

## SUPPORT CIRCLES INFORMED CONSENT

### *Purpose of research*

The purpose of this research is to document and understand how support circles are functioning and to assess the success of neighbors and participants in reaching both overall program goals and the goals set out in the Circle covenants. This also may include understanding how characteristics of the group and neighbor are related to outcomes of the program to help inform how future Support Circles are organized (e.g., understanding optimal size for a group). An additional goal is to foster a greater general understanding of the social support networks of those experiencing or exiting homelessness and how differences in those networks may influence housing stability and personal well-being.

Program research will be used by the Support Circles team to help inform the processes and design of future Support Circles in order to help achieve the goals of the program. Reporting on the processes and outcomes of Nashville's Support Circle initiative may also provide useful information to other communities currently using this model or who may be interested in beginning to use this model.

### *Information about Informed consent*

A principle of conducting ethical research is that participants in research should be able to make an informed decision about whether to participate in the research. In the context of studying data collected naturally by an organization (e.g., administrative data), generally participation in the program indicates that the participant is willing to let the organization use that data for internal purposes or research because they are voluntarily participating in the program.

If the data (or data that is shared with researchers) does not contain personally identifiable information (which generally includes full name, dates of birth, social security numbers, or individual addresses) or health information protected under HIPAA regulations, generally the research is not considered "human subjects research" by Vanderbilt's Institutional Review Board (IRB), an organization which reviews university research submissions to make sure adequate protections for participants are in place, and is granted a waiver. As such, generally the organization works out a data use agreement with the researcher specifying the ways in which the data will be used, accessed, protected, and stored.

If the researcher is personally collecting data from participants (e.g., administering interviews, observing support circle sessions, etc.) or working with personally identifiable information, then the research proposal has to undergo a more extensive review process by Vanderbilt's IRB. Informed consent from those participating may be needed if the data are to be reported on outside of internal Support Circle team use.

For the purposes of conducting the pilot research to test out potential data collection processes and instruments, we would likely just need a general agreement from the group and neighbor to participate, as research done for class projects are exempt from needing to be reviewed by Vanderbilt's Institutional Review Board.

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PAGE 2 has information on consent for the Members of the support group

#### *For Circle Members*

- Key area of consent would be permission for study researchers to review monthly reports, primarily focused on recording frequency of contact with the neighbor and types or frequency of support given.
- To do so, we have two potential options:
  - 1) We could create a report form that makes it easy to remove the names of the report preparer or group members that might be mentioned in the document. The de-identified reports could then be shared with the researcher, subject to a data use agreement.
  - 2) Participants could consent to give me access to full report without names being redacted
  - Note: We could potentially use the second option for the pilot phase and then later create a format for the report so that staff is not having to worry about removing names.
- Additional potential consent or data collection needs could include:
  - Permission to release basic demographic information (age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation) and other potentially relevant information (e.g., ZIP code of address, hobbies or outside interests) from the program application.
  - Participating in a brief survey about the degree of connection people have to each other in the group and/or additional demographic information (e.g., general educational level, broad income category, occupation).
  - For piloting the data collection instruments (e.g., survey, monthly reports), asking group members to participate in a focus group session or individual meetings to get feedback on the instruments.

#### Principles of informed consent:

- Voluntary
  - While submitting monthly reports is part of the Support Circles program requirements, giving a researcher consent to view it and use it for research purposes is voluntary.
- Confidentiality
  - Any information shared with researchers on the project will remain confidential with the Support Circles and members of the research team that have signed a data use agreement.
  - No names will be used in reporting of findings. However, this may not guarantee full anonymity, particularly in the pilot phase where the number of Support Circles is small.
- Benefits
  - Information gathered from the research will be used to improve the program for future participants (and may also help active groups as well)
  - Information gathered about program efforts could be used to help other communities replicate this program or to improve an existing program
  - Gaining a greater understanding of the social support networks of persons experiencing or exiting homelessness may help inform programmatic and policy practices for providing assistance to homeless or formerly homeless persons.
- Potential risks
  - Risks of participating are anticipated to be minimal.
  - While information will be kept confidential and no names will be used in reporting results, researchers cannot guarantee full anonymity. Though information will be aggregated, names will be removed, and precautions will be taken in data storage and handling and report writing to prevent identification of any individual member, we cannot guarantee that someone familiar with the support circle program could potentially identify a particular group or group member.