

Peer Support Specialists: A Critical Component for SOAR Programs

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance Center
Policy Research Associates, Inc.

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Webinar Instructions

- Muting
- Recording availability
- Live Captioning and ASL Interpretation
- Downloading documents
- Questions and Answers
- Evaluation

Purpose and Objectives

- The role of Peer Support Services in SOAR programs
- Best practices for implementing Peer Support Services within your SOAR program
- How Peer Support Specialists are incorporating their lived experience and expertise into their SOAR work to help others and themselves in their recovery journeys.

Agenda

Presenters

- Sametra Polkah-Toe, LMHC, NYCPS, Project Associate, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, Policy Research Associates, Delmar, New York
- Sean Wright, CPC, Community Outreach Director, Capital Recovery Center, Olympia, Washington
- Sara Smith, CPC, PATH Outreach Specialist, Capital Recovery Center, Olympia, Washington

Panelists

- Meta Hogan, Homeless Outreach Stabilization Program Manager, Washington State Health Care Authority, Olympia, Washington
- William Wall, PhD, CRPS, Forensic Peer Specialist, Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Gainesville, Florida
- Tanisha Murdaugh, CRPS, Certified Recovery Peer Specialist, Broward House, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida
- Veronica Delgado, CPSW, CHW, Certified Peer Support Specialist and Certified Community Healthcare Worker, Clinical Operations, Presbyterian Health Plan, Las Cruces, New Mexico

Questions and Answers

- Facilitated by the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

Welcome!

Asha Stanly, MSW, LICSW
Government Project Officer
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Center for Mental Health Services
SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

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Peer Work & SOAR Work: Strategies for Successful Implementation

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What are Peer Services?

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A Peer Specialist is an individual with lived recovery experience who has been trained and certified to help their peers gain hope and move forward in their own recovery.

Peer services supplement existing treatment/service options by:

- Modeling/promoting recovery
- Teaching skills;
- Supporting empowerment;
- Aiding in system navigation.

The Value of Peer Services

- Improves quality of life
- Increases and improves engagement with services
- Increases whole health and self-management.
- Lowers the overall cost of mental health services by reducing re-hospitalization rates and days spent in inpatient services

Where are Peer Services Utilized?

- Outpatient settings
- Bridger Programs
- Crisis residences
- Inpatient hospitals
- Forensic settings
- Criminal justice programs
- Street outreach programs
- Any program utilizing SOAR work!



Who Can Provide Peer Services?

- Adults
- Youth
- Family Members
- Any individual with lived experience whom has met their state requirements for certification!

SOAR Work/Peer Work: Mutual Benefits

- Opportunities to participate in advanced trainings such as the SOAR Online Course could provide peer workers opportunities to acquire additional valuable skills and knowledge
- Increased marketability for Peer workers in competitive job markets
- Expansion of available services offered by the agency
- (SOAR) trained peer workers can play a vital role in increasing agency capacity to serve more applicants, provide support to existing SOAR trained staff, and improve quality of applications.
- Peers can utilize their lived experience to help others navigate the benefits application process.



Integrating SOAR with Peer Certification Guide



Integrating SOAR with Peer Certifications Enhancing Workforce Development and Improving SOAR Implementation

Peer operated services are recognized nationally and internationally as an effective service that promotes positive recovery-based outcomes for individuals with behavioral health conditions. Peer specialists have the capacity to help others as they have an understanding from shared life experiences. SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) trained peer workers can play a vital role in increasing agency capacity to serve more applicants, provide support to existing SOAR trained staff, and improve quality of applications. This document is designed to provide guidance on collaborating with state Peer Specialist Certification Boards to develop infrastructure that integrates SOAR within the certification process.

The Importance of Peer Supports

Peer support workers provide services in a range of settings, including peer-run organizations, recovery community centers and residences, legal settings, hospitals, child welfare agencies, homeless shelters, and behavioral health and primary care settings. Peer support can be provided by adults, youth, and family members and can encompass several roles including support staff, case management staff, data collectors/evaluators, and community health workers. The role of a peer support worker complements that of therapists, case managers, and other members of a treatment team by sharing vital experiential information and real examples of the power of recovery to help support an individual's recovery. Helping people navigate and access the life-saving public benefits and services aligns with the peer role as support in a wide variety of settings and can potentially help improve other system performance measures for the organization (e.g., increased income to obtain and maintain affordable housing, increased access to health insurance to maintain treatment, reduced hospitalizations, etc.).

Many peer support workers currently provide education about benefits and assistance ranging from Social Security Administration (SSA) supports (Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI)) and Medicaid and Medicare, to emergency energy assistance.

Development of the Peer Workforce

States offer Peer Specialist Certification programs to ensure that peers providing services are adequately trained. This also allows peer support services to be reimbursed through various funding sources, including Medicaid. As with other professional certifications, there is training, testing, and continuing education credits that must be obtained for individuals to retain their certification. The requirements for certifying peer support specialists vary by state, and certification bodies range from state government entities to independent non-profit organizations. Find your specific state requirements using the Doors to Wellbeing: State Specific Peer Specialist Certification Database (link provided below).

- The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center has released guidance on collaborating with state Peer Specialist Certification Boards.
- The requirements for certifying peer support specialists vary by state, and certification bodies range from state government entities to independent non-profit organizations.
- Collaborating with Peer Certification Boards to integrate SOAR within the Peer Certification Process is a viable strategy for supporting SOAR work in your community!

How Can Peers Be Involved in SOAR Initiatives? Know Your Ask!

The Ask

I would like to have Peer Specialists trained to complete SOAR-assisted applications.

Strategies for Implementation

1. Identify (or, create) a Peer position that can reallocate job duties for SOAR.
2. Consider revising job announcements to encourage more individuals with lived experience to apply, (e.g., “persons with lived experience of mental health challenges or use of entitlements strongly encouraged to apply.”)
3. Have Peers complete the SOAR Online Course.

How Can Peers Be Involved in SOAR Initiatives? Know Your Ask!

The Ask

I would like Peer workers to support existing SOAR-trained staff.

Strategies for Implementation

1. Get in touch with SOAR-trained agencies (via State Team Lead or Local Lead) to hold SOAR Orientation presentations.
2. Review existing Peer job descriptions to clearly define what support role they will play in the SSI/SSDI application process. Organizations will need to be mindful of avoiding “role drift” where in Peer Support staff become responsible for duties outside of their scope of practice.
3. Provide outreach materials to Peer workers.

SOAR & Peer Certifications - Know your Ask!

The Ask

I would like Peers to take the SOAR Online Course as part of their core education requirements and/or receive Continuing Education credits.

Strategies for Implementation

- Review state-specific requirements for Peer Certification or Continuing Education.
- Contact state certifying body and/or Peer training provider vendor to set up a SOAR Orientation presentation and to discuss how SOAR work benefits the Peer provider.

Other Key Strategies for Implementation!

- Find your “champion” to address issues that arise on a systemic level and to keep the development of peer services a priority for the agency
- Ensure that peer staff reflect the cultural, linguistic, and social diversity of individuals you will be serving
- Provide training for peer staff that covers the specific skills and tasks required in their roles, such as using their recovery story to the benefit of the people they work with, listening effectively, addressing emergent situations, fulfilling documentation requirements
- **Identify and value the unique contributions that peers can make to your program!**



Peer Support and SOAR in Washington

Sean Wright, CPC

Community Outreach Director

Capital Recovery Center, Olympia WA

Sara Smith, CPC

PATH SOAR Specialist

Capital Recovery Center, Olympia WA

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Capital Recovery Center

- Located in Olympia, WA
- Established in 1988 as Capital Clubhouse
- Peer lead Community Mental Health agency
- Services provided:
 - PEER Support program
 - A program to provide support utilizing Certified Peer Counselors in a clubhouse setting
 - Community Outreach
 - PATH and Pathfinder programs
 - Justice Advocate Care Crew
 - Foundational Community Support
 - Olympia Bupe Clinic
 - A low barrier clinic providing medically assisted treatment of opiate use utilizing peer support with a strong focus on Harm Reduction Principals

PEER Support and SOAR

- Certified Peer Counselors (CPC) assist throughout the entire application process.
- The CPC build trust and provide a level of empathy based on their own lived experiences who are nonjudgmental advocates for the applicants.
- The CPC provides assistance with the SOAR application as well as other support and case management services.
- Peers create a welcoming and comfortable environment on site, but are also able to meet at other locations if more comfortable for the applicant.
- The CPC works with Disability Determination Service (DDS) Specialists and SSA Representatives on behalf of the applicant, or can be present during conversations.
- CRC has individuals on site who have successfully applied for SSI/SSDI benefits.

Challenges and Moving Forward

- Funding/Staffing difficulties
- Implementation of new PATH connected SOAR funding
- CRC currently has one staff devoted to SOAR with plans to expand as funding becomes available
- CRC is building capacity to have SOAR trained individuals in all 3 programs (PEER Support, PATH, and OBC)
- Peer Support + SOAR WORKS! But it takes time and commitment

Thank You

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Panel Discussion

The role of Peer Specialists in SOAR Programs



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- William Wall, PhD, CRPS, Forensic Peer Specialist, Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Gainesville, Florida
- Tanisha Murdaugh, CRPS, Certified Recovery Peer Specialist, Broward House, Ft Lauderdale, Florida
- Veronica Delgado, CPSW, CHW, Certified Peer Support Specialist and Certified Community Healthcare Worker, Clinical Operations, Presbyterian Health Plan, Las Cruces, New Mexico
- Meta Hogan, Homeless Outreach Stabilization Program Manager, Washington State Health Care Authority, Olympia, Washington

Please type your questions into the Q&A box.

Resources

SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

<https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/peer-supports>

SAMHSA Peer Recovery Center of Excellence

<http://www.PeerRecoveryNow.org>

National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.)

<https://www.peersupportworks.org/>

Mental Health America – Center for Peer Support

<https://www.mhanational.org/center-peer-support>

Next Steps

- ✓ Download and Review Peer Resources
- ✓ Learn if you have Peer Specialist Certification in your state
- ✓ Begin to have the conversations with your SOAR leadership team about Peer involvement
- ✓ Contact your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison with questions and to discuss more about working as a Peer Support Specialist

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