

Identification of Challenges and Recommendations for Increased Self-Sufficiency through Employment for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Title II (Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)/Child Disability Benefit (CDB))

Date: September 27, 2022

Project Summary: The Social Security Agency (SSA) provides essential income for some individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) either through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) aid.

Although significant effort is being focused on helping those with IDD to become self-sufficient and employed to their full capacity, the current implementation of SSI/Title II Benefits and the associated Work Incentive System is ineffective and serves as disincentives for those with IDD who wish to work full time. The result is that persons with IDD are being “misinformed” that they should work fewer hours to keep their benefits or simply not work at all. (An indicator that the system is broken from the self-advocate, agency, families, individuals, and supporting counselors’ perspective.)

The problems associated with work and SSA benefits has intensified driven by:

- Cost of living increases, especially housing costs. However, Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) has only marginally increased. This is making it difficult for persons with IDD to be self-supporting.
- Persons with IDD are being “misinformed” that they should work fewer hours to keep their benefits or simply not work at all. With the increases in the minimum wage to \$15+/hour the number of hours that persons with IDD “think” they can work is significantly reduced.
- Confusion over how to utilize and apply for work incentive programs, especially the new paid work experiences such as apprenticeships and internships.
- Access to Social Security Agency (SSA) and Office of Hearing Operations (OHO) employees problematic, extending delays for resolution of benefit disputes.

The purpose of this document is to outline elements of the SSI and Title II programs that are ineffective when attempting to secure employment, expand hours, and plan for promotional opportunities to become self-sufficient. The document looks at the programs, the work incentives, and the problem resolution procedures.

This document limits its focus to problems associated with employment in California, although many ideas could be extended nationally.

OCLPA Benefits Planning Work Team Members:

- Judi Uttal*, President Orange County Asperger’s Support Group (Parent)
- Linda O’Neal*, Transition Specialist (Working Group)
- Richard Rosenberg*, Transition Consultant
- Melissa Cory*, Spirit League President Emeritus (Parent)
- Dr. Louis Vismara, Advocate (Guest of OCLPA)

- Nick Herringer*, Community Work Incentive Coordinator, Project Independence (No longer participating)
- Jim Huyck, Benefits Advocate (Guest of OCLPA)
- Susan Katzen, Special Needs Attorney (Guest of OCLPA)
- Scarlett Von Thenen*, Certified Benefits Planner, Orange County SCDD

(*) These individuals were members of a research and development team who created the following information sheets.

Information Sheets contained in this document include:

1. **Problems with SSI and Employment for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD):** This document identifies the problems with the Social Security Supplemental Security Income program for IDD attempting to achieve competitive integrated employment at a life-sustaining wage. Recommendations on policy, procedure, staffing, and software changes that are needed to address these issues.
2. **Problems with Title II (SSDI/CDB) for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD):** This document identifies the problems with the Social Security Title II programs, such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for IDD attempting to achieve competitive integrated employment at a life-sustaining wage. Recommendations on policy, procedure, staffing, and software changes that are needed to address these issues.
3. **Problems with SSI and Title II Work Incentives & Employment Supports for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD):** Work incentives and employment supports have been introduced to encourage persons with IDD who are participating in either SSI or Title II programs to seek employment. This document identifies gaps and problems for those who want to achieve competitive integrated employment at a life-sustaining wage. Recommendations on policy, procedure, staffing, and software changes that are needed to address these issues.
4. **Problems with SSI and Title II Resolution Procedures for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD):** Many times, the Social Security Administration takes actions that may eliminate receipt of benefits presently or retroactively. This document outlines the problems encountered by those individuals impacted and the difficulties they encounter in attempting to resolve a dispute related to their benefits. Recommendations are provided about how these problems can be resolved in a timely manner or avoided all together.