

Spirit to Serve

Ticket to Work Program Success Stories



Jesus has a singular passion for helping people fulfill their potential. Much of this passion grew out of the help and encouragement he received from family members and clinicians when he faced a rare set of challenges as a boy.

Jesus was born with spina bifida, a congenital disorder in which the bones of the spine don't form properly around the spinal cord. For Jesus, this meant spending his childhood using a wheelchair and crutches to get around. "When I was little, it made me feel limited in my physical abilities, and I was unsure of what I would be able to do independently as I got older," he recalls.

But the compassionate and supportive people in his life helped him learn to navigate his teen and young adult years in a body that didn't always cooperate. The help he received influenced the expectations he had for himself and helped him realize his potential. It pushed him to develop the talent he would have to offer as he grew up.

"I grew up ... to appreciate the value of the support I received from professionals who were dedicated to helping other people in a very direct way," he recalls. "I wanted to have an impact on someone else's life in a positive way, too, and I decided to pursue work along those lines."

Ultimately, spina bifida compromised his mobility, but not his ambition.

Exposure

Jesus had been receiving Social Security disability benefits from childhood. But he was not ready to settle for a future with the limitations of a low fixed income. He joined a support group of other young people with spina bifida and began to consider his future. By talking to other group members, he realized that not all occupations required extensive walking or heavy lifting. He began to think about new possibilities.

"I saw that my physical limitations would not necessarily prevent me from finding meaningful employment," he says. "Learning from older people with spina bifida made me see there's more out there than I knew about at first. That exposure was important."

"The first time I met other adults with spina bifida doing work they enjoyed was at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. There, I listened to people tell their stories about how they achieved their educational and [work] goals through volunteer work and other experiences. I was inspired."

Jesus was lucky to have parents and siblings as strong role models. "My parents instilled in me the notion that I was fully capable of achieving my goals just like anyone else," he says. "That was a major influence that helped me keep moving forward. At the same time, my siblings helped me learn and aspire to do more than what others expected of me."

Jesus says he began to discover what he was capable of when he moved out of his parents' home—and his comfort zone—for the first time in 2012. He lived on campus at the University of California at Riverside and experienced a sense of independence he had never known.

"Living on my own at college was a turning point... It was during those years that I developed a great interest in my major, which was sociology. I knew I wanted to do something worthwhile with my degree and seriously contemplated my next steps."

Jesus earned a Bachelor of Arts in 2013 and began looking for opportunities in the field of social work. What he found was the perfect volunteer job and the Ticket to Work program.

A diploma and a ticket

Jesus took the advice of the people he had met at Children's Hospital. He decided to get his feet wet with some volunteer work.

After graduation, he donated his time to a local organization called **Telecare**, which helps improve the lives of people with serious mental illness. As a volunteer, Jesus learned about the population



Volunteer work: Do well by doing good

If you enjoy helping others and want work experience, consider volunteer work. Volunteering involves donating your time and skills to meet a need, promote good, or improve quality of life. It is a great way to give back to your community. It is also an opportunity to explore different fields and learn new skills, which can help you get into college or start a career.

You can find a volunteer opportunity that is right for you by checking out places in your community. You can also search online at:

www.nationalservice.gov

www.volunteermatch.org

www.idealists.org

For more information about work experiences, visit the **National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth**.



Ticket to Work Service Providers

Several different types of Ticket to Work program service providers can help you transition to the workforce or progress in the job you have:



600+ Employment Networks (EN) across the U.S. offer a range of free support services through the Ticket to Work program. Some ENs serve specific populations, while others may provide specialized support services. ENs can help you:

- Prepare for the workforce
- Find a job and stay employed
- Advance in your current job
- Get job accommodations
- Stay in touch with Social Security
- Stay organized



Workforce ENs are providers that are also part of a state's public workforce system. Like other ENs, Workforce ENs can give you access to a wide array of employment support services, including training programs and special programs for youth in transition and veterans. A Ticket program participant who assigns their ticket to a Workforce EN will work with providers in the workforce system (including American Job Centers).



People who need more significant support services (such as rehabilitation or training) may find help at a **State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency**. State VR agencies deliver a wide variety of services to help people with disabilities go to work. These services are designed to provide the client with the training and other services that are needed to return to work, to enter a new line of work, or to enter the workforce for the first time. State VR agencies can help you get ready to work. If necessary, you can then find an EN to help you keep your job and make more money.



Benefits counselors are professionals who can explain how working will affect your Social Security disability benefits. Community-based organizations known as **Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA)** projects, have benefits counselors on staff. Some ENs also offer benefits counseling services.

Use the [Find Help](#) tool to connect with providers that offer the services you need to start or advance your career.

that Telecare serves and the important work the organization does in his community. His role expanded, and later that year, he was offered paid employment as a part-time case manager. He spent most of his day visiting clients and learning about the value of offering personalized support to a vulnerable population.

Jesus was gaining work experience, but he was still uncertain about the risks and rewards of full-time employment. As he considered full-time work, Jesus felt he needed some professional guidance. He found it when he came across information about Social Security's Ticket to Work program online.

The Ticket to Work (Ticket) program supports career development for people with disabilities who are ready for employment. Adults ages 18 through 64 who receive Social Security disability benefits qualify. Through the Ticket program, State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies and service providers known as Employment Networks (EN) offer a range of free support services to help people prepare for, find or maintain employment. Some ENs serve people with a specific type of disability; others offer certain types of services. The program is voluntary and set up to help people progress toward financial independence.

Jesus searched for providers near his home using the Ticket program's online [Find Help](#) tool. He received the guidance he needed early in 2014. He connected with Julie Johnson, a Benefits Counselor at the EN "Career Connection." Benefits counselors like Julie are qualified professionals that give people advice about what working will mean for their Social Security disability benefits. People thinking about employment are encouraged to begin by talking to a Benefits Counselor.

Work Incentives help Jesus focus on his future

With Julie's help, Jesus learned about Social Security rules called Work Incentives. Work Incentives make it easier for adults with disabilities to work and potentially still receive Medicaid or Medicare and cash benefits from Social Security.

Jesus learned that if his disability interfered with his ability to work within five years, he could take advantage of a Work Incentive known as **Expedited Reinstatement** (EXR). EXR may allow Jesus to receive cash benefits again without filing a new application. He felt at ease knowing he would have time to decide if full-time employment would work out.

Julie helped Jesus understand his responsibilities as a Ticket program participant. They worked together on an Individual Work Plan (IWP). An IWP is a road map to help people identify and reach their employment goals. Julie assisted Jesus with a resumé, sent him job leads, helped him with correspondence from Social Security, and supported him throughout the transition to the next phase of his career.

A road map and schedule

Julie also used her information network to connect Jesus with a unique career advancement opportunity. She learned that the Social Security Administration was recruiting to fill select positions around the country. Many job seekers with disabilities will qualify for consideration for positions with the federal government under a special placement authority called "Schedule A." Schedule A is a non-competitive hiring authority available for federal agencies to hire and promote workers with disabilities. By using Schedule A to fill a vacancy, a federal government agency can avoid using the traditional—and often lengthy—competitive hiring process. A person is eligible for a Schedule A if he or she has a severe physical or mental disability.

There are many advantages to working for the federal government. Federal employees serve in a wide variety of exciting jobs, earn good wages, receive medical benefits, and make a difference through public service. The federal government hires people in many different fields, from accounting to public affairs, healthcare to law enforcement, and everything in between.

There are a number of ways that people can apply for a job in the federal government. For people with disabilities, one of those ways is the Schedule A Hiring Authority for people with disabilities (Schedule A).

So what is Schedule A?

There are a lot of rules and regulations for the hiring process at federal agencies. Most of the time, a person must go through a competitive process which is open to all applicants. Applicants who go through this process are hired into the competitive service.

Schedule A is an exception to the traditional hiring process. Schedule A streamlines the hiring process for people with disabilities. In some instances, hiring officials may select solely from a list of qualified Schedule A applicants.

You can apply using Schedule A if you are a person with an intellectual disability, a severe physical disability, or a psychiatric disability. To be selected, you will need to show that you meet the qualifications of the job with or without reasonable accommodation.

Want more information? Read the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's guide to obtaining a job in the federal government using **Schedule A: Tips for Applicants with Disabilities on Getting Federal Jobs**. This guide can answer your questions, and so can a Ticket program service provider who knows about Schedule A.

To learn more about Schedule A, ask a Ticket program service provider or read [Frequently Asked Questions about Schedule A](#).

New learning curve

By 2016, Jesus continued to receive support from his EN while his role at Telecare evolved to full-time case management. When Julie helped him through the Schedule A hiring process, he was confident that the transition to a federal government job would be a positive step in his career. In the Spring, Jesus landed a new job as a Service Representative for Social Security's field office in Norwalk, CA. He enjoys helping people get the resources they need and looks forward to progressing along a new learning curve.

"I am pretty much on the front lines with the public and it's a rewarding job ... to get people the help they need. I also enjoy my coworkers. It's fun learning from them. There are a lot of things to know within [Social Security]. It never gets old or boring and that keeps me interested."

"Work has helped me expand my social circles and my support network as well. I am very happy knowing that I can be independent, achieve the goals I set for myself, and I'm more confident every day. The Ticket to Work program ... the help I received through it ... helped me find my way to work at my own pace and I'm grateful for that."



The Ticket to Work program helped Jesus find his path to a better future.

Find yours! To learn more, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work and contact the Ticket to Work Help Line at **1-866-968-7842** or **1-866-833-2967** (TTY), Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET. Ask a representative to send you a list of service providers or find providers on your own with the Ticket to Work **Find Help** tool.



Notes: "Career Connections" is an EN that is part of the Whittier Union High School District in California.

Sources:

The ABCs of SCHEDULE A: Tips for Applicants with Disabilities on Getting Federal Jobs
(Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

Disability Planner: Benefits for a Disabled Child
(Social Security)

The Mayo Clinic

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

