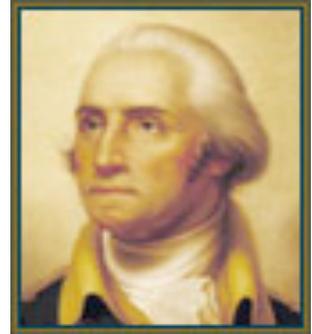


# The George Washington University HEATH Resource Center



## Ticket to Work: New Resources and Revenue for Education and Training Programs

*By Gabriella Madden*

After years of health issues and personal tragedies, Veronica J. of Chicago has put her life back on track again. In 1992, soon after the birth of her second child, Veronica and her newborn son were diagnosed as HIV positive and began receiving Supplemental Security Income disability benefits from the Social Security Administration. The following year, her son died, and Veronica says she became a shell of the person she once had been.

As time passed, she missed working and the sense of accomplishment that it brought. When she received her Social Security Administration Ticket to Work in the mail, she was anxious to take advantage of the program and assigned her Ticket. She now works at a large retirement community as the administrative assistant to the human resources director. "Getting back in the workforce has improved my economic situation, as well as my outlook on life," says Veronica.

Education and training programs throughout the country are helping thousands of individuals like Veronica by participating in a new government program to assist adults with disabilities to enter the workforce. These organizations provide a greater range of

options for Social Security beneficiaries receiving disability benefits, while also accessing a new unrestricted funding source.

### **Ticket to Work: What is it?**

The Ticket to Work Program is a new Social Security Administration employment and healthcare initiative designed to assist nearly ten million individuals with disabilities nationwide who seek to enter the workforce. The goal of the Program is to increase available choices and opportunities for disability beneficiaries to find employment, vocational rehabilitation and other support services through a pool of community providers. It also provides a financial incentive for agencies to expand on their current mission and assist these individuals on their path to self-sufficiency.

The Program was created by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, bi-partisan legislation that addresses barriers to employment for people with disabilities, including concerns regarding healthcare, employment services, and incentives.

The Ticket Program provides greater choice for beneficiaries through structures called Employment Networks (ENs). Education and training programs, state and local government agencies, WIA boards and One-Stop centers,

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Colleges, advocacy organizations, employers, and many other public and private entities across the country are participating as ENs, offering Ticket-holders a wide range of support services, including career assessment, job placement and training, transportation assistance, housing assistance, and workforce/economic development. The Program is market-driven, rewarding successful performance results. Those ENs providing the best services will therefore be the most successful.

### **Ticket-holders: Who is Eligible to Participate?**

Approximately 10 million individuals are eligible to participate in the Ticket to Work Program as Ticket-holders, allowing them to take advantage of the services offered by Employment Networks throughout the country.

Ticket-holders must be between the ages of 18 and 64, and currently receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The Program allows participants to retain their health care coverage by extending Medicare and encouraging states to adopt the Medicaid Buy-in Program, which allows states to provide Medicaid coverage to working individuals with disabilities who, because of their earnings, do not qualify for Medicaid under other statutory provisions. Participants are also exempt from Continuing Disability Reviews by the Social Security Administration and are eligible for expedited reinstatement of benefits, should a change in situation make them unable to continue working.

### **Education and Training Programs Serving as Employment Networks**

The Ticket to Work Program can be easily integrated into existing education, training and workforce preparation services. By becoming an Employment Network,

education and training programs can offer any combination of services to prepare people with disabilities to join the workforce. ENs then receive revenue as Ticket-holders go to work and meet Program employment requirements.

California State University Fresno (CSU) participates as an EN through its Rehabilitation Graduate Program of the Kremen School of Education and Human Development. “Working with the Ticket to Work Program offers a good opportunity for master’s students to get experience,” says Program Director John Lloyd. As an EN, the staff consists of seven students, mostly third semester master’s candidates. The students are trained on Ticket during the first three weeks of class and start with Ticket-holders soon after, at a minimum of eight hours per week.

“It’s a great program for getting people back to work that are willing and able to do that,” says Jennifer Prinz, program director at Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD). An EN since October 2002, EICCD provides an intensive four-week manufacturing pre-employment training program. The program offers basic skills training to bridge the gap between the needs of workers and employers’ need for skilled workers while pre-assessing, screening, and reporting the progress of those potential employees to participating employers. The program offers training in workplace behavior, problem solving, math, computer basics, communications, job search and resume writing, interview basics, OSHA training, and teamwork. Participants learn new skills in the manufacturing industry and gain exposure to potential employers in the area. “The purpose is to target the unemployed and underemployed to get living wage jobs. And of course, we could then get a cash benefit, too,” says Prinz.

### **Why Participate in Ticket?**

A particularly attractive feature of the program is that participating education and training

programs can combine Ticket revenue with existing federal funding from IDEA, Perkins Act, HEA, WIA, and state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. Local community resources are also available to provide planning and support services to assist students in coordinating resources.

To date, over 1,300 organizations have signed on to offer their services, and nearly \$1.5 million in revenue has been paid to providers. Education and training programs can use this revenue to complement existing funding and attract new students while forming ties with other community organizations and employers. At the same time, they can help thousands of Ticket-holders like Veronica J. to achieve the independence and self-sufficiency that comes from employment.

#### **Additional Information**

To learn more about the Ticket to Work program, call the toll-free Ticket Hotline at (866) 968-7842 or visit the comprehensive Ticket to Work Web site at [www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com). Additional information about Ticket to Work can be found at the Social Security Administration's Work Site website for workers with disabilities at [www.socialsecurity.gov/work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work).

#### **About the Author**

Gabriella Madden is a Senior Marketing Coordinator with MAXIMUS, Inc. for the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work and Self Sufficiency Program. In this capacity Ms. Madden recruits organizations and employers in all fields to participate in the Ticket to Work Program as Employment Networks.



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