**Intro**

The Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) Project (or SGA Project for short) is a demonstration model created in partnership with the Institute for Community Inclusion and Mathematica Policy Research.

**What is the SGA Project?**

The SGA Project aimed to assist state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to increase the number of Social Security Disability Insurance (better known as SSDI) beneficiaries they served who earned above SGA level of monthly income at the time their VR cases closed.

The participating State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies in the demonstration project were Kentucky and Minnesota

The goal of the SGA Project is to improve SSDI beneficiaries' quality of life and maximize their economic independence.

**What does SGA mean?**

SGA refers to a level of earnings capacity that is somewhat comparable to that of a nondisabled person. If an individual who receives SSDI benefits works at the SGA level after a 9-month trial work period and 3-month grace period, his/her SSDI benefits stop. SGA is measured by a level of pre-tax earnings ($1,170 per month or higher for non-blind beneficiaries in 2017) after certain deductions from earnings have been applied.

Deductions include “impairment related work expenses (IRWE’s)” (disability-related expenses the beneficiary pays for in order to work) and “subsidies and special conditions” (the beneficiary is paid the customary wage for the job, but works at a reduced rate of productivity or receives extra help to perform the job).

If earnings AFTER these deductions are at least $1,170 per month, then the beneficiary will usually be determined to be performing SGA.

**Why only SSDI-only Clients?**

From 1980 to 2017, the number of Americans on SSDI nearly tripled, from 2.6 million to nearly 9 million. Typically, individuals receiving SSDI-only had a significant work history with skills and experiences that would be valuable to the marketplace. Although impairments and disabling health conditions might affect their current capabilities and productivity, these individuals possess human capital that can be leveraged to support significant levels of employment if employment barriers are addressed.

**Earning above SGA level…**

1). Increased Financial Independence - Clients who earn over SGA levels have, on average, higher incomes and can achieve more financial independence.

2). Increased Social Networks – Clients indicate that full time employment offers opportunities to increase their social networks.

3). Increased Federal Funding - VR agencies are eligible for SSA payments known as “cost reimbursement” only after their SSDI beneficiary clients have become employed and achieved nine months of earnings above the SGA level.

**What makes SGA Project Different?**

The innovations provided by the SGA Project are:

Increased pace from application to IPE from 150 days with traditional pace to 30 days with the SGA intervention.

Coordinated team approach uses the combined expertise of VR Counselor, Work Incentives/Financial Counselor, and Job Placement Specialist versus single VR Counselor to coordinate services.

Prompt and intensive Work Incentives Counseling and Financial Empowerment services, on average, reduced client’s anxiety about losing SSDI benefits. Clients felt more empowered in their financial decision-making versus access to less-intensive Work Incentives Counseling that beneficiaries may or may not pursue

Job Placement Services introduced at the beginning of the process, on average, yielded more successful closure rates than with traditional services.

Final Slide – **Learn More at:**

<http://www.explorevr.org/returntoworkssdi>