

# SOAR Community of Practice Call Summary

## August 11, 2011

### Welcome and Introductions

Deborah Dennis welcomed the group to the first SOAR Community of Practice call and let them know that the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center will hold these calls every other month, based on interest. Dazara Ware asked participants to identify themselves so that everyone knew who was on the call. Will Connelly provided a definition of Community of Practice and asked participants to think about what is the best way to learn from each other and to continue the momentum generated at the SOAR Conference last month.

### Agenda for Today's Call

Dazara Ware suggested that on today's call we share ideas and generate topics for future calls. Additional thoughts can be sent following the call to her at [dware@prainc.com](mailto:dware@prainc.com). Participants discussed the use of other formats and technology (e.g., web conferencing) for future calls, the group seemed to agree that they like the flexibility of a conference call because they can participate from remote locations. Below are some of the topics raised and discussed by the group during the call.

- **PATH and Medicaid funding for SOAR.** Claire Harrison from ME asked the group for information and sample contract language for using PATH funds for SOAR as well as ideas for collecting data and funding SOAR projects. Deb related that Charley Bliss in GA just receiving funding for two eligibility specialists from his state Medicaid program. Federal and state Medicaid programs are very interested in enrollment and access. Charley was able to use SOAR data to demonstrate success in both those areas.
- **Data Collection.** Claire said that the data liaison for Maine is developing a webinar to instruct others on how complete the SOAR data form and submit their data. The SOAR TA Center is hoping the web-based data collection program will go live in November 2011.
- **Sustaining SOAR.** Cindy Schwartz (Florida) said that they did a cost/benefit analysis on small sample to make the case that SOAR was having an impact in their community. She summed average amounts the city was paying for housing, services, and treatment for the 9 months, on average, that it took people to receive benefits before SOAR. With SOAR people were now receiving benefits in about 2 months. She was able to show the city it was now saving the equivalent of 7 months of housing, service, and treatment expenses which equated to \$6.9 M in savings for the city. Cindy's program recently received an award from the governor's office which they've used to leverage more funding. They recently received a new federal grant of \$750K (over 3 years) to help people with justice involvement to resolve immigration issues and assist with SSI/SSDI applications.

At the SOAR Conference in July, Cindy met Richard Balkus from SSA who expressed an interest in working with her program to conduct a pilot study of their SOAR project in the criminal justice system.

Emily Carmody from North Carolina totaled monthly benefit amounts and retroactive payments for people helped by SOAR and projected those for a year. In one year, \$3.3M has

been brought into their State. Her report breaks those totals down by county, allowing her to go to county Commissioners meetings and advocate that they fund SOAR positions.

- **Training.** In response to a participant's comment about having trouble meeting the demand for training, Emily told the group that in North Carolina they now have people apply to attend training. Emily calls each the Executive Director for each applicant for training and gets their buy-in on the amount of time the trainee will need to complete applications. She reviews post-training responsibilities with potential trainees including the expectation that they complete an application within three months of training. She then calls every trainee at the three month mark to congratulate those who have completed their first application, or answer questions and provide support to people who are struggling. In this way, she has prevented new trainees from becoming overwhelmed and "floating away".
- **Funding and Structuring SOAR Coordinators.** Claire asked how their positions are funded. Emily estimates that she spends 70% of her time on SOAR activities. She works for the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness and is funded by the State through ICCHP. Cindy works for the Florida court system and SOAR is only a small percentage of her job. Charles Coley is a grants manager in Nebraska and his position is funded through the State Homeless Assistance Trust Fund. He allocates \$160K/yr from the state's homeless and housing trust fund to fund four SSI specialist positions in 4 regions of Nebraska. He relies on them to drive the SOAR effort in those areas while he plays more of a coordinating role.

Barb Aranosian from Nevada said their STL is looking for funding for a SOAR Coordinator and is wondering how the position should be structured. Katie League, a local lead in Baltimore, said that she coordinates and supports the trainees while the STL, who works for the state mental health department, administers SOAR funding, examines policy issues, negotiates with SSA and DDS, coordinates trainings in multiple counties, starts local lead groups, and keeps SOAR on the radar in local conversations. Emily described her position as trainer, cheerleader, 1:1 coach, data cruncher, sales person, and community organizer to address barriers.

- **Local Concerns.** Tarry Truitt from Mercer County, NJ asked if local projects should be looking to expand and fund statewide efforts. Charles responded, "Absolutely!" He said that a statewide SOAR approach is very beneficial for funding and also for collaboration. It increases the annual HUD scoring so that many CoCs can benefit.
- **SOAR and TANF.** Claire asked if any states are using SOAR with the TANF population. Barb said in Nevada they have a project with their District Attorney's Office and are using SOAR to assist TANF families where a family member is has been unable to meet their child support obligation. Ellen DiDomenico (PA) said that in Pennsylvania SOAR is used with TANF recipients who were also believed to have significant mental health issues due to their use of psychotropic medications (as indicated in Medicaid records). Deb said that the TA Center is working on a brief about TANF and SSA disability benefits for the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

**Next Call: Thursday, October 13, 3:00-4:00 ET**