

JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT REPORT

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33 years
of service

for professionals who support employment for people with disabilities

Need for Technical Assistance for 'Ticket' Program is Growing

By Dennis Born

In July 2008, the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued new *Ticket to Work* (TTW) guidelines that streamlined and improved the payment system, and increased outreach and support for Employment Networks (EN). (An EN may be any organization — other than a federal agency — equipped to provide employment-related services to individuals with disabilities.)

However, while the new guidelines go a long way toward resolving problems and laying the groundwork for expanding the number of ENs, a further step — the development of additional technical assistance — is needed.

Background

The *Ticket* legislation was signed into law in 1999 as the *Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act*. Its major purpose was to offer people with disabilities who were receiving benefits from the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs a variety of employment options.

Since the beginning of the SSA program, the Supported Employment Consultation and



Training Center (SECT), a division of BehaviorCorp. in Indiana, has provided information to a variety of providers concerning TTW.

As Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) such as SECT become established ENs, their need for ongoing specialized help and problem-solving concerning *Ticket* operations will continue to grow.

A 2003 summit conducted by the SSA's *Ticket to Work* and Work Incentives Advisory panel identified critical challenges facing ENs nationwide. The panel's findings highlighted the complexity and administrative burden of TTW — and confirmed providers' lack of knowledge about how to successfully operate a *Ticket* program.

Need Comes to Light

Because SSA pays ENs only if they achieve an employment outcome for a beneficiary (also known as a *Ticket* holder), it's difficult for small community-based nonprofits to establish EN services without seeking outside funding and technical assistance to develop the necessary start-up infrastructure.

For example, the SECT was asked by an agency to help them with some *Ticket*-related billing matters they didn't know how to handle — once we investigated the situation, we were able to resolve their concerns, and they submitted and received payment.

Recently, the SECT asked agencies/CRPs with a current contract with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) if a time-limited technical assistance center focused on "Ticket Operations" would be valuable. All of the agencies queried endorsed the basic concept. However, they were also

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concerned that they wouldn't have the resources to support these types of valued services.

A similar concept was implemented in another state. Knowing that a technical assistance center would assist them from the ground up with such simple tasks as how to respond to first-time callers, report wages, and receive reimbursement from SSA, piqued CRPs' interest in applying to become ENs.

With help from the technical assistance center, the state experienced increased partnerships with other providers of disability services. This assisted in the development of a systematic approach to problem solving that streamlined the *TTW* process.

Focus on Indiana

In Indiana, there has been renewed interest in the *Ticket* program since the release of the new regulations last year. Throw in the possibility of developing an Indiana-based *Ticket* technical assistance center — and it's clear that the proposed center could escalate momentum concerning *Ticket* utilization, and increase the number of ENs in our state.

It is a Program Manager Recruitment and Outreach (PMRO) objective to place ENs in locations throughout Indiana to ensure access to all beneficiaries who seek such services. A list of ENs and beneficiaries in the state is available at www.cessi.net/ttw/maps/Indiana.doc.

To find EN and beneficiary information relevant to where you live (by region and state), visit www.cessi.net/ttw/ticketexpress.html. The maps highlight the need for improved technical assistance at state and local levels to make the *Ticket* program more successful.

*“...it's clear that the proposed center could escalate momentum concerning **Ticket** utilization, and increase the number of ENs...”*

EN Business Portal

The proposed *Ticket* technical assistance center — which we're referring to as the EN Business Portal — is the missing link that will enable ENs in Indiana to fulfill the promise of the *Ticket to Work* legislation. The current law, while recently amended, does not provide for the application of appropriated funds for this [technical] purpose.

Moreover, since the need for such a tool and available technology to solve *TTW* issues emerged only after years of implementing this program, funding to support it is not an allowable SSA expense.

However, because the cost of building this infrastructure is not expensive, an opportunity now exists for a relatively small amount of funding to create the key to larger [overall] *TTW* program success.

Unique aspects of the EN Business Portal include:

- Its potential to solve the major challenge to becoming a successful EN by providing crucial technical and administrative support that will reduce time, overhead, and paperwork; and
- The economies of scale that can be achieved for a statewide EN system, giving it the capacity to serve more beneficiaries.

These characteristics give this model tremendous potential for replication in other states, not just Indiana.

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The EN Business Portal will fulfill the following objectives:

- ❖ To establish an interface to assist organizations in becoming ENs;
- ❖ To provide Indiana ENs (and eventually, in other states) the support they need to manage the administrative aspects of their *TTW* programs, including:
 - Tracking measurable outcomes and progress for each *Ticket* holder;
 - Completing employment verification and follow-up processes necessary to obtain compensation for successful placements;

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- Assessing Ticket holders' skills and job readiness;
- Developing Individual Work Plans (IWPs) for each Ticket holder;
- Completing reporting and other business interfaces with SSA;
- Encouraging employers to hire Ticket holders by incorporating an online feature that assists them with the paperwork required for obtaining tax credits for hiring people with disabilities; and
- Increasing the revenue and job placement results of participating ENs.

Numerous additional details pertaining to this proposed project are ongoing. For example, we would anticipate subcontracting with two current Indiana ENs. We feel it's imperative to have agencies that are providing day-to-day Ticket operations to be involved and assist in establishing credibility in the field.

Summary

An efficient and effective approach to technical assistance and training about *TTW* — such as the project proposed in this article — is crucial for CRPs to fully realize this program's potential. This is true not only in the state of Indiana but nationwide as well. ■

Dennis Born is the director of the Supported Employment Consultation and Training Center (SECT) at BehaviorCorp. The SECT Center provides training and consultation with the 26 Behavioral Health Care Centers across Indiana. The primary mission of the SECT Center is to expand, improve, and enhance quality employment services for individuals with serious mental illness. In addition, he also administers Indiana Works, Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Project. For more information, contact him at (765) 641-8382.



Editor's Notebook

I'd like to thank Dennis Born for following up after we met at the APSE National Conference — and for writing this month's cover article about changes he sees as necessary to continually improve the *Ticket to Work* program (revamped in 2008).

While Dennis's efforts naturally focus on Indiana, where he lives, he believes the EN Business Portal model has the potential to work in other states as well.

Speaking of things that work, this month's newsletter also includes stories on the importance of "person-centered" initiatives — more specifically, as they relate to career planning (on page 8) AND transportation plans (on page 6).

Approaches that stress the person seem obvious, but in a day and age with increasing depersonalization in many areas of our daily lives — I'm sure I'm not the only one who's been stuck in a useless voicemail loop — putting the individual ahead of the

process isn't always as simple as it seems. Thinking outside the box to benefit a specific person is seldom easy, but it sure beats being inflexible in trying to make a square peg fit in a round hole.

Finally, we wish to remind subscribers about the annual reader survey in October's issue of *JTPR*, which was sent via both email and snail mail. Whether you fax it back, or use the postage-paid envelope provided in the hard copy, the survey only takes a few minutes to complete.

Your comments and suggestions help us publish the best newsletter possible. Conversely, we don't know what we could be doing better — or what stories you most want to see next year — if we don't hear from you. We look forward to your feedback. Until next month. ■

Mike Jacquart

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In the News

Website Accesses Tax Credit Info

To help individuals and families better understand tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), GCFLearnFree.org — a training website operated by Goodwill Industries International and Goodwill Industries of Eastern North Carolina (Durham) — collaborated to develop a tax credit tutorial. The online training module contains easy-to-navigate lessons and news articles that cover a number of topics related to personal finance.

Despite the many resources

available, families are often unaware of tax credits or how to qualify. The tutorial breaks down information about credits, refund anticipation loans, Taxpayer Advocate Service, and free tax filing options.

Credits described in the module, such as EITC, can translate into hundreds or even thousands of dollars to low-income households. The 2009 EITC ranges from \$457 to \$5,028. ■

Source: "Working!" a publication of Goodwill Industries International, Inc. (www.goodwill.org).

When a Friend Needs a Job...

By Alisa Weinstein

Ask yourself if the following scenario has ever happened to you, or a colleague: “Your friend hasn’t had any luck in his/her job search, but there’s some great news — YOUR organization is hiring! Besides, it’ll be a lot of fun working together!”

Or will it? A recent CareerBuilder article posed the question: “What happens when your friend becomes your co-worker?” It’s worth thinking about. Recommending a friend is like playing with fire. While working with friends might seem like a dream job, if their work ethic doesn’t match yours, YOU may be in trouble!

If you’re thinking about recommending a friend for a job opening, there are some basic ground rules to use before you open the door to what could be the end of a friendship — or even your job:

1. Do your homework: Ask yourself why you are offering a friend the job? Does he/she really have the proper qualifications? This isn’t the time for a knee-jerk reaction of just helping someone out. The person you invite into your workspace isn’t there to socialize and is a direct reflection on your judgment and reputation.

2. Have a friendship “pre-nup”: Discussing work performance with a friend can be an uncomfortable situation that can be made even more unsettling if your friend receives the promotion that you were vying for. You must be prepared for situations that will challenge your friendship, bruise your ego, and even threaten your job security. Sit down and make an agreement between the two of you because

things can get complicated quickly if you don’t have open communication with each other.

3. Create clear boundaries: Just because you’re friends doesn’t mean you should exchange confidential information about other employees. It also doesn’t mean that you can be interrupted in meetings, or disrespected. People are watching to make sure there is no preferential treatment. You never want to lose the respect of colleagues because you’re more than lenient to family and friends.

4. Have an exit strategy: If you find that your friendship is strained, and the relationship is damaged beyond repair, be prepared to let go. If you’re still working together, you need to state your intentions to at least work together professionally — and don’t get involved in office gossip or fights. If things get out of hand, you’ll need to speak to someone in Human Resources and notify them of the situation. ■

Alisa Weinstein, a certified life and business strategist, and former award-winning journalist for ABC TV, has more than 20 years experience as a successful executive in the entertainment industry.

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Survival Tips for Older Job Seekers

By Joe Turner

I talk with older job seekers almost every day. Like their younger counterparts, they've been caught flat-footed by the economic recession. Whereas before, many were able to advance their careers through word of mouth, they now feel caught totally off guard in a working world that seems foreign.

If you're an older worker and new to the job search world, take the following actions to increase your chances of getting hired:

1. Don't whine! — With some employers there WILL be an age bias. That's reality, and there's no getting around it. Older workers often feel they have to apologize for their years of experience. Don't. Remind yourself that you're experienced, not old. You're seasoned, not over-the-hill. You're here-and-now, not history. It's all about spin and reframing, so drop the apologies.

Use your savvy to sell against youth and inexperience. There are advantages to being older, such as having wisdom and common sense, and a long work record of accomplishments that can translate into benefits to the employer. Sell your track record.

2. Talk MONEY, not years — Recognize that hiring managers today are looking for results, not years. Talk the language that an employer understands and appreciates, which is *Return-on-Investment*. Instead of citing 20-years of experience, identify your benefits to the employer. Put them into monetary terms as much as possible.

Back up your accomplishments with facts that are benefit-based. Sell them from the perspective of how it positively impacted employers. Money CAN trump age.

3. Modify your résumé — You can't do anything about your age, and you can't change the cultural and employment biases against older workers. But you *can* stack the deck in your favor by reworking your résumé to emphasize your strengths. Drop old

work history — anything more than 10 years back is most likely irrelevant, bores the reader, and emphasizes your age.

Remove other obvious roadmarkers in a résumé as well. Take dates off college degrees and professional training that go back more than a few years. It's OK you've been around a while, but an older job seeker doesn't have to call undue attention to it.

Summary

Don't let your age get you down. Emphasize strengths, and don't magnify vulnerabilities. Do this to find a great job regardless of the economy. ■

As a recruiter, Joe Turner spent 15 years finding and placing top candidates in some of the best jobs of their careers. The author of "Job Search Secrets Unlocked," and "Paycheck 911", you'll find free tips and advice on landing a job in this tough economy at Joe's website, www.jobchangesecrets.com. Editor's note: An additional tip geared toward older workers, "Widen Your Online Footprint" was presented in the October 2009 issue of JTPR.

In the News

Alliance Reflects Commitment to Veterans

AbilityOne, the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have other significant disabilities, has entered into a strategic alliance with the USO (United Service Organizations) to assist service members, particularly wounded warriors.

The USO is known internationally for providing morale-boosting activities and services to the military. The alliance will leverage the resources of both organizations to help veterans.

AbilityOne will provide volunteer support through its network of more than 40,000 employees –

2,000 of whom are veterans – for the USO *Operation Enduring Care* program, which works to meet the recovery needs of injured service members and their families. For their first joint initiative the two organizations will pack "comfort kits" for injured troops coming directly from the battlefield.

This declaration marks the beginning of a long-term relationship between AbilityOne and the USO and responds to the *United We Serve* initiative, a call to action by President Obama and the First Lady to encourage volunteerism.

AbilityOne provides employment opportunities to more than

40,000 people. More than 600 participating nonprofit organizations employ these individuals and provide quality goods and services to the federal government at a fair market price.

AbilityOne is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent federal agency; with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH-Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities.

Editor's note: Nov. 11 is Veterans Day. ■

Person-Centered Transportation Works

Sussex County is considered one of the most rural areas of New Jersey. Located in the northwest part of the state, the county has a small transit system that runs *at limited times and in limited areas*. And as many providers know, transportation is often the linchpin to employment. If a person can get a job, but can't get *to* a job, everybody is back at square one.

Recognizing this fact, SCARC, Inc., designed a flexible system to better meet the transportation needs of individuals with developmental disabilities in Sussex County.

SCARC started with a door-to-door transportation network funded by the state government through an annual grant. SCARC contracted transportation services that could take approximately 200 adults with disabilities to and from day program services. Although the program helps a number of persons, individuals who *aren't* at a congregate work site are unable to benefit from the service.

Taking Things One Step Further

After an extensive review by SCARC administration, staff, families, and individuals with disabilities, SCARC decided to add vehicles that could transport four to six persons to individual work sites. It hired drivers and obtained additional vehicles to transport persons from their homes to multiple work sites. It also established transportation routes and monitored them to ensure that the system would efficiently bring individuals to work on a regular basis.

Working Through Difficulties

However, coordinating transportation schedules involved resolving some complicated issues — namely:

- Long commuting distances;
- Multiple work sites in different towns;
- Different beginning and ending work times; and
- Emergencies at work that require the worker to return home prior to quitting time.

A team model — in which a variety of individuals met to develop and monitor a person-centered plan — proved an effective solution to these problems. In many cases, accommodations were made to alter starting and ending work times, change employment location, and move work assignments closer to workers' residences.

'Person-Centered' Works

Developing person-centered transportation arrangements often results in more stable employment for people with disabilities. Focusing on the individual, and flexible transportation arrangements, create a more secure employment history and often guarantee more stability to the employer as well.

In addition, many rural areas such

as Sussex County are subject to inclement weather and subsequent challenges of snow removal and road clearance. Staff members experience a buy-in to the individual's work plan and essentially make sure each person is consistently brought to work on time.

Future Plans

Plans to expand this system and make it even more practical for individual needs, include advocating for a more flexible county transit system. SCARC is also working with state government to increase funds to add more vehicles and drivers, which would meet the needs of more individuals seeking employment in the community.

To learn more about SCARC, Inc. and its transportation program, contact Dr. Lecher, Ph.D., CEO, (973) 383-7442 or by mail at 11 U.S. Route 206, Suite 100, Augusta, NJ 07822. ■

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JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT REPORT

practical solutions for professionals

Expert Reveals Leading Jobs in Green Technologies

The movement to rebuild and modernize America is gaining momentum, creating a wealth of solid job opportunities in a variety of fields and industries.

“In order to succeed in the 21st century, we’re working to improve education, expand health care, fix the infrastructure, overhaul our manufacturing industries, adopt green technologies, and continue our leadership in high-tech innovation,” says Laurence Shatkin, one of the nation’s leading occupational experts and author of the recently released, *200 Best Jobs for Renewing America*.

In his new book, Shatkin explores the industries that are at the center of America’s shift toward a forward-looking economy: Education, Infrastructure, Health Care, Information and Telecommunication Technologies, Green Technologies, and Advanced Manufacturing. He also identifies the best overall jobs, best-paying jobs, and fastest-growing jobs.

Of these industries, green technologies, in particular, has gained a great deal of interest among individuals hoping to secure a solid job as the economy continues to shift and become more competitive.

The following is a sample list of the 10 best jobs in green technologies:

1. Construction Managers — Annual Earnings: \$76,230; Percent Growth: 15.7%;

2. Industrial Engineers — Annual Earnings: \$71,430; Percent Growth: 20.3%;

3. First-line Supervisors and Managers of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers — Annual Earnings: \$55,950; Percent Growth: 9.1%;

4. Environmental Scientists and Specialists (including Health) — Annual Earnings: \$58,380; Percent Growth: 25.1%;

5. Construction and Building Instructors — Annual Earnings: \$48,330; Percent Growth: 18.2%;

6. Environmental Engineers — Annual Earnings: \$72,350; Percent Growth: 25.4%

7. Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters — Annual Earnings: \$44,090; Percent Growth: 10.6%;

8. Geoscientists (except Hydrologists and Geographers) — Annual Earnings: \$75,800; Percent Growth: 21.9%;

9. Carpenters — Annual Earnings: \$37,660; Percent Growth: 10.3%; and

10. Electricians — Annual Earnings: \$44,780; Percent Growth: 7.4%.

200 Best Jobs for Renewing America is available at Amazon.com, major bookstores, and from the publisher (www.jist.com or 1.800.648.JIST). ■

Consider ‘Temp’ Positions for Clients

Supported employment agencies that aren’t utilizing temporary staffing agencies are missing out on employment opportunities for their job-seeking clients. Consider:

- ❖ Employers look to temporary help to keep fully staffed during busy seasons, to fill temporary vacancies, or to staff short-term projects. In addition, many are looking for a good source for *permanent* employees that they can “try out” before hiring.

- ❖ Temporary jobs can provide a gateway to the workforce for people with disabilities, and help those with limited skills to gain additional experience. As mentioned, “temp” jobs also provide a bridge to full-time employment for many workers.

Temps fill jobs in fields as diverse as electronics assembly, administrative/clerical, food service, medical, legal, and others.

Some agencies partner with local businesses to develop recruiting programs that will help close periodic gaps in their workforce. Employers and employees alike reap the benefits of temporary employment. ■

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Matt: Taking the Time to Plan for Employment

Matt is 22 years old and lives in a residential home. Matt has been described as a tremendously able guy who is very friendly and gets along well with others. Matt had some experience working in the community, in a cafeteria and doing landscaping. Matt had also worked at Stop and Shop retrieving carriages, which he described as boring.



Matt's interests include electronics and construction work. He is looking forward to getting married to his girlfriend and living independently in the future.

How the Idea Began

Matt's transition coordinator nominated him for a pilot project, which involved a team and a series of planning meetings to create and implement employment goals. As part of Matt's person-centered career planning process, six meetings in total were held, two of which were quite long.

In these meetings, the group was challenged with discovering Matt's interests and goals — such as what brings out the best and worst in him. This was important information that would guide Matt's employment plan.

The team immediately recognized that Matt was bored at home with nothing to do. As a result, his employment specialist decided to move straight to the job search process. They immediately got Matt ready for interviews and enrolled him in public transportation training.

The team met weekly to maintain momentum, updating each other on his many "world of work" tours (exploring different avenues to see what it might be like to work there). While initial planning meetings were much longer and discussion-oriented, subsequent ones were much shorter, held mostly for updates.

Planning Efficiency

Efficiency in the planning process was ensured because Matt's service coordinator and his facilitator shared responsibility for tasks and coordinated activities with one another. The coordinator and facilitator clearly agreed on their roles:

- The coordinator scheduled meetings, and the facilitator led them.
- The facilitator relied on the coordinator's organization, while the coordinator relied on the facilitator's expertise in person-centered planning.
- The coordinator was also the liaison to Matt's guardian, making sure that she was informed of each step.

What Happened

As it turned out, the employment provider had a contact at a nearby Sheraton Hotel, which had experience employing individuals with disabilities in housekeeping positions. The employment provider's role was to contact the Sheraton, prepare Matt for the interview, and assist him in filling out his application. Matt got the job in one day!

Matt started at 25 hours per week and now works 30 hours each week in the maintenance department at the Sheraton. He

brings his tool set with him (a birthday gift from his co-workers) and does maintenance work and painting. He also cleans the hotel's parking lot in the mornings.

Matt benefits from a supportive group of co-workers who supervise him and help to keep him on task. Matt enjoys lunchtime, when he can sit outside with his co-workers, chatting and laughing. His job coach checks in with his supervisor regularly, but no longer stays with him at the job.

Lessons Learned

❖ Matt's team took time at the outset to discover and discuss his interests, goals, and support needs. This critical period guided the remainder of his planning process.

❖ During the planning process, Matt's employment provider recognized the need to shift gears and implemented a rapid job search process, immediately beginning to investigate job options and put supports in place.

❖ Team members met frequently to keep the process moving forward. While initial planning meetings were discussion-oriented, subsequent ones were task-oriented, with updates provided by each group member.

❖ Matt's facilitator, employment provider, and service coordinator all understood each other's roles throughout the planning process. Delineating roles and depending on each other's expertise created an effective planning and implementation process. ■

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