PROJECT SOAR

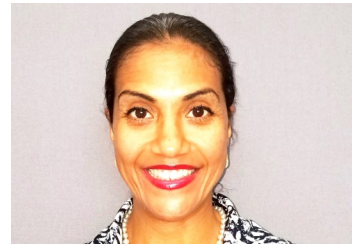## STUDENTS + OPPORTUNITIES+ ACHIEVEMENTS = RESULTS

WELCOME MESSAGE

As the Program Manager, I am truly grateful for all of the work you have put in to make Project SOAR successful. This is the first in what will be a series of short newsletters intended to be a resource for you. We want to share your successes, provide you with tips and tricks for improving your programs, and remind you of key deadlines and resources.

We know that a lot of the work on Project SOAR has been all about learning as you go. We at HUD want to provide you with the support and necessary information to be successful. To that end, we welcome your feedback.

Please feel free to follow up with suggestions for future topics of interest, challenges you are facing, and success stories you would like to share with other grantees.

Thank you and keep SOARing!

Maria-Lana Queen
Project SOAR Program Manager

SPOTLIGHT: PRICHARD HOUSING AUTHORITY

SHARE YOUR STORY

If you have an example of a challenge you have overcome or a success story you would like to share, let your grant manager or the Program Manager know!

We will try to tailor future news letters based on your feedback.

- The Project SOAR Team

There is a buzz in Prichard, Alabama. People are hearing about a new program that can help their kids with their post secondary education. While it has taken a lot of legwork, Sonya Pritchett, couldn't be happier with the word of mouth excitement surrounding Project SOAR. What is her secret? It's all about relationships.

Sonya, who is the Education Navigator, came to Prichard from Florida where she had been involved in similar programs to help youth take advantage of educational opportunities. When she began her role as an education navigator, Sonya knew it would be im-portant to not only involve students and their parents but also other people in the community. She became part of a team of property managers, coordinators and a housing authority dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents. She created strategies and outreach opportunities with team members to spread the word about Project SOAR. She tried to learn as much as she could about the residents and other things happening in the community.

Sonya explains, "I was able to build working relationships with the participants and their parents by going door-to-door and introducing myself. When the parent opened the door I gave them a Project SOAR informational flyer. I wanted to leave a lasting impression with the family; therefore, I never leave my smile at the office. I enjoy meeting people and a warm smile embodied with a BIG HEART goes a long way."

Sonya Prichett, Education Navigator
Prichard Housing Authority

PRICHARD HOUSING AUTHORITY CONTINUED...

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Sonya also knew that working with local schools would be important. Sonya and Zulieka Boykin, the Asset Manager, engaged the superintendent, Martha Peek of the local school district to introduce her to Project SOAR. With her cooperation, they implemented an existing agreement between the school district and the housing authority that allowed information about students and counselors to be shared with Project SOAR.

Residents may sometimes be skeptical that new programs are worth their effort. Many have come and gone in the past, and it may take a wait and see approach. By getting others excited in the program, Sonya has helped to create a program with community buy-in.

As more residents have engaged, Project SOAR has begun to take hold. People are hearing about it and are starting to think it is for real and can really help. "The in-

teractions are none STOP!" says Sonya. "I receive daily phone calls from participants/parents seeking more information on the resources Project SOAR has available."

With the effort of building the visibility of Project SOAR starting to pay off, Sonya is able to spend more time providing services to help students achieve their goals.

CREATING BUY IN & BUILDING TRUST

As Sonya's story shows, creating community buy-in and building trust involves reaching out to many groups. When you have the support of the community, residents will be more willing to engage. There are several places you can start:

- **Schools:** Building a relationship with school leadership and counselors can help you learn about students and what is going on in their lives. Schools also can be great places to meet with students.

- **Other PHA staff:** Service coordinators, property managers, and others understand the community. They can help make introductions and give you ideas about ways to approach residents.

- **Churches and trusted community institutions:** If a trusted member of the community vouches for you, you will gain legitimacy. They also may be willing to host an event where people feel more comfortable attending.

- **Influential residents:** Some residents are social connectors in the community. Getting well-connected residents to spread the word can pay off many times over.

When you have the support of the community, residents will be more willing to engage.

SAVE THE DATE!

Project SOAR Grantee Convening

Where: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC

When: June 13th-14th, 2018

Keep a look out for more information!

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF MEETINGS & EVENTS

Your events can serve multiple purposes. Sometimes, there is a very specific focus like a FAFSA completion night. But events can also be use to draw in new participants, introduce them to Project SOAR, and start to build trust and visibility in the community. When planning meetings, you can try to follow a few basic rules to encourage attendance and participation.

#1: Make it Social

Make your initial meeting a social event. You can use leveraged funds to provide snacks, and could even offer door prizes for those who stay and participate. Social meetings can help you connect to the community and will allow you to reach more people in the future.

#2: Keep it Short

No one likes the dreaded two-hour meeting even if it is full of fun activities. Schedule your meetings for no more than 45 minutes. This will show residents that you value their time. It will also force you to create attainable objectives for each meeting – focusing on a single task or piece of information will help people from getting overwhelmed and you can leave with a sense of accomplishment.

#3: Schedule for Both Parents and Students

Get a sense, by talking with community members, school leaders, PHA staff, of the schedules for both parents and children. Since many of the tasks you will be helping them with will require participation from both, make sure you schedule meeting where both are able to attend. This will help maximize your impact.

FACING PUSHBACK

Some residents may be wary of things that are too good to be true, like free help! Below are some of the common questions and concerns residents have voiced.

This is going to increase my rent! Some parents may be reluctant to provide financial information required on the FAFSA because they think the information will get back to the PHA.

♦ The PHA cannot access any information entered on the FAFSA. The Department of Education is barred by law from sharing financial information with any other agency.

Is this really free? Parents may think that there will be extra costs at some point.

♦ Yes! Your services are free. The FAFSA is also always free to complete. There may be costs associated with placement tests or college applications, but you can help students get fee waivers where possible.

My kid has football practice and I have work. Trying to schedule a time to meet can be very difficult when balancing multiple priorities like work, extra-curricular activities, childcare, and other important life events.

♦ Meet families where they are when possible, and keep in-person meetings short. When the task allows, use other means of communication like Skype or text messaging to make it easier to meet.
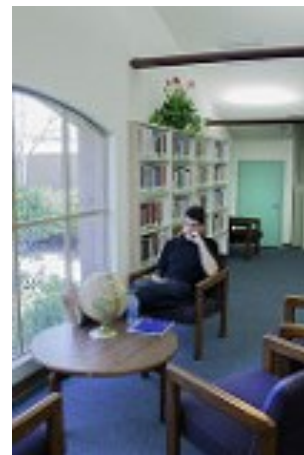
Meet families where they are. Make it easy for them to engage with you on their schedules.

Financial Aid

California

- Majority of state financial aid programs March 2, 2018

Pennsylvania

- Most financial aid applications May 1, 2018

Other grantee states

- Apply as soon as possible, financial aid funds may be limited. Check with individual schools for more information.

Test Registration and Timing

SAT

- February 9, 2018 registration deadline for March test
- March 10, 2018 next scheduled test

ACT

- March 9, 2018 registration deadline for April test
- April 14, 2018 next scheduled test

About Project SOAR

The Resident Opportunities and Self Sufficiency (ROSS) for Education Program, also known as Project SOAR (Students + Opportunities + Achievements = Results), is a new demonstration program that provides grant funding to public housing authorities to deploy education navigators to help public housing youth ages 15-20 and their families apply for the U.S. Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), as well as assist with financial literacy and college readiness, post-secondary program applications and post-acceptance assistance.

KEY RESOURCES

Don't forget to make use of the many free online resources available.

Stay on top of key activities with Department of Education **checklists for success**:

- https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/prepare-for-college/checklists/

Find **free test prep resources** available at Khan Academy:

- https://www.khanacademy.org/

Find **scholarships** to help pay for school:

- https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search
- https://www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-scholarships.aspx

Compare colleges and make a list of possibilities:

- https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/