



2023 SAMHSA SOAR SEPTEMBER E-NEWS

2023 Recovery Month: Health, Home, Purpose, Community!

The [2023 Recovery Month themes](#) remind people in recovery and those who support them that wellness in recovery encompasses a person's whole life, not just their mental health or substance use condition. They also highlight the importance of peer support in engaging people in recovery with a vital sense of belonging, support, and hope!

In celebration of this Recovery month, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center recognizes the value of lived expertise in the benefits acquisition process and extends thanks and appreciation to the 250+ SOAR-trained case workers who identify as "peers." As stated by SOAR Benefits Manager, Ramona Brown, "You are amazing for this work because you have what people cannot learn from a book or workshop -- real-life experience." We absolutely agree! These staff serve in various roles, using their shared experiences to help others find financial stability in their recovery journey.

We interviewed SOAR partners who identify as "peers" and asked, "How has your lived experience helped you in your SOAR work?" Below are a few responses that were shared.

[Read the complete interviews!](#)



Ramona Brown

SOAR Benefits Manager, SAFE Alliance (Austin, Texas)

"I listen with genuine care and understanding. These relationships allow me to gather the information I need and maintain good communication, which can be very difficult at times."

Kat Heredia

Community Recovery Coordinator/ SOAR Local Lead, Piedmont Community Services (Martinsville, Virginia)

"I've found that I can connect with somebody and provide a better Medical Summary Report (MSR) experience because when I meet with them, I can have a very honest and transparent conversation and use my lived experience and skills to help that person get through the process. I think that helps people to open up more about their struggles and barriers."



September Spotlight

Kansas City Leadership Academy



From August 8-10, 2023, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center facilitated a SOAR Leadership Academy in Kansas City, Missouri. The training welcomed 23 new SOAR State and Local Leads from 13 states. Guest presenters included the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Kansas City Regional Communications Director (in-person) and the Rhode Island Disability Determination Services' (DDS) Assistant Administrator (virtually). 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 Kentucky

The following SOAR success story was submitted by Samantha Heatherly at Lifeskills, Inc. in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

“Edwin had been experiencing chronic homelessness for almost 10 years. I met him through street outreach and learned he had disabling conditions. 5 months later he was awarded benefits, and today, he has moved into his very first apartment! After spending almost a decade experiencing chronic homelessness, he finally has a home, and his life has changed forever. Edwin may not have ever been awarded benefits without the use of the SOAR model. Street outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness can be the first step to changing their lives forever.”

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: Completing the SSA-1696

Completing the [SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative](#) form is a critical component of the SOAR model. It allows SSA and DDS to communicate with you, the SOAR case worker, about the application, and gives you authorization to ask questions and receive information. This form is submitted to SSA as part of the complete application packet. Please visit [Establishing Representative Role: Completing Form SSA-1696](#) for detailed information, including a [short video](#) on the importance of the SSA-1696 and tips on how to thoroughly complete the form.

Upcoming Events



SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call

[September 19, 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.

[Read more about SOARing Over Lunch!](#)

Federal Updates

Faxed applications are no longer accepted by SSA

In an effort to expedite application processing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Social Security Administration (SSA) temporarily accepted faxed applications as valid, waiving original signature requirements. However, the Public Health Emergency ended on May 11, 2023, and in response, SSA will no longer accept faxed applications as having a valid signature.

[Read more about valid applications.](#)

SSA Adds 12 New Conditions to the Compassionate Allowances Program

The [Compassionate Allowances](#) program quickly identifies claims where the applicant's medical condition or disease clearly meets Social Security's statutory standard for disability. Due to the severe nature of many of these conditions, these claims are often allowed based on medical confirmation of the diagnosis alone. Please read the [SSA press release](#) for details.

New Online SSA-3288: Disclosure of Records Protected Under the Privacy Act

Applicants can now complete and submit the SSA-3288 online using [Form SSA-3288-OP1: Disclosure of Records Protected Under the Privacy Act](#). This form allows people over the age of 18 to consent to and authorize SSA to disclose certain types of their Privacy Act-protected records to a third party. However, to submit this online form the individual must have a [my Social Security account](#). For individuals who created their accounts prior to Login.gov and ID.me implementation, there are also extra security measures that require financial information to verify identity, followed by receiving instructions from SSA by **mail** to complete the process.

Partner Updates



HHRC Releases Two Free Online Courses

Trauma-Informed Outreach and Engagement

This course is free to the public and provides foundational information about trauma-informed outreach and engagement strategies, approaches, and service delivery models. This will focus on ways to support individuals who have serious mental illness, substance use disorders, or co-occurring disorders.

[Learn more and register.](#)

Supporting People Who Use Methamphetamine

This course is free to the public and focuses on evidence-based strategies for treatment and housing support for people experiencing homelessness who use methamphetamine. The course provides an overview of the drivers of methamphetamine use, its impact on physical and mental health, and the implementation of harm reduction strategies.

[Learn more and register.](#)

Please direct questions about these courses to: info@hhrctraining.org

SOAR Jobs



- **Maryland:** Harford County Office on Mental Health - *SOAR Specialist:* Submit SSI/SSDI applications using the SOAR model for individuals with severe mental illness who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This is a remote-friendly position, with the requirement to report in person for mandatory trainings, staff meetings, face-to-face assessments & follow-up activities, and any other requests from your direct supervisor.
- **New Mexico:** Heading Home
 - *SOAR Specialist - Contractor:* Heading Home seeks an experienced, organized, and committed SOAR Specialist to work on a contract basis. Contractors will use the SOAR model and critical components to assist clients experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness who are identified as being in need of connection to disability benefits.
 - *SOAR Specialist:* The SOAR Specialist will assist with the coordination of intake and referral processes. This individual will assist with following up on all referrals, obtain pertinent additional information, or perform SOAR services including requesting and obtaining SSI/SSDI award letters, and retirement applications. The SOAR Specialist's main duties will be completing SOAR applications for eligible individuals within the program.
- **Florida:** SMA Healthcare - *SOAR Processor:* Complete SOAR applications and provide specialized training, advocacy, and assistance to consumers who may be eligible and wish to apply for SSI/SSDI benefits.

Learn more about these positions on the [SOARWorks website](#). Do you have a job posting you would like to

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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).

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