



**MALATEST**



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**SOAR Review Draft Report**  
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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.





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## Executive Summary

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) invested in a two-year project developed by the Murphy Centre to help address key barriers to progression in the trades in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The evaluation demonstrated that FSC's support enabled the Murphy Centre to deliver tutoring and counselling services to early career tradespeople. The evaluation resulted in lessons learned for organizations to enhance service delivery and the development of partner networks, and implications for FSC and other funders to determine where to allocate funding for similar projects to enhance their scalability in the future.

SOAR is a good example of a program that is early in its journey. Key findings from the evaluation include the following:

- **Low uptake of the SOAR program led to changes to program implementation.** Partnerships and services were realigned to better engage participants and to address their needs and skill gaps.
- **Greater program efficiencies may have been realized if resources were reallocated to enhance partnership.** Enhanced collaboration among network partners was needed to promote best practices, share lessons learned and avoid duplication of efforts.
- **The SOAR program's immediate outcomes were met for early-career tradespeople.** Outcomes for employers, and intermediate and long-term outcomes, could not be assessed.
- **There were challenges to determining causal attribution.** The lack of counterfactual data, incomplete employment data, low response rates in qualitative and quantitative lines of evidence, and that other similar services were being accessed by participants, not all outcomes could confidently be attributed to the program.

The evaluation resulted in the development of the following criteria for FSC and other funders to assess a program's potential for expansion, adoption, investment and partnership:

- **Assess partnership development and buy-in.** Program buy-in from industry stakeholders, employers and organizations serving early career tradespeople can enhance program adoption, expansion, and viability, and therefore make similar programs attractive to investors.
- **Establish capacity for data collection and monitoring.** If programs similar to SOAR can demonstrate positive outcomes for early career tradespeople and for employers, potential exists for expansion in other areas of the province and across Canada. If the program does not have this capacity, consider investing in capacity building within the organization or hiring evaluators at the start of the project.
- **Determine the extent of alignment with existing supports and services.** Areas for further investigation include determining which other programs or services support apprentices that are at risk of exiting the trades. For instance, those that provide capacity-building in essential and technical skills, or can provide wraparound supports, can be leveraged to enhance referrals, reduce duplication and to improve service delivery of similar programs.

## 1. Background and Project Description

The skilled trades sector has been facing labour shortages across Canada, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> As part of its efforts to address this gap in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Murphy Centre developed the Skills, Explore, Achieve, Revive (SOAR) project to:

- provide support services such as exam preparation, math tutoring, and counselling to individuals pursuing careers in the skilled trades;
- enhance labour mobility by supporting individuals who lost their jobs in other sectors and are now looking to work in the skilled trades; and
- promote retention in the skilled trades by supporting those struggling to progress to the next levels of their apprenticeship.

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) invested \$428,000 in support of this two-year project (2020-2022) and sought an evaluation of the project in light of its intended goals. While the Murphy Centre completed some evaluation activities during the project's inception and delivery, FSC commissioned Malatest to conduct an independent evaluation of the project upon its completion. The purpose of this document is to summarize the evaluation's design, methods, results, and implications.

### 1.1 Project Need

This sub-section addresses the following questions:

- Why was this project needed?
- To what extent were these needs being addressed before project implementation? What was known about what needed to be improved or expanded?
- Which populations did this project aim to serve?

#### 1.1.1 Need for the SOAR Project

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the second largest occupational group are trades, transport and equipment operators.<sup>2</sup> The economic slowdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted this occupational group, including many of the skilled trades. The construction sector was particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, with a 35% drop in employment between February and May of 2020, as many large construction projects were either postponed or cancelled.<sup>3</sup>

As the economy reopened, the demand for skilled tradespeople increased; however, some early-career tradespeople struggled to complete their apprenticeship and meet the rigid demands of various sectors that rely on tradespeople. A 2020 study found that only 16% of registered apprentices had completed their program within the expected average of five-years, and a further 20% had left their program

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2022). Labour Shortage Trends in Canada. Retrieved from: [Labour shortage trends in Canada \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-662-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada. Occupational Outlook - Newfoundland and Labrador 2020 – 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis/job-market-reports/newfoundland/prospects-report>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

during the same time frame.<sup>4</sup> According to Statistics Canada, the main barriers to completing apprenticeship and becoming certified included:

- Prior work experience and training not being recognized or credited towards apprenticeship;
- The inability of employers to take on apprentices which impeded apprentices' ability to progress through the various levels of apprenticeship; and
- COVID-related issues such as reduced working hours and limits on training enrollment numbers.<sup>5</sup>

Studies have also shown that those working in skilled trades, particularly those in the construction industry, are more likely to experience mental health issues such as burn out and suicidal ideation. They are also less likely to seek help for mental health issues to help them cope with workplace stress as compared to those working in other fields.<sup>6</sup> Reasons for increased stress or burn out include long working hours, tight timelines, job uncertainty, financial pressures, and working away from home. These studies point to a culture where mental health conditions and seeking help are perceived as personal weakness. In addition, this attitude is prevalent across all levels of the industry, from executives to site managers and early career tradespeople.<sup>7</sup>

The SOAR project sought to prepare new entrants more effectively to the skilled trades and help remediate those who required additional support with essential skills and personal development. The goal of the SOAR project was to help marginalized youth enter a skilled trade and encourage the retention of early career tradespeople that were at risk of leaving the skilled trades to ultimately help meet labour market demands in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### 1.1.2 Need for Improvement or Expansion

Although tutoring and counselling services exist to help early career tradespeople complete their training, to pass apprenticeship exams and to cope with the demands of the job, these supports may not be accessible to all early career tradespeople.

- **While other tutoring services exist, they are expensive, require proof of a diagnosed learning disability at union-owned trade colleges, or are offered by peers rather than subject matter experts.** Those struggling to pass their skilled trades training or apprenticeship exams could seek tutoring. While public colleges offer free peer tutoring for those taking skilled training courses,<sup>8</sup> not all students are comfortable being tutored by their peers. Additionally, tutoring services are generally not available to students at union owned trade colleges in Newfoundland

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<sup>4</sup> Jin, H., Langevin, M., Lebel, A., Haan, M (December, 2020). *Factors associated with the completion of apprenticeship training in Canada*. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00008-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00008-eng.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>For example: [Understanding and enhancing responses to distress in the construction industry: Preliminary findings from a nation-wide mixed methods study \(mates.org.au\)](https://www.mates.org.au/understanding-mental-health-in-the-built-environment); [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB](https://www.cio.org.uk/understanding-mental-health-in-the-built-environment); [Mental Health and Well-being \(workplacementalhealth.org\)](https://www.workplacementalhealth.org/mental-health-and-well-being); [Mental Health and Apprenticeship \(clac.ca\)](https://www.clac.ca/mental-health-and-apprenticeship)

<sup>7</sup> Rees-Evans, D. (May 2020). *Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment*. Chartered Institute of Building, United Kingdom. Retrieved from: [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB](https://www.cio.org.uk/understanding-mental-health-in-the-built-environment); [CAF-FCA, Apprentice Well-Being: An Apprentices in Canada ePanel Report, \(Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2020\)](https://www.caf-fca.ca/understanding-mental-health-in-the-built-environment)

<sup>8</sup> College of the North Atlantic student support services. Retrieved from: [www.cna.nl.ca/MyCna/Academic-Support/Peer-Tutoring](http://www.cna.nl.ca/MyCna/Academic-Support/Peer-Tutoring).

and Labrador unless they have a diagnosed learning disability. Even with a diagnosed learning disability, students must pay for these services.<sup>9</sup> Although there are private companies that offer paid tutoring services, not all early career tradespeople can afford these services or access the services due to their work schedule.

- **While personal counselling services exist free of charge through some employee assistance programs, public training colleges or by various provincially funded service organizations, they are not always readily accessed by early career tradespeople.** Access to free personal counselling from provincially funded organizations is on a first come, first served basis, are single sessions with no guarantee that subsequent sessions are with the same counsellor or available on a regular basis.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, not all public colleges offering free counselling have professional counsellors available.<sup>11</sup> While some trades unions may provide counselling services through an employee assistance program, not all early career tradespeople are connected to a union. Further, some unionized tradespeople may not access counselling through their employee assistance program in fear of the stigma associated with mental health conditions should their supervisors or co-workers learn they accessed these services.<sup>12</sup> While personal counselling can also be accessed through private professionals, the cost is often too prohibitive for early career tradespeople to afford.

By offering tutoring and counselling support free of charge, the SOAR project sought to address these barriers to progression in the trades by providing early career tradespeople essential skills training (such as enhancing math skills and study habits), and by helping them develop coping skills to address mental health issues.

### 1.1.3 Which Populations did the SOAR Project Aim to Serve

The SOAR project was accessible to residents of Newfoundland and Labrador who were looking to explore careers in the skilled trades sector, were currently enrolled in skilled trades training or were employed in the skilled trades sector. A 2020 Statistics Canada study found that many equity-seeking groups were less likely to obtain their trades certificate than those not identifying with these groups.<sup>13</sup> The SOAR project therefore aimed to target these groups, including women, Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, immigrants, people from rural, remote, and northern communities, people with essential skills gaps, youth, newcomers, refugees, LGBTQ2s+ peoples, veterans, people without post-secondary education, and persons with disabilities.

## 1.2 Theory of Change

This sub-section addresses the following questions:

- What was being tested in this project?

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<sup>9</sup> BAC Masonry College Student Policies and Procedures. Retrieved from [www.abtec.ca](http://www.abtec.ca).

<sup>10</sup> Newfoundland and Labrador Health and Community Services counselling options. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/mentalhealth-committee/mentalhealth/counselling-options/>.

<sup>11</sup> College of the North Atlantic student support services. Retrieved from: [www.cna.nl.ca/student-support/counselling-services](http://www.cna.nl.ca/student-support/counselling-services).

<sup>12</sup> Rees-Evans, D. (May 2020). Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment. Chartered Institute of Building, United Kingdom. Retrieved from: [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB; CAF-FCA, Apprentice Well-Being: An Apprentices in Canada ePanel Report, \(Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2020\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> Jin et al., December 2020.



- How were the resources / inputs to be used to deliver activities and outputs?
- What did project partners anticipate to be the result of delivering the project as planned?
- What assumptions were initially made about the project in order to achieve its objectives?
- What contextual factors were anticipated that might affect how the project is delivered?
- How was success initially articulated for this project?

To address some key barriers to progression in the trades and help provide a stream of labour into the skilled trades sector in the province, the SOAR project aimed to test the extent to which supports such as math tutoring and mental health counselling could:

- enhance essential skills among early career tradespeople and those who are struggling to complete their training;
- promote well-being among those that faced barriers to progressing in their trade because of mental health issues; and
- encourage those potentially entering or exiting the skilled trades to evaluate their career paths and make informed choices.

The following sub-sections describe the projects delivery model, resources and activities implemented during the program, anticipated outcomes of the interventions undertaken, assumptions and contextual factors that could impact the success of the program, and objectives defining how SOAR would achieve its goals.

A detailed logic model for the SOAR program can be found in Appendix C.

### 1.2.1 SOAR's Delivery Model

SOAR's delivery model was based on the development of a network of trades-related unions, training institutions and community organizations that supported apprentices and other early-career tradespeople. This network was intended to promote the project and, where possible, refer individuals to SOAR. Once apprentices and other early career tradespeople accessed or were referred to SOAR, the project aimed to support these individuals by providing:

- The opportunity to explore a career in the skilled trades;
- Information on what is required to work in the skilled trades;
- Math tutoring and study skills;
- Career and personal counselling; and
- Preparedness for training and employment for early career tradespeople.

### 1.2.2 Process:

Activities implemented by the resources identified for the SOAR project are included in Figure 1.1 below.

**Figure 1.1 SOAR Project Resources and Activities**

Resource	Activities
<b>The Murphy Centre</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified current skill and support gaps which were prioritized for treatment by the SOAR model.</li> <li>• Developed flexible delivery model and curriculum for SOAR.</li> <li>• Engaged with government for knowledge and support.</li> <li>• Referred graduates from other Murphy Centre programs to the SOAR project.</li> <li>• Hired and trained project coordinator/educator (tutor) and counsellor to deliver intervention strategies.</li> </ul>
<b>Project Coordinator/Tutor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met with partners and employers to identify current gaps in skills and supports.</li> <li>• Created intake procedures and forms and made accessible to stakeholders.</li> <li>• Provided electronic and printed materials to allow participants to explore career options.</li> <li>• Promoted SOAR to stakeholders and participants (including marginalized groups) through presentations and awareness activities.</li> <li>• Conducted surveys to collect data on stakeholder perception and satisfaction with SOAR.</li> <li>• Provided math tutoring and study skills to participants.</li> </ul>
<b>Counsellor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided career counselling and personal counselling to support employment or academic success.</li> <li>• Met with stakeholders to identify current gaps in skills and supports.</li> <li>• Promoted SOAR to stakeholders and participants (including marginalized groups) through presentations and awareness activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholders (Umbrella organizations, training institutions and community organizations)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided insight on current gaps in skills and supports.</li> <li>• Referred participants to the SOAR project.</li> <li>• Championed and promoted the SOAR project.</li> </ul>

### 1.2.3 Outcomes:

The SOAR project was anticipated to result in outcomes for participants receiving the interventions, for institutions and organizations, and at a broader systems level. Immediate, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes are identified in the sub-sections below.

#### 1.2.3.1 Participant Outcomes

Outcomes identified for SOAR participants receiving interventions included:

##### **Immediate outcomes:**

- Participants access the tutoring and gain basic math, improved study skills, digital skills and confidence;
- Participants access the counselling and have improved well-being and confidence;
- High school graduates and job seekers demonstrate an understanding of what a career in the skilled trades entails and determine if they wish to pursue a career in the skilled trades;
- A more diverse group will seek careers within the skilled trades;
- Participants deem the project as valuable and helpful to their growth; and

- Participants are satisfied with the support and/or training received.

**Intermediate outcomes:**

- Participants stay at the job for more than a year;
- Trainees pursue further education; and
- Apprentices pass their apprenticeship exams.

**Longer-term outcomes:**

- Reduced barriers to finding employment;
- Reduced barriers to sustaining employment; and
- Skilled trades workers have career stability and opportunity for development.

**1.2.3.2 Institutional Level Outcomes**

At the institutional level, the SOAR project's intention was to create a network of partners to collaboratively identify solutions to address gaps in an individual's preparedness for training and employment for early career tradespeople. Outcomes for organizations and employers included:

- Develop a network of skilled trades and wrap-around service partnerships;
- Skilled trades training providers have students that are successful in required academic areas of their skilled trades program;
- Employers specifically hire individuals that had accessed SOAR interventions;
- Employers report reduced stigma and satisfaction with hires; and
- Employers have improved employee retention.

**1.2.3.3 System Level Outcomes**

With respect to impacts for system and policy changes, the SOAR project sought to address the barriers to progression in the trades and enhance opportunity for successful skilled trades careers to help prevent unemployment and reliance on social or employment assistance.

**1.2.4 Assumptions:**

Several assumptions were made about the SOAR project in order to achieve its outcomes:

- Project partners involved in the network would actively champion and promote the SOAR project making recruitment easy and ensuring a reliable stream of program participants;
- Training institutions would share their curriculums to inform the development of SOAR project components (for instance, to create a bridging program for participants and bring assistance to training in the skilled trades sector);
- SOAR had the resources to accommodate the anticipated demand for their services and could grow by adding additional staff if needed (in other words, the project was scalable);
- Potential participants, having been made aware of the SOAR program, would willingly seek the supports being offered and would be able to attend during the program's time frame; and
- The tutoring provided would effectively support early career tradespeople struggling to pass their training course or apprenticeship exams.

### 1.2.5 Contextual Factors:

Several contextual factors impacted how the project was delivered, including:

- The structure of some original network partners was not conducive for the recruitment of participants to SOAR’s interventions given the indirect chain of referral and the government restrictions placed on training institutions. Although the umbrella associations represented skilled trades employers and unions, they had no direct interaction with workers or trainees. Instead, they relayed information about SOAR to their members who in turn shared this information with employees and union members. Additionally, training institutions interviewed indicated they were restricted from directly referring their students to SOAR due to “government regulations.”<sup>14</sup> Although instructors could provide their students with information about SOAR, they could not directly recruit them to the project.
- Although early career tradespeople may have been aware of SOAR, there may have been reluctance to seek the intervention services offered. There is a culture within the skilled trades that does not actively encourage seeking support. There is a perception that seeking help is a sign of weakness and some skilled trades workers are reluctant to admit they need or are seeking help as a result of this stigma.
- The SOAR activities and interventions were delivered remotely due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some SOAR partners and participants experienced online fatigue, which made engagement challenging.
- Turnover of network partner representatives may have impacted the development of the network, partner relationships, and the extent to which representatives were engaged in supporting and promoting SOAR.

### 1.2.6 Articulating Success:

Success for the SOAR project was initially articulated through the following project objectives:

1. To support participants in their journey toward finding a suitable skilled trades career;
2. To support participants currently enrolled in skilled trades programs who require tutoring services (i.e. numeracy, literacy and other skills);
3. To support those currently employed in the skilled trades who are at risk of being terminated;
4. To create a support mechanism whereby participants will be provided the necessary career and personal interventions;
5. To create an effective network among stakeholders in the skilled trades sector aimed at the provisions of appropriate training and intervention; and
6. To reduce barriers between marginalized groups and employment in the skilled trades.

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<sup>14</sup> The specific regulation was not found.

## 2. Evaluation Goals

To assess the extent to which the SOAR program achieved its intended outcomes, the Murphy Centre completed some evaluation activities during the project's inception and delivery. FSC then commissioned Malatest to conduct an independent evaluation of the project upon its completion. This section describes SOAR's key stakeholders, the planned evaluation activities, and limitations impacting the evaluation results.

### 2.1 Project Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the SOAR project fell into three categories:

1. **Network partners:** such as industry associations, training institutions, and community organizations that referred entry-level workers to the SOAR project. There were three groups of partners, including:
  - Umbrella organizations that promote and coordinate the interests of building and construction trades unions and employers;<sup>15</sup>
  - Institutions providing training in skilled trades;<sup>16</sup> and
  - Community organizations that referred participants to the SOAR project.<sup>17</sup>
2. **Project participants:** those pursuing a career in the skilled trades that received tutoring or counselling services (or both) through SOAR to help facilitate their career progression, including:
  - Students graduating high school that were interested in exploring a career in the skilled trades; and
  - Marginalized individuals who were academically or otherwise challenged to progress in their trade, including those at risk of being terminated from their apprenticeship.
3. **Lead partner:** program staff from the Murphy Centre that administered the SOAR project including a counsellor and combined role for tutor and project coordinator.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.2 Planned Evaluation Activities for SOAR

Several evaluation activities were planned to obtain feedback from stakeholders at various points throughout the project, including:

- Consultations with network partners to determine which gaps the program could help address;

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<sup>15</sup> Umbrella labour organizations included: [Trades NL - Building Our Province Together, and The NL Construction Association\(www.ncla.ca\)](http://www.ncla.ca).

<sup>16</sup> Training institutions included: the Association of Building Trades Educational Colleges ([www.abtec.ca](http://www.abtec.ca)), Academy Canada ([www.academycanada.com](http://www.academycanada.com)), and College of the North Atlantic ([www.cna.nl.ca](http://www.cna.nl.ca)).

<sup>17</sup> Community organizations included: Office to Advance Women Apprentices ([Office to Advance Women Apprentices \(OAWA\)](http://Office to Advance Women Apprentices (OAWA))), Stella's Circle ([www.stellascircle.ca](http://www.stellascircle.ca)), and Women in Resource Development Corporation ([www.wrdc.ca](http://www.wrdc.ca)).

<sup>18</sup> The Murphy Centre is a registered, non-profit charitable organization offering alternative options to complete a high school or equivalency diploma, as well as a range of career services ([www.murphycentre.ca](http://www.murphycentre.ca)).

- Consultations with participants to help address their individual barriers to progress in their trade and to determine how effective the project was at addressing these barriers; and
- Consultations with SOAR project staff to understand the challenges related to implementation and how they were addressed.

As indicated in the table below, SOAR staff conducted interviews and surveys with project participants and network partners during the project, while Malatest completed post-project evaluation activities.

**Figure 2.1 Summary of Evaluation Activities**

Planned activities	Intended use by partners	SOAR	Malatest
Group discussions with network partners	To gain perspectives on how SOAR could best address identified skills gaps and provide supports for early career tradespeople.	✓	
Intake surveys with participants to assess their needs and concerns	To inform the services offered through SOAR (service type and approximate service length).	✓	
Meetings and ad hoc discussions with SOAR stakeholders	To further focus and adapt the services offered through SOAR.	✓	
Surveys with participants (n=22) and network partners (n=16)	To evaluate project effectiveness and adjust delivery of activities to better serve participants and network partners. For example, adjusting service hours and methods of communicating with partners and promoting SOAR.	✓	
Follow up interviews with participants (n=2) and network partners (n=11)		✓	
Reviewed reports prepared by the Murphy Centre for FSC	To learn about the progression and outcomes of the SOAR project (including observed immediate outcomes, emerging intermediate outcomes and potential longer-term outcomes).		✓
Interviews with SOAR staff at the Murphy Centre (n=3) and one network partner	To assess the extent to which the project met its stated goals and any lessons learned (including key strengths and weaknesses that influenced outcomes).		✓
Brief literature review	To provide context and background information on the need for the SOAR project.		✓

### 2.3 Evaluation Limitations and other considerations

The results of this evaluation should be viewed in light of the following limitations.

**Delays in data collection:** Since the SOAR project did not include the potential use of a third-party evaluator in their agreements with their stakeholders, SOAR project leads were unable to share the contact information of some of their stakeholders with Malatest. As a result, SOAR staff sought permission from their stakeholders to send Malatest their contact information. This two-step process caused inefficiencies, and resulted in delays in data collection. While Malatest made efforts to collect

as much primary data as possible, few responded to the invitation to participate. Others declined to participate altogether.

**Lack of primary data:** The lack of consent agreements for third-party evaluators also meant that Malatest was unable to obtain first-hand information from project participants. Therefore, data from project participants were limited to the data collected by the Murphy Centre. Surveys administered by the Murphy Centre were on a voluntary basis and invitations were sent only to participants accessing the program during November and December of 2022 (program ran from approximately April 2020 to March 2023). Further, it is unknown how many program participants were invited to complete the survey. Given the inability to conduct a full independent review, assessing the extent to which participant outcomes were realized is limited.

Data from network partners was also limited as only one network partner agreed to be interviewed by Malatest evaluators. Where possible, network partner data obtained by the Murphy Centre were also used. However, the network partner perspectives on the outcomes achieved as a result of the SOAR project is limited.

**Lack of a comparison group:** Participants that may have been referred to the SOAR project but did not participate in or receive their services—or in other words, non-participants—were not included in the evaluation. Given the lack of this comparison group, examination of participant versus non-participant outcomes limited the ability to fully assess program outcomes.

**Lack of data on key performance indicators:** Several key performance indicators such as the number of participants that passed their apprenticeship exams after receiving support were not tracked by SOAR staff. Similarly, other intermediate outcomes such as whether program participants remained in their job for more than one year, had been promoted, or pursued further education could not be assessed as post program follow up with participants was not conducted. This limited the extent to which the effectiveness of program objectives could be determined and whether outcomes could be attributed to the SOAR program.

**Lack of generalizability.** While the information gathered from the few stakeholders that were consulted can be reported with confidence, these perspectives may not reflect those of all stakeholders. The inability to collect primary data (due to consent restrictions noted previously) also restricted the ability to generalize the findings to all stakeholders' perspectives.

**Selection bias:** Participation in data collection activities was voluntary. This may have resulted in a selection bias where those who hold particularly strong views about the topic (whether positive or negative) may have been more likely to participate in the evaluation than those who were neutral or had no opinion.

**Attributing outcomes to SOAR:** Participants had access to training and support from other service providers, their skilled trades training programs, and for union members, their unions. Therefore, the extent to which participant outcomes can be reliably attributed to the SOAR project is limited.

## 3. Evaluation Questions, Data Sources and Indicators

The evaluation questions are detailed in this section. Evaluation questions were developed to assess the SOAR project's implementation process, effectiveness, efficiency, and any causal attribution. A detailed table noting the sub-questions, indicators, data collection methods and data sources for each evaluation question noted below can be found in Appendix D.

### 3.1 Implementation (Process)

The evaluation sought to learn about how the SOAR project was implemented through the following questions:

- How did SOAR staff engage with the different stakeholders?
- What worked well? And why?
- What challenges did you encounter implementing SOAR and how were they addressed?
  - Are these challenges related to the design of the project, its implementation or environmental factors?
  - For participants who did not sign up or did not complete the project, what were their challenges?
  - For participants who completed the project, to what extent did SOAR help them overcome their challenges?
- What lessons can be drawn to be shared with others in the skills development sector?

Questions posed by the Murphy Centre to gain perspectives from project participants and network partners included:

- Why are some people in the skilled trades industry not availing of free tutoring and counselling through SOAR?
  - How can we reduce barriers so more people from the industry can make use of our services?
- Why have some of our stakeholders not been as engaged with us as we expected? How could we get them more invested?

### 3.2 Effectiveness (Outcomes)

The evaluation sought to learn about the extent to which outcomes of the SOAR intervention were achieved from the perspective of the project, its participants, and other key stakeholders through the following questions:

- How did SOAR staff, participants and partners define success for the project and what benchmarks were used to measure success?
- What percentage of participants completed the training?
  - Of those who completed the training, how many got hired?
  - How long did they keep their job?
- For participants who completed – how has this project helped them?



- How did the project impact employers?
- How did the project impact network partners?
- What did SOAR staff and partners see as the potential longer-term outcomes for participants and other stakeholders?
- How did the services support these longer-term outcomes?
- What lessons can be shared with others in the sector?

### 3.3 Efficiency:

The evaluation sought to learn about the extent to which resources were used or could have been more efficiently used to achieve the desired outcomes through the following questions:

- What worked well? And why?
- What challenges did you incur and how were they addressed?
- What were Murphy Centre's experiences in working with FSC?

While Malatest has obtained activity reports that The Murphy Centre submitted to FSC, we did not obtain financial reports. An assessment of efficiencies will be based on the documents provided and interview data and is therefore limited.

### 3.4 Causal Attribution:

To determine what, if any causal attribution can be linked to the SOAR project, Malatest looked for evidence from the following sources:

- Participant survey and interview data collected by SOAR;
- Partner survey and interview data collected by SOAR;
- Quarterly and annual project reports provided by the Murphy Centre to FSC;
- Interview with a SOAR network partner (conducted by Malatest); and
- Interviews with SOAR staff (conducted by Malatest).

## 4. Evaluation Results

This section discusses the evaluation’s findings with respect to project implementation, effectiveness in achieving project objectives, efficiency of project activities, and any causal attributions.

### Summary of evaluation results

- **Project implementation.** Low uptake early in the SOAR program resulted in a shift to how SOAR was implemented, including revising promotion strategies and ongoing engagement with local organizations to increase program awareness and enrollment.
- **Project effectiveness.** While SOAR was able to achieve immediate outcomes for some participants, the evaluation was unable to assess its intermediate and long-term outcomes.
  - **There was some misalignment between their initial objectives and the scope of the services.** Murphy broadened their inclusion criteria to those not in the trades to increase enrollment; therefore, their services were also provided to individuals that were beyond the scope of the funding they received from FSC. Although some data suggests that many participants were early career tradespeople, their exact proportion could not be confirmed. This misalignment and lack of data means that any immediate outcomes that were met—such as enhancing essential skills—were also met for some participants that were not initially targeted by the program (and therefore by FSC funding), potentially diluting any findings that support SOAR’s effectiveness.
  - **While immediate outcomes were met for participants in the trades, there was insufficient primary data and no benchmarking data to assess or infer intermediate or long-term labour market outcomes.** Some data suggests the program helped enhance soft and essential skills, and encouraged some participants choose a trade (thereby meeting immediate outcomes for some participants). However, the extent to which these supports have any intermediate or long-term outcomes for participants or for the skilled trades sector more broadly could not be determined.
  - **SOAR is beginning to demonstrate initial signs of scalability through partnership building; however, the evaluation did not find sufficient evidence to support SOAR’s expansion, adoption or investment in the near future.**
- **Efficiency.** Greater program efficiencies may have been realized if resources were realigned to better engage with and secure network partners and to develop a reliable referral source to recruit early career tradespeople. Enhanced collaboration among network partners was needed to promote best practices, to share lessons learned and to avoid duplication of efforts.
- **Causal attribution.** While the SOAR program led to the achievement of immediate outcomes for SOAR participants, the evaluation was unable to determine whether any intermediate and longer-term goals for participants and program stakeholders, along with any institutional or system level impacts could be attributed to the program.

These findings are discussed in more depth below.

## 4.1 Project Implementation

### Summary of implementation activities

Based on review of quarterly activities reporting by the Murphy team, SOAR was not implemented as originally planned as early uptake was much lower than anticipated. In response, the Murphy Centre made the following adjustments:

- Referral strategies to recruit SOAR participants were revised to reduce inefficiencies and increase awareness of SOAR;
- Tutoring services were realigned to better address participants' needs and skill gaps identified by network partners; and
- Counselling services were realigned to better address participants' needs and mental health issues.

Murphy pivoted their activities to better address the barriers to progression for early career tradespeople. These activities are discussed in further detail below.

### ***Referral strategies to recruit SOAR participants were revised to reduce inefficiencies and increase awareness of SOAR.***

Recruitment of SOAR participants relied initially on referrals from the Murphy Centre and their network of partners. The Murphy Centre had anticipated that their network would provide a reliable stream of participants; however, the project experienced low participation during the first and second quarter of the funding period. The underlying reason for low participation was the inability of network partners to engage students directly. For instance, according to SOAR staff and project partners interviewed:

- Skilled trades associations have direct contact with their member employers, but not with students, apprentices or employees. Therefore, these associations utilized an indirect referral process by relying on employers to inform their employees about the SOAR project.
- Skilled trades training colleges were restricted to providing their students with information about SOAR, as government regulations prevented them from referring students directly to the program.<sup>19</sup>

To address the issue of low enrollment and lack of recruitment support from network partners, the Murphy Centre revamped their awareness campaign to build their partner network and directly reach out to potential participants. Specifically, the Centre:

- Asked partners with a social media following to share recruitment materials;
- Contracted a marketing firm to develop posters and promotional videos. These were distributed to partners and community organizations;
- Presented information and answered questions about the program to leaders in the skilled trades industry not already involved in SOAR, to skilled trades students, and to community organizations that worked directly with youth, immigrants and marginalized individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> As indicated in Section 1.2.5, it is unclear what the government regulation is.

Collectively, these activities led to a broader awareness of SOAR, increased participant enrollment and strengthened partnerships.<sup>20</sup>

***Tutoring services were realigned to better address participants' needs and skill gaps identified by network partners.***

Murphy Centre staff noted that the intent of tutoring was to provide academic support to students including apprentices that struggled to pass exams and progress to higher levels of their apprenticeship. As indicated in the SOAR funding proposal, it was anticipated that the partner training institutions would give access to their curricula so that SOAR tutoring support could be designed to focus on specific training topics. However, the training institutions belonging to the stakeholder network were reluctant to share their curriculum due to proprietorship of their training programs and concern that material shared would be used by the Murphy Centre to develop training programs in direct competition with the network training institutions. Although SOAR staff could not access specific trades course curriculums, they were able to access the essential math skills curriculum developed by the Newfoundland and Labrador government<sup>21</sup> that outlines the key math skills required for various skilled trades.

Since the Murphy Centre was unable to obtain specific course curriculums, they consulted their network partners to understand the barriers to learning and progression in the trades. These consultations indicated the following:

- Many early career tradespeople struggled with their math skills. In response, Murphy Centre staff provided tutoring in the common math skills needed across a variety of skilled trades (including construction); and
- Many students were unable to form effective study habits to prepare for their exams which resulted in them repeatedly failing their certification exams. In response, Murphy Centre helped these students develop strategies to better prepare apprentices for their exams instead of providing support for specific training curriculum topics.

***"I needed help with mathematics and formulas that I was not given any instruction on how to apply them [in my apprentice exams]"***

***(SOAR Participant: apprentice in the plumbing trade)***

***Counselling services were realigned to better address participants' needs and mental health issues.***

Murphy Centre staff had originally envisioned that the role of the counsellor was to provide both career consultation and personal counselling. However, according to SOAR staff, the majority of individuals participating in the project had received career counselling or had been connected with a career consultant prior to their involvement with SOAR. Feedback provided from network partners and participants revealed the need for supports to help participants improve their mental health and increase their ability to succeed in training programs or their work environments. The type of counselling offered was realigned to focus exclusively on personal counselling and wellbeing by

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<sup>20</sup> Enrollment increased from a total of 19 participants by December 31, 2021, to an additional 43 participants by March 31, 2022. Network partners increased from four original partners to eight partners by project end. Source: Progress reports completed by Murphy Centre and submitted to FSC.

<sup>21</sup> Essential Skills (Related) Courses (March 2019). Newfoundland and Labrador. Retrieved from: [www.gov.nl.ca/ipgs/files/Related-Courses-Package.pdf](http://www.gov.nl.ca/ipgs/files/Related-Courses-Package.pdf).

providing strategies and skills to cope with issues associated with work-related stress, financial stress, interpersonal issues, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

## 4.2 Project Effectiveness

***The SOAR program was effective in meeting its immediate outcomes, one institutional level outcome and partially meeting its system level outcome. However, the extent to which the program met its intermediate, longer-term, and most institutional level outcomes could not be determined as metrics related to these outcomes were not collected.***

Figure 4.1 below details SOAR’s intended outcomes and the extent to which they were met. Although Murphy broadened the inclusion criteria of the SOAR program and could not confirm the number of non-trades participants, most participants were in the skilled trades based on their survey results. “High extent” indicates that outcomes were generally met, while “some extent” indicates that outcomes were partially met.

**Figure 4.1 Extent SOAR Outcomes were Met**

Outcome	Extent Outcome was Met
<b>Immediate Outcomes</b>	
Participants access the tutoring and gain basic math, improved study skills, digital skills and confidence	High extent: evidence indicates that tutoring helped some early career tradespeople improve their math and study skills
Participants access the counselling and have improved well-being and confidence	High extent: evidence indicates that personal counselling improved early career tradespeople’s confidence and mental wellbeing
High school graduates and job seekers demonstrate an understanding of what a career in the skilled trades entails and determine if they wish to pursue a career in the skilled trades	Not applicable. Most participants came to the program knowing which skilled trade they wished to pursue or were already employed in a skilled trade.
A more diverse group will seek careers within the skilled trades	High extent: 50% of participants were youth, 34% were women, 33% were persons with a disability or deaf, and 31% identified as lacking essential skills.
Participants deem the project as valuable and helpful to their growth	Some extent: question not asked; however 20 of 22 participants responding to SOAR’s survey said that SOAR met their needs <sup>22</sup>
Participants are satisfied with the support and/or training received	High extent: 22 of 22 participants responding to SOAR’s survey indicated satisfaction <sup>23</sup>
<b>Intermediate Outcomes</b>	
Participants stay at the job for more than a year	Unknown, not measured by program
Trainees pursue further education	
Apprentices pass their apprenticeship exams	
<b>Longer-Term Outcomes</b>	
Reduced barriers to finding employment	Unknown, not measured by program

<sup>22</sup> The reader is reminded that only 16% of the 136 program participants responded to the survey. In addition, not all program participants were invited to participate in the survey.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Outcome	Extent Outcome was Met
Reduced barriers to sustaining employment	
Skilled trades workers have career stability and opportunity for development	
<b>Institutional Level Outcomes</b>	
Develop a network of skilled trades and wrap-around service partnerships	High extent: evidence indicates that the program was successful in developing a network of skilled trades and service partners; however, not all partners actively referred participants to the program
Skilled trades training providers have students that are successful in required academic areas of their skilled trades program	Unknown, not measured by program
Employers specifically hire individuals that had accessed SOAR interventions	
Employers report reduced stigma and satisfaction with hires	
Employers have improved employee retention	
<b>System Level Outcomes</b>	
SOAR sought to address the barriers to progression in the trades and enhance opportunity for successful skilled trades careers to help prevent unemployment and reliance on social or employment assistance.	Some extent: SOAR addressed barriers to progression in the trades by offering tutoring and personal counselling. However, no metrics were collected to assess whether the program prevented unemployment or reliance on social or employment assistance.

The evaluation also found that the SOAR program partially met its objectives owing to the need to pivot their engagement and recruitment activities to increase enrollment. Although the project team was able to continually adapt the program to help meet the needs of participants and expand their partner organizations, this meant that the program's objectives were redefined as the project progressed. The following figure outlines the six original objective statements and their revised wording:

**Figure 4.2 SOAR Project Objectives and Revised Wording**

Original Wording	Revised Wording
To support participants in their journey toward finding a suitable skilled trades career.	To support participants throughout their career journey with the skilled trades.
To support participants currently enrolled in skilled trades programs who require tutoring services (i.e. numeracy, literacy and other skills).	No change in wording.
To support those currently employed in the skilled trades who are at risk of being terminated	To support those currently employed in the skilled trades who have employment instability.
To create a support mechanism whereby participants will be provided the necessary career and personal interventions	No change in wording.

Original Wording	Revised Wording
To create an effective network among stakeholders in the skilled trades sector aimed at the provision of appropriate training and intervention	To create an effective network among stakeholders in the skilled trades sector to allow collaboration and reduce isolation between organizations in this industry.
To reduce barriers between marginalized groups and employment in the skilled trades.	No change in wording.

The extent to which these objectives were met are discussed in the following sub-sections.

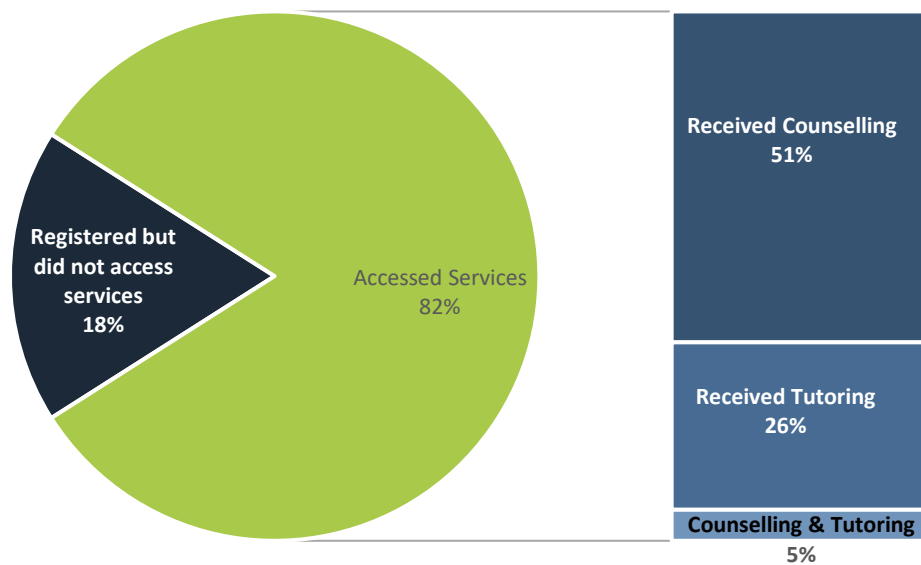
#### 4.2.1 Participant Outcomes

***While the SOAR program came close to meeting its target of 144 participants, not all participants were involved in a skilled trade.***

While a total of 166 individuals registered for the SOAR program, according to SOAR staff, 30 individuals chose not to access tutoring or counselling after determining that the type of support available through the program was not what the person was looking for. As such, the program provided tutoring and personal counselling services to 136 participants, coming close to reaching the target of 144 program participants. As indicated in Figure 4.3 below, among those accessing SOAR:

- more than half (51%) received counselling only;
- 26% received tutoring only; and
- a few (5%) received both counselling and tutoring services.

**Figure 4.3 Number of SOAR Program Participants**



Source: SOAR administrative data, n=166

While most program participants were early career tradespeople or students in skilled trades training, the SOAR program also accepted individuals seeking support to complete high school upgrading for entrance into college programs and those in non-trades programs needing math tutoring. The total number of program participants not involved in skilled trades was not provided to the evaluators; however, data from a survey conducted by SOAR staff indicated that five of the 22 respondents were not involved in a skilled trade.<sup>24</sup>

Results from this survey<sup>25</sup> suggested that SOAR participants appeared satisfied with the support they received from the program. Specifically, out of the 22 respondents that completed the survey:

- 19 reported that they were extremely satisfied with the services they received and three indicated they were somewhat satisfied;
- 14 indicated the SOAR services met their needs extremely well and six respondents said SOAR met their needs very well;
- 19 reported they were extremely likely to use SOAR services again; and
- 16 respondents reported they were extremely likely to recommend SOAR to friends, family, or colleagues.

#### 4.2.2 Objective 1 Findings: Supporting Participants in Finding Suitable Skilled Trades Careers

***Few SOAR program participants required support to find a suitable skilled trade as most came to the program having previously accessed career counselling and knew which trade they wished to pursue.***

According to the Murphy Centre's quarterly reports, the extent to which SOAR was able to support participants in choosing a suitable skilled trades career was limited since most participants had already chosen a trade or had received career counselling prior to accessing SOAR services. One lesson learned noted by SOAR staff was that more effort should have been devoted early in the project to learning about the extent to which program partners could promote SOAR to the target audience and actively recruit participants. This would have allowed the SOAR team to engage sooner with organizations that could directly refer participants to the program. Also, by engaging sooner with these organizations, the SOAR team would have realized these organizations offered career counselling and there was no need for the SOAR program to offer the same service.

By the second year of the program, the SOAR team had redefined this objective to more accurately reflect how they supported participants, namely through exam preparation and personal counselling. The redefined objective was "to support participants throughout their career journey within the skilled trades". For the smaller proportion of participants who required support to find a skilled trade, SOAR provided them with career counselling and access to career cruising software so they could explore various trades. Individuals were also connected to organizations that supported skilled trades workers, such as unions and trade-related associations to assist them in finding a suitable skilled trade.

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<sup>24</sup> Note: the extent to which this survey sample was representative of all participants that accessed SOAR could not be confirmed.

<sup>25</sup> The reader is reminded of the limitations to the data collected from the Murphy Centre including low response rate and not all program participants were invited to participate in the survey. Please see Section 2.2.2 for further details.



### 4.2.3 Objective 2 Findings: Supporting Individuals Who Required Tutoring Services

***SOAR was effective in providing tutoring for math skills commonly used in trades, helping participants develop learning plans, better study habits, set study goals, and access digital study tools. This support also increased participants' problem-solving skills and helped them to cope with exam anxiety.***

A total of 51 of the 136 individuals that accessed the SOAR program received tutoring. According to quarterly activity reports and interviews with SOAR staff, participants requiring tutoring services were supported primarily through math tutoring and exam preparation including developing better study habits. In-person and online tutoring support was offered to participants based on their preference.

Specific skills learned by SOAR participants that received tutoring services included:

- Math skills, equations, and formulas specific to an apprenticeship program;
- Developing a learning plan;
- Setting study goals;
- Developing study habits;
- How to break down exam questions;
- How to access digital platforms to use study tools such as digital flash cards;
- Problem solving; and
- Coping with exam anxiety.

SOAR program staff noted that the extent of tutoring support needed varied by participant. Some participants required support for a few weeks leading up to their apprenticeship exam or their college entrance exams. Others continued to access tutoring support for the various courses in their training program.

Results of surveys administered by the Murphy Centre indicated that SOAR participants were satisfied with the tutoring service they received. Of the 22 participants responding to the survey, 86% indicated they were extremely satisfied with the support they received from the staff at SOAR. However, it is important to note that only eight of the 22 survey participants accessed tutoring support.<sup>26</sup>

One of the strengths of the program as noted by SOAR program staff was the ability to provide one-on-one tutoring to each participant. In this way, staff could customize the program to target the specific needs of each participant. According to the program's tutor, the learning plan increased participant success as it helped participants focus on achieving specific goals and increased confidence in their ability to succeed academically.

### 4.2.4 Objective 3 Findings: Supporting Early Career Tradespeople

***SOAR struggled to effectively support early career tradespeople due to challenges in connecting with tradespeople needing mental health support and providing customized tutoring support for specific trades.***

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<sup>26</sup> As noted previously, the evaluators did not have access to SOAR program participants which further limits the extent to which participant satisfaction can be assessed (see Section 2.2.2 Data Limitations and Other Considerations for further details).

Through conversations with network partners, employers and participants, SOAR staff learned that many tradespeople experienced job instability and high levels of workplace stress. These employment challenges are especially common in the construction industry, where a greater proportion of the work is based on contracts for specific projects within a limited time frame. Workers are often subject to long hours followed by layoffs when the project has completed, and no new work is available.<sup>27</sup> Early career tradespeople are most vulnerable to such layoffs as employers will prefer to retain those at a higher apprentice level and those who have attained their trades certificates (and have therefore obtained Red Seal or journeyperson status).<sup>28</sup>

Although SOAR provided personal counselling to help participants cope with work stress, anxiety, and improve their confidence and general wellbeing, not all program participants were skilled tradespeople. Quarterly reporting indicated that the program struggled to connect with early career tradespeople who needed mental health support. Reasons for this challenge included a general reluctance within the skilled trades sector to seek support for mental health issues or encourage others to do so. This aligns with recent studies demonstrating a reluctance to address mental health in the workplace. A 2021 US study found that only 17% of construction workers felt comfortable openly discussing mental health with their supervisor and 18% were comfortable discussing mental health with a co-worker.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to workplace stress, many program participants indicated to SOAR staff that they became frustrated when they could not move beyond their current apprenticeship level because they had failed their exams. According to SOAR staff, while participants could perform the tasks required for their level of apprenticeship, they struggled with the academic side of their training. Further, repeated exam failures had discouraged some from continuing in their chosen trade.

***“Many of the participants in the SOAR program have repeatedly failed one or multiple exams and have a negative view of their ability to study for and successfully pass their exams.”***

**- SOAR Program Staff**

As noted previously in Section 2.2.3 the tutoring provided support for essential math used in the skilled trades and study skills to help prepare for exams. Further, SOAR staff partnered with SkillPlan<sup>30</sup> to access resources developed specifically for Canadian pre-apprentices and apprentices, and provided links to other free online materials and tools aligned specifically for skilled trades students and apprentices.<sup>31</sup> Students were also encouraged to bring in their course materials for customized tutoring.

Interviews with SOAR staff indicated that apprentices supported in preparing for their apprenticeship exams, included participants employed in automotive service tech, plumbing, millwright, and

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<sup>27</sup> [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB.](#)

<sup>28</sup> Jin et al., December 2020.

<sup>29</sup> *Mental Health and Well-being in the Construction Industry: 2021 PULSE SURVEY.* American Psychiatric Association Foundation Centre for Workplace Mental Health. Retrieved from: [Mental Health and Well-being \(workplacementalhealth.org\).](#)

<sup>30</sup> SkillPlan is a not-for-profit organization in B.C. that develops products and services that support “unions, training providers, government and other organizations to create workforce solutions for industry”. Retrieved from: [www.skillplan.ca/about/](http://www.skillplan.ca/about/).

<sup>31</sup> For example, the Federal government offers an online essential skills workbook for trades. Retrieved from: [www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/images/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/tools/wp-167-workbook/WP-167\\_Workbook\\_FINAL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/images/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/tools/wp-167-workbook/WP-167_Workbook_FINAL_EN.pdf).

instrumentation. SOAR staff reported that some program participants were successful in their exams, while others were not. However, the exact number of SOAR participants that passed their apprenticeship exams after receiving SOAR support is unknown as this metric was not tracked.

According to feedback collected by SOAR staff, some program participants and partner organizations suggested that SOAR could have done more to support early skilled tradespersons by providing more trades focused tutoring. They suggested having an experienced tradesperson that could provide tutoring to prepare participants for their apprenticeship exams in specific trades. SOAR staff acknowledged that the level of tutoring provided was limited to only essential trades-related math and could not focus in depth on any specific trade.

*“I think delivery of tutoring needs to be by a tradesperson who has written and passed the exams.”*

- SOAR Program Partner

#### 4.2.5 Objective 4 Findings: Supporting Individuals Who Require Career and Personal Counselling

***The counselling services provided through SOAR appear to have been effective in helping participants cope with their stress and anxiety thus improving their mental wellbeing.***

Through their engagement with network partners, SOAR staff identified the need for personal counselling as a gap in the services available to marginalized individuals and early career tradespeople. Many network partners indicated that they did not have the resources to provide counselling. While many unions offered employee assistance programs that offered counselling, not all SOAR participants were connected to a union. Network partners also noted that many of their clients had difficulty building trust in professionals and thus were less likely to seek support.

Best practices suggest that employers and organizations proactively offer services to help individuals that may be distressed but unwilling to seek help.<sup>32</sup> However, some studies note that often employee assistance programs are under-subscribed<sup>33</sup> and having a supportive environment that is non-judgemental was a key to helping employees.<sup>34</sup> According to SOAR staff, the counselling sessions provided a safe space for participants to discuss their work life, training or personal issues impacting their ability to train or perform their work.

*“We can’t ignore the impact mental health has on an individual’s ability to perform at school and work, so creating an environment where staff understands this and has resources available to provide [to] students and employees is imperative.”*

- Murphy Centre Staff

Of the 136 individuals that accessed the SOAR program, 76 received personal counselling. Participants could access counselling in person, virtually or by phone in blocks of up to ten sessions. SOAR staff

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<sup>32</sup> Wittenhagen, L., Meurk, C. (January 20, 2023). *Understanding and enhancing responses to distress in the construction industry: Preliminary findings from a nation-wide mixed methods study*. The University of Queensland and MATES in Construction, Australia. Retrieved from: [Understanding and enhancing responses to distress in the construction industry: Preliminary findings from a nation-wide mixed methods study \(mates.org.au\)](https://www.mates.org.au/understanding-and-enhancing-responses-to-distress-in-the-construction-industry-preliminary-findings-from-a-nation-wide-mixed-methods-study).

<sup>33</sup> [Mental Health and Well-being \(workplacementalhealth.org\)](https://www.workplacementalhealth.org/).

<sup>34</sup> [Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB](https://www.cio.org.au/understanding-mental-health-in-the-built-environment).

indicated they employed a variety of therapeutic approaches to the counselling including art-based, attachment, narrative, and person-centered techniques to help participants improve their mental wellbeing.

According to SOAR staff, the counselling helped participants learn how to cope with anxiety over writing exams or the concept of failure, process their feelings around being laid off, and work on developing or redefining their career goals. SOAR staff also observed that many individuals seeking personal counselling had complex issues including addictions, housing insecurity, and social anxiety that required additional counselling. These participants were placed on a waitlist that allowed them to access further sessions when spaces were available and were connected to community organizations for supplemental supports.<sup>35</sup>

Anecdotal evidence noted by SOAR staff and survey evidence suggest that many participants found value in the counselling and were satisfied with the service they received (82% were extremely satisfied with their overall SOAR experience). Some participants reported an increase in their self awareness and more confidence in their ability to cope with stressful situations. SOAR staff also received feedback from partner organizations indicating that SOAR filled a gap by offering personal counselling as these organizations did not have the resources to provide this service.

*“As participants began taking a leadership role in telling their stories and starting to grow, we received many reports of an increased sense of self, ability to manage difficult situations (including stress and conflict), and an overall feeling of satisfaction with themselves and their lives, from participants themselves and stakeholders who referred them.”*

- Murphy Centre Staff

#### 4.2.6 Objective 5 Findings: Creating a Network of Skilled Trades Sector Partners

***Although the SOAR program created and maintained a network of skilled trades sector partners for the duration of the program, the extent to which these partners could support SOAR by promoting and referring individuals to the program was limited. Renewed engagement efforts proved effective in broadening the partner network and increasing program participation.***

Although the SOAR program was effective in developing a network of partners, not all partners were fully supportive of SOAR, or active in referring participants to the program. The greatest challenges for the SOAR program, as noted by SOAR staff and stakeholders, centered on the development of network partners needed to support the program. Early quarterly reports indicated that the original group of five partners were closely involved in the skilled trades sector and were in favour of initiatives that could support early skilled tradespeople; however, the extent to which they were able to promote SOAR and act as a referral source were limited.

SOAR staff acknowledged that it took longer than anticipated to develop a network of partners that would promote the program and refer enough individuals to make the program viable. They realized that more time was needed to develop the partner network, more thoroughly understand how each partner could support SOAR, and clarify the message presented to potential partners.

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<sup>35</sup> This could include organizations such as the John Howard society to discuss criminal records, Choices for Youth, to look at housing options, or Thrive to get connected with literacy programs.

Figure 4.4 below details the reasons for limited referrals by early network partners and the strategies taken by SOAR to address these issues:

**Figure 4.4 Network Partner Challenges and Strategies to Address Challenges**

Challenge	Strategy Implemented to Address Challenge
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the skilled trades sector, including skilled trades related associations, unions, employers, and training institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations had fewer resources to dedicate to promoting the SOAR program;</li> <li>• Communication with these organization challenging as emails and phone calls were not promptly returned;</li> <li>• Training institutions had to restrict the number of courses they could offer in-person, and the number of students permitted in each course. As a result, fewer trades students were exposed to information about SOAR.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held round table discussions with network partners, employers, and government representatives to promote SOAR.</li> <li>• Customized their communication strategy (e.g. personalized email communication, in-person meetings, regular check-ins to update progress on SOAR).</li> </ul>
<p>Communication gaps negatively impacted stakeholder collaboration with SOAR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turnover within partner organizations meant that SOAR staff were frequently engaging with new individuals to explain the SOAR program and how their organization could provide support.</li> <li>• Some network partners did not clearly understand the intent of SOAR and their role as partners in the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOAR staff met with each network partner individually to explain the purpose of the program and services offered, and to better understand how the organization could support SOAR.</li> </ul>
<p>Skilled trades organizations and training institutions could not directly refer participants to SOAR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skilled trades organizations relied on their employer members to pass information about SOAR to their employees;</li> <li>• Government legislation prevents training institutions from actively referring students to support programs. While these institutions could make the information about SOAR available to their students, the students must seek such support on their own.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised their recruitment campaign to target organizations that worked directly with the early career tradespeople, youth, women, and other marginalized populations;</li> <li>• Hired a marketing firm to create and distribute promotional videos and posters;</li> <li>• Attended career fairs and gave presentations about SOAR directly to potential participants (e.g. at training centres and community organizations);</li> </ul>
<p>The extent to which SOAR was enthusiastically promoted varied among and within network partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a culture of stigmatism prevalent in the skilled trades sector towards those in need of support and dissuades workers from seeking help.</li> <li>• Despite being closely involved in the skilled trades, each organization had unique objectives, mandates, and functioned differently (i.e. unions, non-profits, public colleges, private training colleges). This challenged the development of a common understanding of the SOAR program among the partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired a marketing firm to create and distribute promotional videos and posters;</li> <li>• Attended career fairs and gave presentations about SOAR directly to potential participants (e.g. at training centres and community organizations);</li> </ul>

These strategies resulted in the addition of new partners that actively promoted SOAR and became a dedicated referral source. Feedback from the stakeholder survey in late 2022 indicated that the majority of stakeholders, especially community organizations, found SOAR to be relevant and that it filled a service gap. By the end of the second year of the program, SOAR staff reported that most of their referrals came from two network partners: Stella’s Circle (that served youth and marginalized individuals) and the provincial apprenticeship board (that included a question on the follow up form for

those failing their exam asking if they required support. Those indicating ‘yes’ were referred to SOAR). While these referrals increased enrolment into the program, SOAR also began accepting individuals who were not tradespeople (such as students writing college entrance exams for non-trades programs).

#### 4.2.7 Objective 6 Findings: Reducing Barriers for Marginalized Groups Seeking Employment in Skilled Trades

***The SOAR program was effective in helping to reduce barriers for marginalized groups employed or seeking employment in the skilled trades through targeted engagement with community organizations specializing in services for marginalized populations which led to increased referrals to SOAR.***

According to the Murphy Centre’s quarterly activity reports, the SOAR program supported many participants that identified as belonging to a marginalized population group. As shown in Figure 4.5 below, half of SOAR participants were youth, 34% were women, 33% were persons with a disability or deaf, and 31% identified as lacking essential skills, (Figure 4.4). While it is likely that some participants identified with more than one group (such as youth that had a disability), the exact numbers of these individuals could not be confirmed by the Murphy Centre staff.

**Figure 4.5 Participants Identifying as Belonging to a Marginalized Group**

Marginalized Group	Year 1 Apr 1’21 – Mar 31’22 (n=62)		Year 2 Apr 1’22 – Mar 31’23 (n=124)		Full Program (n=186)**	
	#	%*	#	%*	#	%*
Youth aged 15-29	38	61%	55	44%	93	50%
Women	21	34%	42	34%	63	34%
Disability including deaf persons	15	24%	47	38%	62	33%
People with essential skills gaps	7	11%	50	40%	57	31%
Older adults (65+ years)	3	5%	11	9%	14	8%
LGBTQ2S+	3	5%	9	7%	12	6%
Rural, remote, northern communities	2	3%	10	8%	12	6%
Racialized person	2	3%	5	4%	7	4%
No post-secondary education	--	0%	6	5%	6	3%
Newcomers & refugees	4	6%	2	2%	6	3%
Immigrants	3	5%	3	2%	6	3%
Indigenous	--	0%	2	2%	2	1%
# of individuals participants (may included in more than one group)	62		124		186	

\*totals add up to <100% as participants may belong to more than one group. \*\*Total = 186 Assumptions – includes those who did not complete program (n=30) and those who accessed SOAR more than once (n=20); excludes 3 participants after end of program timeline (Mar 31).

By shifting their focus from those specifically in the skilled trades, SOAR was able to broaden their reach to include more marginalized populations. Quarterly reports submitted by Murphy Centre staff indicated that SOAR staff attempted to reduce marginalized groups’ barriers to employment in the skilled trades by collaborating with community support organizations that were connected to youth, women, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. Engagement activities included email and phone

communications, and in-person presentations to further explain the SOAR program and recruit participants. Specifically, SOAR staff reached out to the following:

- Youth organizations: Waypoints, Key Assets, Choices for Youth, YMCA, Skills Canada, Stella's Circle, and the Community Sector Council;
- Women's organizations: Office to Advance Women Apprentices and Women in Resource Development Corporation;
- Immigrant organizations: Stella's Circle and Association for New Canadians;
- Organizations supporting the disabled: Empower and ABC life literacy; and
- Skilled trades organizations, trades fairs, and trades college campuses and located in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOAR staff acknowledged that although most aspects of the program were made available virtually to provide participants in rural areas of the province access to the program, uptake from this demographic was low. Staff suggested that more robust and targeted marketing of the program to this demographic could have increased enrollment of rural participants.

Evidence from surveys and interviews<sup>36</sup> with network partners working with marginalized individuals suggest there was satisfaction with SOAR services. These network partners indicated that the SOAR services complimented their services and were considered as a valuable free resource to their clients that had experience in the skilled trades or an interest in attending skilled trades training. SOAR staff indicated that most individuals referred by these organizations remained connected to that organization while participating in SOAR.

### 4.3 Efficiency

As noted previously, the evaluator did not have access to SOAR program financial data or reports. As such, the assessment of efficiencies for the SOAR program were based on activity reports submitted by the Murphy Centre and interview data collected by the evaluator.

***Findings suggest that there were opportunities for improving the efficiency of the SOAR program by:***

- ***Increasing engagement with network partners prior to program delivery;***
- ***Dedicating more resources to increase program awareness and develop reliable referral sources; and***
- ***Enhancing collaboration among network partners to promote sharing of best practices and avoid duplication of efforts.***

***There were opportunities to improve the efficiency of the SOAR program by increasing engagement with network partners prior to program delivery.***

Findings suggest that SOAR staff needed a better understanding of early network partners' capacity to support the program. Once the program had been implemented, SOAR staff realized that not all network partners were able to actively promote the program and directly refer candidates to SOAR. Trades associations passed on information to their membership of employers, who then informed their employees. While training colleges made information about SOAR available to their students, they

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<sup>36</sup> Surveys and interviews were conducted by SOAR staff.

were restricted from directly referring them to the program.<sup>37</sup> The expectations around promoting and referring candidates to SOAR could have been better communicated with network partners prior to delivering services. SOAR staff could have better understood their partner's limitations and developed strategies to ensure that they were reaching their targeted potential participants.

***Dedicating more resources to increasing awareness of SOAR and developing reliable referral sources to recruit early career tradespeople could have improved program efficiency.***

Quarterly program reporting revealed that efforts to reach out to trades associations and training institutions did not result in increased referrals to the SOAR program. Interviews with Murphy Centre staff found that in hindsight, SOAR should have allocated more of the resources they had to promoting awareness of SOAR among early career tradespeople (such as more direct, in person presentations to workers and students about what SOAR offered). This would have improved the efficiency of the program to support students and workers struggling in the skilled trades fields. Although the program was able to increase enrollment over the duration of the program, many participants were not involved in a skilled trade.

***Enhancing collaboration among network partners to promote sharing of best practices and lessons learned, and to avoid duplication of effort enhanced program efficiency.***

Although SOAR staff held a roundtable early in the project to engage with network partners and the community<sup>38</sup> to discuss skilled trades worker needs, available supports and gaps in supports, there was no evidence that these roundtables continued throughout the project. Quarterly reporting indicated that knowledge mobilization activities during the second year of the program consisted mainly of one-on-one collaborations to promote SOAR and encourage participant registration. Results of a survey conducted by SOAR in late 2022 revealed that stakeholders identified communication issues as a barrier to working with SOAR. Some stakeholders responding to the survey described a disconnect with the project due to poor communication from SOAR, lack of updates or data sharing around referrals to the program, and limited knowledge sharing about the SOAR program. Although recommendations stemming from these survey results included hosting more roundtables and networking events, it appears these recommendations came too late in the project as none were implemented.

#### 4.4 Causal Attribution

***While the SOAR program led to the achievement of immediate outcomes for SOAR participants, there was limited evidence to determine whether anticipated intermediate and longer-term goals for participants, institutional or system level impacts could be attributed to the program.***

Challenges to determining causal attribution included:

- **Lack of counterfactual data.** The lack of this data meant that there was no baseline measurements or control group; therefore, the evaluators were unable to compare the impact of SOAR against what might have happened in the absence of the program;

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<sup>37</sup> The reader is reminded that interviewed respondents indicated that government regulations directly prohibited training colleges and instructors from directly referring students for programs such as SOAR.

<sup>38</sup> Quarterly reporting indicated that a roundtable held in June 2021 included skilled trades workers, employers, leaders at training colleges, community support organizations and apprenticeship board employees.



- Limited data collection meant that anticipated outcomes for SOAR could not be fully assessed or attributed to the program. Challenges with data collection included:
  - **Incomplete employment data.** For example, no data were collected on the number of participants that passed their apprenticeship exams, that obtained employment or were promoted because of their participation in SOAR;
  - **Low response rates (survey and interviews).** A one-time data collection activity (survey or interview) by Murphy Centre staff yielded low response rates and the opportunity to participate in the survey or an interview was not offered to all participants and network partners; therefore, measures such as levels of satisfaction may have been biased and not representative of the opinions of all participants. Additionally, the evaluator's request for interviews with network partners resulted in only one program partner interview, and therefore limited the extent to which the perspectives of network partners could be assessed;
  - **No follow-ups.** Post-program follow-up of participants was not completed; therefore, assessment of intermediate and longer term outcomes was limited;
  - **Lack of primary data from participants.** Evaluators could not directly contact program participants for data collection which limited the extent to which participant outcomes could be assessed; and
- There is evidence of other programs that could have contributed to the achievement of intermediate and longer-term goals:
  - **Other similar services were being accessed by participants.** Program participants had access to services and wrap around supports provided by network partners including training institutions, unions, and community organizations.

The evaluation determined that the program had a direct impact that resulted in the following immediate outcomes for some participants:<sup>39</sup>

- Participants accessed tutoring and gained basic math, improved study skills, digital skills, and confidence;
- Participants accessed counselling and had improved well-being and confidence; and

The evaluation also found that the program may have contributed to the following outcomes:

- **A more diverse group will seek careers within the skilled trades:** Due to the program expanding its reach, a diverse group of individuals such as women, newcomers, and persons with disabilities may have sought careers within the skilled trades.
- **Tradespeople pass their skilled trades training or apprenticeship exams:** Anecdotal evidence that some passed their training and exams, however, anecdotal evidence also indicated that some SOAR participants were unsuccessful;
- **Early career tradespeople pursue further education:** many SOAR participants were in training programs when accessing SOAR and it is plausible that many continued with their programs;

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<sup>39</sup> As metrics were not tracked for each participant, evidence was sourced through written reports and limited data collection administered by Murphy Centre staff.

- **Long term network of skilled trades and wrap-around service partnerships:** Written reports by SOAR staff indicated that the program struggled to develop a network of partners to promote the program and act as referral sources. Survey evidence suggested that some network partners found SOAR to be of value to their organization; however, no evidence was found to support that these partnerships have continued; and
- **Employers specifically hire from this community:** While it is unknown how many SOAR participants were hired as a result of SOAR, evidence shows that some (i.e. registered apprentices) were employed prior to their participation in SOAR.

While it is plausible that the SOAR program could lead to longer term outcomes, the evaluation could not find evidence to confidently link the program to the following outcomes:

- Employers committed to hiring SOAR trained youth;
- Reduced barriers to finding employment;
- Reduced barriers to sustaining employment;
- Early career tradespeople complete their training and apprenticeships; and
- Early career tradespeople have career stability and opportunity for development.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

**Summary:** The SOAR project is a good example of a program that is early in its journey towards expansion, adoption, investment and partnership. FSC's support enabled the Murphy Centre to deliver tutoring and counselling services to early career tradespeople in the St. John's area of Newfoundland and Labrador. While the evaluation resulted in lessons learned for organizations to enhance service delivery and the development of partner networks, it also resulted in implications for FSC and other funders to determine where to allocate funding for similar projects to enhance their scalability in the future.

### 5.1 Lessons for Service Delivery

Results from the SOAR program highlight several implications for service delivery including:

- Targeting campaigns to secure partners and recruit early career tradespeople;
- Hiring tutors with trades knowledge;
- Providing access to counselling in a safe environment; and
- Tracking program outcomes.

These implications are discussed below.

#### 5.1.1 Implications for Participant Recruitment

The evaluation found that although the SOAR program struggled to recruit participants early in the program, a revised recruitment strategy to directly connect with early career tradespeople and organizations serving marginalized groups led to increased referrals to SOAR. Program staff learned that greater effort was needed to develop a network of partners that could promote the project and encourage early career tradespeople to participate. While SOAR's network partners included trades associations and institutions that offered training in various skilled trades, not all partners could directly refer early tradespeople to the program. SOAR developed a more targeted messaging campaign to explain what the program offered, who the program was intended to support, and how potential partners could promote and otherwise support the program. By attending career fairs and presenting information about SOAR in person to potential participants and local organizations, they were able to increase program enrollment.

#### 5.1.2 Implications for Tutoring

Evidence suggests that the tutoring provided by SOAR increased participants' math and study skills. However, some participants and network partners noted that more trade specific tutoring could have enhanced skill development among early career tradespeople. Studies indicate that linking theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios can help apprenticeships better prepare for their exams.<sup>40</sup> Having a tutor that has experience in the skilled trades and has been through the apprenticeship process can offer valuable knowledge to early career tradespeople that general counselors and tutors may not be able to provide.

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<sup>40</sup> Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. *2021 National Best Practices Forum Summary*. Retrieved from: [www.caf-fca.org/](http://www.caf-fca.org/).

### 5.1.3 Implications for Counselling

While counselling increased participants' confidence and well-being, studies show that early career tradespeople may be unwilling to seek help.<sup>41</sup> These studies suggest encouraging trades associations to proactively offer support services and provide a safe space for workers to discuss their work life, training or personal issues affecting their ability to train or perform their work. Spaces such as those offered by the SOAR program allowed participants the opportunity to discuss their issues without the fear of possible repercussions from supervisors or colleagues.

### 5.1.4 Implications for Program Outcomes

To assess the extent to which the SOAR program was meeting the needs of participants and stakeholders, staff conducted surveys and interviews during the end of the second year of the program. While the results provided feedback on how the program was supporting its participants and suggested areas for improvement, it came too late in the program for any changes to be effectively implemented. In addition, no tracking of key metrics and no post-program follow up were conducted with program participants. The lack of benchmarking data and post-program follow-up made it difficult to assess the full extent to which program outcomes had been met, especially as no third-party agreements were in place to facilitate program evaluation. Better planning for evaluation activities throughout the program and the tracking of key program metrics would have allowed for earlier assessment and implementation of changes to improve program delivery and assess how outcomes were being met.

Should a project like SOAR be implemented in the future, FSC may wish to consider encourage them to do the following to enhance their service delivery and meet their objectives:

- **Enhance data collection.** Conduct preliminary research with target audience prior to program launch to develop an understanding of any issues that could pose as challenges to the program (such as what is preventing them from progressing and what additional supports are needed). Imbed tracking of key metrics and evaluation activities in the program design to occur throughout program implementation and post program (ideally involving third party evaluators). Design privacy agreements to include ability for third party evaluators to contact individuals for the purpose of evaluating the program
- **Strengthen partnership building before program implementation.** Ensure enough funding is allocated towards stakeholder engagement. Engage potential partners to better understand how they could help promote the program, act as referral sources, or otherwise support the program. Do not assume that program partners will actively promote the program or be a reliable referral source.
- **Develop a targeted messaging campaign through partnership buy-in.** To effectively promote the program directly to the intended target audience, develop a targeted messaging campaign and ensure alignment with partners. Clearly explain what the program is offering, who the program is intended to support, and how potential partners can promote and otherwise support the program.

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<sup>41</sup> See for example: [Understanding and enhancing responses to distress in the construction industry: Preliminary findings from a nation-wide mixed methods study \(mates.org.au\)](#).  
[Mental Health and Well-being \(workplacementalhealth.org\)](#).  
[Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB](#).

- **Hire tutors that have industry knowledge and experience.** Consider hiring tutors with trade-specific knowledge and experience. Additionally, leverage partnerships with trades associations to connect early career trades people with mentors that work in the trades, and to proactively offer services to help individuals that may be distressed but unwilling to seek help.

## 5.2 Expansion

**If programs similar to SOAR can demonstrate positive outcomes for early career tradespeople and for employers, potential exists for expansion in other areas of the province and across Canada.** While the SOAR program mainly served individuals in the St John's region, there is evidence to suggest that the program had the potential to expand into other areas of the province. Quarterly reports noted that some individuals in rural parts of the province accessed the SOAR program remotely. The SOAR program also connected virtually with program participants when COVID-19 restricted in person activities. Virtual communication could facilitate access to one-on-one counselling and tutoring for those in rural or remote areas across Canada providing these areas have reliable connectivity.

Another consideration for the expansion of programs such as SOAR is to ensure there is a thorough understanding of the needs of early career tradespeople in specific regions, what services exist to fill these needs and how programs like SOAR could fill the gaps. While the Murphy Centre had identified the need for early career tradespeople to be supported in obtaining their required certifications and to deal with work-related stress, they were not aware of the extent to which their partner network could actively promote the program and recruit program participants. They were also not aware that participants had access to career counselling from other local organizations. These learning were made once the program had been implemented and the program's activities were realigned to better recruit and serve participants. More effort to understand these issues prior to program launch would have resulted in more early career tradespeople accessing the program and a focus on personal counselling from the start.

Should a project like SOAR be expanded to other regions of the province or to other provinces, the following should be considered:

- Explore the potential of technological integration or adoption. Any use of technology in an organization (such as virtual learning, meetings and networking platforms) should be considered when expanding. For instance, the accessibility and adoption of SOAR's tutoring and counselling services online warrants further study;
- Partner with (or at least engage) employers that hire program graduates to ensure the essential and technical skills being taught are relevant to their industry, and to help determine graduates' employability post-program;
- Conduct preliminary research to develop an understanding of any issues that could pose as challenges to the program (such as what is preventing early career tradespeople from progressing, what additional supports are needed) and how local organizations could help promote the program, act as referral sources, or otherwise support the program; and
- Ensure that the program has earned the support of skilled trades organizations and training institutions prior to promoting and recruiting skilled tradespeople. This level of support would help facilitate expansion.

### 5.3 Adoption

**Services such as tutoring and personal counselling can be adopted as wrap around supports to supplement other services offered by community organizations supporting early career tradespeople.** As mentioned previously, studies<sup>42</sup> show there is a need for services such as tutoring to improve skills and enhance an individuals' ability to secure meaningful employment. Likewise, many studies<sup>43</sup> have called for increased access to mental health services for early career tradespeople, especially for marginalized populations. In addition, community partners participating in the SOAR program indicated that the tutoring and counselling services were of value to their clients as they filled a gap not supplied by services they could offer. Although services such as tutoring and personal counselling are widely available, they are not always for free. The extent to which such services could be provided for free by community organizations relies entirely on the amount of funding an organization receives and whether they have secured or can secure resources to implement these services.

Should elements of the SOAR program be adopted by other organizations, the following should be considered:

- Conduct preliminary research to develop an understanding of any issues that could pose as challenges to adopting elements of the program (e.g. what is preventing early career tradespeople from progressing, what additional supports are needed);
- Invest in human resources and capacity building within the organization (for example, hiring tutors with trade-specific knowledge, enable staff to acquire skills to deliver personal counselling); and
- Secure funding from multiple sources, such as different levels of government and the private sector to enable tutoring and personal counselling services.

### 5.4 Investment and Partnership

**Program buy-in from industry stakeholders, employers and organizations serving early career tradespeople can enhance program adoption, expansion, and viability, and therefore make similar programs attractive to investors.** Given the challenges the SOAR program encountered in developing a partnership network, the program highlighted the need for developing strategies to effectively raise program awareness and secure appropriate partnerships. Research conducted by SOAR revealed that there was no common understanding of the SOAR program among the partners and some partners were unsure of their role in supporting the program. By revising their communication strategies and refocusing promotion of the program directly to their target audience, SOAR was able to increase their partner network and participation in the program.

The project also highlighted the need for greater collaboration among skilled trades organizations to address the barriers to progression in the skilled trades sector more effectively. Studies in Canada and globally stress the need for unions, employers, training institutions, and community organizations to work together and be more responsive by supporting early career tradespeople and promoting

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<sup>42</sup> For example: Jin et al., December 2020.

<sup>43</sup> For example: Understanding Mental Health in the Built Environment | CIOB; Mental Health and Apprenticeship (clac.ca); Mental Health and Well-being (workplacementalhealth.org).

apprentice wellbeing.<sup>44</sup> Without ongoing support to similar organizations and partnerships, early career tradespeople may not receive the supports needed to propel them towards certification and help fill labour market gaps.

Strategically dedicating resources to increase program awareness and buy-in can help secure funding from multiple sources and enhance financial sustainability. Murphy Centre staff acknowledged that more resources should have been allocated towards increasing awareness of SOAR. Increased engagement with existing and new partners would have had the potential to enhance program efficiencies, and to attract other funding. Finally, similar programs would become more attractive to investors after demonstrating their capacity to collect benchmarking data and to track success metrics.

## 5.5 Broader Implications for FSC and Future Projects

The evaluation also revealed some broader implications should projects similar to SOAR be considered moving forward.

Projects should be encouraged to better plan the tracking and collecting of metrics to determine program outcomes and support the ability to collect benchmarking data, including:

- **Detailed plan for identifying and tracking metrics pre, post and during program:** Collecting data on outcome indicators pre-program, immediately following the program, and where possible 3 to 6 months or more post-program establishes a base line to compare results over time and better assess ultimate program goals;
- **Design of third-party agreements to allow for program evaluation:** Given that third-party evaluators were not included in privacy agreements, project partners were unable to send sampling frames to Malatest. This barrier resulted in an indirect consent process which resulted in a low response from request to participate in the evaluation and limited the extent to which the achievement of program outcomes could be assessed. Adding a statement to application forms to stipulate that all applicants for a program including those that try to access but do not receive services (in other words, non-participants) may be contacted by third-party evaluators for research purposes will help to gather counterfactual data and establish any causal attribution of outcomes to the program; and
- **Involvement of evaluators or planned evaluation activities throughout program:** Involving evaluators early in the development of a program or project would help to ensure that useful benchmarking or baseline data and success metrics are being captured early during a project's inception. It is also important to ensure that evaluators are consulted to help projects develop a robust evaluation strategy that clearly defines the processes for participant consent, program referral, eligibility, tracking data metrics, and data collection and monitoring including at post-program follow-up.

The evaluation shed light on areas for further investigation. For instance, studies show the need for encouraging early career tradespeople to complete their apprenticeship. Consideration should be given to what other programs or resources are needed or can be leveraged to support apprentices that are at risk of exiting the trades. Studies also show there is a reluctance to seek mental health support in the construction industry. Consideration should be given to what other programs or resources can be

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<sup>44</sup> CAF-FCA, Apprentice Well-Being: An Apprentices in Canada ePanel Report, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2020); Jin et al., December 2020; [Understanding and enhancing responses to distress in the construction industry: Preliminary findings from a nation-wide mixed methods study \(mates.org.au\)](#).

leveraged to provide wraparound support to early career tradespeople to encourage retention in their trade.





## Appendix A: Data Collection Instruments

### Murphy Centre - Skills, Explore, Achieve, Revive (SOAR) project

The SOAR project is funded in part by the Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates, an external and independent research firm, to conduct this study in collaboration with the Murphy Centre. We are looking to understand the how project has provided value to trade sector employers and participants. We will use the findings from this review to generate knowledge and learning about the strengths, challenges and outcomes of the SOAR project to direct the Murphy Centre’s future work and other projects like it.

The main objectives of this project are to shed light on:

- How SOAR supported participants with math tutoring; and
- How SOAR engaged with participants with counseling.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses will remain anonymous. Your choice to participate will have no impact on your relationship with the Murphy Centre.

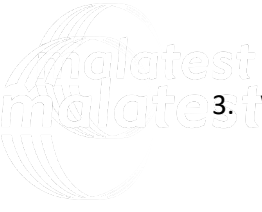
The interview will take approximately 45-60 depending on your answers.

<p><b>Confidentiality and Anonymity:</b></p>	<p>No one other than Malatest researchers will have access to any <u>identifying information</u> from this interview. Your responses to interview questions will be <u>anonymized</u> (that is, reported without your name or any identifying information attached). In some cases, we may use direct quotes that exemplify a trend among interviewees’ responses; in this case, we will make sure that the quote does not contain any information that could be used to identify you. All identifying data will be destroyed by Malatest when the report provided to FSC is finalized. More information on our privacy policy can be found on our website at <a href="http://www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm">http://www.malatest.com/Privacy.htm</a></p>
<p><b>Informed Consent:</b></p>	<p>Please keep in mind that your participation is <u>voluntary</u>, and you may end participation at any time. You can also skip any question that you do not want to answer, or feel is not applicable to you. With your permission, we hope to audio record this interview, for <u>Malatest’s</u> note-taking and <u>quality assurance purposes only</u>. This recording will be destroyed once the interview notes have been verified and completed. Do I have your <u>permission to audio record</u> the interview?</p>
<p><b>Questions:</b></p>	<p>If you have any questions about this interview or this project, please feel free to contact Neha Khullar, Assistant Research Manager, R.A. Malatest &amp; Associates Ltd., at 1.888.689.1847 ext. 116 or via email at <a href="mailto:n.khullar@malatest.com">n.khullar@malatest.com</a>.</p>

#### A. Background information (5 mins)


1. Can you tell me about your role in SOAR project? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
2. Can you tell me about your organization and how it supports the SOAR project? (*SUPPORT PARTNER*)  
Can you tell me about your role in your organization? (*SUPPORT PARTNER*)

#### B. SOAR training (20 mins)

- 
3. What were the strengths of the project? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
    - a. What support services were needed to deliver the project? (*LEAD PARTNER*)
    - b. How did they help you deliver your services? (*LEAD PARTNER*)
    - c. How did Murphy Centre address mental health issues? (*LEAD PARTNER*)
  4. What were the weaknesses of the project? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
  5. What were the challenges faced by the project? How did you mitigate these? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
    - a. Foreseen challenges
    - b. Unforeseen challenges
    - c. Challenges with online training?
    - d. Its impact compared to offline training.
  6. What would you do differently next time? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
  7. What would you recommend to other organisations based on your learnings in this project? (*LEAD PARTNER*)

**C. The individuals you trained (20 mins)**

8. How were SOAR participants different compared to people you train? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
  - a. How did tutoring help their performance?
  - b. What skills they did acquire?
  - c. What were their strengths?
  - d. What were their weaknesses?
  - e. What were their challenges?
  - f. What does their career progression look like?
9. How many individuals did you train through SOAR project? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)
  - a. What percentage of student took either tutoring services or counselling and how many took both? (*LEAD PARTNER*)  
How many participants did you support through SOAR project? What kinds of support did they need? (*SUPPORT PARTNER*)
  - b. What does it take at an individual level to successfully complete this project? (*LEAD PARTNER*)
10. Of those who completed the training, how many got hired? (*LEAD PARTNER*)
  - a. What does profile of a successful candidate look like?
  - b. Where do they work now?
  - c. What were their starting salaries?
  - d. How long did they keep their job?
  - e. Where do they live now?
11. What was your perception of training at risk/ complex social history participants? Has it changed after working with SOAR participants? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)



12. What would you do differently next time? (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)

13. What would you like to share with others in your sector? (*LEAD PARTNER*)

**D. Your experiences with FSC (20 mins) (*LEAD PARTNER*)**

14. How did you hear about the Shock-proofing the future of work grant project by FSC?

15. How was the information for application and approval conveyed?

16. What were FSC's strengths?

17. What were the challenges in working with FSC? What could they do differently next time?

18. What kinds of supports did FSC offer?

- a. How satisfied are you with FSC and the support it is providing organizations? Would you apply again?

**E. Wrap up (5 min) (*LEAD AND SUPPORT PARTNER*)**

19. Do you have any recommendations to enhance FSC support services for organizations like yourself?

20. Do you have anything else to add, or any questions for me?

**Thank you for your time!**



## Appendix B: Communication Materials

Email Invitation for Community Partners

**Subject:** Interview invitation: Murphy Centre’s “Skills, Explore, Achieve, Revive (SOAR)” project

Dear [name],

**We’d like to learn about how SOAR is supporting individuals to enter the trades and partnering with community organizations.**

Future Skills Centre (FSC) has contracted R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, an external and independent research firm, to understand the how Murphy Centre’s “Skills, Explore, Achieve, Revive (SOAR)” project has provided value to trade sector employers and new apprentices. FSC aims to use the findings from this study to generate knowledge and learning for FSC and their funded organizations.

The main objectives of this project are to shed light on:

1. How SOAR supported individuals with tutoring services; and
2. How SOAR supported individuals with counselling services

We are interviewing community organizations such as yourself, to gather insight to inform our analysis. The interview is expected to take approximately 45 to 60 minutes depending on your answers.

**All SOAR community partners are eligible to participate in an interview.**

Here are a couple of possible days and times for the interview with one of our researchers. If neither of these work for you please feel free to suggest a different day/time:

- DDDD, MMMM DD, YYYY
- DDDD, MMMM DD, YYYY

For your reference, we have attached a document with the questions that will guide the discussion, including details regarding privacy and anonymity.

We appreciate all the support you provide to this research. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

## Appendix C: SOAR Program Logic Model

**VISION:** To provide personalised educational and support services to help high risk youth find trade jobs and not depend on welfare projects

Inputs  
Networks, Human & financial

### Activities in 2021 and 2022

- Develop flexible delivery model for SOAR
- Develop SOAR curriculum
- Hire an educator and counsellor
- Train new hires in industry standards
- Engage government for knowledge and support
- Engage with marginalized groups
- Engage with trades related organizations

### Outputs in 2021 and 2022

- Identify current gaps in participant learning and commitment
- Printed materials and online resources to allow participants to explore career options
- Counselor on staff to provide career and personal planning
- Tutor on staff to provide support for studying and trades related math skills
- Partnerships with trades and community organizations

### Immediate Outcomes

- Partner organizations refer individuals to SOAR program
- Participants access tutoring and gain basic math, improved study skills, digital skills and confidence
- Participants access counselling and have improved wellbeing and confidence
- A more diverse group will seek careers within the skilled trades
- Participants deem the project as valuable and helpful to their growth
- Participants are satisfied with the support and/or training received

### Intermediate Outcomes

- Tradespeople pass their skilled trades training/ apprenticeship exams
- Early career tradespeople pursue further education
- Long term network of skilled trades and wrap-around service partnerships
- Employers specifically hire from this community

### Ultimate Outcomes

- Employers committed to hiring SOAR trained youth
- Reduced barriers to finding employment
- Reduced barriers to sustaining employment
- Early career tradespeople complete their training and apprenticeships
- Early career tradespeople have career stability and opportunity for development

**REACH:** High school students, youth and trade workers, trade networks and employers in Newfoundland and Labrador

**BARRIERS:** COVID-19 restrictions, decrease in quality of mental health and an increase in suicidal ideation in the skilled trades

## Appendix D: Evaluation Matrix

Table 3 below details the sub-questions, indicators, data collection methods and data sources<sup>45</sup> for each evaluation question noted in Section 2 of this report:

**Table 1. SOAR Evaluation Question Matrix, Indicators, Data Collection Methods and Data Sources**

Evaluation Question	Indicators	Methods	Data Sources
<b>Implementation (Process)</b> What did we learn about how the program is being implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of employer partnerships, description of trade jobs per employer, sector partnerships (public, private, not-for-profit, academic, employers)</li> <li>• # of outreach activities to develop partner network and promote project</li> <li>• #Wraparound services needed</li> <li>• #Mental health services</li> <li>• # training components; online and in person</li> <li>• Identified skills gaps</li> <li>• Staff reports of project adaptation</li> <li>• Changes in stakeholder’ needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document and literature review</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs assessment reports, where applicable and available</li> <li>• Industry benchmark reports, where applicable and available</li> <li>• Prior evaluation reports</li> <li>• Stakeholder and Lead partner interviews</li> <li>• Quarterly and annual reports to FSC</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness (Outcomes):</b> What did we learn about the outcomes of the intervention? After what time period?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of participants; completers and non-completers; of total completing, portion accessing tutoring, counselling or both</li> <li>• % of participants indicating they gained math skills, improved literacy, teamwork skills, and improved self-worth, confidence, and accountability</li> <li>• % Under-represented groups represented</li> <li>• Participant satisfaction with the support or training received</li> <li>• # of organizations engaged in network</li> <li>• Stakeholders perceived relevance of SOAR in meeting their needs</li> <li>• Stakeholder satisfaction with network</li> <li>• Staff perceptions of project delivery successes and challenges</li> <li>• Stakeholder perceptions of project effectiveness and barriers</li> <li>• Participant perceptions of project effectiveness and barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Anecdotal</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly and annual reports to FSC</li> <li>• Stakeholder and Lead partner interviews</li> <li>• Stakeholder survey</li> <li>• Participant interviews</li> <li>• Participant survey</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> Note: refer to Section 1.2.2 for the data limitations and other considerations for this evaluation.



<p><b>Efficiency:</b> What will we learn about how to use resources more efficiently to achieve the desired outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # Of employer partnerships, description of trade jobs per employer, sector partnerships (public, private, not-for-profit, academic, employers)</li> <li>• # Of outreach activities to develop partner network and promote project</li> <li>• # Of participants; completers and non completers; of total completing, portion accessing tutoring, counselling or both</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly and annual reports to FSC</li> <li>• Lead partner interviews</li> </ul>
<p><b>Causal Attribution:</b> To what extent will we learn about the extent to which any outcomes can be causally attributed to the project intervention? What information (qualitative or quantitative) would improve our confidence in the role the project played in achieving outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # project participants have reported that the knowledge acquired through the project has led to improved career decision making</li> <li>• # project participants have reported knowledge acquired for improved decision-making on current and emerging in-demand skills</li> <li>• Perceived ability to advance career</li> <li>• % of participants achieve education or credentials needed</li> <li>• % of participants entering high-paying jobs</li> <li>• % of participants pursuing further education</li> <li>• % of participants report career stability or development</li> <li>• Change in employment status</li> <li>• % of partners report reduced stigma associated with needed help to complete training or to reduce stress factors associated with skilled trades work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anecdotal</li> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly and annual reports to FSC</li> <li>• Stakeholder and Lead partner interviews</li> <li>• Stakeholder survey</li> <li>• Participant interviews</li> <li>• Participant survey</li> </ul>