FY 2016 Accomplishments
SOAR Presents at MHPA Conference

On September 23, 2016, Jen Elder, National Policy and Partnerships Coordinator, represented the SOAR TA Center at the Medicaid Health Plans of America Conference in Washington, D.C. Her presentation, *Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Super Utilizers, and SOAR: How SSI and Medicaid can Improve Social Determinants of Health*, focused on the high costs of homelessness and the importance of increasing access to SSI and Medicaid in order to improve housing stability and health outcomes and to reduce overutilization of costly emergency services for individuals with disabling conditions. Jen highlighted cost-savings for Medicaid plan leaders brought about through investment in dedicated SOAR benefits specialists and encouraged them to explore the use of 1115 waivers and Medicaid Administrative Claiming in order to fund SOAR services not covered by targeted case management. The SOAR TA Center will be releasing more information about SOAR and Medicaid partnerships over the coming months—stay tuned!

Success Stories

California

Last week SOAR TA Center team member and California liaison Abigail Lemon attended an SSA Field Hearing in Los Angeles, California. The hearing aimed to strengthen relationships with SSA and SOAR...
providers ahead of increased funding for benefits advocacy throughout Los Angeles County. The series of meetings included representatives from SSA headquarters and regional offices, USICH, Los Angeles county and community service providers. Attendees were also given a tour of the Skid Row neighborhood, which only served to drive home the continued need for SOAR and SOAR trained providers in the community.

**Missouri**

Kelly Wallis, Director of Boone County Community Services in Missouri, is seeking to hire a dedicated SOAR specialist using funds from the county’s Community Health Fund. “The position is a result of the county’s Stepping Up Initiative, which aims to reduce the number of inmates with mental health illnesses in jail. Mental health professionals, law enforcement officers, court representatives, and social service agencies identified the need for a SOAR specialist during an August workshop...” Way to go, Boone County!

**Virginia**

Latasha Howlett, SOAR State Coordinator for Virginia, shared these inspirational success stories in response to the question, “What about your SOAR program are you especially proud of this year?”

SOAR efforts have continued to expand across Virginia with four new communities joining the effort. We have also experienced continued expansion within our current communities. Our SOAR workers consistently go above and beyond to help their clients obtain benefits and access to services and housing.

One such example occurred in the Norfolk community, where SOAR workers from several agencies joined forces to assist an individual that fell through the cracks. They worked together to obtain detailed assessments and old medical records for the claimant. He was denied several times before because he would disappear and in the midst of completing the process. DDS determined the individual met the criteria for an Intellectual Disability and he was finally able to receive benefits, housing, and services!

As in previous years, we continue to marvel at the collaborative spirit exhibited by our partners at the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS). One shining demonstration of their commitment to this effort occurred in Virginia Beach, when a DDS analyst went out of his way to find out the date of death for a SOAR applicant’s mother to determine if the applicant was also entitled to Survivors Benefits as her child. The DDS workers looked through old newspapers from another state to get that information because the applicant was unable to provide this information about his mother.

In August, Alberta Thomas, SOAR practitioner with the Norfolk Community Services Board, received SSA’s Public Service Award in recognition of her outstanding achievements. Alberta has completed over 150 applications using the SOAR model and has an impressive 86 percent approval rate on initial applications! Latasha praised her work saying, “Time and time again Alberta has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to assisting the clients that are the most vulnerable and experiencing homelessness. This was a well-deserved honor.”

*We truly appreciate the outstanding work of SOAR providers across Virginia and the amazing support of SSA and DDS! Thanks, Latasha, for sharing your successes with the SOAR Community!*

**New Website Resource**

**Online Access to Applicants’ eFolders at Hearing or Appeals Council Levels via SSA’s Appointed Representative Services**

Online access to SOAR applicants’ electronic folders or eFolders is now available for Appointed Representatives (vis-à-vis the SSA-1696) with ALJ hearing and Appeals Council-level cases! We strongly encourage you to enroll for online access to your applicant’s eFolders. [Read more](#) to learn about the
benefits of enrollment and its multi-step process. You must follow all the steps to enroll for eFolder access, but we promise, you’ll be glad you signed up for this amazing SSA service!

Federal Updates

SSA Notice: Revised Medical Criteria for Evaluating Mental Disorders

SSA is revising the criteria in the Listing of Impairments that they use to evaluate claims involving mental disorders in adults and children under titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act. The revisions reflect SSA’s program experience, advances in medical knowledge, recommendations from a commissioned report, and public comments they received in response to a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. The SOAR TA Center will be sending out guidance about these changes that will go into effect on January 17, 2017. Read our summary of the main changes and stay-tuned for more information, including a national webinar.

SSA Invites Comments on Proposed Changes to Medical Evidence Rules

On September 9th, the Social Security Administration (SSA) published proposed revisions on their medical evidence rules in the Federal Register, including the proposal to expand the list of Acceptable Medical Sources to include Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). SSA invites the public to comment on the proposed changes before November 8th. Read our recent newsflash for more details.

SSA Notice: Request for Information on Strategies for Improving Work Outcomes for Individuals with Musculoskeletal Disabilities

Deadline: November 18, 2016

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 amended section 234 of the Social Security Act, which authorizes SSA to plan and implement new demonstration projects that waive certain Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program requirements in order to evaluate strategies for improving work outcomes for SSDI beneficiaries and applicants. This request for information (RFI) seeks public input on possible demonstration projects designed to improve employment and earnings outcomes for individuals with musculoskeletal impairments. The input SSA receives will inform their deliberations about the possible design of a future demonstration project using the section 234 authority.

HUD Releases New Rule on Gender Equality in Housing

On September 21st, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released a new rule in the Federal Register, which builds upon the historic 2012 ruling that ensured HUD’s housing programs would be open to all eligible individuals and families regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. This new rule expands the previous work by addressing the barriers, discrimination, and violence transgender and gender nonconforming persons face when accessing temporary emergency shelters and other facilities with physical limitations or configurations that require and are permitted to have shared sleeping quarters or bathing facilities. According to a statement from HUD, under this ruling “providers using funds awarded through [HUD’s] Office of Community Planning and Development, including those operating single sex projects, must maintain equal access to programs, benefits, services, and accommodations in accordance with an individual’s gender identity without the individual being subjected to intrusive questioning or being asked to provide documentation.” The new rule goes into effect on October 21, 2016.
VA Awards $6.8 Billion for Medical Disability Examinations

The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the awarding of 12 contracts between 5 firms totaling $6.8 billion to improve the Medical Disability Examination process for Veterans.

Funding Corner

Lodestar Foundation Accepting Applications for 2017 Collaboration Prize

Deadline: November 16, 2016

The Lodestar Foundation has announced the 2017 Collaboration Prize, a national competition to celebrate exemplary nonprofit collaborations. The prize identifies and showcases models of permanent collaboration between two or more nonprofit organizations and is intended to shine a spotlight on collaborations that demonstrate innovative and effective responses to challenges or opportunities.

A grand prize of $150,000 will be awarded to the collaboration that best exemplifies the impact that can result from working together on a permanent basis. In addition, each of eight finalists will receive $10,000. In addition to identifying and showcasing exceptional nonprofit collaboration efforts, the Collaboration Prize collects and shares models and best practices for the field through the Nonprofit Collaboration Database, a resource for anyone seeking real-life examples of how nonprofit organizations can work together.

Recent Stories from the SOAR Voices Blog

Everything You Need to Know about Successfully Using iAppeals to Request a Reconsideration or Hearing

A little over a year ago, as part of an upgrade to iAppeals, the Social Security Administration (SSA) began a practice called “single-submission.” The SOAR TA Center recommends not only filing initial applications online, but also reconsideration and hearing appeal paperwork too. Read the full blog...

Events

SOAR Webinar: Rural Homelessness

Wednesday, October 12, 2016; 3:00-4:30 p.m. ET

In this webinar, to be held on October 12, 2016, the SOAR TA Center and SOAR leaders will discuss the challenges and successes implementing and sustaining SOAR in their rural areas. Presenters will provide an overview of their communities’ SOAR programs and also present strategies to strengthen coordination and collaboration to address key challenges in a rural state or community. Read more and register for the webinar...

SOARing Over Lunch Conference Calls

Tuesday, October 18, 2016; 1:00 p.m. ET

The next SOARing Over Lunch Conference Call will take place October 18 at 1:00 p.m. ET! The SOAR TA Center is hosting a series of informal monthly calls designed to help support SOAR efforts across the country. Participants can call in to ask about any SOAR-related question they may have. These is no agenda
set in advance for these calls, but we do ask that you submit questions and/or topics you would like covered in advance of the calls.

The SOAR TA Center is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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