

Ticket Talk



Podcast Transcript

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Ticket Talk with Success Story Participant Rob McClain

Opening: You are listening to the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work podcast series. Get answers to your questions, access information and resources, and receive expert advice on work incentives and the Ticket to Work program.

Interviewer: Ticket to Work Success Stories highlight the achievements of job seekers with disabilities who found their path to a better future with help from Social Security's Ticket to Work Program. These stories feature real people who used their Ticket to achieve financial independence through work, and provide an inside look at their journeys with the Ticket Program. Through these stories, you can learn about their experiences, their challenges and concerns, and most importantly, their success. We often reconnect with some of the people we've previously profiled to catch up and to learn more about their journey to financial independence. Today we're talking with Rob McClain. Rob received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) due to kidney failure and related health complications. Before his disability interfered with his ability to work, Rob ran a towing and trucking company that provided employment for many folks in his home town. While receiving disability benefits, he earned a college degree and decided to participate in Social Security's Ticket to Work Program. By 2011, after recovering from a successful kidney transplant, Rob wanted to return to work. With assistance from his state Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and his Employment Network, Employment Resources Inc., Rob found work with Wisconsin's Department of Transportation. Since 2012, a larger paycheck and Social Security Work Incentives have allowed him to achieve financial independence. Rob, it's great to have a chance to catch up with you today. Thanks for joining us.

Rob McClain: Thank you very much. I'm honored to be with you again.

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Interviewer: So Rob, it's been a while since we last talked about your experience returning to work. Can you bring us up to date and tell us how things are going for you?

Rob McClain: It's been very well. I've been going, and working a lot of hours and getting back into my lifestyle of being able to work, not being dependent on Social Security as a primary income. I'm able to do a lot more things with my job. I have been trying to go up the ladder within the state, trying to get promoted. I've been having interviews as a team leader and a supervisor, throughout the state. I've been continuing pushing myself to better myself at my job. A lot of experience is coming to me now, being able to work with the public has been awesome. And in my hometown, I've been able to continue my work with the community and to help others try to find their...to help them to get over their problems and concerns they have with a lot of medical issues or ways of getting off of Social Security as well, or to help them answer questions that I have went through when I was disabled, to ease their questions, to find the right answers to how to go about doing it.

Interviewer: So let's talk about that a little bit more. So there are other folks in your community that are in similar situations that you were in previously. So how exactly are you helping them, I guess, overcome these challenges?

Rob McClain: Well, a lot of the challenges that people have is that they don't...there's this fear of not knowing, the fear of not knowing what's coming towards them. I have a sister going through possible kidney failure – it's what I had – so I'm constantly answering questions and trying to help her get through and let her know what's coming up. And to try to ease her mind and to make things you know a better outlook for her. In the community there's been so many, even though work, of the ways of people having kidney failure, possibly having to be going in dialysis.

Interviewer: So do these folks feel better after talking to you and hearing that you've had a positive experience and made the transition back to work?

Rob McClain: Yes, because people – I know when I first started with my job when I was working and I was trying to – all the fears of "what am I going to do, am I going to

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be able to pay my bills? What's going to be my expectation of life in the future of working? And Social Security and Medicare I felt, was a lifesaver once I got into the system and I understood what was expected of me. But then after I had the challenges there comes down the reality, I just worked through it day by day. I had a lot of resources, I had a lot of professionals to help guide me, and I searched them all. I didn't sit and wait for them to find me. I searched them all to make sure that my life – I could get back to work. I'm a person and didn't want to sit there. I like to do more things I like to be more self-sufficient. After I found out I would have a transplant that I would be able to go back, was a great outlook for me and it was great to know that I would be going back. And I would try to set goals and things like that.

Interviewer: That's great. What kind of ongoing assistance have you had from your Employment Network, ERI?

Rob McClain: Yeah, they have been continuously helping me with financial opportunities of making sure I supplement payment of \$200 a month. That goes towards when I need fuel, or a car payment, or my education, trying to pay for the education that I had taken. Anything that will help support me to keep me financially going. It's a big plus. And any kind of counseling, anything that I need to supplement with resources or if I continue having problems, they're there for me to help. And Kate Pingree is one of my resource managers, and any questions or anything like that, I can call her, email her, at any time. I email her sometimes at 5 or 6 o'clock at night, and I get a response. She must be monitoring her email, so if there's any time that I email her she gets back immediately, which is awesome knowing that there's someone there to help me like that.

Interviewer: Well it's got to be comforting to know that assistance is there for when you need it. Sounds like from what you said earlier, you have some new opportunities at work. What kinds of successes and challenges have you experienced in your professional life since participating in the Ticket to Work Program?

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Rob McClain: It's been really overwhelming in a way of helping you stay healthy. Obviously employer or employment, you have your challenges on your job, but you have to, well umm, be knowing that you once you get past that probationary and you get into work, you have to set your goals and deal with challenges, you know, just like any other job. You can have those challenges, but you have to try and take care of those challenges. ERI is there to help me keep on that path, and right now, they asked me to present the organ donation presentation to the Northeast region; that's all of the state employees in the entire Northeast part of the state. And I was able to give a lecture on organ donation in the state, and what to expect and as an employee, the reason behind pushing organ donation...not so much as pushing, but trying to inform and to help the person that's up to the counter to realize how precious a donation of that is, and to help them make a decision by informing them what it actually is, what it's about, pretty much the who/what/where/when/and how of organ donation. And I got to sit up there and give a lecture on behalf of the State of Wisconsin, and I was happy to do that.

Interviewer: Well that sounds like quite the honor. Congratulations on that!

Rob McClain: Thank you.

Interviewer: That's kind of a very interesting intersection of your personal experience with organ donation and the DMV that is the organization that manages people that volunteer for that, right?

Rob McClain: Correct, we have a statute – we need to – ask about if the person wishes to be an organ donor to get the reality of what – some people when they come up they don't understand the reality...to help educate them, to help give them the information for them to make their decision, and then to actually have the decision given is a big plus.

Interviewer: So what has changed in your life outside of employment? Have any opportunities opened up as a result of your job?

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Rob McClain: I've had many opportunities in the way of career advancement. I've been trying to advance in my job. I've been involved in many community events. I've been active with our fire department.

Interviewer: So Rob, if we check in with you again in a year or so, what would you like to be able to tell us about working at that point?

Rob McClain: Just that I have met most of my goals, I'm still independent, I'm still looking forward in my life, I'm still enjoying life to the fullest every day, that my goals are being met consistently. If my one of my goals do put me back, I'm jumping ahead to overcome that negativity to make it a positive. I feel that I have some financial goals that I've been doing to stay independent and the consistency of ERI being there to help me get through this is a big thing.

Interviewer: Well, we may have to give you a ring in a year or so to see if that's where you are. So, wrapping things up, what advice would you offer someone who's considering the Ticket to Work Program?

Rob McClain: Try to get back to work, try to be independent, always look forward to the future of going back to work, being independent, and become very...overcome your obstacles to be the best you can be, and use the help that's there to help get you through things.

Interviewer: Well that sounds like great advice from someone who's been through it. Rob, thank you for speaking with us today, we really appreciate you sharing some of your experiences with the Ticket to Work Program and our listeners. Currently, Rob is in his third year of his Extended Period of Eligibility, or EPE. We've discussed EPE in

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more detail in a previous podcast, but in a nutshell, EPE is a Work Incentive that provides 36 consecutive months of continued eligibility for Social Security benefits while you work. You can learn more about work incentives by signing up for a free Work Incentives Seminar Event, or WISE, webinar, on Choosework.net/WISE. Like Rob McClain, don't let the word "fail" be part of your vocabulary. With support from Ticket to Work, Rob and many other Social Security disability beneficiaries have found their path to a better future. Find yours. Visit our website for more inspiring stories and to learn how Social Security's Ticket to Work Program can help you. Visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work or call the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 for voice or 1-866-833-2967 for TTY.

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