

SOAR 55, Service Opportunities After Reaching 55 is a volunteer-connector organization for people aged 55 and over who would like to share their professional and experience-based skills with local public and nonprofit organizations that need help in Newton and Metro West, Massachusetts. We offer a unique, personalized, and thoughtful approach to matching each individual with a rewarding and satisfying volunteer opportunity. SOAR 55 has over 300 volunteers serving at 80 sites in assignments that range from tutoring children, assuming leadership roles in nonprofit organizations, to management consulting. SOAR 55 is a Corporation for National and Community Service RSVP program.

For more information please contact Jan Latorre-Stiller at our headquarters in Newton, MA at 617-969-5906 x120 or at jlatorre-stiller@ncscweb.org or Lois Levick at 508-532-5570, ext. 4353 or at llevick@minlib.net at our satellite office in Metro West, MA



[Wicked Local Newton](#)

Posted Jan 17, 2013 @ 10:00 AM

Jan Latorre-Stiller: Today's volunteers are highly skilled

Newton ·

It is not news that nonprofit organizations doing important work are increasingly struggling to do more with less. A recent Boston Foundation study, ["Passion and Purpose Revisited" Massachusetts Nonprofits and the Last Decade's Roller Coaster](#), exposes the struggle between the sector's allegiance to mission and the fiscal realities that render it increasingly unable to meet that mission amidst increasing community needs.

"The Massachusetts nonprofit sector continues to be threatened by unsustainable growth. And while the sector's focus on mission provides a much needed safety net for the Commonwealth's residents, its inclination to continuously put mission before financial health is of grave concern, particularly given the slow economic recovery and the changing picture of public revenues." The report goes on to say, "We are encouraged, however, by the innovation and introspection."

SOAR 55, part of a national network of volunteer programs, is locally sponsored by Newton Community Service Center. Our program, on a small scale, is helping shape one aspect of the "innovation" that the authors of the Boston Foundation report may be alluding to—creating new and effective ways for individuals and communities to lend support to the ailing social service sector. SOAR 55 mobilizes, trains, places and supports adults, age 55 and over, to contribute their skills and experience to help strengthen and expand the capacity of local nonprofit and public organizations. The aging of the baby boomer generation has created a sea-change in terms of the ways in which volunteer-connector organizations like SOAR 55 can help nonprofits in these demanding times--and there is no turning back. Each day, for the next 19 years, 10,000 adults will turn 60 years of age. This long-term demographic surge provides an incredibly rich resource of available, highly skilled and motivated individuals who, with the right levels of support, coordination and training, are filling the gaps in nonprofit and public service capacity created by recent and undoubtedly indefinite fiscal challenges. SOAR 55 volunteers have been at the forefront of this movement—they work directly with nonprofit clients; help in leadership roles by offering specialized expertise such as IT or HR assistance; and, as pro bono consultants, provide essential management assistance and strategic tools through

which nonprofits reassess and re-organize to become not only stronger, but more efficient and effective in the long-term.

A case in point that perhaps best illustrates the "up-scaling" of volunteerism, is an experience we had with a Newton after-school program. Before the Executive Director understood the realm of possibilities, she had asked for a SOAR 55 volunteer to help serve refreshments to students during their afternoon break. You can imagine her delight and gratitude at instead having the opportunity to engage a team of SOAR 55 pro bono consultants to help with a revenue-producing project that, because of a lack of resources, had been kept on the back burner. Our consultants delivered a business plan several months later that eventually resulted in a now-thriving pre-school program for the organization. There are numerous examples of this higher level of volunteer assistance: a former VP at Fidelity was instrumental in launching Newton at Home, an aging-in-community program for Newton's senior citizens; a social worker and artist designed and facilitates a well-attended creative writing program at MCI Framingham; and a communication professional developed an employee communications plan for a Newton-based human services agency.

Volunteerism is flourishing. People want to help and not just via their checkbooks (although that certainly remains critical). And all sectors of communities—business, faith-based, individuals, social networking sites, and even network television (CNN Heroes and NBC's "The Giving Awards")—are making an effort to elevate the notion of giving back and making a difference.

To keep volunteers interested, we must establish new ground rules. We know for sure that most SOAR 55 volunteers want to serve in roles that capitalize on their interests, skills, passions and schedules. They want to make a significant difference. If we continue to deliver, the door is open to innovative and exciting possibilities, for both organizations and individuals.

SOAR 55 is part of the Corporation for National & Community Service and locally sponsored by Newton Community Service Center. For more information, please visit our website at www.ncscweb.org/programs/soar55 or contact Jan Latorre-Stiller at 617-969-5906 x120 or jlatorre-stiller@ncscweb.org.

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/newton/news/x1926906944/Jan-Latorre-Stiller-Todays-volunteers-are-highly-skilled#axzz21FZCjSm9>

Roxbury Weston benefits from SOAR 55 program

By Naomi Shore

[GateHouse News Service](#)

Posted Feb 18, 2013 @ 06:05 PM

WESTON ◊

Roxbury Weston Programs has been joining children from diverse communities to learn, play and understand each other for nearly 50 years.

It runs a highly regarded preschool and after-care program that unites children from the two communities in what is the longest running voluntary desegregation education program in the country.

But early last year, the Board of Trustees and Executive Director Ingrid Mansfield decided they needed some help if they were going to continue fulfilling this mission.

At first, they thought they had a marketing problem, and Mansfield turned to someone in a program at the Harvard School of Education for help. That person suggested Mansfield contact the SOAR 55 Nonprofit Management Consultant Group Program.

Such was the beginning of a year-long relationship with SOAR 55, which assigned a volunteer consulting group to the Roxbury Weston Program. This group ultimately found that marketing was only part of the picture.

Begun in 2006, the SOAR 55 Nonprofit Management Consulting Group Program offers individuals 55 and over the opportunity to use their professional skills and career experience to provide pro bono assistance to local nonprofits. It is currently looking for new, qualified candidates to apply.

The program has been funded in part by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation for the past four years. It currently has 60 active consultants and has worked with about 40 nonprofits on approximately 50 projects.

The nonprofits have ranged from small community choruses to the relatively large Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council.

For more information on becoming a nonprofit client or to apply to the spring training program, contact Sharon Levinson at 617-969-5906, ext. 356, or by email (slevinson@ncscweb.org).

For the Roxbury Weston Programs, Judd DeCew and John Gracey arrived with decades of experience in management consulting and business process optimization, and health care administration and troubleshooting, respectively.

In addition, they had committed 60 hours to the program's training course.

DeCew and Gracey first spent time researching the demographics of Weston and the current availability of preschool education. Their research confirmed that a marketing plan was needed, but they went further into aspects of business planning and needs assessments.

Along the way, they performed IT research in order to recommend new computer programs that would help with the marketing plan. They kept the Board of Trustees and the executive director informed of all their preliminary findings, and wrote a final report with their recommendations. It will be up to the trustees to decide which recommendations will be implemented and in which order.

Mansfield reports the Board of Trustees has agreed to hire a program director to oversee marketing, fundraising and grant writing. This is a direct result of the recommendations they received from the Nonprofit Management Consultant Group. She looks forward to working with this new person and says she has benefited from all the education that DeCew and Gracey provided her in these fields. She found that they were very responsive and made it easy for her to ask questions.

Mansfield said she highly recommends the Nonprofit Management Consultant Group Program to local nonprofits who could use some outside guidance and perspective.



Nurturing second-graders for over a decade

By Naomi Shore

[GateHouse News Service](#)

Posted May 17, 2013 @ 05:48 AM

Barbara Oster, a resident of Framingham, has been nurturing second-graders for over a decade. She has volunteered here in town at the Woodrow Wilson Elementary School for 13 years in the SOAR 55 Learning Partners Program and for the last 10 years has worked with Helen Higgins three mornings a week in her second-grade classroom.

Higgins says that Oster, who came to the school with a work background as a draftsman not a teacher, is a trained and trusted second presence in the classroom. "She explains concepts, provides more practice, or in other ways helps each individual student who works with her," Higgins said

This is very important because research shows that if a child is not proficient in reading ability by the end of third grade, he/she is more likely to have trouble moving forward in school.

Children who have trouble keeping up in math at early grade levels will have even more difficulty learning advanced math.

SOAR 55 developed its nationwide Learning Partners Program in 1997 to recruit, train, and place volunteers to help local elementary school students improve their reading and math skills. There are 15 volunteer Learning Partners in the Framingham public school system today, but SOAR 55 is looking for more people to join this effort.

Both Oster and Higgins note that she is a grandmother figure to the students, many of whom left grandmothers behind when they immigrated with their parents to this country. They respond to her in a different and sometimes more intimate way, though Oster is careful to reinforce and sustain learning discipline.

The number of English-as-a-second-language students in the classroom each year is high and it is particularly vital for those students to have more one-on-one time, according to Higgins.

Oster said she receives enthusiastic support from many at the school. "Helen gives me leeway, encourages me, and consults with me. The environment is wonderful. My role as a volunteer here feels right," she said. Oster still gets a thrill when she sees a child's face light up as he/she grasps the concept they have been working on.

According to Jan Latorre-Stiller, SOAR 55 senior director, "Our volunteers get hooked because of the special relationships they develop with the kids. Partners realize that they are doing something very important not only for each child, but for the whole community."

SOAR 55 offers training so that a volunteer can enter the classroom with confidence, and also offers ongoing support. Like Oster, many volunteers are not teachers by profession. Previously she had done other volunteer work, particularly with the Red Cross Aids Outreach Program, but not with children ó at least not since she raised her two sons here.

SOAR 55 is a Newton Community Service Center program with offices in West Newton and at the Framingham Public Library. Anyone 55 years old or older who might be interested in becoming a Learning Partner should contact Latorre-Stiller at 617-969-5906, ext. 120 or email jlatorre-stiller@ncscweb.org.

Naomi Shore has worked as an editor and reporter for a group of community newspapers in New York. She is a volunteer writer for SOAR 55.

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/article/20130517/News/305179589>



Karen Krone

By Naomi Shore

Special to the Town Crier

Posted Apr. 17, 2014 @ 5:22 pm

SUDBURY

Karen Krone, a 22-year Sudbury resident who was looking to use her professional skills to volunteer, was able to bring her talents to an assignment that delighted both her head and her heart.

Having joined the SOAR 55 Nonprofit Management Consulting Group Program and undergone its training, Krone was one of the pro bono consultants assigned to the team that worked on a five-year strategic plan for Adoptions with Love. This non-profit serves mothers and children and provides life-long support for everyone in the process, including birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees.

Krone says that she is impressed with the adoption agency and its founders and what she learned in SOAR 55's 60-hour training course, the caliber of her "classmates," and by the commitment her team had to achieving its goals once it was on the ground working with a local non-profit.

The extensive training was well worth her time even though she came with a background in non-profits, said Krone. She was the fundraising chair for the Atkinson Pool

scoreboard and also the fundraising chair for the Curtis Middle School Science Olympiad team, when she raised \$25,000 in three weeks to send the state champions to the national competition in Illinois.

Krone also served for three terms on the Sudbury Public School Committee. Professionally, she has been an assistant professor of health education at Teachers College, Columbia University and a consultant for numerous health related organizations around the country.

Whether you come with a business or a non-profit background, Krone says the SOAR 55 training gives you the vocabulary you need to work together as a team, ways to transfer your existing skill set to different situations, and a chance to do very high impact volunteering.

"We can make a huge difference to these agencies who can't afford market rates for what we can do. I recommend joining the SOAR 55 Nonprofit Management Consulting Group Program to anyone who is passionate about making a difference whatever their skills are."

The nonprofit agencies that apply to the Management Consulting Group Program (there have been over 50) are also dedicated to working with the teams and implementing the teams' recommendations, notes Krone. In the case of Adoptions with Love, over nine months, the team met every two weeks with a committee, which included staff and board members. The final five-year plan was presented for Board approval with the help of the SOAR 55 consultants.

Amy Cohen, one of the founders of Adoptions with Love, said that the team helped her move from theoretical plan to concrete steps as they began their strategic plan.

"They pushed us to be better than we thought we could be. They really focused on us and made the project a success through their professionalism and organization," said Cohen.

For more information SOAR 55 Nonprofit Management Consulting Group Program and how to apply for the fall 2014 training program or to receive pro bono management consulting services, contact Sharon Levinson at 617-969-5906, ext. 356, or by email (slevinson@ncscweb.org).

Naomi Shore is a volunteer writer for SOAR 55.