

## Success Stories: Donna



Donna used the Ticket to Work program to ease back into the working world. The program is free and voluntary, for people ages 18 through 64 who receive SSDI or SSI benefits. Ticket to Work allows people to work while receiving Social Security benefits and Medical Assistance. The goals of the program are to offer people with benefits more choices for services and supports to enter, re-enter, and/or maintain employment. It increases financial independence and self-sufficiency for people who have SSI or SSDI and reduces or stops reliance on disability benefits when possible.



Donna was able to eventually work full time while still receiving benefits from having challenges with major depression and anxiety/panic attacks. Donna says she found working helpful because “it increased my self-confidence, I believed that my goals were obtainable, and it allowed me to believe that recovery was possible.”

The Ticket to Work program gave Donna a chance to see if she was ready to go back to work full time. It gave her 9 months to increase her hours, and she would receive her SSDI (Social Security Disability Income) and MAWD (Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities).

On her first attempt, Donna found out she was not ready. Eventually, she tried again and succeeded. On Donna’s second attempt to work, she decided to get certified as a Peer Specialist to help others struggling with a mental health condition, while working part time. As her 9-month trial came to an end, Donna was reevaluated to see if she was still eligible to receive Social Security benefits. Donna was deemed ineligible for benefits, and she agreed with the evaluation. She was ready to work full time. Donna was hired full time as a residential program worker. She found personal satisfaction helping and inspiring others. Donna now works at the same place where she once lived and received services.

Donna faced some challenges going back to work but successfully overcame them. She says, “The biggest challenges were the negative things I would tell myself, things like I can’t do this and why even try. I had to really work on telling myself that I could do it. With the help of some amazing people in my life that gave me major support, it helped me.” Donna also says that “going to therapy and prayer” are important to her.

Donna lives by a definition of Recovery she learned in her Certified Peer Specialist class. “I was told that Recovery meant remembering who you are and using your strength to the fullest,” she said. “This really stuck to me. My past is behind, but it does not need to define me.” Her biggest dream and goal for the future is to eventually buy a house.

