“WHEN IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE GOALS CANNOT BE REACHED, DON'T ADJUST THE GOALS, ADJUST THE ACTION STEPS.”

-Confucius
BENEFITS AND WORK INCENTIVES

Essential Supports for Employment Success!
Why This Information is Important (One)

Employers

Workers who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) have to deal with issues that arise from having earned income from a job and SSI/SSDI cash benefits and Medicaid and/or Medicare.

Workers receiving SSI and/or SSDI might contact the HR department hoping to get assistance with benefits issues.

Because SSI and SSDI are not administered by you, but by the Social Security Administration, your HR department can benefit by having referral resources for workers on SSI and/or SSDI.
Why This Information is Important (Two)

Texas Workforce Solutions/Workforce Development Boards

Individuals seeking assistance from a TWS local office may have questions about the effect of earned income on their SSI and/or SSDI cash benefits and healthcare.

It is important to have referral resources for these individuals so that they can get accurate information to help them make an informed decision about the amount of hours or rate of pay they are willing to accept at this point in time.
Why This Information is Important (Three)

Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Knowing the basics of SSI and SSDI is the foundation for successful closure when working with participants who receive these benefits.

You have a Benefits Subject Matter Utilization Resource Facilitator (“SMURF”) in your office who can provide basic information and referral to these participants and answer questions you may have.
The Most Important Thing to Know

Individuals receiving SSI and/or SSDI can work and make a living wage while staying attached to these benefits systems, as long as they need to do so.

This includes retaining Medicaid and/or Medicare.
Have You Ever Heard…. 

If I go to work I will lose my benefits.

I can only make a certain amount each month or only work a certain number of hours or I will lose my benefits.

I can’t get the skills and experience I need for a career without losing my benefits.

If I go to work and then stop working, I won’t be able to get back my cash benefits or Medicaid/Medicare back.

If I go to work Social Security will send me a letter asking for a lot of money back.
Let's Bust Those Myths!

Reduce fear and misunderstanding about the effect of working on benefits.

Prevent crises that can result when change occurs.

Improve employment and economic outcomes through:

Increased employment rates;

Increased earnings; and

Decreased medical expenses.
THE BASIC TERMS

**SSA:** Social Security Administration

**SSI:** Supplemental Security Income

**SSDI:** Social Security Disability Insurance

**SGA:** Substantial Gainful Activity: $1,170 (2017) monthly gross earned income non-blind, $1,950 (2017) blind

**WORK INCENTIVES:** Both federal and state-specific programs that are available to people with disabilities in their return to work efforts.
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) adult benefits are not “disability only” benefit programs.

SSI and SSDI are “benefits based on your inability to do substantial gainful activity due to your disability” benefit programs.

Substantial Gainful Activity, or “SGA” is only important if the person receives SSDI, and even then only at a specific point in their work activity. SGA has nothing to do with SSI work activity at all.
SSI: The Basics (One)

CASH BENEFIT
Disabled by SSA definition.
Little to no assets and little to no income.
Monthly benefit amount for 2017 is up to $735 a month for an individual, $1,103 for a couple and will be reduced by other income.

HEALTH CARE BENEFIT
Medicaid (no waiting period and no cost). Provided through Managed Care organizations.
SSI: The Basics (Two)

Supplemental Security Income = Title XVI (16)

The main objective of the SSI program is to provide the basic cash support of needy aged, blind, or disabled individuals. This means the individual must need assistance with obtaining food and shelter.

To qualify:
Meet all five steps of the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) sequential evaluation;
and
Meet resource limit of $2,000 for an individual or $3,000 for a couple (2016) minus standard exclusions.
SSDI: The Basics (One)

CASH BENEFIT
Be disabled by SSA definition.
Be “insured”, or draw off “insured” worker who is disabled, retired, deceased. Amount varies based on work history.
No asset/resource test (no limit to the amount you can have that is not earned income).

HEALTH CARE BENEFIT
Medicare (after 24 month waiting period; and costs associated with all Parts (A, B and D).
SSDI: The Basics (Two)

Social Security Disability Insurance = Title II (Two)

An individual pays into the program in order to draw benefits, or someone who qualifies can “draw off” the qualified individual’s record.

The younger someone is, the quicker they can become an SSDI beneficiary if they are working.

To qualify:

Meet all five steps of the SSA’s sequential evaluation;
and
Most must meet “recent work” and “duration of work” tests.
SSI Myth #1: People lose SSI if they work

FACT: WORK INCENTIVES LET PEOPLE KEEP SSI CASH CHECK OR STATUS WHEN THEY WORK!

Basic Deductions: SSI cash benefit is reduced $1 for every $2 earned after first $20 and/or $65.

Additional Work Incentives let people keep more cash:

- Impairment Related Work Expense
- Blind Work Expense
- Student Earned Income Exclusion
- Plan to Achieve Self Support
THE FACTS BEHIND THE SSI FORMULA

As the individual earns more, the amount of SSI monthly cash benefit goes down.

The more money the individual earns the more money he/she has in pocket, even after taxes - always, every single time, regardless of amount of earnings.
The SSI Formula: Step One

Unearned Income = $0
General Income Exclusion = $0
Total Countable Unearned Income = $0
The SSI Formula: Step Two

Gross Earned Income = $1,170
Student Earned Income Exclusion = $0
Remainder = $1,170
General Income Exclusion (if not used in Step One) = $20
Remainder = $1,150
Earned Income Exclusion = $65
Remainder = $1,085
Impairment Related Work Expense = $0
Remainder = $1,085
Divide by 2 = $542.50
Blind Work Expense = $0
Total Countable Earned Income = $542.50
The SSI Formula: Step Three

Total Countable Unearned Income = $0
Total Countable Earned Income = $542.50
PASS Deduction = $0
Total Countable Income = $542.50
The SSI Formula: Step Four

Base SSI Rate for this Individual/Couple = $735
Total Countable Income (-) $542.50
Adjusted SSI Amount = $192.50
SSI Myth #2: There is no incentive for students to try working

Fact: STUDENTS HAVE A SPECIAL RULE THAT LETS THEM KEEP MORE OF THEIR SSI WHEN THEY WORK!

Student Earned Income Exclusion
SSI: STUDENT EARNED INCOME EXCLUSION (SEIE)

• Under age of 22.

• Regularly attending school.

• $1,790 (2017) a month or $7,200 (2017) maximum a year is forgiven from SSI check.

• Must be requested. No individual is automatically considered for this work incentive—not even someone in public high school!
SEIE In Action (One)

No unearned income

Gross Earned Income = $1,170
Student Earned Income Exclusion = $1,170
Remainder = $0

Total Countable Unearned Income = $0
Total Countable Earned Income = $0
PASS Deduction = $0
Total Countable Income = $0
SEIE In Action (Two)

Base SSI Rate for this Individual/Couple = $735
Total Countable Income (-) $0
Adjusted SSI Amount = $735
SSI Myth #3: People needing services or items related to their disability to maintain employment can’t afford to work.

Fact: There are SSI work incentives that will return up to half of out of pocket expenses - or more to the monthly cash benefit!

Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE)

Blind Work Expense
Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE)

Written plan with items or services directly related to maintaining or advancing in employment. Participant must be working to get an IRWE.

Participant pays for all IRWE expenses out of pocket.

Cost of IRWE must be reasonable.

SSA ‘refunds’ to ½ the money spent on the IRWE in the monthly SSI cash benefit.
COMMON IRWEs

Medical services not covered by insurance

Paratransit

Job coaching

Mileage to and from work when driven by someone else and cannot get to work any other way

Durable equipment such as wheelchair

Assistive Technology if you can prove it is necessary for the job

Co-pays on prescription medications and doctor’s visits
Without an IRWE

No unearned income

Gross Earned Income = $1,170
GIE = $20; Remainder = $1,150
EIE = $65; Remainder: $1,085/2 = $542.50

Total Countable Unearned Income = $0
Total Countable Earned Income = $542.50
Total Countable Income = $542.50

Base SSI Rate for this Individual/Couple = $735
Total Countable Income (-) $542.50
Adjusted SSI Amount = $192.50
With an IRWE

No unearned income

Gross Earned Income = $1,170
GIE = $20; Remainder = $1,150
EIE = $65; Remainder: $1,085
IRWE = $150
Remainder =$935/2 = $467.50

Total Countable Unearned Income = $0
Total Countable Earned Income = $467.50
Total Countable Income = $467.50

Base SSI Rate for this Individual/Couple = $735
Total Countable Income (-) $ 467.50
Adjusted SSI Amount = $267.50
BLIND WORK EXPENSE (BWE)

Comes off dollar for dollar and has many allowed exclusions such as:

State and Federal Taxes
Union Dues
Mandatory Pension
Cost of Uniforms
Reader Services, Driver Services, and Cost of Service
Animal’s Care
Childcare
Transportation
Meals Consumed at Work
Adaptive Equipment
SSI Myth #4: There aren’t any resources to help people reach self-sufficiency

Fact: There are work incentives that will match funds set aside to pay for expenses related to a vocational goal!

Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS)

Individual Development Accounts (IDA) [http://cfed.org/](http://cfed.org/) to find an IDA.
PLAN TO ACHIEVE SELF SUPPORT (PASS)

Can be working or not working, but must have an employment goal. If working, PASS goal has to be different than current job, or advancement in current job position or hours/pay.

Must have earned or unearned (e.g. SSDI) income to create plan; cannot use SSI cash benefit. Must be able to live on amount left after putting money into PASS.

Income that would normally reduce SSI cash benefit will not be counted, nor are savings in PASS counted towards $2,000 resource limit.
SSI Myth #5: Earning income causes people to lose their medical coverage

**Fact:** People on SSI can keep Medicaid when they work!

1619(b) Medicaid

Individualized Threshold

Texas Medicaid Buy-In program
SSI 1619(b) Medicaid

1619(b) is a federal Social Security program that allows individuals to continue to receive Medicaid after their SSI cash benefit goes to “$0” a month due to earned income, and until they reach the state “threshold”.

The Texas state threshold for 2016 is $34,670 gross annual income a year! (The 2017 number has not been released).
MEDICAID BUY-IN

A great resource for individuals who received SSI, but have exceeded the state threshold (“earned off” 1619(b)) and do not qualify for an individualized threshold. Person must be working to get MBI.

People who recently “earned off” SSI are presumptively eligible for Medicaid Buy-In! People on SSDI who are working can “buy-in” at any time.

For Buy-In application go to: Link to DADS forms H1200-MBI
Myth #6: If wages cause SSI cash benefit to stop, there’s no way to get it back

FACT: People stay in eligibility status even when they don’t get a cash check!

1619(b)

Expedited Reinstatement

Individualized Threshold
SSDI Myth #7: People lose SSDI if they go to work

FACT: Work Incentives let people keep SSDI cash check or status when they work!

- Trial Work Period (time limited)
- Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)
- Subsidy/Unincurred Business Expense
- Extended Period of Eligibility

And more!
Trial Work Period and Extended Period of Eligibility

**Trial Work Period (TWP):** Nine months in a rolling 60 month period where the individual can make any amount of money above $840 (2017) and still receive SSDI cash benefit. Months do not have to be consecutive.

**Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE):** 36 consecutive month period begins the first month after the completion of a Trial Work Period. During EPE the individual either gets the SSDI cash benefit or doesn’t get any cash benefit if earnings are above “Substantial Gainful Activity” ($1,170 gross a month).
IRWE and Subsidy

Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) or Subsidy used after completion of Trial Work Period when making over Substantial Gainful Activity to reduce income to below SGA and continue to receive full SSDI cash benefit during and/or after 36 month EPE.
SSDI Myth #8: If wages cause SSDI cash benefit to stop, there’s no way to get it back

**FACT:** People stay in SSDI eligibility status even when they don’t get a cash benefit!

Extended Period of Eligibility

Expedited Reinstatement
SSI and SSDI Semi-Myth #9: Working always results in overpayments

**Fact:** There are strategies to prevent overpayments!

- **REPORT REGULARLY**
- Get, or request in writing, a receipt from SSA and keep copies of everything sent in
- Know the rules - negotiate!
- Overpayments under $1,000 must be automatically waived
- Don’t ignore the letter, no matter how scary it sounds
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FIGURE ALL THIS OUT?

Good News!

There are folks right here in Texas who can help!
COMMUNITY WORK INCENTIVE COORDINATORS (CWICs) at WORK INCENTIVE PLANNING AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (WIPA)

CWICs are highly trained staff certified by SSA under the SSA WIPA grant in benefits and work incentives.

Services are free to any consumer who receives SSI and/or SSDI and is actively looking for a job, or has a job.

Find your WIPA program at http://choosework.net.
SSA’S WORK TICKET TO WORK HELP LINE

Individuals can contact a representative at SSA’s Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 (voice) or 1-866-833-2967 (TDD).

Representatives give individuals basic information on SSI and SSDI programs, and the effects of earnings from work on cash benefits and health care coverage.
PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR BENEFICIARIES OF SOCIAL SECURITY (PABSS)

PABSS assists beneficiaries with overpayments that are work related and consumers dissatisfied with services provided by an Employment Network under the Ticket to Work.

PABSS can also provide information to individuals on a variety of work-related subjects, including accessible housing.

Call Disability Rights Texas’ Intake Line: 1-800-252-9108. Individual will be contacted by a PABSS staff.
HEALTH INFORMATION COUNSELING AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM (HICAP)

HICAP consists of both certified Regional Benefits Counselors and trained volunteers who assist Medicare-eligible persons with disabilities of any age with information, counseling, assistance and advocacy regarding Medicare and Medicaid, entitlements and legal rights, including general SSI/SSDI information; help people get on certain benefits; and assist with appeals.

Find your AAA HICAP program at:
http://www.dads.state.tx.us/contact/aaa.cfm
Now That You Know, What Can You Say? (One)

SSI cash amount is determined by a formula….people always have more money if they work under SSI.

SSI Medicaid continues as long as someone gets any amount of SSI cash benefit, and even if they make up to $34,670 (2016) or higher each year!
Now That You Know, What Can You Say?
(Two)

SSDI cash works in stages. There are lots of safety nets and many years the person can try work and still be attached to the system – and even get back onto the system after termination!

Medicare continues as long as someone gets a cash benefit and continues even after that for many years! People receiving SSDI qualify for Texas’ Medicaid Buy-In if they are working.