

# Home Base:

## *Lisa's Story*



Lisa remembers high school orientation day vividly. It was the fall of 1990 and at fourteen, she was both excited and apprehensive. As she waited with her mother in the high school auditorium, a wave of nausea and vertigo hit without warning. Lisa was suddenly sweating. She had trouble breathing and her heart raced; she thought she was going to die of a heart attack. An ambulance brought her to the emergency room, where she learned she was having a panic attack. Lisa was diagnosed with a panic disorder and soon after, agoraphobia (fear of going out in public places). She struggled through adolescence with anxiety disorders that restricted her life.

Lisa earned a high school diploma through home schooling. But her disability interfered with so many aspects of her life that she and her family did not know how to manage. *"Crowds and open spaces were very difficult for me to handle,"* she recalls. *"After [getting my diploma], I hit rock bottom ... I had to move into a group home [because] my mom and I didn't know how to deal with my agoraphobia. I was lucky to be able to receive Social Security disability benefits, and receive the treatments I needed to get healthy again."*

### The Door Opens

Lisa received effective treatment in 2000 and felt ready to be released from the confined space in which her anxiety held her. With help from an agoraphobia coach, cognitive behavioral therapy and medication, Lisa learned to do simple things that were not possible previously. Taking one step at a time, she began to drive to destinations near her home. Driving was particularly difficult, so this was a significant achievement. She visited local stores that drew small crowds. Then, with her coach, she finally went to a busy shopping mall. Her recovery was under way and Lisa found renewed confidence. She was determined to go to college and find employment.

In 2001, Lisa took classes online in psychology and early childhood development at Kayuga Community College. *"To [complete] the year of school was huge for me,"* she recalls. *"It lifted my self-esteem. I realized 'oh I can do this!' ...and I wanted more. I found that I would really enjoy helping others with their life struggles, and I figured out that I'd rather work with adults who are kind of in the same boat as me. I felt like I was achieving goals, and knew it was a matter of time before I would [find suitable work]."*



With the right support, Lisa found her path to a better future. Find yours. To learn more, call the Ticket to Work Help Line at **1-866-968-7842 (V)** or **866-833-2967 (TTY)**, or visit **[www.socialsecurity.gov/work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work)**.

## A Welcome Detour

In 2002, Lisa gained work experience in a few temporary jobs. Successful stints as a retail sales representative and as an employment counselor reinforced her instinct that she would have much to offer in a job that involved helping other people.

Then, later that year, she learned she was going to be a mother. She devoted the years that followed to caring for her son. His needs pushed her to venture outside of her comfort zone: to the pediatrician, to the playground, to “Mommy and Me” classes. Each new experience became more comfortable.

Lisa’s treatment for agoraphobia and panic disorder continued. As her son grew and she felt ready to return to work, she explored her options.

*“I always knew I wanted to work and feel productive. I wanted to help people in situations like my own. I was determined to start looking for work,” she says. “It was a little overwhelming at first: battling anxiety disorder; worrying about losing my benefits... I was very nervous about [working]. I knew my disability would require accommodations, and I felt concerned about the anxiety interfering with long-term employment. But it was something I felt like I wanted to do badly. I hated having to rely on [Social Security] disability benefits.”*

## Work Incentives and Ticket to Work

Lisa knew she needed help understanding how work would affect her Social Security disability benefits. She decided to do some research online and visited Social Security’s Ticket to Work program website at **www.socialsecurity.gov/work**. She read about Social Security rules, known as “Work Incentives.” Work Incentives make it easier for adults with disabilities to enhance their job skills through education, training and work experience. While preparing to find and sustain employment, SSDI and SSI recipients like Lisa can still receive Medicaid or Medicare coverage and some cash benefits from Social Security. Social Security disability beneficiaries (age 18 through 64) are also eligible to receive free employment support services through the Ticket to Work program. Lisa decided to learn more about Ticket to Work and Work Incentives by calling the Ticket to Work Help Line.

The Help Line representative provided Lisa with a list of “Employment Networks” (ENs). ENs are authorized Ticket to Work service providers that help people prepare

## Employment Networks



ENs offer free services through Ticket to Work that can help you prepare for, find or maintain employment.

Visit **socialsecurity.gov/work** for tips on choosing the right EN. Use the “Find Help” tool to connect with providers who offer the services you need to start or advance your career.

## What are Job Accommodations?

A job accommodation is a reasonable adjustment to a job or work environment that makes it possible for an individual with a disability to perform job duties. Accommodations may include specialized equipment, facility modifications, and adjustments to work schedules or job duties, as well as a whole range of other creative solutions.\*

Through the Ticket to Work program, an EN of your choice or your state Vocational Rehabilitation agency may offer free consulting services on accommodations that could make it easier for you to go to work.

\*source: US Department of Labor



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for work, find a job, or advance in their current position. Lisa found an EN called Employment Options, Inc. (EO). She was grateful to find attentive professionals who answered her questions and introduced her to resources that could help her succeed in the workforce.

Because she was concerned about whether her condition would be compatible with working in an office environment or commuting, Lisa wondered whether working from home could be an option.

Employment Options (EO) helped her plan for her future. She verified what she had learned about Work Incentives on the Ticket to Work website by talking to a benefits counselor. At EO, Lisa received career counseling and advice about job accommodations. Together they developed an Individual Work Plan, and decided her best option would be to work from home. Then something out of the ordinary happened.

*"Employment Options, by chance, had an opening for a job counselor. When they learned that I had related work experience and saw my qualifications, they hired me!"*



It is not common for an EN to hire the people they serve. But Lisa's EN had a need and recognized that she could fulfill it. Lisa now works from home and offers counseling services over the phone. Working from home accommodates Lisa's disability, and offers her the flexibility she needs now as a parent of two children. She is able to integrate work with running her household and says she has found the perfect job.

## A New Outlook

*"Working again has given me a new outlook ..." she says. "Helping others with disabilities has been a dream of mine especially since I can put myself in my clients' shoes. There is no bigger reward than [getting] my clients back to work."*

Lisa credits employment and the help she received through Ticket to Work with improvements in her life. She believes that working has been essential to her recovery. She no longer relies on Social Security benefits, and says that life is "wonderful."

*"Working makes me feel empowered. It has helped me grow. I do not suffer any longer from agoraphobia. I actually travel to Florida for work meetings and look forward to the trips. I am now able to run a household while helping other people like me find their calling. I am so lucky to have found Employment Options. I would not have the ... courage to go back to work [without them]. Thanks [to] Employment Options and the Ticket to Work program, I have changed my life!"*

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