

Working & Social Security for Individuals with Disabilities

By: Steven Nguyen

I often get asked by young adults and adults with disabilities, “I really want to work (or work more), but I am scared to lose some of my government benefits. What am I to do?” Truth is everyone who is willing to work, should have that opportunity, without fears. Many know about agencies that help individuals with disabilities obtain and maintain employment, but very few know about the agencies that assist with navigating through the complex Social Security system. The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA) is that hidden gem!

WIPA is a federal initiative started through *The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999*. Under this act, the Social Security Administration awarded grants, contracts, and/or cooperative agreements to provide community-based work incentives expertise to beneficiaries of Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits based on disability.

Locally, you have the Southeast Louisiana WIPA program through the Advocacy Center and Benefits Planning Services (BPS) through LSU. (Depending in which parish you reside) Each program is staffed by Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICS) that will help you understand how work and earnings may affect your SSI, SSDI, and other benefits. They will also answer any questions such as:

- Going to Work or Working More
- Social Security Work Incentives
- Medicare/Medicaid Eligibility
- Ticket to Work and Related Programs
- SSI or SSDI payments while working
- Information and Referral To Other Employment Programs

Who qualifies for their services? Any beneficiary of SSDI or SSI, who are between the ages of 14 and 64. The best thing of all? Their services are at **no cost to you.**

As someone who has personally used their services, I am extremely grateful and pleased with the knowledge they have given me. They are the security blanket of sorts. For more information or to refer, call the numbers below.

SELAWIPA (Advocacy Center) : 1-855-877-8599

Parishes Served:

Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, East Baton Rouge, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, West/East Feliciana, St. Helena, Livingston, Ascension, Terrebonne, Assumption, Lafourche, Washington, St. James, St. John The Baptist, and St. Charles

Parishes Served:

Acadia, Allen, Avoyelles, Beauregard, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Calcasieu, Caldwell, Cameron, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, De Soto, East Carroll, Evangeline, Franklin, Grant , Iberville, Iberia, Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, La Salle, Lincoln, Madison, Many, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Ponte Coupee, Rapides, Red River, Richland, Sabine, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Tensas, Union, Vermillion, Vernon, Webster, West Baton Rouge, West Carroll, & Winn