

Cleaning up at the FBI: Christopher O'Dell's Story

When Christopher O'Dell finished high school in rural West Virginia, he looked forward to gaining independence and having a job of his own. But he was also apprehensive about an unknown future. Chris worried that with a disability, a special education certificate and little work experience, his employment prospects would be limited. Still, depending on a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) check left few choices, and a need for purposeful employment ultimately led him to pursue work in spite of these concerns. *"I got tired quickly of sitting at home, and even though I was nervous at first, I decided to [find help],"* he says.

Work Incentives

A counselor at school referred Chris to Job Squad, a provider of employment opportunities and support services for job-seekers with disabilities. When considering employment, it is important for anyone who receives Social Security disability benefits to consult an expert and learn how work can affect these benefits. With help from his family and a benefits counselor at Job Squad, Chris explored his opportunities. He learned that rules called Work Incentives make it easier for adults with disabilities to enhance their job skills and gain work experience, while still receiving Medicaid and/or Medicare and some cash benefits. Thanks to Work Incentives, Chris' Medicaid coverage may continue even if his income is too high to receive an SSI check. Chris also learned that if he has to stop working because of his disability within five years, Social

Security may be able to start his benefits again without a new application. Because each person's circumstances differ, it is important to understand which rules apply to you, and what these rules will mean for your benefits when you consider working. Work Incentives supported Chris as he built confidence, and helped give him the courage he needed to pursue long-term employment.

The Ticket

Chris' counselor also told him he would be a good candidate for Social Security's Ticket to Work program. The Ticket program is voluntary and exists specifically to help people with disabilities progress toward good jobs, good careers, and a better, self-supporting future. It is a good fit for those who would like to improve their earning potential and are committed to preparing for long-term success in the workforce. Social Security disability beneficiaries 18 through 64 qualify for the program's free services. With the help of state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies (VR) and specialized providers known as Employment Networks (ENs), the Ticket program offers people with disabilities improved access to meaningful employment. More than 1,000 ENs across the country offer a range of employment support services. These may include benefits counseling, career counseling, résumé writing, interview skills support, referral to vocational training or continuing education, job placement, job coaching and/or advocacy. Some ENs like Job Squad specializes in serving

To find an Employment Network near you, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work to use our "Find Help" tool. You can also contact the Ticket to Work Help Line at **1-866-968-7842 (V)** or **866-833-2967 (TTY/TDD)**.

select populations. Program participants may speak with several providers before finding a good match, and can choose any EN that meets their needs.

As a nationally recognized leader in Customized and Supported Employment, Job Squad was well equipped to meet Chris' needs. Multiple government contracts at Job Squad allow them to provide job placement for some clients. They worked with Chris and his family to develop an Individual Work Plan (IWP), a road map to help him meet his employment goals. After assessing his skills and training potential, Job Squad placed Chris in a job as Custodian for the FBI Criminal Justice Information System in 2008. He is responsible for stripping floors, cleaning carpets and several other routine building maintenance activities. In the early weeks of his job, Chris had a difficult time adjusting. He described it as *"really hard work, until you get used to it."* But Job Squad worked with him until he was comfortable in his duties and he now enjoys his routine. Individualized training, a job coach, and other supports helped him become confident in his ability to succeed at work.

Promise

Chris is conscientious in performing his five weekly shifts from 3:00 p.m. to midnight, and is excited about his work. According to Travis Klein, Director of Human Resources at Job Squad, Chris often volunteers for the challenging midnight shift, and has grown as a team player. *"He takes a lead in orienting new employees and strives to promote teamwork with his crew at the FBI building,"* he says. FBI employees enjoy having Job Squad workers like Chris on site.

They contribute to a positive morale, and Travis hopes that contract expansion opportunities will soon allow Job Squad to promote Chris into a supervisory position.

Pride

Chris has seen tremendous improvements in his life since he decided to participate in the Ticket to Work program. At 26, he is now a devoted father with a family of his own and proud of what his independence has allowed him to achieve. He has been financially self-sufficient for four years, and feels free of the limitations imposed by relying on SSI. As Chris talks about fishing with his son, spending time with friends and co-workers, purchasing an all-terrain vehicle, or completing payments on the car, his satisfaction with life after Social Security disability benefits is clear. He looks forward to a better future for himself and his family. Chris is glad he decided to participate in the Ticket program, suggesting other young people should take a chance on their future and *"...go for it!"*

Ticket to Work and Work Incentives helped Chris find his path to self-sufficiency. Find yours. To learn more, Visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work or call **the Ticket Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 (V) or 866-833-2967 (TTY/TDD)** to learn more.



Learn which Work Incentives apply to you! Read the [Social Security Red Book](#), the official guide to Work Incentives or call the **Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 (V) or 1-866-833-2967 (TDD/TTY)**. Help Line representatives can answer many of your questions related to Social Security disability benefits and employment.