

SOAR Dialogue Highlights 2/20/14

Attendees: Pamalia Davis, Elizabeth Lewin, Candice Chilton, Liz McDermott, Tracy Miller, Joyce Allen, TJ Emwanta, Daphne Drew

Introductions and Updates:

- Pamalia Davis: Currently has one presumptive, one case that is looking promising, and one that is a “quick decision” case. She hopes to have three approvals within the next 35 days.
- Candice Chilton: New SOAR case manager at Duke, who is just getting started with her cases.
- Liz McDermott: All her cases are moving along. She has noticed that SSA and DDS have been slow lately because of understaffing due to the weather.
- Tracy Miller: Just received two approvals.

SOAR Caseworker Burnout and Self-Care

Recognizing burnout:

- Feelings of frustration and anger
- Thinking that what your clients are experiencing could happen to you too (homelessness, mental illness, etc.)
- Each person has personal signals that indicate burnout – important to learn what they are to be able to recognize and head off burnout
- Important to have a support group of colleagues to discuss cases, ask for advice, share frustrations

Things that contribute to burnout:

- Being “at work” all the time – answering the phone at all hours, going out at night to try to get clients to go into the shelter
- Trying to make sure clients’ basic needs are met (food, shelter, warmth) – weighs on caseworkers’ minds if they feel these needs are not being met. Have to remember that the client managed to survive before the caseworker showed up and can continue to do so now.
- Frustration – burnout tends to come on when you see a problem and can’t see a solution to it.

Ways to deal with burnout:

- Success – getting approvals, seeing the difference your work makes in people’s lives.
- Focusing on the positive, not the negative.
- Giving yourself permission to take mental breaks (not thinking about work when you’re at home)
- Taking a vacation – separate yourself from the work so that you literally can’t do it
- Taking care of your own needs instead of just clients’ needs (health needs, social needs)
- Setting firm boundaries (for example, having firm work hours)

Populations that are harder to work with and lead to burnout more frequently:

- Dual diagnosis
- Borderline personality disorder – have to be extra firm with boundaries
- Substance use that affects client’s behavior and can affect caseworker

- Working with clients who give unclear information or misinformation. Caseworkers feel it can reflect badly on them and leads to mistrust from other agencies that are trying to help the clients.
 - Tip: go to appointments with the clients to help represent the client and make sure information is accurate

Difficult cases that can lead to burnout:

- Example: client who is not invested in doing the application, does not share information needed to complete application, repeatedly misses meetings or cuts them short.
 - Tip: If the client has been given numerous chances and continues to miss meetings, she may not be ready for the SOAR process. Caseworker can set a boundary by telling the client she has one more chance to come to a meeting; if she misses it, the caseworker can educate her about doing the application on her own and tell her to come back when she's ready to engage.

Next SOAR Dialogue Call: Thursday, March 20 at 10:00. Register at <http://www.ncceh.org/events/730/>. The topic will be work history; anyone with suggestions for discussion points can send them to Liz McDermott at elizabeth.lumley@duke.edu.