

# SSI and SSDI as Tools in Re-Entry



SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery

*for people who are homeless*

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# SSA's Two Disability Programs

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**Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** For people who are low income and aged, blind or disabled. Eligibility based on need with limits on income and resources. Max federal benefit rate in 2009 -- \$674/month

→ **Social Security Disability Income (SSDI):** Based on earnings put into FICA. Income amount dependent on earnings history. No limit on resources.

# Why is Access to SSI and SSDI So Important for Re-entry?

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- For people who are disabled, these benefits provide access to:
  - Income
  - Housing
  - Health insurance and treatment

# SSA's Criteria for Disability

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- 1) Must have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment *that either meets or is equivalent to the listing of impairments that DDS considers.*
- (2) Duration of the impairment must have lasted or be expected to last 12 months or more or result in death.
- (3) Person must show significant functional problems caused by the medical impairment.

# The Problem

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- Only about 37 percent of **all** applicants are typically approved on application
- People coming out of prison or jail are approved at a much lower rate
- Appeals take years and many potentially eligible people give up and do not appeal

What We Know Is Possible...

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Approval rates of 65-95%  
**on initial application**

# SOAR Technical Assistance Initiative

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- SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery
- Sponsored by HHS and HUD since 2005; No direct funding provided to States or localities
- Helps States and communities increase access to SSI/SSDI through:
  - Collaboration and strategic planning
  - Training
  - Technical assistance

# 34 States Participate in SOAR

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- Alabama
  - Alaska
  - Arizona
  - Colorado
  - Connecticut
  - DC
  - Delaware
  - Florida
  - Georgia
  - Hawaii
  - Indiana
  - Kentucky
  - Louisiana
  - Maryland
  - Massachusetts
  - Michigan
  - Minnesota
  - Montana
  - Nevada
  - New York
  - New Hampshire
  - New Jersey
  - North Carolina
  - Ohio
  - Oklahoma
  - Oregon
  - Pennsylvania
  - Rhode Island
  - Tennessee
  - Texas
  - Utah
  - Virginia
  - Washington
  - West Virginia

# *NEW* Data from SOAR States

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- As of August 2009, 3,135 persons -- 71 percent of those assisted in 31 states -- were approved for SSI in 89 days on average
- In 2009 alone, SSI will bring \$25.4 million into the state and local economies of these 31 states

# How Is This Model Different?

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- Staff actively assist applicants
- Step-by-step explanation of SSI application and disability determination process
- Focuses on the initial application – “Get it right the first time!”
- Avoids appeals whenever possible
- Focuses on documenting the disability

# If incarcerated...

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## SSI...

- Is suspended when a person is in a jail/prison for a full calendar month
- After 12 months, SSI benefits are terminated; must re-apply upon release

## SSDI...

- Continues while in jail/prison prior to conviction of a felony; after conviction benefits are suspended during incarceration
- Upon release – no need to reapply to reinstate SSDI
- Legal proof of release is required to re-determine benefits.

# 1825 Sing Sing – “Up the River”



## Successful Models: Collaborations with Corrections

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- Applications done prior to release from **Sing Sing prison** by a community services agency
- Same staff who does applications follow folks in community and access housing for them
- 89% of 100 pre-release SSI applications approved in 59 days on average
- Similar work in DOC in OK CT and MI, Miami-Dade County Jail, Bergen Co. and Mercer Co. NJ

# Applying Prior to Release from Jail or Prison

- Individuals can apply for SSI benefits within 30 days or more of their release.
- Institutional pre-release agreements with SSA, either formally written or informal may allow for applications as much as 120 days prior to release
- Agreements usually made by jail/SSA or DOC/SSA for all prisons
- Payment is made upon release

# Pre-Release Agreements

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- Designate someone to take the lead, preferably in-facility, coordinating with community based program staff
- Contact SSA public affairs specialist in your area
- These specialists can coordinate planning for SSA or direct to person who can
- Consider optimal time to ask for -- typically 4 months maximum

# Four Functional Areas Considered

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→ Activities of daily living

→ Social functioning

→ Maintaining concentration, persistence and pace in the completion of tasks

→ Repeated episodes of decompensation

Three or more attempts to work within the last year resulting in symptom increase and inability to maintain employment

# Overlooked Diagnostic Indicators

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- Trauma
- Stigma
- Lack of Community MH Treatment History
- Culture of Incarceration
- Substance Abuse as Primary Diagnosis
- Medical/MH co-morbidity

# Tips

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- Train examiners on Prison MH Programs
- Train clinicians to interpret prison functioning for examiners
- Clean up record
- Aggressively pursue community treatment records
- Important to have a community program willing to work with and assist in follow-through upon release

# SSA Work Incentives

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## SSDI

→ Trial Work Period – Full Benefits

→ 9/60 > \$720/mo.

## SSI

→ Less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of earnings counted before an SSI reduction.

# Conclusion

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- Focusing on expediting benefits as a tool for re-entry works!
- Its a win-win for the individual, for states and localities, and for community programs
- A major tool in recovery for persons with serious mental illnesses and other disabilities

# Youth in Transition Webinar

**Delivering Employment Focused Services and Waivers to Youth**

→ Hosted by Mathematica's [Center for Studying Disability Policy](#)

**Date:** Thursday, March 3, 2011

**Time:** 12:00–1:30 p.m. (EST)

**Location:** [Mathematica's DC Office](#)

**Webinar:** [www.mathematica-mpr.com](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com).

→ **Speakers:**

**Thomas Fraker**, Senior Fellow, Mathematica Policy Research

**Taylor Runner**, Program Manager, Human Resources Development Foundation

**Arif Mamun**, Senior Economist, Mathematica Policy Research

**Kelli Crane**, Senior Research Associate, TransCen, Inc.

# For More Information

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Visit the SOAR website at [www.prainc.com/soar](http://www.prainc.com/soar)

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