

Working Healthy Helps Carry Out Employment Plans

By Mike Lynam, M.S., Employment/Housing Coordinator, Central Kansas Mental Health Center

J. had been a client here at Central Kansas Mental Health Center for many years, moving to Salina from a small town in the outlying part of our catchment area. Over the years, J. has been a client with whom we have seen, to steal from Clint Eastwood, the good, the bad and the ugly.

Many of the struggles we first came to experience along with him were due to behaviors related to problem drinking. This affected every area of his life. He frequently lost his independence, not to mention his driver's license. After multiple hospitalizations that took place most often due to decompensation he experienced while drinking, J. was assigned a guardian who also served as his payee.

Following one hospitalization, J.'s guardian arranged for him to stay in a local residential care facility. While staying there, his ability to seek and consume alcohol was limited. He also began to think much more clearly and function in a manner that we had never seen before.

After beginning work with a dedicated case manager, J. moved back to an apartment. He returned to full independent living in the community with occasional support from his case manager, never experiencing any problems, outside those that seem to be experienced by all bachelors.

After a time, J. told his case manager, who works with me in supported employment, that he wanted to consider working. We met with a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor whom J. had worked with before and with whom he was very comfortable. He also encouraged J. to take this next step in his recovery. This is where the story began to take another turn.

J.'s guardian was concerned about his potential return to work, as he had come so far in his sobriety and independence. She wanted to talk before signing anything to agree to VR services. It was at this point that Working Healthy came into play.

The first item I had on our meeting agenda was Working Healthy. As soon as I told the guardian if J. became employed his spend down could potentially be eliminated, she was like Ross Perot - all ears. VR applications and other agreements could not be signed fast enough.

This was about a year ago and shortly thereafter J. became employed in customer service with a Dillon's store in Salina where he works to this day.

This is not necessarily a story climax to rival Cecil B. DeMille, but it is the heart of Working Healthy. Ordinary folks with ordinary jobs and ordinary stories, being able to live ordinary lives in the community thanks to the ability to access the care they need while maintaining employment. Collectively, stories like J.'s along with all the other similar stories are what make the changes people experience thanks to Working Healthy so extraordinary.

Additional Funding for Working Healthy Awarded

Kansas has been awarded two more years of Medicaid Infrastructure Change funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to continue implementation and outreach activities for the Working Healthy program. Working Healthy plans to use the funds for several new activities, including:

- Providing technical assistance and limited on-site support in the Topeka Workforce Center to increase Center staff's awareness of and responsiveness to the special needs of job seekers with disabilities.
- Because employers are key stakeholders for the Working Healthy program, WH staff will target employers as

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Benefits Specialists' Corner

This issue features Working Healthy Benefits Specialist Steve Curtis from the Topeka SRS Office. Steve recently made the move from Southwestern Kansas to Topeka. He shares these words regarding this transition: "There are so many people out in Southwest Kansas that have contributed to my personal and professional growth that I can't begin to thank them all here! I'm beginning to develop similar relationships in here and I'm sure when all is said and done I'll love Topeka just as much as SW Kansas." Steve can be contacted by phone at (785) 296-5816 or by E-mail at SXXC@srskansas.org.

Tax season is, or soon will be, upon us. Benefits Specialists won't be able to offer specific tax advice since it is outside our area of expertise. However, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) does offer information that may be of interest to employed persons with disabilities.

The following publications are available electronically from IRS at <http://www.irs.gov>. Paper copies are available by calling 1-800-829-3676. To request publications via TTY/TDD, call 1-800-829-4059.

Publication 907, Tax Highlights for Persons with Disabilities, includes general information on income, itemized deductions, tax credits, and other items along with references to specific forms. Various types of income, including Dependent Care Benefits, Social Security and Railroad Retirement, Disability Pensions (employer paid), Military and Government Disability Pensions, Long Term Care Insurance, Accelerated Death Benefits, and Other Payments are defined and whether they are considered taxable or non-taxable income is clarified. Also, if you file an itemized return certain Medical Expenses and/or Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs) may be deductible. Total medical expenses are not deductible, but the amount that exceeds 7.5% of adjusted gross income is allowable. There is no adjusted gross income limit on IRWEs. In addition to the tax credits discussed below, there is the Child and Dependent Care Credit if you pay for care for children under 13 or for a spouse or dependent who is unable to care for himself or herself.

Publication 524, Credit for the Elderly or Disabled, has detailed instructions regarding who is eligible for the credit, figuring the amount of the credit, and how to get tax help. Something to be aware of: the IRS definition of Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) is quite different from the Social Security definition and may disqualify some working individuals with disabilities from qualifying for the credit. Page 4 of Publication 524 includes examples of what is and is not considered SGA.

Publication 596, Earned Income Credit (EIC), explains the eligibility requirements and how to compute the amount (or let the IRS compute it for you). This credit is more universally applied with the only restrictions based on income. There are higher income limits if one also has a qualifying child or qualifying children.

Income, filing status and number of dependents will affect how much of a credit one can claim and/or the amount of any refund one may get. Individuals will need to file a tax return to take advantage of tax credits and refunds.

Questions about these publications may be directed to the IRS at 1-800-829-1040.

-Steve Curtis, Working Healthy Benefits Specialist

KS Awarded a Grant to Help People with Disabilities Maintain Independence and Employment

Kansas is one of three states that have recently been awarded funding for a five-year Demonstration to Maintain Independence and Employment (DMIE) project. Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services, the University of Kansas, and other partners will test the hypothesis that providing intensive health care and support services will help people with potentially disabling conditions to remain employed. While Working Healthy allows people with disabilities to return to work and maintain their Medicaid coverage, the new program funded by the grant will help keep participants from ever having to lose employment because of their impairments in the first place.

Participants will be 400 employed individuals covered by the Kansas “high-risk” insurance pool who have progressive impairments that, without early intervention and treatment, would likely result in permanent disability. Half of these individuals will receive enhanced health coverage and other supports paid for by grant funds. The other half will participate as a control group and will not receive the enhanced health coverage and support services offered to the intervention group.

About 600,000 individuals leave the work force and enroll in Social Security Disability Insurance program each year, which entitles them to Medicare coverage after a 2-year waiting period. This program will help policy makers determine whether early intervention and support can keep people at risk of becoming permanently disabled on the job, where they can remain productive and self-sufficient, contribute to the Kansas economy, and avoid dependency and impoverishment.

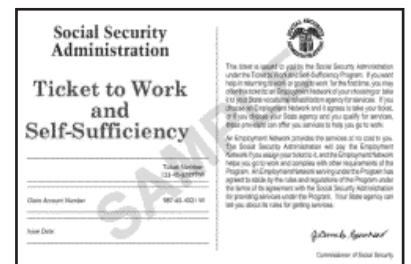
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a key outreach group during the next two years. Outreach and promotion will be directed at local Chambers of Commerce, business organizations and businesses.

- Working Healthy staff will also focus promotional and outreach efforts on under-represented groups such as youth. Staff will work with Transition Councils and other transition programs throughout the state to reach students with disabilities of transition age for education about Working Healthy and other work incentives.
- Additional activities will include technical assistance with micro-enterprise development and outreach to medical providers.

Kansas Employment Networks

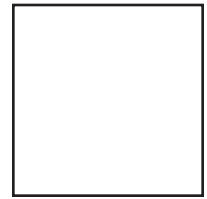
All Kansans with disabilities who are currently Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries or who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance should have received a Ticket to Work voucher in the mail. As explained in previous Working Healthy newsletters, these tickets can be used at Employment Networks to access a variety of services at no cost to help people with disabilities attain employment.



In Kansas, many different types of providers are registered as Employment Networks, including centers for independent living, mental health centers, community developmental disability organizations, other community-based organizations, and state Vocational Rehabilitation. To find out more about the Ticket program or local providers, call 1-866-YourTicket (1-866-968-7842), or visit <http://www.yourtickettowork.com>.

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on-line at: <http://www.workinghealthy.org>**

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Additional copies and copies in alternate formats are available upon request by writing the University of Kansas, CRL - Division of Adult Studies, Attn: Noelle, JR Pearson Hall, Room 521, 1122 West Campus Rd., Lawrence, KS 66045-3101, by phone (785) 864-7085, or by E-mail: pixie@ku.edu

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