

Ticket to Work – Employment Network

Despite successful progress in a variety of areas of community life, persons with disabilities continue to experience underemployment and unemployment at far greater rates than their non-disabled peers. Advocates and policy makers continue to debate traditional barriers: transportation, discrimination, and training. Beneath the surface of the employment issue, there are complex federal-welfare and long-term disability insurance programs that are administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA). While intended to provide basic income and health care for persons with disabilities, they have evolved as a formidable obstacle to work and financial independence.

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act is federal legislation which addresses the fundamental barriers to employment encountered by persons with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). While it is common knowledge that many individuals receiving either or both of these benefits will require this support into retirement age, it is recognized that some individuals can successfully return to work with proper information, guidance, and individualized support.

As part of this federal initiative, SSA is reinventing its return to work strategy by recruiting organizations to serve as “Employment Networks (EN).” Under this arrangement ENs are invited to provide employment services to any beneficiary whom it believes can achieve the goal of full employment. An EN is not paid by SSA until the ticket user earns enough income to terminate federal cash benefits. In order to increase retention, SSA will make this payment available to the EN for up to 60 months. SSA uses a Program Manager as an intermediary to facilitate the relationships between beneficiaries and EN. As an economic policy, this strategy is budget neutral. Among the operational concerns are: the complexity of the SSA programs for both providers and beneficiaries; the high degree of financial risk given the goal and elongated payment structure; lack of providers; and need for education of beneficiaries about the program.

AHEDD is a specialized human resource organization with a mission to serve the community as a catalyst in the employment and development of persons with disabilities. The non-profit organization based in Camp Hill, PA operates through a network of field office throughout PA and DE. Using a core group of Employment Network Coordinators, AHEDD will demonstrate an effective and financially self-sustaining program. For further information, contact John Miller, Project Director at (717) 763-0968, ext. 118 john.miller@ahedd.org or Alyssa Brenneman, Employment Coordinator at (412) 381-3313 alyssa.brenneman@ahedd.org