

SOAR Program Celebrates 50th Class

Marion County, OR – October 2025 — Student Opportunity for Achieving Results (SOAR) was launched in 2009 after funding became available through Measure 57. This funding created opportunities to expand treatment for people struggling with addiction. In response, a partnership formed between Chemeketa Community College, the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), and Marion County Health and Human Services (MCHHS) to create SOAR.

SOAR is a 12-week intensive program designed to support clients as they return to the community after incarceration. It combines cognitive programming, employment services, parenting classes, housing assistance, substance use treatment, and peer mentorship. Graduates of SOAR consistently demonstrate significantly lower recidivism rates compared to other high-risk supervised clients.

The first cohort began in January 2010. Now, 15 years later, we are proud to celebrate the 50th SOAR class.

Kori's Journey

In 2014, Kori graduated from Cohort 14 of SOAR. Before the program, he was in and out of trouble and felt broken inside. After having a child, he realized he needed to change—he didn't want his son to experience the same hardships he had. While in jail, an MCSO Community Corrections officer offered him the opportunity to join SOAR.

Joining wasn't easy, but Kori committed because he knew his choices were limited: change his life or end up dead or in prison. For him, the best part of SOAR was the staff and the supportive community. The program helped him understand how his mind worked and why he continued destructive patterns. At graduation, his cohort celebrated with hiking, food, and fellowship—a day he says he will never forget.

After graduation, Kori moved into sober housing to support his recovery. Though SOAR lasted only three months, it gave him the tools to build the future he wanted. He learned to set boundaries, ask for help, and surround himself with people on the same path. The staff supported him in countless ways—from giving out rides, to helping with vital records, to writing letters of recommendation.

Today, Kori has been clean since October 10, 2013. He has a wife, children, a great job, and owns his own home. He credits SOAR with paving the way for his success.

Lyuba's Journey

Lyuba joined Cohort 43, the first women's SOAR class. At the time, she felt stuck, heading towards prison. When offered a place in the program, she saw it as her chance to rebuild her life.

For Lyuba, the most meaningful part of SOAR was the community. Once the women in her cohort grew close, they leaned on one another as they worked toward a new future. One of her favorite memories was their graduation trip to Silver Falls.

SOAR taught Lyuba to think differently, ground herself, and recognize that her choices affect more than just her. Most importantly, she discovered that life held possibilities beyond substance use. She still keeps in touch with SOAR staff, who continue to support her journey.

Lyuba recommends SOAR to others, saying the program gave her hope. Two years after graduation, she has a stable job, her own place, and recently celebrated two and a half years of sobriety. She is now planning to buy a house.

Josh's Journey

Josh graduated from Cohort 11 in 2012, but his path to SOAR was unique. While in prison, MCSO Community Corrections Deputy Anna Jefferson offered him a spot in SOAR. He refused.

Fifty days after his release, Josh went to Chemeketa to explore trade school and ran into a friend who invited him to a meeting. There, he unexpectedly re-encountered Deputy Jefferson. Overcome with emotion, he apologized for turning down the program before and asked for another chance.

That moment changed everything. At first, Josh resisted the staff's belief in him, testing whether they truly meant it. But when Florida authorities denied his request to move closer to his children, Deputy Jefferson sat with him and promised to fight alongside him. For the first time, he believed someone in the system genuinely wanted to help.

Josh embraced the program, and with support from Deputy Jefferson and SOAR staff, he eventually gained custody of his children. Shortly after graduating, he had a home, his kids with him, and was enrolled in college.

Since then, Josh has earned two master's degrees and is pursuing a PhD. Professionally, he helped launch and run the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program in Marion County for five years and now serves as Senior Director of Community Development for

| Ideal Option, the largest outpatient Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program in the U.S., overseeing nearly 100 clinics nationwide. He also helped launch LEAD Deflection programs in Oregon and the first Forensic Peer Program in New Mexico.

On a personal level, Josh is married, has seven children, and recently became a grandfather. In January, he will celebrate 15 years of sobriety.

Josh says the most valuable tool he learned from SOAR was the Recovery Self-Assessment exercise: *“Play the tape all the way through.”* It taught him to pause, think, and see where his choices would lead. More than that, SOAR gave him staff who fought for him, stood by him, and showed him he was worth believing in.

“SOAR gave me my life back,” Josh says. “It showed me that I could give instead of take and be part of positive change.”

Looking Ahead

For 15 years, SOAR has helped people in Marion County transform their lives. From Kori, to Lyuba, to Josh, and hundreds of others, the program has proven that with the right support, change is possible.

We are proud to celebrate 50 SOAR classes and look forward to many more years of hope, growth, and success.

To learn more about the SOAR program, visit the Community Corrections Programs page on our website.