



North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness

NC SOAR: SSI/SSDI Access, Outreach and Recovery
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In order to transition a person out of homelessness, we know that one will need affordable housing, access to appropriate services and an adequate income. For many North Carolinians who are homeless, working a full-time job is not an option because of some type of disability.

For these, federal disability benefits will be their ticket out of homelessness. Disability Benefits, including a monthly check and health insurance, can help individuals and families access affordable housing, access needed healthcare and mental health services, and provide some income to help pay for living expenses.

In shelters across North Carolina, we see people hoping to receive disability benefits. They are often frustrated and confused by what can be a long, disappointing process.

National rates of approval for disability (SSI/SSDI) applications are approximately 35% for first time applicants. Among the homeless population, however, the approval rates are significantly less – closer to 15%, despite the high percentage of homeless persons who are prominently disabled.

As caseworkers, we are often perplexed by the denials from disability. We can clearly see that a person has some sort of condition that renders them unable to work. So why can't Social Security see that? Do people really have to be denied three times? It just doesn't make any sense.

The truth is, applying for disability benefits can be a tough process. For persons experiencing homelessness, it can prove even more difficult. Lack of access to a phone or an address and the transitory nature of homelessness make it difficult for SSA and DDS to communicate with applicant. Obtaining copies of records or even simple identification can be a struggle for a homeless person. Even the nature of one's disability may make it impossible to follow the process for applying for disability.

But the real truth is, the process has seemed difficult because we have not understood how the it works. Until now.

Over the past 3 years SAMHSA has contracted with Policy Research Associates to develop and facilitate a training called **SOAR – SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery**. Communities that have participated in the training and implemented the SOAR technology fully have had similar results, documenting up to 93% approval rates within 3 months, for homeless persons generally considered to be eligible, and 65% approval rates within 3 months, for homeless persons who were thought by caseworkers to be on the cusp of meeting eligibility standards.

North Carolina has launched our own SOAR initiative. Become a North Carolina SOAR community today!

Contact Susanna Birdsong at susanna@ncceh.org or 919.559.9369 to learn more about getting started.