**You’ve Got a Ticket to Work (and You Should Care)**

In past blogs, I have written a lot about Work Incentives offered by Social Security and Medicaid to workers with disabilities. The Work Incentives are basically exceptions to various eligibility rules and criteria. These exceptions allow people with disabilities to work and earn more but also remain qualified for certain cash and service benefits. The Work Incentives dovetail with a Social Security Program, called the “Ticket to Work”. Everyone who is on either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because of a disability or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) has a “ticket” in this sense. You used to get an actual paper ticket in the mail. Now, whatever agency you chose to assign your ticket just looks you up. All ticket services are free to you, paid for by Social Security.



You can assign your ticket to either your state’s Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (the Vocational Rehabilitation Division of the Department of Human Services in Illinois) or to a private sector employment network (EN). You can find ENs near you by following this link: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/result?option=directSearch>. You then explore the ENs near you to find one that is a good match. EN services may include career counseling, skills and knowledge assessment, locating education and training opportunities, designing and requesting work accommodations, resume writing assistance, interview coaching and job search and placement assistance.

All EN’s help you to create an “Individual Work Plan” or “IWP”. Your IWP is a collaborative effort between you and your Vocational Rehabilitation or EN counselor. The plan sets out your particular work goals and the specific steps that you would be taking to reach them, as well as a time table for this purpose. For example, you may want to work as a veterinary technician. The steps of your work plan might be to research accredited programs, select a program, determine your class schedule, map out transportation and apply for a public transportation pass, decide on and obtain any technology or study aids, pass the classes, obtain an internship, reach out to local veterinary firms and schedule informational interviews, create a targeted resume, locate practices that are hiring, practice interviewing, interview, and follow up. Finally, begin working part-time with a goal of earning at the level to meet Social Security’s criteria.

Your EN will report on your progress to Social Security. As long as you are using your ticket and making timely progress, Social Security will suspend any medical re-evaluation of your disabling condition. Timely progress measures depend on your career stage and your IWP steps as well as how many months you have been using your ticket. For instance, in general, by the end of your first 12 months, using the ticket, you are expected to achieve one of the following milestones:

* Worked for at least 3 months at the Trial Work wage level, which is $850/month for 2018
* Completed your GED or obtained a high school diploma
* Completed 60% of a full-time course load in an academic or vocational training program
* A combination of the above

Within the 13-24 months of usage, you are expected to achieve one of these milestones:

* Worked for six months at or above the Trial Work wage level
* Completed 75% of a full-time course load
* A combination of the above

Within the 25-36-month period, you are expected to:

* Work for nine months of work at the Substantial Gainful Activity level ($1,180/month in 2018)
* Complete an additional academic year of study
* Complete a 2- or 4-year college program
* Complete a year of a technical training program
* A combination of the above

Time progress and your Ticket to Work program can continue for up to 84 months. During that time, Social Security and Medicaid work incentives will allow participants to keep cash benefits in certain situations, where their work earning have either not yet started or are low, in order to keep Medicare for up to 93 months and to keep Medicaid-funded services almost indefinitely.

If you have a disability, are receiving SSI or SSDI payments, and have a dream to work, and also participate in your own livelihood, ***YOU*** have a ticket to work; and you ***should*** care. You can put your talents to good use and make a difference in your own and other’s lives.

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