

Where is **Larry** now?

Larry looked at the restaurant bill and considered whether treating his friend to lunch would fit into his weekly budget. With a broad smile he announced, "I've got this!" Few people get a bigger thrill out of picking up the check than Larry. He says it feels good to be able to do it now that he is no longer relying on **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**.

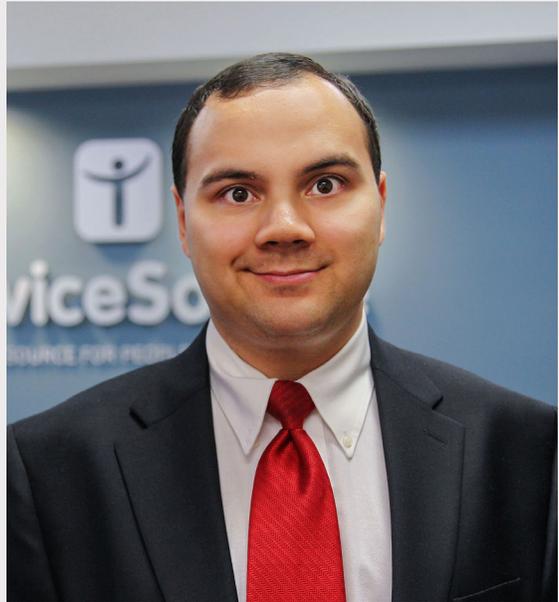
It has been 6 years since Larry shared his original Ticket to Work **success story**. Now in his thirties, he is confident and self-possessed. As he and his family reflect on the past, they express gratitude for the growth he has experienced.

In 2011, with help from Social Security's **Ticket to Work** (Ticket) program, Larry landed a job with a federal contractor. His employment has since contributed to more than the restaurant bill. It has been a source of comfort, achievement, stability, connection, and a more engaged life in the community.

"Larry has more self-esteem now," observes his mother Carmencita. "He is more social, and we have noticed improvement in his communication since [he began working]."

Larry belongs to a group of people born with a disability that has been misunderstood for decades. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) describe neurological conditions that interfere with a person's senses, social interaction, communication, and mental health. ASD has a broad range of attributes and symptoms. It is a "spectrum" disorder because with such variety in its characteristics, it looks different in each person. Some people on the spectrum have remarkable gifts, while others have complex support needs. Many have a combination of both.

ASD has given Larry exceptional visual and long-term memory. It also created barriers to relationships, communication and independence. He says work has helped him get out in the community and connect with other people. Larry also learned to use strategies for managing anxiety and becoming more flexible in a professional setting.



Performing the technical duties of his job wasn't difficult. The most important growth Carmencita describes has been in "soft skills." Soft skills are personal attributes that help someone interact well with other people. An employee with strong soft skills fits into a work environment, behaves professionally, communicates effectively, and cooperates with co-workers. People who don't have autism take soft skills for granted. But without them, it is nearly impossible to succeed in a job that involves working with others.

2021 will mark Larry's 10th year on the job at the Mark Center, where officials from the Department of Defense (DoD) come together to advance U.S. national security. As part of a team that sets up the center's conference rooms for daily meetings, Larry plans logistics with attention to detail that is worthy of the 4-star generals the center serves.

"Larry... is efficient, creative and... has an outstanding work ethic," says Harold Michael, the team supervisor.

Now a Mark Center veteran, Larry feels at home. He says he's a creature of habit and the job is a perfect fit. Larry's family says work has helped him improve

Ticket to Work and Work Incentives

Since 1999, Social Security's Ticket to Work program has improved access to employment support services for millions of job seekers with disabilities. This voluntary program supports career development and promotes financial independence through work.

 Through the Ticket program, state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies and service providers known as **Employment Networks (EN)** offer a range of free services to help people prepare for, find, or maintain employment. Everyone (age 18 – 64) who receives Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) qualifies. 

If you are feeling ready for work, don't let the fear of losing your benefits stand in the way. You can explore work while maintaining access to your SSDI, SSI and Medicare or Medicaid coverage as you transition to work.

If your disability interferes, you may be able to return to benefits without a new application. Social Security rules and programs called **Work Incentives** make this possible. Because each person's circumstances are different, job seekers are encouraged to consult a **Benefits Counselor**: a professional equipped to help you understand how employment will affect your benefits. Use the **Find Help** tool to find a service provider who can help.



problem-solving skills and he is more willing to take risks. Team members appreciate the unique color and enthusiasm he adds to the work environment. Larry's exceptional memory for people's names, birthdays and family has helped him connect with co-workers and form good relationships.

"I really like working with other people on the set-up crew," he says. "It feels good to achieve something together every day."

Larry's novel neurology has brought the Mark Center novel solutions. He figured out logistics that increase efficiency, and his employer's confidence in him reinforced his confidence in himself. The resulting growth in Larry's self-determination and earnings has enhanced his community participation and his choices. It is the kind of win-win arrangement that the Ticket program is all about.

"We are grateful to **Service Source** [Larry's **Employment Network**] and the Ticket program for believing in Larry," says Carmencita. "He is more comfortable navigating the community, he gets out more, and he is more comfortable in his skin."

With the right support, Larry found his path to a better future. **Find yours!**



To learn more, call the Ticket to Work Help Line at **1-866-968-7842** or **1-866-833-2967** (TTY). You can also visit **choosework.ssa.gov**.

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