

Calculator Scenario

Karen is a 29-year old Veteran who served two tours in Iraq before receiving an honorable discharge. She experienced trauma during her military service, which she doesn't like to talk about, but she mentions having nightmares and extreme fear of leaving the house. She has lost three jobs in the past year due to absenteeism. She currently receives VA Compensation at 20% (\$276.84/month) and recently received a housing voucher for permanent supportive housing. With help from her caseworker, she will begin receiving Supplemental Security Income next month (which will be \$514.16 after reductions due to VA benefits), based on her difficulties in maintaining work due to severe anxiety and PTSD. Last month, Karen began working at a non-profit health clinic for nine hours per week at \$8/hour, filing records after hours, but isn't sure how that will affect her benefits. When you talk with Karen about her employment goals, she really wants to become a medical transcriptionist, as she loves the medical field and could work from home with flexible hours, making up to \$15/hour. However, the course and materials for that will be \$2000. She's not sure how she'll ever be able to achieve her goals and is asking for your help in making a plan.

Facilitator notes:

- Her income with VA and SSA benefits will be \$791/month.
- Adding her current job to this (\$288/month), will reduce the SSI check, but her overall income increases to \$967.50 (I think this is tricky to figure out without a calculator because there's a work incentive you'd need to know about)
- One of the quickest ways to maximize her income to support her employment goal would be to help her develop a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) with SSA. This is a work incentive that allows SSI beneficiaries to save for an employment goal without it reducing her SSI check.
 - o If she sets aside \$100/month in savings for the course, her new monthly income would be \$1,017.50, due to increases in her SSI cash benefit.
 - o If she's able to set aside \$150/month in savings for the course, her new monthly income would be \$1,042.50, due to increases in her SSI cash benefit.
- Another way to maximize her income using SSA work incentives is to see if she might have an Impairment Related Work Expense. Since she experiences severe anxiety, if she takes medication that helps reduce her anxiety and enables her to work, the medication co-pays can be considered an IRWE. If those are \$50/month, that would further increase her take-home SSI cash benefit (to \$1,067.50 if she's doing a PASS for \$150/month).
 - o At some point, the work incentives will not keep increasing her SSI cash benefit at her *current earnings* because you'll see in the calculator that the total countable earned income may be reduced to zero. But, it's helpful to know that as she increases her income once she becomes a medical transcriptionist, they will continue to help.
- Fast forward to Karen achieving her certification and transcription equipment – you can use the calculator to help her see how continuing to increase her income from employment will help increase her overall income stability. You can play with multiple scenarios where she is making \$15/hour and working variable hours. She could get another PASS if she's completed the first one and IRWEs could still count.