



## SOAR is an Essential Part of the Homeless Response System

SOAR is a key part of a systemic response to ending homelessness and represents an innovative model for increasing income and housing stability for individuals who have disabling conditions. Implementing the SOAR model and increasing access to Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits strongly contribute to USICH's All In strategy to "Maximize current resources that can provide voluntary and trauma-informed supportive services and income supports to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness." Maximizing income support leads to stable housing, education opportunities, employment benefits through [SSA's work incentives](#), and increased health outcomes through connection with Medicaid.

Funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) can be used to support SOAR implementation. Nationwide, Continuums of Care (CoCs) were awarded \$3.16 Billion for over 7,000 projects for FY2023. In addition to the general annual funding, 32 communities were awarded \$420 million in a Special Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to address unsheltered homelessness. The San Antonio/Bexar County CoC is using some of its funding for three outreach projects containing one team member dedicated to benefits access through SOAR. Make sure your CoC is on this list next year!

- *Bring SOAR providers to the table and find creative ways to work across systems.*
  - Identify which populations currently have access to SOAR services and where increased access is needed.
- *Nominate individuals who have benefited from SOAR to the CoC Board to increase the voice of individuals with disabling conditions in CoC policy decisions.*
  - Individuals with experience in going through the SOAR process are uniquely equipped to provide insights into increasing access to benefits and using SSA's work incentives to explore work and educational opportunities.
- *Create a plan for reaching out to individuals with disabilities and assisting them to apply for SSA benefits.*
  - Look at ways that Coordinated Entry and other referral systems can help identify potential applicants.
- *Utilize data from the SOAR [Online Application Tracking \(OAT\)](#) program to demonstrate how your community has increased access to SSA benefits.*
  - Demonstrate that your community has been successful in addressing systemic challenges to ending homelessness, such as increasing income and housing stability for those with disabling conditions. SOAR data can help show community progress.

## Empowering Social Workers to SOAR

*By Tennessee SOAR State Team Lead, Christy Spangler*

The White House officially recognized March as National Social Work month in 1984. Social Work Month encourages support of the profession, uplifts social workers, and celebrates their contributions. The theme for this year, chosen by the National Association of Social Workers, is "Empowering Social Workers!"



Why did you want to become a social worker? I am sure it has something to do with wanting to help others or to make a difference in your community. Becoming SOAR trained to assist others, can do just that! I know because I have done it myself; I have had the opportunity to tell someone that they now have benefits and health insurance. When you assist a person in search of permanent housing, mental or medical health services, or meeting any of their other personal goals, a lack of income becomes a barrier.

As a social worker, you help to meet long-term needs. Becoming SOAR trained to assist individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and who meet eligibility criteria for Social Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) benefits throughout the process is a benefit to the field. Social workers build on their skills and become experts at submitting quality applications in a timely manner. You also have direct contact with SSA and the Disability Determination Services (DDS) as a representative for the applicant on the claim.

SOAR empowers social workers to advocate fiercely for the people in our program, ensuring their voices are heard and building trust with key agencies. It's about being a catalyst for change, breaking down barriers to access, and empowering individuals to reclaim their independence. This gives applications a greater chance at approval on the initial application without having to wait for years for appeal decisions.

I highly recommend any social worker to become SOAR trained. Use your social work skillset to assess functioning, build trust with those you work with, and improve their overall well-being and become a SOAR specialist. This will help both you professionally and help the people you work with to meet their goals! The feeling of SOAR success is so impactful and so empowering that every social worker should feel it.

SOAR really does work in the field of Social Work.

## SAMHSA SOAR Leadership Academy - Seattle, Washington



From February 13-15, 2024, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosted a SOAR Leadership Academy in Seattle, Washington. The training welcomed 24 new SOAR State and Local Leads from 16 states. Guest presenters included representatives from SSA's Seattle Regional Office and the Public Relations Officer for the Washington State Division of Disability Determination Services. We are excited to welcome our newest SOAR State and Local Leads! We can't wait to see how they grow the SOAR initiative in their states and local communities.

## See How SOAR Works



### Sharing Our Successes

#### ***SOAR Success in Illinois***

*The following SOAR success story was submitted by Cynthia Brown, a SOAR-trained practitioner from Featherfist in Chicago, Illinois*

Solomon had been experiencing homelessness for one month when he was accepted into one of our homeless programs on August 19, 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. He has a physical condition that leaves him unable to work.

Using the SOAR model, we submitted an SSI/SSDI application to SSA on September 1, 2020. His application was initially denied, but we filed an appeal using the SOAR model. After many months of waiting for a decision, he was approved for a monthly SSI benefit of \$841.00 along with a back payment of \$10,682.76! It was also determined that he needed a payee, and his mother was able to step in to help.

Solomon was reunited with his family from whom he had been estranged for many years. They have become a considerable part of his life and support system. He is now receiving case management and medical services in a permanent supportive housing program. The SOAR model was instrumental in helping Solomon obtain access to income and medical services.

My advice to new SOAR practitioners: Patience... follow the SOAR process -- it works!

***Have a story of your own? [Submit your SOAR success!](#)***

*\*Sharing Our Successes stories are edited for brevity and clarity. All beneficiary names have been changed to protect anonymity.*



### **SOAR Tip: SSI Information for Parents and Caregivers**

In this [video](#), SOAR Senior Project Associate Pam Heine provides parents and caregivers with a basic understanding of SSA's eligibility requirements for children under the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Explore this new resource and [others](#) to learn more about SSI eligibility for children and how to navigate the process.

## Upcoming Events



### SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call

*March 12, 2024, 1:00–2:00 p.m. ET*

The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center holds informal monthly calls designed to help support SOAR efforts across the country. No registration required.

[Read more about SOARing Over Lunch](#)

## In Case You Missed It



### SOAR Webinar: Strategies and Considerations for Representing Older Adults with SSI/SSDI Claims

On February 27, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosted a webinar, titled *Strategies and Considerations for Representing Older Adults with SSI/SSDI Claims*, to address the needs of the growing population of older adults with disabilities who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and the specific challenges they face, including accessing SSI/SSDI benefits and other needed assistance.

Participants heard from Washington DC presenters Kate Lang, JD, Justice in Aging and Ryan Elza, Administration for Community Living, and Ohio SOAR provider with Freestore Foodbank, Arnita Miller. Presenters discussed how older adults may face inequities at the intersection of age and other identities and included a discussion with a SOAR beneficiary from Ohio who shared their experience accessing Social Security benefits and other assistance.

[View the Recording](#)



## SOAR OAT and Outcomes Orientation

On March 5, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center hosted a quarterly OAT and Outcomes Orientation. We discussed how to report the outcomes of SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications and took participants step-by-step through the process from registering for an account to entering details about the application. We addressed many common questions and discussed how you can use your outcomes to promote SOAR in your community.

[View the Recording](#)

## Federal Updates

### Appeal Status Checker

SSA has developed a [service](#) that provides detailed information about disability and SSI appeals filed [online](#) or in person at an SSA local field office. To check the status of appeal, assist the applicants you work with to create or log in to their personal [my Social Security account](#)

## SOAR Jobs

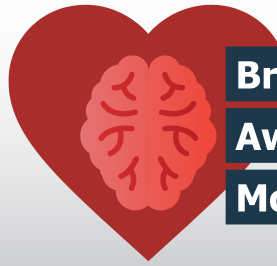


**Massachusetts:** Boston Health Care for the Homeless - *Patient Benefits Coordinator II (Full-time)*: Assist individuals with applying and retaining their SSI/SSDI benefits using the SOAR model.

Learn more about these positions on the [SOARWorks website](#). Do you have a job posting you would like to share with the SOAR community? Please submit it to the [SAMHSA SOAR TA Center](#)!

## More From SOAR





**Brain Injury  
Awareness  
Month**



**State Directory**

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**Library and Tools**

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**Contact Us**



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance (TA) Center is sponsored by SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Disclaimer: The SAMHSA SOAR Technical Assistance Center is sending this eNews with support from SAMHSA, HHS. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of HHS or SAMHSA.

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