



Are You Ready for Work"

Thousands of people each year say, "YES" to this question and begin the journey to employment! Many people find that returning to work, or working for the first time, changes their lives. They find they can earn more money, gain greater financial independence, meet new people and learn new skills.

But, many people who think they might want to try working are not sure where to start. The good news is that help is available for people who want to work their way to a better future: Social Security's **Ticket to Work** program!

Ticket to Work is a free and voluntary program offered by Social Security that can help people age 18 through 64 who receive Social Security disability benefits and who are interested in returning to work or working for the first time. Ticket to Work connects individuals on SSI or SSDI with free employment services to help them decide if working is right for them, prepare for work, find a job or maintain success while they are working.

The New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Area Consortium Board is a Workforce Employment Network (WFEN). Workforce ENs are part of a state's public workforce system. Workforce ENs provide access to a wide array of employment support services, including training programs and special programs for youth in transition and veterans. A Ticket to Work participant who assigns their Ticket to a Workforce EN will either work with a Workforce EN directly or via other providers in the workforce system, including American Job Centers.

Our Disability Resource Coordinators can assist SSI/SSDI beneficiaries in meeting their employment goals:

- Assist those with questions about the Ticket to Work Program
- Counseling on how returning to work will affect their benefits (assisting with financial planning)
- Developing an Individualized Work Plan with the Ticket holders on what needs to be done in order to return to work or start their own business
- Partnering with other programs and/or connecting to other resources so that the Ticket holder can meet their employment goals

Ticket holders we are currently working with:

- MP hasn't working in over 13 years due to issues with anxiety and severe depression. Now that her youngest child is older, she is interested in trying to rejoin the workforce, specifically in an office management capacity. While very intelligent, her skills are limited or quite rusty. She is co-enrolled with DEI and WIA Adult services to update her skills and rebuild her confidence. She is currently enrolled in Microsoft Office courses and plans to take the Microsoft Office Specialist certification exam in Word and Excel. Her 'ticket' has been assigned to us.
- HS hasn't held a job since 2000 due to severe personality disorders. Recently, her living situation changed and she realized that she would be unable to make ends meet on her current benefit payments. Her disability makes it difficult to work with others and adding in her status as an ex-offender, finding a traditional job would be extremely difficult. She has worked with a DRC and the Radford University Small Business Development Center to explore self-employment. Earlier this month, she went out on several small jobs as a contract pilot car driver and is feeling more at ease with every trip. We are in the process of developing her Individualized Work Plan to assign her 'ticket' to our Employment Network.
- PS has been unable to work for about five years due to a serious medical condition. With the help of her doctors, her condition is now stable and she would like to attempt to work full time again. Her past work experience is limited to production work but she is interested in branching out into some type of work with customer service, possibly in an office setting. Her first grandchild was recently born very premature and with several medical conditions and she has temporarily delayed her attempt to work.
- MT has been disabled and unable to work for about five years due to a medical condition. In the past year or so, her new medical regimen has helped keep the condition under control and she is ready to try to work again. She has experience as a CNA but will not be able to return to that line of work. She is interested in pursuing work in a clerical position, possibly in a medical office. We are in the early stages of discussing strategies and developing a plan for her to reach her goal of rejoining the workforce.
- LB is a 52 year old man who began having significant hearing problems about 10 years ago. He was working in a manufacturing environment and had to quit when his hearing and other subsequent disabilities made it too difficult for him to continue. His mother operated a kettle corn business which he would like to start up again. We are currently working on getting Larry help with aids to improve his hearing, and he will soon begin classes for small business owners to help him start his own business. His Ticket will be assigned to us soon.
- RN moved to Virginia from Michigan 3 years ago. He began receiving Social Security benefits in 2003 due to mental impairments. He has much experience in over the road driving and light construction/home improvement. He is a highly motivated person who wants to work, become a small business owner and leave the Social Security roles. We are currently working to get his CDL license so he can run his own delivery service from his home. We are drafting an individualized work plan which encompasses his short and long term employment goals. His Ticket will then be assigned to us.
- CP is a 54 year old woman who worked in the manufacturing industry for many years, but her bipolar disability made it impossible to continue. Since medication has helped with her medical needs and goals, she seeks to rejoin the workforce to help continue her progress. She hasn't decided if she wants to rejoin the manufacturing industry; we are in the early stages of discussing what type of position she may want to pursue. We'll begin updating and restructuring her resume this week and begin job search soon.