

LINKING EMPLOYMENT, ABILITIES & POTENTIAL (LEAP)

Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) *The Road to Self-Sufficiency through Benefits Counseling*

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A program to empower individuals with disabilities in making informed life choices through benefits counseling.

BACKGROUND: Work incentives programs are designed to reduce the apparent barriers that can make individuals on SSI or SSDI benefits reluctant to find full-time work - including fear of losing Medicare/Medicaid coverage and fear of losing SSI/SSDI benefits before work income is high enough to cover living expenses. There are many elements to the federal work incentives programs within SSA, plus various state-level opportunities. SSA found that many SSI/SSDI recipients and their advisors knew very little about all the options that are available, much less understood the requirements and procedures involved. To correct this, SSA awarded contracts for BPAO offices in each state to help people sort out their options. LEAP is one of four BPAO offices in the State.

GOAL: To inform and educate beneficiaries of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) about their disability benefits.

DESCRIPTION: The purpose of this project is to provide accurate information to persons with disabilities about work incentive programs and issues related to such programs, enabling them to make informed choices about work. Through a five year agreement with SSA, LEAP is providing benefits planning assistance to persons with disabilities who live within a 15 county area in Northeast Ohio.

ELIGIBILITY:

1. Currently receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or be a Disabled Adult Child (SSDAC)
2. Between the ages of 14 and 65 and have a desire to return to work
3. Resident of one of the following 15 Northeast Ohio counties: Ashland, Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Erie, Geauga, Huron, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, and Wayne.

SERVICES:

- Provision and explanation of accurate benefits information.
- Assessment of the potential impact of employment and/or other changes on eligibility for Federal and State benefits and overall financial well-being.
- Education about Employment Networks (EN's), work incentives and other vocational rehabilitation options involving Ticket to Work.
- Information and assistance in understanding the potential impact of changes in life situations, and guidance regarding the effects of various work incentives.
- Evaluation of available options and development of a consumer driven service plan.
- Direct assistance in the development of a comprehensive, long-term benefits management plan.
- Advocacy on behalf of individuals with other agencies and programs.
- Education regarding comprehensive benefits monitoring and management.
- Information, referral, and problem-solving support.
- Follow-up assistance as needed.

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