

A blue-tinted photograph of a family walking in a park. A man is walking on the left, a woman on the right, and a young child is riding a blue tricycle in the center. They are all smiling and appear to be enjoying their time outdoors. The background shows trees and a path.

Riverside Community Care

Leading the Way in Behavioral Healthcare & Human Services

Caregivers S.O.A.R.

Sustainable Opportunities for Accessing Respite

*A Model for Sustainable, Community-Driven
Respite Services*

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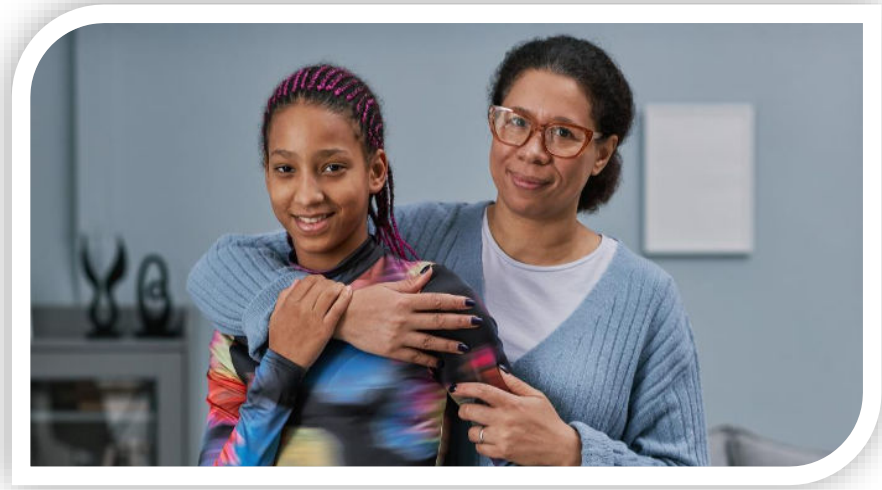
Introduction

Riverside Community Care:

- It is a community-based non-profit organization serving more than 40,000 people a year in Massachusetts.
- Riverside is a leading provider of mental healthcare, developmental and brain injury services, early childhood and youth programs, addiction treatment, suicide education, trauma response, and more.

Caregivers SOAR (Sustainable Opportunities for Accessing Respite):

- It is a non-traditional, coaching-based respite model.
- It is a sustainable and community-rooted caregiver respite model that shifts the paradigm of what "Respite" means for families with children facing mental health challenges, fostering inclusive engagement and personal growth.



“...getting [youth]in the right environment. So it was right school, getting him the proper medication, us learning him, us receiving the other services from Riverside. But SOAR is definitely one of these pieces that led to things getting better and letting the stress getting better.”

-Caregiver Quote

Learning Objectives

1. Understand SOAR's team-based approach and how it bridges traditional and non-traditional mental health supports.
2. Learn about the unique staff roles that enhance caregiver resilience and youth engagement.
3. Explore data-driven outcomes and best practices for measuring respite impact



“SOAR provided both of us, the space and the breathing room that we both needed so badly in order to help our relationship and to grow, me as a parent and them as a child, trying to go through this world.”

-Caregiver Quote

PART ONE: THE NEED FOR INNOVATION IN RESPITE

The Crisis

Why Traditional Respite Models Fall Short

Caregivers of youth with complex mental health needs face:

- Burnout & chronic stress.
- Limited access to respite (waitlists, financial/logistical barriers.)
- Gaps in cultural responsiveness (language barriers, family structure mismatch.)
- All reasons why we need a sustainable, community-driven alternative.



“No, I didn’t have respite services before.” “ There weren’t respite services available. SOAR is the first one.” “There is a lack of guidance; I didn't know this type of program existed.”

-Caregiver Quotes

What is Caregivers SOAR?

Innovative & Sustainable Respite

A non-traditional, coaching-based model built through the lens of social sustainability that integrates:

- Drop-off respite & on-site caregiver engagement.
- Person-centered coaching alongside traditional mental health services.
- Co-located services (outpatient therapy, care coordination, youth support, well-being coaching.)
- Culturally responsive strategies for diverse caregivers (grandparents, youth workers, immigrant families.)
- Strong community partnerships (Community and youth centers, schools, participant in SOC, etc.)

“I am feeling like I set out to like really make some intentional decisions about myself this year and like really understand what self-care is and really understand like how to prioritize myself in amongst the hurricane of caregiving”
-Caregiver Quote



PART TWO: SOAR'S UNIQUE TEAM- BASED APPROACH

Unique Roles That Make SOAR Work

Building a Sustainable Support Network

- **Sustainability Coach** – Helps caregivers navigate systems and continue working toward goals identified in PIA.
- **Family Partner** – Provides peer support from lived experience.
- **Young Adult Peer Mentor** – Engage youth through real-world guidance & skill-building.
- **Health & Well-Being Coach** – Support mental & physical wellness for caregivers and youth.
- **Community Youth Workers as Natural Caregivers** – Expanding support beyond families.

“I would absolutely recommend [SOAR] to anyone in the community who can benefit from it.... It’s like feeling human about the caregiver aspect of it. Feeling normal about the stresses strain that break you down every day and it’s about reinforcing the presence and benefits of self-care. Some healthy connections in the community. The people who were running the program were amazing people”

-Caregiver Quote



Riverside Community Care

Leading the Way in Behavioral Healthcare & Human Services

Internal & External Advisory Councils

Keeping SOAR Community-Driven

Internal Advisory Council

Who: Clinicians, direct care staff, lived experience roles (Family Partners, Peer Mentors.)

Purpose: Ensures the model stays clinically sound & aligns with real-world caregiver/youth needs.

Outcome: Rapid adaptation of programming based on frontline staff feedback.

“you can really trust them... I feel like I didn’t have an issue thinking somebody wouldn’t understand her or us.”

-Caregiver Quote

External Advisory Council

Who: Community partners, caregivers with lived experience, young adults who have received services.

Purpose: Brings in community voices to ensure programming is relevant, accessible, and culturally responsive.

Outcome: Helps SOAR remain adaptable, sustainable, and impactful at a systemic level.

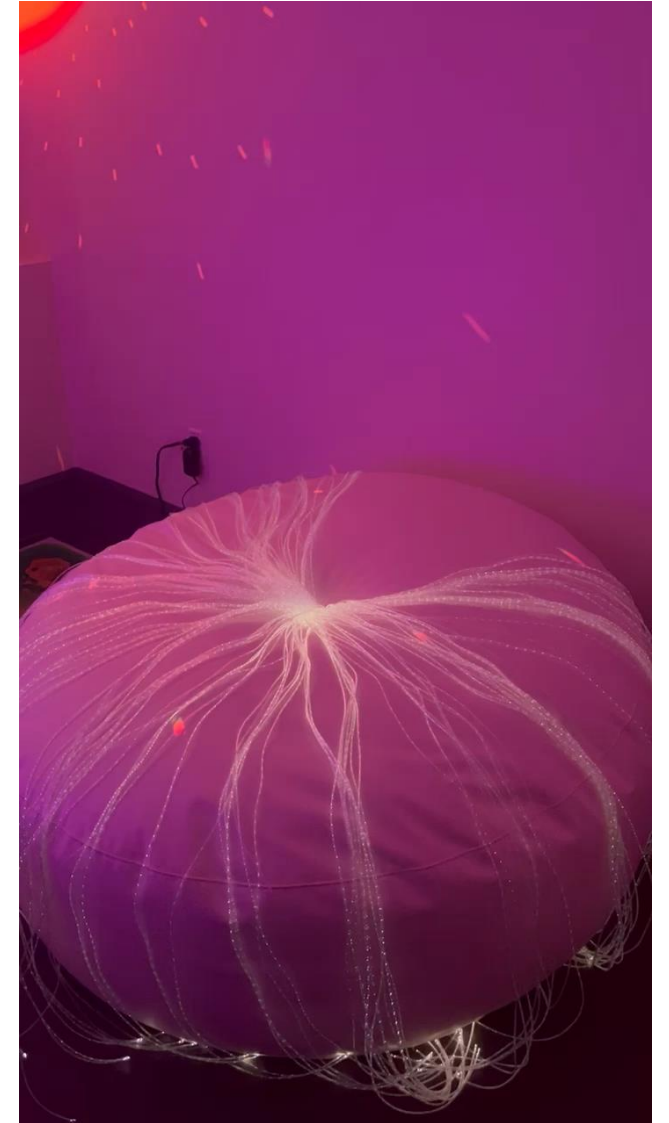
Expanding Access & Cultural Responsiveness

- Capacity to serve immigrant & first-generation families (Cambridge, Somerville, and beyond.)
- Language accessibility – English, Spanish, Haitian Creole.
- Integrating VR & Sensory Room Projects for diverse engagement strategies.

"Antes de SOAR teníamos servicios enfocados en el niño y lo veían como dinero que tiene que ser cobrado en las visitas por el seguro. En cambio SOAR es gratis, y se interesaron en mi como una persona, y me sentí vista, valorada. En SOAR el enfoque es cuidar de mi, como persona, y no solo cuidar de mi para ser una mejor cuidadora."

"Before SOAR, our services were child-focused, and they were seen as money that had to be collected from insurance during visits. On the other hand, SOAR is free, and they took an interest in me as a person, and I felt seen and valued. At SOAR, the focus is on caring for me as a person, not just on caring for me to be a better caregiver."

-Caregiver Quote

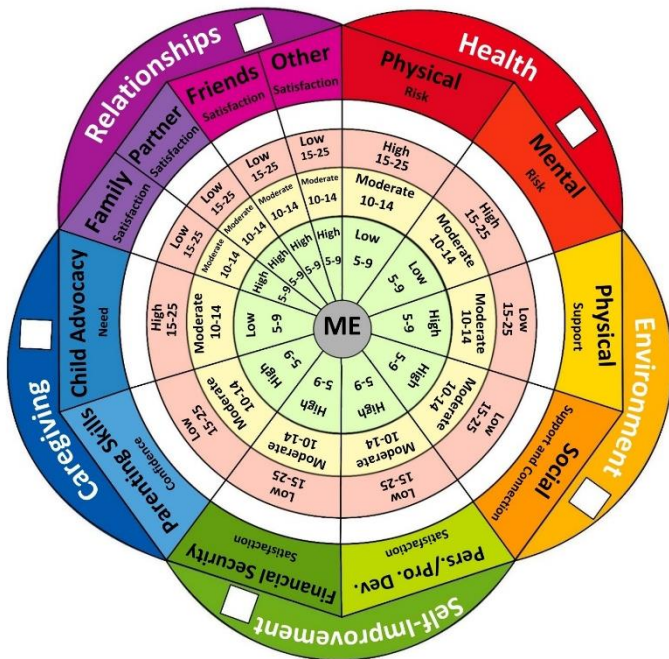


PART THREE: REAL- WORLD IMPACT AND DATA INSIGHTS

Measuring Success - Data & Outcomes

Caregiver Assessment Tools:

- Personal Inventory Assessment.
- Individualized Support Plan.
- Focus Group: Respite Knowledge and Experience in MA.
- AMA Stress Self-questionnaires.
- Semi-structure interviews.



Youth Assessment Tools:

- Personal Inventory Assessment.
- Individualized Support Plan.
- Resiliency Board Game.
- Behavioral Youth Profiles.



Community Youth Worker Assessment Tools:

- Burn-out, Occupational Stress and Self-care Questionnaire.

Real Impact – How SOAR Changes Lives

Stress Status before SOAR

How would you rate your overall well-being before SOAR?

1	2	3	4	5
Very good	Good	Somewhat good	Slightly good	Not at all good

How would you rate your overall stress level before SOAR?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all stress	Slightly stressed	Somewhat stressed	Moderately stressed	Very stressed

Stress Status during SOAR

How would you rate your well-being during SOAR?

1	2	3	4	5
Very good	Good	Somewhat good	Slightly good	Not at all good

How would you rate your overall stress level during SOAR?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all stress	Slightly stressed	Somewhat stressed	Moderately stressed	Very stressed

Benefits obtained from SOAR:

- Positive change in forecasted caregiver stress levels and wellbeing after SOAR participation.



Real Impact – How SOAR Changes Lives

Benefits obtained from SOAR:

- Awareness of the availability of these respite services in MA and the benefits for their families.
- Enhance social connections and support from fellow caregivers, SOAR staff, and other resources.
- Improved understanding of the health and education systems, thanks to the guidance provided by SOAR staff.



Real Impact – How SOAR Changes Lives

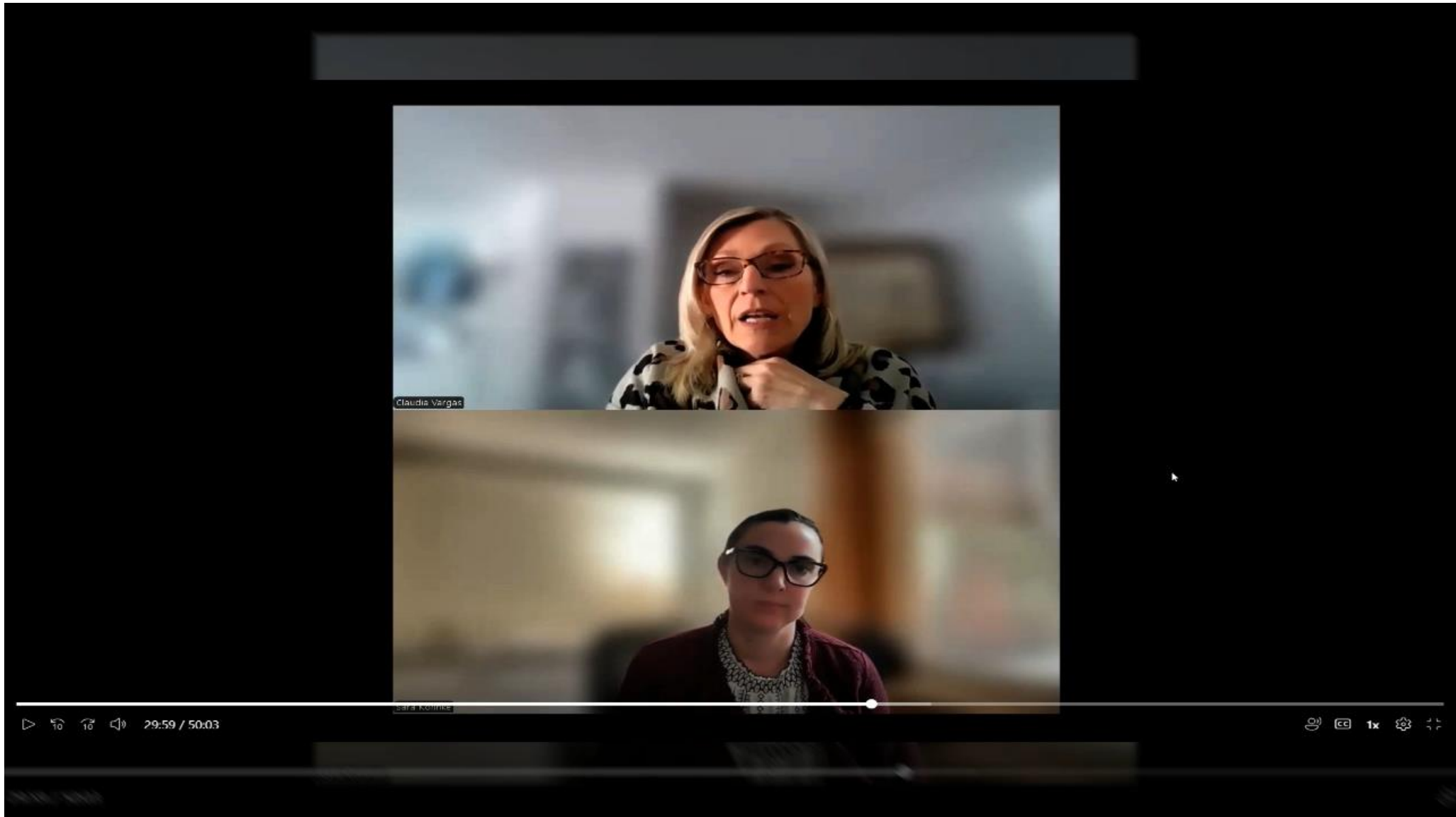
Benefits obtained from SOAR:

- Reflecting on and understanding the needs of their current life domains helped to foster positive change.
- Youth engagement success – Peer mentorship = fewer crisis episodes, better emotional regulation.
- Total On-Site Respite Hours: **883.0 hours** (12/26/2023-03/15/2025)



“I’ve been immensely grateful for the support of the program, for the staff who care deeply for [youth’s name]. I feel very safe with him being in their care. I don’t worry about him at all”

-Caregiver Quote





Claudia Vargas



Emily Wilson

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PART FOUR: BEST PRACTICES AND SCALABILITY

Lessons Learned

What Works & What We've Adapted

- Flexibility is key – Caregivers need options to engage in ways that work for them.
- Community partnerships enhance sustainability (Somernova, Somerville Education Fund providing transportation vouchers.)
- Non-traditional roles (peer mentors, sustainability coaches) fill critical gaps.
- Innovative tools (VR, sensory rooms, resilience assessments) improve engagement.



I feel stronger... I feel competent. I also feel like... my eyes were open to a lot of resources, I feel like my eyes were open to them before, but I didn't necessarily know how to connect to them and I think [staff] have been able to connect me... so I feel less isolated"
-Caregiver Quote

Expanding SOAR

How This Model Can Be Replicated

- Embedding SOAR into existing systems strengthens long-term success
- State & national implications – Respite programs can incorporate SOAR’s coaching model
- Next steps for community-driven expansion- ***Advocacy needed***

“ the connection to the [family partner] has been incredibly helpful both in supporting my parenting and advocating to DCF which is such a game changer. So that is something that would not have happened otherwise”
-Caregiver Quote



**PART FIVE:
INTERACTIVE
DISCUSSION AND
CLOSING**

**How would you implement
a SOAR-like model in your
setting?**

Final Message from Caregivers SOAR

Collaboration and Advocacy



- SOAR proves respite can be sustainable, flexible, and culturally relevant.
- Opportunities for collaboration & scaling this model.

Contact Information:

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“until you, if you have never gotten respite, and you don’t know what that is like, it’ll be such a game changer for you”

-Caregiver Quote

THANK YOU!