SOAR365 VOLUNTEER FAQ

What is SOAR365?

SOAR365 is an organization that works in partnership with families to create life-fulfilling opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Is SOAR365 a non-profit organization?

Yes, SOAR365 is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization (tax ID #54-0629691) that thrives with thanks to the philanthropic support and engagement of the community it serves.

How long has SOAR365 been around?

SOAR365 was first established in 1954 by a small, dedicated group of families who were determined to find a better way of caring for their loved ones with disabilities.

What kinds of programs & services are offered by SOAR365?

SOAR365 offers four sets of core services:

- **Pediatric Therapy**: Provides specialized rehabilitation services for children, from birth through adolescence, who are at risk for developmental delays, have delays in development, have a developmental disability, or suffer from an injury that adversely affects their development.

- **Adult & Children/Youth Programs**: Provides structure and supervision for adults and school-aged children (through 21 years) with developmental disabilities who cannot be left alone. Parents & caregivers are able to go to work with the assurance that their child is not only safe but experiencing new people and activities.

- **SOAR365 Business Solutions**: Gives men and women with disabilities the opportunity to work and be productive through a successful multi-tiered employment program that includes Janitorial/Custodial Services, Landscaping & Grounds Maintenance, Assembly & Logistics, Digital Imaging, Administrative Services, and Supported Employment.

- **Residential Programs (Respite and Summer Camp)**: Provides full-service, handicap-equipped camp programs for individuals with special needs, as well as Emergency Respite, Extended-Stay Respite, and Weekend Respite.

How many individuals are served by SOAR365?

In 2019, SOAR365 served over 1400 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

What distinguishes SOAR365 from other non-profits that serve people with disabilities?

SOAR365 empowers people with disabilities across the broadest spectrum:

- Across the life span--from babies to boomers
- Across all levels of disability--from mild to profound
- Across the community -- not limited by geographic boundaries-- so families can have the best help wherever they live

How can I find out more about SOAR365?


You can find out more about SOAR365 by:

- Visiting our website at http://www.soar365.org/
- Signing up to receive our quarterly newsletter
- Following our Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/soar365/

**How can I support SOAR365?**

As a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization, SOAR365 is reliant upon philanthropic support from the community in the form of:

- Donations of money: when you give to SOAR365, your gift transforms the lives of people with disabilities!
- Donations of in-kind goods: donations of children’s books, food, supplies, and welcome packages improve quality of life for the people we serve!
- Donations of time: volunteers of all kinds engage in mission-critical service to support our mission and strategic goals!

**How do I get involved as a volunteer?**

To get started, interested individuals and team leaders should send an email to alison.jones-nassar@soar365.org or call 804-665-1214. All individuals will be required to attend a mandatory information session, complete an application including references, and schedule a one-on-one interview. **PLEASE NOTE:** Volunteer candidates who are interested in engaging in direct service with our program participants will be required to complete additional training and pass a background check. All steps must be completed before the candidate is approved for service.

**What kinds of things do SOAR365 volunteers do?**

Four broad categories of opportunities are available for SOAR365 volunteers. Event Support opportunities and Property Beautification opportunities are episodic and do not require advance onboarding – just sign up! Administrative Support opportunities and Program Support opportunities (which involve direct interaction with program participants) require additional training and documentation.

**What kind of time commitment is required for SOAR365 volunteers?**

There is no mandatory time commitment for SOAR365 volunteers. Time commitments are dictated by the specific type of volunteer opportunity and are determined at the time of the interview and placement. However, please note that, with the exception of event-based service, most opportunities including program support opportunities occur during the weekdays. This limits SOAR365’s ability to accommodate volunteers in the evenings and on weekends.

**Do volunteers have to complete a background check?**

Yes, to comply with DBHDS licensing regulations, all adult volunteers who engage in Program Support opportunities must complete and pass a yearly background check prior to engaging in service. For youth volunteers ages 12-16, the adult supervisor must complete and pass the background check. For volunteers ages 16 and up, in lieu of the background check, a minimum of three references (one academic, one extracurricular, and one service-related) must be provided.

**What if I don’t want to interact personally with SOAR365 clients?**
There are plenty of opportunities at SOAR365 that do not involve direct interaction, such as event planning, event support, property beautification, and administrative support. Volunteers who are not interested in this type of service should clearly indicate this preference as soon as possible.

**What if I DO want to interact personally with SOAR365 clients?**

All volunteers wishing to engage in Program Support opportunities (opportunities that involve direct interaction with program participants) MUST (in addition to attending an orientation, submitting an application, and completing a personal interview) pass a criminal background check, complete human rights & policy training, and show proof of a recent TB test.

**Why is the volunteer application process so structured?**

SOAR365 serves a population of individuals designated as “vulnerable” by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). According to DBHDS guidelines, individuals designated as “vulnerable” “require the utmost care and specific ancillary practices. The vulnerable populations’ freedom and ability to protect one’s self from harm and risk are abbreviated and their freewill to make choices has impediments.” SOAR365 is legally and ethically obligated to ensure that all individuals coming into contact with our program participants (staff, service providers, contractors, and volunteers) receive the training and instructions necessary to protect and maximize the health, safety, and welfare of the individuals receiving our services.

**What does policy training involve?**

Policy training is designed to prepare Program Support volunteers for successful service. Topics include Values-driven service & S.E.R.V.E. principles; SOAR365 Code of Ethics; Person-First Language; General confidentiality, HIPAA, use of phones, photography policies, etc., Understanding the visual & auditory environment; Definition of mandated reporting and reporting protocols; Clear boundaries for touching, situations requiring “therapeutic intervention”, etc., Potential liability situations (i.e. Daily Living Activities, being alone with a program participant, etc.), and other volunteer-specific policies & topics.

**What does it mean when a volunteer is a “mandated reporter”?**

“Mandated reporters” are required by law to report suspected harm in the form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation directed toward individuals designated as “vulnerable.” Volunteers engaging in direct interaction opportunities with SOAR365’s program population are required to receive Human Rights training so they are able to recognize potential harm situations and bring them to the attention of the appropriate staff. Volunteers will be trained in the appropriate confidential reporting protocols and will not be retaliated against for making a report.

**What volunteer opportunities are available for groups?**

SOAR365 has a commitment to work with many different volunteer groups including corporate teams, fraternities & sororities, service & civic clubs, congregations, and scout troops. Opportunities available to groups include property beautification activities of all kinds at our four facilities, in-kind donation drives, and event support opportunities. Group enrichment activities that involve direct interaction with our program participants will be approved on a case-by-case basis. The full menu of opportunities is available upon request.

**What volunteer opportunities are available for youths?**

The minimum age threshold for youth volunteers is 12. For volunteers between the age of 12 and up to age 16, the youth must be accompanied & supervised by a parent or adult guardian at all times. The parent or adult guardian must complete all application steps required for adult volunteers and provide direct supervision of the youth volunteer for the entire duration of the service commitment. For volunteers age 16 and up, the youth may
volunteer independently, provided they complete all onboarding steps. A minimum of three references is required (one academic, one extracurricular, and one service-related). Volunteers age 16 and up who wish to engage as Summer Camp Counseling Assistants must have previous experience working with individuals with disabilities.

**Why is parental supervision required for younger volunteers?**

DBHDS licensing requirements mandate a strict programming staff ratio. When youth volunteers are present without parental supervision, this effectively increases the ratio and potentially creates additional distractions. This policy has been put into place in order to maximize the safety of our program participants, youth volunteers, and staff members.

**Are there internship/fieldwork opportunities with SOAR365?**

Yes, SOAR365 accommodates 5-10 interns and fieldwork students each semester. Internships and fieldwork opportunities are available for students seeking two-year associate degrees and technical certifications, undergraduate students at four-year colleges and universities, and graduate students. Students seeking degrees in social work, counseling, psychology, human services, and related fields or pre-med tracks can gain experience or receive academic credit supporting our direct services programs. Students seeking liberal arts degrees including communications, non-profit management, business administration, accounting, and IT can serve as capacity-building administrative support interns.

**Does SOAR365 accept court-appointed volunteers?**

Due to the fact that SOAR365 serves a population designated as “vulnerable,” we are unable to accept court-ordered volunteer candidates.

**How can I find out more?**

To find out more about volunteer opportunities with SOAR365 or receive our monthly volunteer e-updates, send an email to alison.jones-nassar@soar365.org or call 804-665-1214. More information about SOAR365 volunteer opportunities is located on our web site at https://www.soar365.org/volunteer/ and you can see SOAR365 volunteers action on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/soar365/.