**Emerging Practice**

**Title: Multi-Tiered Approach to Financial and Work Incentive information for SSA beneficiaries**

**Submitted by:** Nikki Powis

 nikki.powis@wintac.org

 (907) 957-4702

**Source:** (please provide specific reference)

1. Research Project
2. Journal Article
3. Other Center
4. **Information Gathered from VR Programs**
5. Intensive TA Provision
6. **Other – connection with American Job Centers (AJCs), Disability Employment Initiative, WIPA project and Community Rehab Providers**

**Highlights:**

1. Alaska identified a need for increasing capacity of service providers to be responsive to questions regarding benefits and work incentives for individuals receiving SSI and SSDI benefits through a multi-tiered approached:
	1. Purchasing and maintaining an Alaska-specific DB101 system: <https://ak.db101.org/>;
	2. Training VR Counselors, frontline AJC staff, Community Rehab providers and other partners as Financial and Work Incentive Navigators;
	3. Increasing the number of VR CRPs who are trained Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs); and
	4. Increasing the number of AJC Employment Counselors/Disability Resource Coordinators who are CWICs.
2. This multi-tiered approach increases resources within the AJCs, VR and partners to have the necessary information to respond to questions regarding work and SSA benefits for Ticket To Work clientele and for agency staff and providers to have the knowledge for informed referrals for full Benefit Analysis when needed.
3. This initiative has expanded the system’s capacity and timeliness to meet the needs of SSA beneficiaries, thereby increasing the potential for earlier engagement into employment.
4. Alaska developed a quality assurance system to ensure CWICs providing benefit analysis to VR clients remain up-to-date on skills and knowledge.

**Description:**

*This description was generated from information gained through involvement with Alaska through the DEI and WINTAC Technical Assistance services, information gained through contact with VR, WIPA, partners and workforce staff:*

Alaska recognized that the lack of combined agency staff knowledge on available work incentives and impact of work on benefits as well as the shortage of trained CWICs was inhibiting the ability and comfort level of individuals with disabilities to engage in work. To respond to the need, The Alaska Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education, The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Division of Rehabilitation (DVR), the WIPA, and the workforce system through the Disability Employment Initiative came together to address the problem.

The initial approach was to identify and fund 10 individuals from across Alaska and across agencies to attend training to become trained as CWICs. The group included CRPs, staff from CILs and other partner agencies. In addition, through funding under the Disability Employment Initiative, the workforce system committed to training all their Disability Resource Coordinators as CWICs and expand the number of ENs within the AJCs. This resulted in additional CRPs working as CWICs to provide benefit analysis through the VR fee-for-service system. This also resulted in each workforce region having a trained CWIC to work with individuals coming into the AJCs. The combination of which increased the capacity to respond to SSA beneficiaries and assist them with understanding how working was a feasible and more financially self-sustaining option.

In addition, Alaska VR wanted to ensure quality benefit planning and analysis. As a way to support quality from CWICs providing services to VR, a quality assurance program was created. Now SSA has followed suit by requiring Continuing Certification Credits from all CWICs in order to maintain their certification status. In Alaska, this has been in place for several years.

However, the need still existed for VR counselors and partner agency personnel as well as AJC frontline staff to be more informed on the financial aspect of working versus reliance on benefits and having a deeper understanding of work incentives. Therefore, the next approach was to contract with Griffin Hammis to develop a curriculum that would become the first tier in the multi-tiered approach of benefit planning and assistance. This first tier resulted in knowledge acquisition for multiple agency staff with the ability to provide initial information to beneficiaries as financial and work incentive navigators. The Tier I, Financial and Work Incentive online training and Navigator course has been expanded and is offered statewide through distance delivery to multiple providers, including the following:

* High School Transition Teachers
* Case Managers
* Representative Payees
* Community Rehab Providers
* Employment Counselors

For more information on this training, visit <https://www.aktclms.org/Training/Class/101697>.

The final piece of the puzzle was to create and sustain an Alaska-specific DB101 site that beneficiaries could visit and find information through a self-serve model and could be used as a tool for providers when working with SSA beneficiaries. Effective use of this tool is also taught within the navigator course.

Alaska DB101 can be found at <https://ak.db101.org/>.

**Evaluation and Potential Impact:**

As a result of the multi-tiered approach and expanded training and awareness of Financial and Work Incentives, Alaska providers can more readily address a full spectrum of needs and concerns around working for individuals receiving SSA benefits. The outcome of which is that individuals can seek employment more quickly and readily armed with the knowledge of impact on their benefits.

**Contact:**

Larrisa Cummings

907-264-6228

larrisa@alaskachd.org