view, had the young man been more risky, *this Circle would have been a failure*.

Circles and Multi-agency Work

The size of the professional network that supports and monitors a young man leaving Glebe House depends on a variety of factors including: status in the care system, criminal justice involvement, and housing circumstances. Transitions work from Glebe House, family support and the provision of a Circle add to this network. For example, in this study Adam had a support network that comprised a leaving care worker, Glebe House staff and some relatives. Jordan's support network included a leaving care worker, a probation officer, a housing support worker, a Circles coordinator and volunteers and Glebe House staff.

From the perspective of the professionals who participated in this study, the process of setting up the Circles had gone well in terms of setting expectations, sharing information and briefing everyone involved. The opportunity to get together as a professional network and meet Glebe House staff had been valuable.

In all cases, the professionals were positive about the Circle's contribution to the multi-agency work surrounding the young man. Information sharing was constructive and appropriate.

Communication, while not always perfect, was good with clear agreements about who was doing what. Professional 3 explained that he never had to chase the coordinator for information and described the review meetings as *super helpful*. Two probation officer professionals valued the input that Circles workers (staff and volunteers) had made to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process.

The professionals voiced concerns about life after the Circle. Professional 2's interview took place after Jordan's Circle had ended. She expressed regret that the Circle volunteers did not agree to an extension and explained that life had again been difficult for Jordan as the Circle ended at the same time as his housing support was also withdrawn. Looking ahead, Ryan's professionals anticipated similar difficulties. Professional 4 predicted that Ryan would miss the Circle as it had been *really valuable* for him and he would be *back on his own*.

Having a Circle

In conclusion, it does not make sense to ask whether each of these Circles was a success or a failure. The position is more complicated than that. One of the Circles is relatively young and certainly fragile. The other three have ended, and include both constructive and ineffective elements. Against the expectations of his coordinator and volunteers, Jordan stuck with his Circle and was not recalled to prison. Ryan had a set-back just as his Circle was ending and two of his volunteers have agreed to maintain supportive contact with him (although they will do this informally and independently of the Circles provider). William remains in contact with his coordinator who has recently (and after the Circle had ended) supported him through the process of disclosing his convictions to a partner.

All four young men say that they would recommend a Circle to Glebe House residents. Despite his mixed views about his Circle and his stated intention to withdraw, Jake said that *people should try it*. William recognised that Circles were *a chance with someone 'with a past' to talk* and a valuable source of help through inevitable difficult times. He would recommend that everyone leaving Glebe House should have a Circle, but could see that some people would view the Circle as an unwelcome commitment or as an obstacle to moving on with their lives.

4.5 The Experience of Not Having a Circle

Harry, Lewis, Michael and Adam did not have a Circle in place at the time of their second research interview. Harry, Lewis and Michael had decided that they no longer wished to have a Circle. Adam was still hoping that one would be established (and, happily, this was to happen, although not until after the end of this study's fieldwork period).

As set out in Section 4.1, at the time of their first interview, Harry, Lewis and Michael were all anticipating that they would be involved with a Circle. The process of setting up a Circle was underway, with transitions staff working with Circles providers. However, months passed and the local coordinators were not able to assemble a sufficient number of appropriate volunteers. Harry and Lewis were returning to Area D where, for funding reasons, the local Circles provider prioritised probation service referrals. At the time and in the towns that Harry and Lewis needed a Circle, the local provider did not have the capacity to assist. In Harry's case, transitions staff began work on establishing a Circle to be coordinated from Glebe House. This required sensitive negotiation with the local provider about the recruitment, sharing and training of volunteers. Limited progress had been made at the point that Harry concluded that he was no longer interested in a Circle. In the absence of a Circle Lewis was offered the possibility of a one-to-one mentoring with a volunteer from his new home town identified by Glebe House. Lewis chose not to take up this offer. In Michael's case, the local Circles provider did not have volunteers available in the town where Michael was living. Volunteers were available elsewhere in the county but (as explained in Section 4.2) a combination of poor public transport and the restrictions of Michael's post-custody licence made the establishment of a Circle impractical.

As time away from Glebe House passed, Harry, Lewis and Michael all concluded that there was no longer any point in being part of a Circle. Their decision ended the Circle planning process. At his second interview, Lewis said that it was now *too late* for a Circle. He felt that his transition away from Glebe House had gone well and he was not in need of the support that a Circle could offer. Harry made a similar point. His Circle was taking *for ever* to set up and would now be *too late*. He argued that he had made his transition with help and support from elsewhere. Having a Circle established now would feel like *back-tracking*. Michael also asserted that there was no point in a Circle after the early days of transition. He also explained that he was now reluctant to join a Circle because he did not like groupwork and was happy with the recent offer of one-to-one mentoring.

By contrast, Adam was prepared to wait for a Circle believing that it would offer a degree of support and social activity that was missing from his life. He explained that it would have *been more helpful* if his Circle had started as he left Glebe House. It was a *shame* that establishing the Circle was being delayed by a shortage of volunteers.

All four of Harry, Lewis, Michael and Adam felt that they had been supported through the transition from Glebe House and had people that they could speak to frankly about their lives. Two of the young men identified family support as important and explained that they could talk openly to particular relatives. One developed this point by saying that he had not yet encountered a situation he could not discuss with his mother but could anticipate situations in which it would be preferable to talk within a Circle rather than with his family.

Three of the young men were living in accommodation with an element of housing support and all spoke of the importance of this support. Lewis said that he could talk about everything to his

housing support worker, Michael named his probation worker and Harry mentioned the youth offending team. Harry also described Glebe House as *always there*.

Circles coordinators and professionals knew that delays in establishing Circles risked losing the young man's consent and commitment. Coordinators stressed the importance of knowing as early as possible where the young man would be living, but accepted that securing end of placement accommodation was not the responsibility of Glebe House. The process of recruiting and training volunteers also took time, particularly in places where the local Circles provider was not already well established.

Two of the interviewed professionals were working with young men who did not have a Circle. Neither of them had been involved with the unsuccessful attempts to establish a Circle. Professional 9 felt that a Circle could have played an important risk management role and suggested that *maybe it should not be possible* for the young man to refuse one. He knew that the young man was still in contact with transitions staff and suggested that there should be more inter-agency communication during the move-on period. Both professionals had little or no contact with Glebe House staff, something that would have been different had Circles been successfully established.

Despite their own experiences, all four young men said that Circles could be of use to people leaving Glebe House. As one said *It didn't work out for me, but I would recommend it to others who don't have family or professional support*.

4.6 Ending Circles and Moving Beyond Transition

The Glebe House transitions phase is intended to last for 18 months. At the end of this phase the transitions staff cease active involvement with the young man, who remains (as with all ex-residents) able to contact Glebe House by phone. Ideally the transition phase ends with the transitions worker making a visit to the young man which everyone knows will be the final formal contact.

One consequence of the delay in establishing Circles is that it becomes likely that the Circle will run beyond the 18 months after leaving point and, when this happened, the transitions team extended the transitions period. This is on the basis that support from Glebe House cannot end while the Glebe House Circle is running, and should not end at the same time as the Circle is withdrawn.

Each Circles provider has its own policy about how long a Circle will run, how it ends and what follows in terms of contact and support. Jordan and Ryan's Circles (both in Area B) ended around the 12 months point. The coordinators considered extending the Circles into a less formal second phase but this did not happen in either case. Jordan's volunteers felt that they had done all they could and were not willing to continue with the Circle. Ryan's Circle had shrunk in size and the remaining volunteers wanted the flexibility to meet him on a one-to-one basis. This was not permitted under the auspices of the Circle and they made the choice to do this independently.

The policy of the Circles provider in Area A is also that there is no more contact between volunteers and core members after the formal end of the Circle. However, relationships built up in Circles are not always easy to end. Volunteer 8 interpreted the policy to mean that after the Circle any contact is then *our own business*. Coordinator 1 explained that he would be *touching base* with William every month or so for about a year after the end of the Circle and was *happy to do this*. William had

recently (and after the Circle had ended) made a full disclosure of his offending history to a girlfriend, a process that the coordinator had supported.

The ending of the formal transitions phase of the Glebe House programme, and the closing of a Circle if one was established, is a further moment of change. By this point some young men are settled in the community and supported by friends, family and professionals. For others social isolation and lack of support remain a problem. Glebe House transitions staff, recognising that *every case is so different*, respond to the differing circumstances of each young man, on occasion extending the length of the formal transitions period.

5.0 Looking to the Future

This section of the report discusses the extent to which Circles have supported young men leaving Glebe House and considers ways that the study's findings can inform the development of Circles and wider transitions work at Glebe House.

Transitions work is valuable and increasingly well integrated into the Glebe House programme

The young men in this study benefited from transitions work both in their final months at Glebe House and in the period after they left. The good relationships built with transitions staff at Glebe House were sustained in the community. Transitions staff have a thorough knowledge of the young men and approach their work with flexibility, imagination, good humour and care. They are highly regarded by Circles staff.

Circles are now a familiar concept at Glebe House. They are part of general conversation. Residents hear about them from staff and other residents. They know ex-residents who are involved with Circles and who speak positively about their experience.

Circles of Support and Accountability are a good fit for Glebe House transitions

Circles make sense as part of a Glebe House transitions plan for many reasons. Young men often swap life at Glebe House for a situation where they know few people, have a lot of spare time and are constrained by court orders. A Circle offers support, social interaction and positive role models at this vulnerable time. Having successfully completed the Glebe House programme, young men are familiar with the routine of sitting and talking with adults and, in this respect, are better prepared for Circles than many prospective core members.

Circles are also a good fit for Glebe House; both institutions are informed by a Quaker ethos of social action. Both reinforce the importance of relationships, community and collective responsibility.

Circles support young men who leave Glebe House

The young men who joined Circles attended and participated. Circles constituted a space where they could talk and discuss problems, and where they were heard. Relationships within Circles were often (although not always) characterised as trusting, warm and friendly. The activity element of Circles built relationships and enabled the young men to try new leisure pursuits. Eating out was particularly popular.

Circles also offered practical help and guidance in areas such as housing, money management and employment. Professionals (like probation officers and leaving care workers) were happy that this support was available, seeing it to be necessary but beyond their capacity to provide.

Circles have a limited accountability and risk management function

The accountability and broader risk management work of Circles is shaped and constrained by the approach of the core member. Glebe House Circles are not unique in this respect. Sometimes young men used the Circle to talk about disclosure, new relationships or family troubles; sometimes they were happy to engage in exercises about risks and triggers. However, on other occasions they avoided or deflected attempts to discuss difficult issues. This study suggests that more could be done to prepare young men for the accountability aspect of the Circle.

Circles volunteers were, on occasions, unsure whether the core member was caught up in a fantasy or being deliberately untruthful. The initial training and briefing event at the start of the Circle provides a valuable opportunity for Glebe House staff to share information likely to help volunteers in their accountability role.

On the other hand, professionals with a public protection responsibility valued the monitoring function of the Circle. They appreciated the flow of information from the Circle and incorporated this in their decisions about risk assessment and sentence management.

Clarity about move-on accommodation helps with but does not solve the problem of establishing Circles

Some young people do not know where they will live until a week or so before they leave Glebe House. The agency (usually the local authority) that placed the young person at Glebe House is responsible for securing move-on accommodation. Limited resources, concerns about risk and public protection, and the general housing shortage make this task harder. The Glebe House transitions team is now working more closely with local authorities in the final six months of a placement, including hosting meetings for all the relevant professionals with a focus on transition planning.

Lack of certainty about the young man's move-on accommodation delays Circles planning. Similarly, work to establish Circles is wasted if a last-minute change of housing plan is made. Circles coordinators would prefer to know for certain where a young man was going to live at least three months before the end of his placement.

However, certainty about housing does not guarantee that a Circle will be set up. This study suggests that in some places and at some times, despite the best efforts of Circles providers, it is not possible to recruit sufficient volunteers.

Glebe House transitions staff work well with Circles providers but a more formal protocol is needed

Communication between transitions staff and Circles coordinators is excellent. There is respect and goodwill on both sides, as well as learning and experience gained from early Circles. Good quality inter-professional relationships support effective practice and transition plans are precisely tailored to the circumstances of each young man.

A more formal protocol would complement, not take the place of, the relational aspects of the work. A formal agreement would outline responsibilities, processes and timelines. It would set out expectations about payment, the service to be delivered, and payments to be made. It would be available to third parties (like local authorities) working with the young men. A written agreement would reduce the reliance on the knowledge and experience of existing staff.

Glebe House involvement at the start of the Circle should continue. Transitions staff know the young men extremely well and Circles volunteers benefit from a detailed introduction to the core member and to the Glebe House programme. A training and briefing event also provides a valuable opportunity for the professional network around the young man to get together.

Sharing and contextualising information about risks (of sexual re-offending, general re-offending and self-harm) is an important element of this briefing. Glebe House staff, Circles staff and volunteers, and external professionals see risk in different ways. The opportunity to exchange information and insights is valuable.

Coordinating Circles from Glebe House is extremely challenging

It has not been possible to set up and run a bespoke Circle from Glebe House. A couple of attempts to do this ended when the young men involved indicated that they were no longer interested in having a Circle. Established Circles providers find it hard to set up Circles in places where they do not have a pool of experienced volunteers and a history of recruitment and training; the obstacles faced by Glebe House staff trying to do this at a distance are greater. Working with existing Circles providers offers the best hope of success.

However, the capacity of local providers to establish a Circle in a particular place at a particular time cannot be taken for granted and, given current funding uncertainties, may shrink rather than grow. A tentative conclusion from this study is that establishing and coordinating a Circle at a distance would require an increase in the resources of the Glebe House transitions team.

Circles have important characteristics but there is merit in exploring other community interventions too

Systematic transitions practice, growing relationships between Glebe House and local Circles providers, and clarity about protocols and spot-purchasing arrangements increase the chances that Circles are promptly established, but will not guarantee a Circle for every young man. There are likely to be places, personalities and events that conspire against the establishment of a Circle.

Circles are a logical first choice for young men leaving Glebe House. It makes sense for a group of people (rather than a lone volunteer) to work with individuals in complex and challenging circumstances. Circles providers are experts in responding to sexually harmful behaviour. However, the young men in this study benefited from the routine and social interaction inherent in the Circle alongside the more specialist support and accountability. In the absence of a Circle, there is merit in exploring other voluntary sector projects and programmes (e.g. in areas like community chaplaincy and youth work).

The transitions phase could be more systematic where there is no Circle (or where the Circle is late to be established)

The process of establishing, running and reviewing a Circle creates a number of opportunities for Glebe House transitions staff to meet the young man and the professionals working with him. It leads to a regular flow of news and information.

Without a Circle, knowledge and experience from Glebe House is less likely to be shared with professionals working with the young man in the community. Opportunities for support, accountability and risk management may be missed. The transitions phase for young men without a Circle would benefit from greater structure, including points of review and evaluation that mirror those created by a Circle.

There is scope to build on this study

This study has collected rich qualitative data about a small number of Glebe House transitions and identifies lessons from the first two years of the Circles project. It shows both that the project itself has merit for ex-residents, and that the research method has proved viable.

There are a number of ways of developing this research including:

- continuing the study and recruiting new Glebe House leavers.
- extending the study until the end of the transitions period for all young men in the sample.
- setting up a second phase of the study with refreshed aims and objectives.
- working more closely (on evaluation issues) with providers of other Circles for young people.

'Why wouldn't you have a Circle?'

The young men in the study were asked whether they would recommend that everyone leaving Glebe House was provided with a Circle. All those who had experienced a Circle said that they would, including one who replied '*Why wouldn't you have a Circle?*' The evidence from this study suggests that the short answer to his question is 'No reason at all'.

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