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## Helping SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries Get to Work: What Do Successful Employment Networks Look Like?

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# Helping SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries Get to Work: What Do Successful Employment Networks Look Like?

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**Abstract:** In this session, we presented findings of a study of the Ticket to Work (TTW) program designed to help Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) beneficiaries obtain employment. The study examined the TTW program through several different lenses, including: 1) the SSA perspective, through analysis of Social Security Administration (SSA) data; 2) a workforce development perspective, through assessing the public workforce system's accessibility and service practices; 3) a practitioner's perspective, through site visit interviews and observations; and 4) the participants' perspective, through focus group discussions. We shared findings about the characteristics of successful TTW programs and invited session participants to share insights from their own TTW experiences.

**Keywords:** Employment; SSI/SSDI

**Knowledge Focus:** Research/Theory

**Topic:** Postsecondary Education & Employment

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal a continuing pattern of limited workforce participation among people with disabilities. For example, labor force participation is less than one-third that of people without disabilities, and the unemployment rate is more than twice that of the general population.

Before the Social Security Administration's (SSA's) Ticket to Work (TTW) program was launched in 2002, SSI/SSDI beneficiaries who were looking for help obtaining employment were served primarily through the state/federal Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. The TTW program, designed to reduce or eliminate reliance on SSA disability benefits by increasing beneficiaries' financial independence, expanded employment services options beyond VR. Under TTW, other agencies and organizations in addition to state VR can become Employment Networks (ENs) and receive payments for serving people with disabilities. These agencies can include both public and private organizations (e.g., workforce agencies, non-profit service organizations, private firms), which increases the choice SSA beneficiaries with disabilities have when seeking service and supports to enter, re-enter, and/or maintain employment.

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IMPAQ International, LLC (IMPAQ) was contracted by the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Chief Evaluation Office to investigate the public workforce system's involvement in the TTW program. The primary objective of this study was to examine how ENs operate, and identify the program characteristics associated with success. The study used two major sources of data. First, SSA administrative data provided basic information such as number of ticket holders served and number and amount of ticket payments. Second, site visits to ENs provided more detailed information about program implementation and service delivery.

In this session, we discussed the findings of this recently completed study of ways that ENs can be most effective in helping SSI/SSDI beneficiaries get to work. This included examining the TTW program through several different lenses, including: 1) the SSA perspective, through analysis of SSA data; 2) a workforce development perspective, through working with DOL and a technical workgroup of experts, as well as assessing the public workforce system's accessibility and service practices; 3) a practitioner's perspective, through site visit interviews and observations; and 4) the participants' perspective, through their own voices shared during focus group discussions. We presented our findings about the characteristics of successful ENs and invited session participants to share their insights from their own TTW experiences.

### Authors



**Kay Magill**, Ph.D. (Stanford University), Senior Research Associate at IMPAQ International, has almost 30 years' experience in policy research, program evaluation and studies of employment and education services, community living options, and vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities.

*Image Description: Photo of Kay Magill*



**Linda Toms Barker**, M.A., (Antioch West University), Principal Research Associate at IMPAQ International, has almost 40 years' experience in program evaluation and public policy research with a particular focus on disability employment policy. She has also studied service delivery and quality of life implications of a wide range of policies and regulations influencing community living options and access to mainstream social services for individuals with the full range of disabling conditions, including multi-method studies of community living, employment, education, and health care for individuals with disabilities.

*Image Description: Photo of Linda Toms Barker*