



SOAR – THE YEAR THAT WAS

Joy Petersen - Mentor and Tracking Coordinator

In 2020 we re-launched the first-generation pre-welcoming programme with much excitement and enthusiasm. Within a very short time a small team from DSAf including myself, Charl Davids, Yeki Mosothame, JC Landman and Delecia Davids put together a program aimed to sharpen FGS Strengths, have them leverage Opportunities Stellenbosch University has on offer, activate their Agency, and maintain their Resilience. The *SOAR network* delivered on the goal of creating a platform where students can make early friendships and build their confidence before they are integrated into their respective communities and the wider SU campus.

Our tracking of the students indicated that they were able to suitably adjust and make sense of their academic journey, even under the precarious and uncertain COVID-19 conditions. With Covid-19 abruptly stopping our plans to meet in-person for the remainder of 2020 – we had to divert our plans but stayed connected and engaged via newsletter. Herein we discussed various relevant social justice issues of the day, including Black Lives Matter, the impact of COVID-19 on the economically vulnerable. We introduced a range of coping mechanisms for studying from home and how to design your working space, prioritize time and the simple toolkit based on learning how to learn.

The SOAR dashboard figures for 2020 indicated we were able to retain 98 percent of our students with one student discontinuing her studies. Several students achieved distinctions in their modules and overall, the SAORies had 130 A+ all together.



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Our 2021 kicked-off with lots of uncertainty again, and we were grateful so many parents could join the students for the welcoming and opening by Dr Choice Makhetha. This year we had the entire cohort of first-year THUTUKA Bursary students join us and the EMS faculty representative, Sybil Smith joined us for this occasion. We stayed with the same program of 2020, which provided a winning formula and included facilitators, Juantill Pettus, a young, vibrant life coach, Gideon Basson doing our empathy workshop, Delecia Davids firing the mornings with Zumba, self-care and Charl strengths coaching sessions, amongst others.

A series of experiences was planned throughout the year, fortunately we could deliver on some of these plans. Our hike to Lions Head, and garden visit to Babylonstoren was illuminating experiences for the students who have not been able to visit the wider Western Cape region and surrounding Stellenbosch towns. We ended our *network* program for 2021 with an appreciation and motivation ceremony at the Botanical Gardens in October. The students were excited to dress formally for this occasion and meet up with those they have not been able to see since the inception of the program. This ceremony was organized by the senior group who shared their best practices for the upcoming exams and urged the newcomers to persevere and endure. Their message was fitting: gratitude and appreciation is an important component to their aspirational journeys and by cultivating an attitude based on generosity and humility they will continue to SOAR not just as students but as SA and indeed, global citizens.