



The Ticket to Work program inspired me, challenged me and encouraged me to take those first risky steps toward self-sufficiency.”

– Tracy M.

Choose Work

Summer 2010

Quarterly

A Newsletter of the Ticket to Work Program

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Issue Spotlight

From the 2010 APSE Conference

Dan O'Brien, Acting Associate Commissioner, SSA's Office of Employment Support Programs, gave welcoming remarks at the APSE 2010 National Conference opening plenary session,



highlighting the Employment First and Choose Work themes and encouraging participant attendance at the seven Ticket to Work workshop sessions. Dan is pictured on the right speaking with Tom Gloss (center) and a conference attendee. SSA and CESSI put together a team of expert presenters to cover as many aspects of the Ticket program as possible. Everything was covered, from the "basics" to Partnership Plus, Medicaid Infrastructure Grants and "best practices" for operating ENs. Of the nearly 500 conference participants, our estimate is that more than 200 people attended one or more of the Ticket sessions. Thank you to APSE and to our expert presenters for making this a Ticket success!

Disability News Desk. 6

Matt Getze, Wheelchair Adventurer

Read an interview with Matt Getze, world traveler and wheelchair adventurer, from the New York Times.

Ticket Help Desk 6

Employment Network Handbooks

These tools walk you through the process of becoming an EN, give you background on the Ticket to Work legislation and highlight other tools that are available to you. This issue read how the Employment Network Handbook can help you become a successful EN.



Ticket to Work: A Braided Funding Option

Tom Gloss

When the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued new rules for the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program in 2008, it made the program a much more viable business proposition for many organizations helping those with disabilities who want to work. The Ticket program offers access to employment supports and services for people with disabilities, ages 18–64, who receive benefits under the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. Organizations and/or agencies that are approved by SSA to provide those services (called Employment Networks or ENs) are paid on an outcome basis, as opposed to a fee-for-service system. Under the original Ticket program rules, some ENs found it difficult to bring in enough money to continue their operations. Now, Ticket payments to ENs are higher, received at an earlier point and some are based on earnings consistent with the beneficiary working part time. The total potential value of each beneficiary's Ticket is around \$22,000.

Despite these favorable changes in the Ticket rules, many organizations and agencies were still reluctant to participate in the Ticket program because they receive Medicaid reimbursements and were afraid accepting Ticket payments would be considered “double dipping” thereby reducing their operating budgets.

The good news is that on January 28, 2010, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a State Medicaid Director Letter (SMD #10-002) clarifying that there is *no conflict* with the receipt of Medicaid reimbursements and Ticket payments; that is, using both of these funding sources does not constitute an overpayment of federal dollars for services provided since Ticket payments to ENs are payment for an outcome rather than for a Medicaid service rendered. Further, CMS encourages state agencies and/or providers to participate fully in the Ticket program. (For a copy of the letter, please visit www.cessi.net/ttw/docs/CMS_Letter.pdf.)

SSA is encouraging agencies and organizations to consider Ticket payments as part of a braided funding approach, along with money from Medicaid and State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs, to help SSDI and SSI beneficiaries achieve their employment goals. Using the Ticket payments as the third funding source in the braid allows those organizations and agencies a flexible way to fill any gaps since SSA imposes *no*



restrictions on how ENs use the Ticket payments they receive. In other words, supports and services that cannot be funded under the other programs can be paid for from Ticket payments. For example, if a beneficiary needs help with something at home that is interfering with going to work,

Ticket payments are flexible enough to be used to overcome that obstacle. Ticket money can also be used to hire new staff, buy new equipment or enlarge the EN's office. The key to success, however, is to wait until the Ticket funding stream has started before incurring those kinds of expenses, since Ticket payments are only made after beneficiaries attain the required earnings milestones and outcomes. (For more on the “Outcome Payment System,” please visit www.cessi.net/ttw/serviceproviders.asp, or see pages 12–13 of the Employment Network Handbook available for download at www.cessi.net/ttw/resources/providers.html).

For more information about the role of braided funding specific to mental health programs, please check out the archived teleconference from February 18, 2010 at www.cessi.net/ttw/resources/. This website is also a good place to find general information about the Ticket program and how to become an EN, as well as a variety of tools and resources that provide answers to questions you may have about the program.

If you are interested in becoming an EN or finding out more about Ticket to Work, please contact a CESSI Account Manager at (877) 743-8237 (voice or TTY).

By the Numbers: Ticket Successes Steadily on the Rise

Jim Wackerbarth

The path to increased employment and self-sufficiency through the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program involves several factors and milestones. For that reason, assessing the program's effectiveness means measuring each step along the way. Two of the most telling indicators of improved self-sufficiency are Ticket assignments, which demonstrate beneficiary initiative and engagement, and payments to Employment Networks (ENs), which demonstrate beneficiary success at reaching work and earnings-related milestones and outcomes.

Since late 2006, beneficiary and EN participation in the Ticket program have shown substantial growth by both measures. As beneficiaries and the service providers that assist people with disabilities in returning to work have learned more about the advantages of SSA Work Incentives, and gained experience with the program, both groups have enjoyed greater success with employment outcomes.

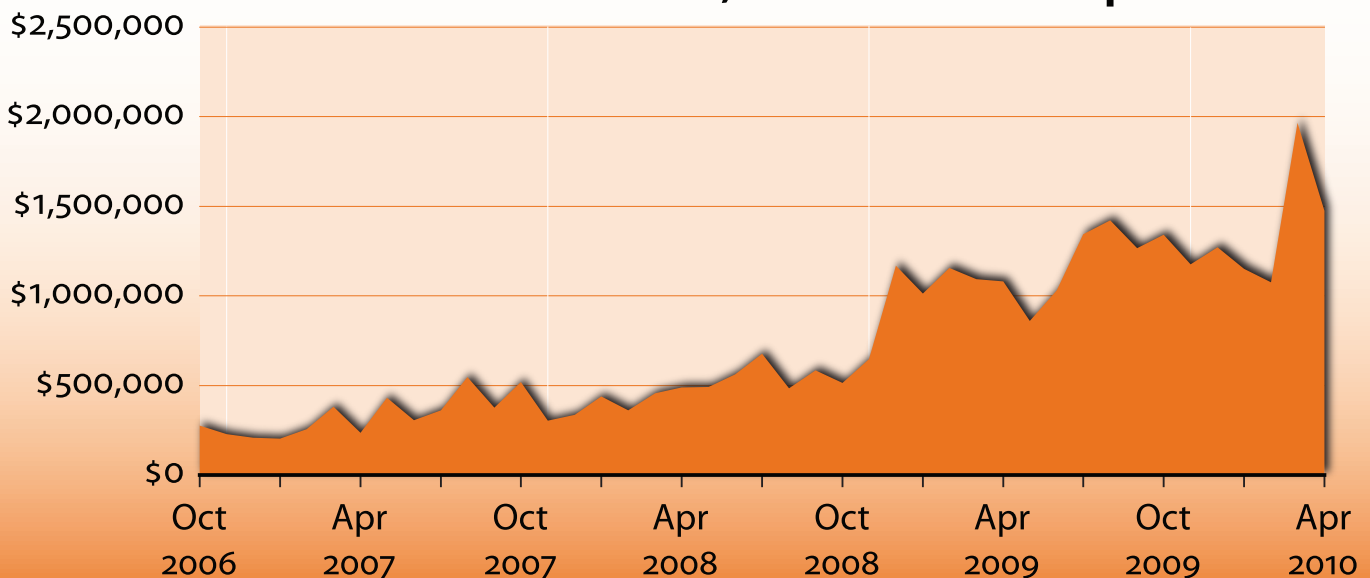
Every year since 2006, beneficiaries have increased their ticket assignments. In November 2006, for example, 261 new beneficiaries assigned their Tickets to ENs. In November 2007, that number increased to 358; in 2008, to 830; and by 2009, the number of new Tickets assigned in November was 1,018, a 390 percent increase. On aver-

age, 290 Tickets were assigned each month in 2007, 723 assigned per month in 2008 and 959 in 2009. A total of 11,502 Tickets were assigned in 2009 alone.

But getting the Tickets assigned is only the first step. Once assigned, the EN must help beneficiaries reach employment- and earnings-related milestones and outcomes in order to receive payments. EN payments indicate the number of beneficiaries finding work and doing so at the prescribed levels of Trial Work (\$720/month in 2010) and Substantial Gainful Activity (\$1,000/month for disability other than blindness and \$1,640/month for blind individuals in 2010). The trends in EN payment since 2006 are positive as well. For example, in November of 2006, SSA paid ENs roughly \$220,000; the next year \$296,000; the next \$647,000; and in November 2009, SSA paid ENs roughly \$1,176,000 for their services. Total payments in 2009 exceeded \$14 million.

Since the program's inception, more beneficiaries have taken their first steps toward employment, and ENs have shown increasing ability to turn those tickets into self-sufficiency success stories. The Ticket program was designed to be a "win-win" situation for all parties involved. Through knowledge and experience, the program continues to gain strength.

Total Dollars Paid to ENs, October 2006 to April 2010



Choose Work Tour Might Be Visiting a City Near You!

Lisa Ekman

In December 2009, the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of Employment Support Programs (OESP) launched the Choose Work campaign to support the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program. The purpose of the campaign is to encourage people receiving Social Security disability benefits to "Choose Work" by promoting awareness of the services and supports available to assist them and to help dispel the myths regarding disability benefits and work. The campaign began with the launch of the Choose Work website (www.choosework.net). The website lets visitors view short, informative videos; hear powerful stories told by people just like themselves whose circumstances have led them to explore the Ticket program and other Work Incentives; experience a Work Incentive Seminar Event (WISE); and find local resources and other helpful information in one interactive online location.

A forthcoming major component of the Choose Work campaign will be the Choose Work 2010 Tour. SSA has selected 10 cities to tour between June and November of 2010, and will host a two- or three-day event in each city. The purpose of the tour is to foster collaboration and cooperation among a variety of interested stakeholders, including providers of vocational and employment support services (service providers), state and local agencies and people with disabilities. By targeting

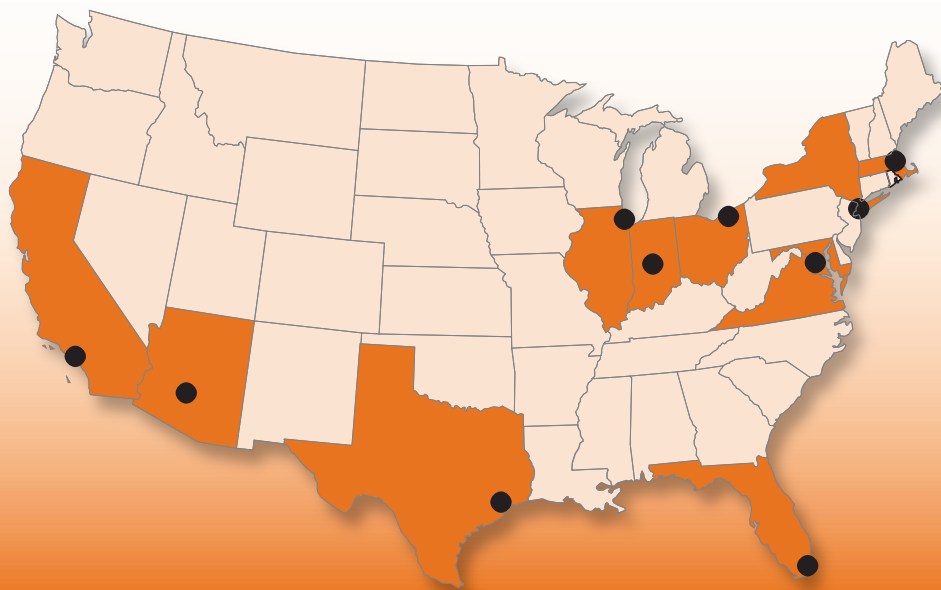
communities with existing collaboration and infrastructure, the Choose Work team hopes to accomplish several goals:

- Expand the number of Employment Networks (ENs) and assist current ENs to help more Ticket Holders through technical assistance, training, sharing of best practices and Work Incentives training.
- Further develop existing – and create new – partnerships in the community to educate individuals receiving disability benefits about the Ticket program and other SSA Work Incentives.
- Facilitate connections between ENs and individuals receiving Social Security disability benefits to further bolster Ticket assignments and help ENs receive increased revenue.

Each event will vary based on the needs and characteristics of the host city. All of the trainings will provide an overview of the Ticket program, SSA Work Incentives Ticket payment structure, the EN application process, drafting Individual Work Plan for beneficiaries, Ticket payment process and marketing to beneficiaries and attracting Ticket Holders. Speakers will also explain the Partnership Plus program that pairs state vocational rehabilitation agencies with ENs in assisting individual beneficiaries.

Through the Choose Work 2010 Tour, SSA hopes to help the selected locations take the next step forward in supporting people with disabilities receiving Social Security benefits to become and stay employed. Look for the first event in Phoenix, Arizona from June 22–24, 2010. Visit www.cessi.net/ttw to see if the tour will visit your town!

Email chooseworktour@cessi.net with questions.



Face of the Ticket – Edward B.

Arielle Dorros

A proud grandfather and third-generation farmer, Edward developed a unique aptitude for agriculture and mechanics over the decades he spent working the land. But a knee injury combined with severe, degenerative arthritis would require 20 surgeries, including complete knee replacements. During a painful, 15-year struggle to regain mobility, Ed went on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). He never lost his interest in farming, his drive or his work ethic. Ed knew he was ready to return to the satisfaction that work would bring. Yet, he would continue to require surgeries and couldn't afford to give up the Social Security benefits he relied on – especially Medicare. Also unsettling was uncertainty about whether employers would be willing to give him a chance after so many years of being unemployed. Ed would soon discover that he belongs to our nation's largest minority population, sought after by savvy employers looking to tap the singular talent he could offer.

Ed's "ticket" to opportunity came in the mail from the Social Security Administration (SSA). As part of the 1999 Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program offers

people with disabilities receiving Social Security benefits (Ticket Holders) a variety of supported employment options. The program is voluntary, and the Ticket Holder may choose to assign his or her Ticket to any approved organization that has agreed to provide return-to-

work services. These organizations, known as Employment Networks (ENs), are increasing in number around the country. Together with employers and SSA, ENs offer a growing infrastructure of supports for Americans with disabilities who want to work.

When Ed found out that his medical reviews would be put on hold while using his Ticket and that SSA's Trial Work Period would allow him to return to work without putting his benefits at risk, he assigned his Ticket to Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE) in Visalia, California (an EN). TCOE worked one-on-one with Ed, assessing his skills and walking him through his options for a successful return to work. Just one of the many Work Incentives offered by SSA, the Trial Work Period (TWP) allows people to test their ability to work while receiving full SSDI benefits. After the TWP is complete, an Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE) may allow workers to continue receiving benefits as they develop careers. Ed was able to receive 12 months of SSDI checks along with his paycheck. His employer, N. Robert Nielsen Inc., was pleased with Ed's industry knowledge and skills as a farm manager and gave him a promotion and a raise. Now he is self-sufficient and working for another division, Ray Moles Farms. He is earning more money than he would have by relying solely on an SSDI check, and more than he imagined he would be capable of earning. Continuing Medicare Coverage will allow him to receive Medicare up to 8.5 years after the SSDI check stops. This is a great relief to Ed, who is grateful for supports that will enable his evolution toward a gratifying career and full independence.

Evolving is a marathon, not a sprint. Every marathon begins with one step. If you are interested in gaining access to meaningful work and better earning potential for yourself, a family member or a friend, SSA can help. To learn more about the Ticket program and other Work Incentives, visit www.ssa.gov/work/receivingbenefits.html or register for a Work Incentive Seminar Event (WISE) at www.cessi.net/WISE/.



Ticket Help Desk: Spotlight on Resources

The Employment Network Handbooks

Jim Wackerbarth

Service Providers and Employers – get your hands on the Ticket to Work Employment Network Handbook! This important resource outlines the process of entering into the Ticket to Work (Ticket) program and taking advantage of its many benefits. You can find this resource and others by visiting www.cessi.net/ttw/resources.

The Ticket handbooks explain step by step how to enroll as an Employment Network (EN) and detail the support organizations can receive to be successful. They describe completely the program and its features, in easy-to-read charts, including how ENs receive financial incentives when beneficiaries achieve designated employment milestones and outcomes. With the Employment Network Handbook for Employers, you can estimate EN payments per employee and read about companies who have increased productivity by employing individuals with disabilities. This handbook also provides important information on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and guidance in making workplace accommodations.

As the handbook indicates, the Ticket program increases your organization's bottom line by adding an unrestricted funding stream. Additionally, it assists employers in fulfilling Affirmative Action goals and requirements and puts beneficiaries back to work. Visit <http://www.cessi.net/ttw/resources/> to read these documents and start taking advantage of Ticket to Work today!

Ticket to Work Upcoming Events

Matt Getze, Wheelchair Adventurer

SSA Ticket to Work Program will be participating and/or exhibiting at conferences and events around the world. Below is a list of the events where you can find us this quarter.

Date	Event/Conference
July 3-8	National Federation of the Blind Annual Conference
July 6-10	50th National Association of the Deaf Biennial Conference
July 12-16	DOL VETS Grantee Conference
July 21-22	Choose Work: Indianapolis
July 25-27	National Summit of Disability Policy 2010
August 3-6	National 2010 ILG Conference
August 17-18	2010 Disability Forum
August 25-26	Choose Work: Chicago
Aug 1-Sept 1	Choose Work: Cleveland
September 15-16	Choose Work: Boston
September 16-17	RSA's National Employment Conference
September 19-21	13th Annual USBLN Conference
September 23-26	2010 Self Advocacy Conference
September 27-28	NACDD 2010 Annual
Sept 29-Oct 3	Alternatives Conference

To get more information on SSA Ticket to Work events, visit www.cessi.net/ttw or www.ssa.gov/work/events. Learn how Social Security beneficiaries use Work Incentives to return to work. There will be nearly one hundred Work Incentive Seminar Events (WISE) nationwide this quarter. Visit us at www.cessi.net/wise to see if there will be one near you!

In May 2010, the New York Times featured an interview with Matt Getze, the creator of wheeladventure.com. Matt, who has lived with polio since childhood, is an accomplished world traveler and a generous storyteller. With the motto "Oil. Tighten. Pack. Roll." he has explored many parts of Europe, the Americas and Asia. His website draws from these experiences to provide people in wheelchairs pertinent advice in getting deals, working with airlines, and finding accessible hotels abroad. Read the full interview at: frugaltraveler.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/qa-with-matt-getze-wheelchair-adventurer/