

Alternative format version of MN Work Incentives Connection, FY '09 Annual Report

Front cover:

Answers, Choices, Possibilities
Work Incentives Connection
2009 Annual Report

Our Mission:

To provide answers about the impact of work on benefits, so that people with disabilities can see their choices and take advantage of life's opportunities.

We believe in...

Putting People with Disabilities More In Charge of Their Lives
The Power of Work
Providing Clear and Accurate Answers
Tenaciously Advocating for Our Clients

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Dear Friends,

The Work Incentives Connection champions people with disabilities to participate in the work life of our community. This past year, we served over 5,300 people.

This Annual Report tells the stories of just a few of those we served last year who moved themselves to financial self-sufficiency through work. In addition to Shawn, Greg, Jennifer and Patrick, there were hundreds of others who started a job or who took some other major step in their personal journey to achieve their work goals.

The demand for our services remains strong. People with disabilities are seeking work, so they can be more self-sufficient, take care of their families and contribute to their communities. Getting accurate information to make an informed decision about working, household finances and health care is more important than ever before. In this fragile economy, the fears and risks are higher than usual.

As with most other nonprofits, this has been a tough year with high demand for services, flat funding, and the need for more intensive services for some individuals. The coming year brings these challenges and maybe others as well. Despite this, we remain energized by the work we do.

The board and staff of the Connection are inspired by the strength, persistence and resilience demonstrated by the people we serve. We are reminded daily of our responsibility to fulfill our role in assisting them along the way. There is much work for the Connection to do. We do not do our work in isolation. We want to thank our partners, our supporters, and all of you who invest in the futures of people like Shawn, Patrick, Jennifer, Greg and the many others we have the privilege to assist each year.

Regards,

Barb Smith, Executive Director and Sue Abderholden, Chair, Board of Directors

Quote from consumer with a disability: “The Connection provides an invaluable service, particularly in this time of severe economic uncertainty.”

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Shawn Works Himself to Self Sufficiency (with photo of Shawn and his boss, Chef Robb)

Working three part-time jobs wasn't enough for Shawn. Born with a disability, he wanted to be self-sufficient and was willing to do the hard work to achieve his goal. Shawn was referred to the Connection by his local Social Security office. At the time, Shawn was receiving two kinds of Social Security benefits, along with Medical Assistance and Group Residential Housing. The University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse had offered Shawn a full-time job, but the transportation available to him didn't fit with the job hours. He had his driver's license, but needed a vehicle to get back and forth to work.

The Connection helped Shawn use a Social Security work incentive, called a “Plan for Achieving Self-Support” or “PASS”. This allowed Shawn to save for a car and related expenses without having his Social Security benefits affected until he was ready to move to full-time work. The Connection helped Shawn get his PASS approved by Social Security, and showed Shawn, his mother and his support team how to manage the PASS.

The Connection also provided specific examples of how each of Shawn's benefits would be affected by working; how much money he would have for living expenses while he was saving for the car; and how much he would have in his pocket once he started working full-time. The Connection coordinated with all the people involved in Shawn's life – his mother, social worker, group home staff and State Vocational Counselor, making sure everyone was on the "same page" in understanding Shawn's work and benefit issues.

Once he had enough money for a down payment, Shawn bought a pickup truck and accepted the full-time job as a dishwasher for the University. He likes to stay busy, so he often works extra shifts. Shawn could collect unemployment when the University is closed for the summer, but instead, he works two, part-time jobs. Each month, he has faithfully made his truck payments, and recently paid off the loan. Shawn no longer receives Social Security benefits and his job provides health insurance, so he only needs Medical Assistance to supplement what his employer's plan doesn't cover.

Shawn is proud of his accomplishments. He believes people often limit themselves by not "seeing themselves as what they could be." Shawn was happy to work several part-time jobs until he could move to full-time. He advises others: "Do the jobs that are available, even if you need a little help."

Photo of Jenny with caption: Jenny (standing) took a full-time job helping others who want to work. She gave up Social Security benefits and government health coverage for herself and her family.

Fiscal Year 2009 Results:

Core Services Delivered:

Specialized Benefits Information & Referral: 2,526 contacts

Problem-solving and Advocacy: 667 contacts

Comprehensive Benefits Analysis: 320 participants

Outreach and Training, 1,804 attendees: 100 sessions

Anyone can call the Work Incentives Connection's toll-free Hotline with questions about the impact of work on benefits for people with disabilities.

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Photo of Greg at work

On benefits, Greg felt stuck. Now, he supports himself and inspires others to do the same.

Growing up with Cerebral Palsy, Greg says, "I believed I couldn't work a normal job, I didn't fit in, and no one would hire me." Despite his doubts, Greg moved past these barriers. It helped that Greg's family believed in him and in his future. Going to college was an unquestioned family expectation. After high school, Greg attended college and graduate school with help from State Vocational Services. As Greg began looking for work, his Vocational Counselor referred him to the Work Incentives Connection. Greg wanted to work full-time, which would mean giving up his Social Security benefits. It was not a decision to be made lightly.

At that point, Greg had been on benefits for so long that the thought of losing them felt overwhelming. Greg stresses that, "the longer you're on benefits, the harder it is to get off. Whenever I didn't get a job offer after an interview, I would start thinking that I probably shouldn't keep applying for jobs because it would interfere with my Social Security benefits." Greg says the Work Incentives Connection kept him

from “throwing in the towel” by cutting through the confusion around using benefits and working. The Connection provided specific examples, so Greg could see that being self-sufficient was within his reach. He credits ongoing assistance from the Connection as being a huge help to achieving this goal.

In April 2009, Greg took a three-year, full-time job in communications at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. He enjoys his work and hopes his experience will lead to another full-time position after this one ends. He no longer receives any Social Security benefits and only uses Medical Assistance and Medicare for health needs that aren’t covered by his employer’s health plan.

Greg has now turned his focus to a childhood friend who also has Cerebral Palsy and receives Social Security benefits. Greg brought his friend to the Connection’s Recognition Banquet to show him that work is possible. His friend was so inspired that he decided to contact State Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and has called the Connection for benefits assistance, too.

On government benefits, Greg says, “I always had a vague feeling of being stuck. I had enough money to survive, but I didn’t feel needed and wasn’t necessarily in control of my life. Now, I’m much more satisfied than I ever was when I depended on government benefits.” Greg is moving along in his life and looking to leave his imprint on the world.

Savings to taxpayers:

\$83,131 per month in reduced benefits for 1,559 Benefits Analysis participants studied.

Potential savings of almost \$10 million over 10 years for those studied.

Additional government benefit savings for the hundreds of other Connection consumers who go to work. These individuals also pay income taxes and contribute toward their own retirement through FICA taxes.

Quote from disability advocate: “Very helpful information, which leads to positive change, measurable in dollars and cents and quality of life.”

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Photo of Patrick

Patrick’s parents worried about the future. Now, they can focus on other things.

Patrick is a shy, young man with a brain injury. Patrick’s parents worried about what would happen when they were no longer around to look out for him. They believed Patrick could work, but they didn’t want him to lose his government benefits unless he could be self-sufficient. Patrick and his parents were referred to the Work Incentives Connection by his State Vocational Counselor. The Connection showed them how different levels of earnings would affect Patrick’s benefits and his financial bottom line. The Connection’s benefits specialist also reviewed his options for health care and housing.

The Connection checked in with Patrick and his parents several times over the next 18 months. The first time, Patrick was trying to find the right job and was living with his parents. Six months later, Patrick had a full-time job, doing prep work and dishwashing in a grocery store deli. After a few months, he became eligible for health insurance through his employer. This allowed him to give up Medical Assistance and Medicare coverage, as well as his Social Security benefits. Patrick moved out of his parents’ house and is living in an apartment with his brother. Since he is unable to drive, Patrick rides his bike to work in all kinds of weather. He enjoys cooking, sports and knitting hats, afghans and scarves. When pressed for comment, Patrick quietly acknowledges that it’s a big deal being

independent. For his parents, it's really, big deal! Patrick's dad says "Of all our boys, I now worry about Patrick the least."

Outcomes:

The Connection's outcome research continues to show statistically significant, positive outcomes for Benefits Analysis participants within just one year after intake:

3 charts are shown:

1. Employment: 12.9% increase for 12 month study cohort (41.5% employed at intake. 46.8% employed at 12-month follow-up.)
2. Hours worked: 13.4% increase for 12 month study cohort (56.39 hours per month at intake. 63.95 hours per month at 12-month follow up.)
3. Earnings: 24.2% increase for 12 month study cohort (\$486.51 per month at intake. \$604.23 per month at 12-month follow up.)

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After a long struggle, Jennifer's life is fulfilling again

Ten years ago, Jennifer was working full-time at the post office. She had been married for 12 years and had a 10 year old son. She and her husband were excited to have just purchased a duplex. Then, Jennifer found herself battling an unknown force eventually diagnosed as bipolar disorder. As time passed, Jennifer felt so physically and mentally exhausted that she could no longer work, take care of her family, or do any of the things she used to enjoy. Jennifer describes it as living "in a bubble that included my bed and the bathroom; I felt cut off from everyone and everything". The "bubble" had replaced her once exciting and happy life. Occasionally, Jennifer had periods of great energy and activity, but they were always short-lived. Jennifer feared that she was somehow losing herself...that she was getting smaller as her illness was gaining strength.

It took a number of years to identify her illness, to find effective treatment and to stabilize her life. Once Jennifer started feeling better, she jumped at the chance to get her life back. Jennifer went to school and got her AA degree in Accounting. Then, she found a job at a Minnesota Workforce Center. Taking a temporary, part-time job meant risking the government benefits that she and her family had come to depend on during her long illness. Jennifer's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor referred her to the Work Incentives Connection, so she could make an informed decision about that risk. The Connection showed Jennifer exactly how the job would affect her financial bottom line, and explored her options for health coverage. Jennifer credits the Connection with providing the information she needed to make difficult decisions. "It's easier to make the jump [to employment] when you know someone is going to catch you at the bottom."

Jennifer excelled at her job. This job eventually led to a full-time, permanent position with a state agency serving people with disabilities. Jennifer saw this as her "chance to give back."

It hasn't been easy, but Jennifer and her husband have now been married almost 22 years and their son is grown. Jennifer has health insurance through her employer, and has given up her Social Security, Medicare and Medical Assistance benefits, as well as MinnesotaCare benefits for her family.

Jennifer feels lucky to have picked up the pieces of her life, but her accomplishments go far beyond luck. Through her hard work and perseverance, Jennifer has created a bright, new future!

Quote from Brian, 2009 Award Winner with 3 children who gave up Social Security benefits to work full-time as an accountant: “The Connection helped me find the break-even point where work made sense.”

Quote from a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor: “We could not do what we do without you.”

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2009 Work Incentives Connection Financials:

Statement of financial position

September 30, 2009

Assets:

Cash and cash equivalents: \$209,815
Contracts receivable - government grants: \$86,809
Program fees receivable – government: \$28,400
Prepaid expenses: \$13,716
Furniture and equipment, net: \$15,484
Total Assets: \$354,224

Liabilities and net assets:

Accounts payable: \$13,983
Accrued payroll expenses: \$44,952
Deferred Revenue: \$16,356
Total Liabilities: \$75,291

Net Assets:

Unrestricted:
Board designated: \$60,000
Other: \$218,933
Subtotal: \$278,933
Temporarily restricted: \$0
Total Net Assets: \$278,933

Total Liabilities and Net Assets: \$354,224

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets, September 30, 2009

Revenues and Support:

Unrestricted:

Government Contracts and Grants: \$820,936
Contributions: \$5,513
In-Kind Contributions: \$0
Interest Income: \$1,831

Miscellaneous income: \$397
Net assets released upon expiration of use restrictions: \$9,477
Total unrestricted revenues and support: \$838,154

Temporarily Restricted net assets released upon expiration of use restrictions: (\$9,477)

Total:

Government Contracts and Grants: \$820,936
Contributions: \$5,513
In-Kind Contributions: \$0
Interest Income: \$1,831
Miscellaneous income: \$397
Net assets released upon expiration of use restrictions: \$0
Total revenues and support: \$838,154

Expenses:

Program Services:
Benefits Planning and Assistance: \$579,763
Training (Education): \$25,095
Outreach (Education): \$74,319
Total program services: \$679,177
Management and general: \$105,912
Fundraising: \$13,050
Total Expenses: \$798,139

Change in net assets: \$40,015 unrestricted minus \$9,477 equals total of \$30,538
Net assets, beginning of year: \$238,918 unrestricted plus \$9,477 equals \$248,395
Net assets, end of year: \$278,933

Revenues chart showing: Government contracts and grants: 97.95%; Foundation grants released from restriction: 1.13%; Contributions: 0.66%; Interest and miscellaneous income: 0.27%

Expense chart showing: Program Services: 85.1%; Management and general: 13.3%; Fundraising: 1.6%

The Connection's financial statements for the year ending September 30, 2009, were audited by the firm of Mahoney, Ulbrich, Christiansen, Russ, P.A. The information above is derived from audited information. For a full copy of the Connection's Audited Financial Statements, please call 651-632-5113 or 1-800-976-6728 (TTY: 651-632-5110 or MN Relay - 711).

Back cover:

Our Fiscal Year 2009 Donors (10/1/08 To 9/30/09)

With their generous contributions, the following individuals and organizations helped to continue the Work Incentives Connection as a long term resource for people with disabilities who want to work. We are deeply grateful for their support!

Foundation Grants:

Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, Partners in Justice Fund
SPEDCO Economic Development Foundation of The Saint Paul Foundation

Government Support:

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Minnesota Department of Human Services, HIV/AIDS Program

Minnesota Department of Human Services, Pathways to Employment

Social Security Administration, Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

Gifts from Individuals and Businesses:

Abderholden, Sue

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Plus 10 additional donors who wished to remain anonymous.

For answers about the impact of work on benefits for people with disabilities, contact:

Minnesota Work Incentives Connection

Answers, Choices, Possibilities

2200 University Ave West, Suite 240

Saint Paul, MN 55114

651-632-5113 or 1-800-976-6728

TTY: 651-632-5110 or MN Relay – 711

www.mnworkincentives.com