

Welcome back to the New Hampshire Family Voices podcast series. In this podcast Terry Ohlson-Martin joins Douglas Matey from Granite State Independent Living. Doug is the Community Work Incentive Counselor and Financial Planning and Employment Coordinator in the Community Economic Development Department at GSIL.

When you're finished listening to this Podcast, we encourage you to visit GSIL.org for more information.

Terry: All right. So hi, Doug, and thanks so much for joining us today. We're really excited to learn more about Granite State Independent Living and how you can help families who have adults that may qualify for your services.

Doug: Excellent. Great. Thank you. It's nice to be here Terry.

Terry: Can we start off by having you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your role?

Doug: Sure. So my name is Doug Matey. My role here at GSIL, it's – I'm under Employment. So my role is specifically shared by two services; the Work Incentive Planning Assistant Program, which is a program of the Social Security Administration for disability, as well as the employment program here. So I have two primary roles at GSIL. One, once again, is through Social Security's Work Incentive Planning Assistance Program, which is essentially Social Security Disability. And the second is employment. So essentially assisting individuals throughout the employment process.

Terry: So how long have you been with GSIL?

Doug: I've been here – well, it's approaching thirteen years for me.

Terry: Wow.

Doug: Yeah.

Terry: Cool. So I'm assuming that none of these questions that we're peppering you with are going to be big surprises. You've been around.

Doug: Nah. No, I – well again, my focus is – is those two programs. However, I – yeah, I – after this time I certainly have a general idea of all the programs.

Terry: Right. Because I wanted –

Doug: [inaudible] –

Terry: - I – I really wanted to start out with generally some basic information, such as what's the – what's the mission of Granite State Independent Living?

Doug: Well Granite State Independent Living is an independent living center, and there's at least one Independent Living Center in all fifty states. For New Hampshire, GSIL is the only Independent Living Center in the state which offers – there's five core services of GSIL. The mission being to promote the quality of life with independence for people with disabilities through advocacy, information, education, support, and transition services.

Terry: Is that pretty much the same across other states as well? Or is that just unique to New Hampshire?

Doug: The four – there's a fifth core service in New Hampshire. My understanding is all Independent Living Centers offer the four basic – the four of these services; being advocacy, information, education, and support. So, in New Hampshire at least, I can't speak for other states, we have added – we have the transition services for youth. So essentially that program being working with at-risk youth in high school level, and providing them – you know, it's an alternative educational opportunity for them to earn credits so they can successfully graduate high school.

Terry: So how does someone find out if they might be eligible for any of those programs?

Doug: Well there's approximately twenty programs now, that's my understanding. The best –

Terry: Wow.

Doug: - way is to – we have several sites throughout the state. We're a statewide nonprofit Independent Living Center. So the main site, of course, is in Concord. The best way for anyone who feels that the mission can be helpful to them is to contact our main site, and we have certified information referral specialists there, and they can help with, you know, help triage, and help determine exactly how and who to refer them to within the agency.

Terry: Is there like an age that would make the most sense for a family to be calling you? Or could an adult who has special needs call you on their own? Who should we kind of be expecting to call you?

Doug: I wouldn't rule out anyone who has a need related to our mission can be contacting our main office. Each program can be distinctive in terms of their age, you know, their age limitations, but – or what they – as far as the age timeframes. But, so again, you know, even children, parents can call. We will – our certified INR people are well-trained to make sure that they address the needs of the caller, and the resident, and make sure they get the appropriate supports that are needed, and refer them to the specific person, program, and again, regionally as well. I am based out of our Littleton office up North, and I cover – for my services I cover the whole region of North Country.

Terry: Wow, that's a big service area.

Doug: It is.

Terry: How are your services funded?

Doug: And so, again, that would be unique to each program. However, for myself, the Work Incentive Planning Assistance is a program of Social Security Administration. So that program is funded – is a grant funded program of Social Security Administration. Again, it's because this is a federal program, it's consistent in all fifty states. So one of the things that I focus on, and specialize in, is the – is both SSI, supplement security income, and social security disability insurance for individuals enrolled in those benefits, and exactly how many of these people enrolled in the programs want to return to work. So my focus is helping them understand exactly how job earnings will interact and effect their

benefits, all of their benefits, whether it's SSI, SSDI, or both, as well as their medical insurance; Medicare, Medicaid, and et cetera.

Terry: So is there a waitlist for those kinds of services?

Doug: We don't categorize it as a waitlist. Of course, there's different referral pathways. We will – I mean for me, we don't have a specific waitlist. We will address them based upon the urgency of their situation. So, for example, under WIPA disability, if someone has a job, they're just starting a job, you know it's very important they understand how everything directs, that's a priority. Versus someone who is just wanting to generally know how, and you don't yet have a job, how all these benefits will interact with job markets.

Terry: So knowing just enough to be dangerous here about some of those programs, how do they interact? And how can you guys help with things like Medicare, Medicaid, market place insurance, and those sorts of things, knowing that as people go back to work one of the concerns is frequently losing their insurance or which insurance they may or may not qualify for?

Doug: For someone receiving Social Security disability, and often, you know, they may be enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, there is an eligibility part of WIPA, the Work Incentive Planning Assistance, which is, you know, they want to be pursuing, or at least actively pursuing employment, and understanding that because they're going to be pursuing employment they have these questions about how everything directs. Many of the referrals for me or for the WIPA Program, they come through what's called the Helpline, which is a phone number of Social

Security Administration. It's more of a triage ideally, but there's more than one way that we can help someone. But ideally someone would be speaking to the Helpline first, which has trained individuals to help answer general questions about the WIPA Program, the Work Incentive Planning, as well as Social Security's Ticket to Work Program. And then from there we receive the referral forms through the Helpline directly to our program, and then we would contact them for the more intensive services; the verifications, and all those details.

However, you know, for within the state, if someone is not connected or does not contact the Helpline first, we're more than happy to help them, and answer general questions, and go from there. But for me, my referral source would be both the Helpline, Social Security's helpline, as well as New Hampshire Voc Rehab. I do work a lot with customers of New Hampshire Voc Rehab as well in terms of the intensive services, which include writing what's called a Benefit Analysis, after verification, and writing – so it's a report. It's a –

Terry: Uh-huh.

Doug: - in-depth report, and the illustration shows them exactly how their job earnings would interact with their benefits, and medical insurance, so forth and so on.

Terry: Oh, that's cool. So it would be laid right out for them as to what –

Doug: Right.

Terry: - what's going to effect what, and then they can make their decisions going forward.

Doug: Those –

Terry: So but –

Doug: - benefits analyses are very detailed, yes.

Terry: Yeah. So could a family just call you directly? Or do they have to go through Voc Rehab first?

Doug: No. I would say if someone is – I'm more than happy to speak with someone directly, you know, if they're not able to first contact Voc Rehab, that's not a problem. I would triage and speak to them in general, and then if they needed more information in the general conversation, you know, then I would suggest to them contacting Voc Rehab or going through – it's either Voc Rehab or a Ticket to Work.

Terry: Uh-huh.

Doug: But again, for general information, benefit information, I'll be happy to speak to them.

Terry: So Ticket to Work, we haven't talked about that much, and I know that's a fascinating opportunity to me for families and for young people who are getting out of school, and they have their social security but they do want to work. I don't think we know enough about it, or we share enough information about it so that families understand it really is a good idea for kiddos to be able to go to work, and that they can do it without losing all of their benefits if they're careful, right?

Doug: Absolutely. Yeah, it's so important. And, you know, some of these programs are not that well-known, and it's a matter of, you know, the advocacy, informing

them, educating people, and that's why I'm more than happy to speak with someone directly if necessary. Yeah, the Ticket to Work Program is also a program of Social Security Administration, and anyone who is already enrolled in Social Security Disability has this Ticket to Work program that essentially they have this fictitious ticket. They can assign that ticket to an agency within the state, including Voc Rehab, or what's called an employment network that's certified by Social Security to help them reach their vocational goal, which often is employment. Yeah, that's one of the avenues to help really get into the details and help them understand all those intricate details how everything fits together.

Terry: So could an Area Agency help with something like that in New Hampshire? Or would that be beyond their scope?

Doug: It depends. The Area Agencies do have financial counselors. They have financial people that are very good in, you know, understanding much of the details. You know, often when it becomes very complicated, you know, we have – well the Work Incentive Planning gets into a little more depth because we go through intensive training with Social Security, and so we're certified by Social Security Administration to really know the ins, and outs, and the details.

Terry: Uh-huh.

Doug: But yes, the Area Agencies, you know, do have good resources, financial resources, to advise individuals as well that are part of their agency.

Terry: I was just wondering about having a team where I had somebody from the Area Agency, and somebody from Granite State Independent Living, and Voc Rehab. It

sounds like I would then have the best of all the worlds to help kind of make the plan for my child?

Doug: Yeah, exactly. And again, it does depend upon the depth of understanding and needs. You know, sometimes there are – the financial people at the Area Agency are able to offer all the necessary information. So it really depends upon the depth and complication. Just more complex cases yeah, you know, would be important to have someone from Work Incentive Planning's assistance most likely.

Terry: So I guess it would be – or you tell me, would it be fair to say that if somebody had questions about Ticket to Work they could call you? If they had questions about, is it WIPA?

Doug: Yeah. Yes, and I would – they're welcome to call me, but if they have more broad questions, really another good resource is our certified INR people through the Concord site, and you know, that's our central line. But like I said, I'm more than willing to speak to someone specifically who has questions about benefits. Just bear in mind that I do cover the North Country region, and we have – there's other – I have a few colleagues that cover the southern parts of the state that do the same thing.

Terry: So it makes more sense for them to call the Concord number. Do you know what that is offhand?

Doug: Absolutely, yup. And so that would be – our main office would be 826-3700, that's toll-free 800-826-3700.

Terry: So they could call there and then kind of talk through with the INR person to see where the best place to end up with next? Because if you live in Concord, or Salem, or Rochester, you don't want to talk to the Littleton person, no offense, right?

Doug: Yeah. No, no, exactly. In terms of the benefits, yeah. Especially if they don't live in the North Country. Yeah, I could go through our main office, and from there they triage. Yeah, absolutely. And then especially if someone needs – is interested in more services, more broadly than just benefits or employment because those are, again, those are my two areas of benefits and employment.

Terry: So besides benefits and employment, what are some of the other services that might be something that somebody wants to call about?

Doug: Sure. So there's really three pillars of services the agency offers; homecare, community supports, and employment supports. So like I said, I'm under employment. But homecare is a big program. But the homecare programs are either PCA or PCSP. They're consumer directed programs. And so up here in our region, for example, we have a director just for homecare programs.

Terry: So for PCA, what you mean by that is personal care assistance, right?

Doug: Yes.

Terry: And what was the other one?

Doug: PCSP, which essentially is personal care. It's a very similar program I believe -

Terry: Yeah.

Doug: - for somebody, yeah. So someone in homecare who is not using a wheelchair.

Terry: Okay. All right.

Doug: But they're both consumer directed programs, so meaning that the individual needing services actually is the one doing – is who would be hiring and firing, taking care of the attendant for them.

Terry: Okay. So the best way for me to understand that is that was a program that my son didn't qualify for because he didn't have the capacity to do that kind of directing, that's something that we direct. So we ended up with the Area Agency instead of Granite State Independent Living.

Doug: That's right. GSIL no longer offers the agency directed program, yes.

Terry: All right. So there's homecare. And then what was the other one you said?

Doug: The other is consumer support. So that would be if an individual would need a – what I'm trying to say is for example; accessibility for the house, ramps, modifications, in-home modifications, et cetera, that would be the community supports basically, and then transportation is part of that. So the – I'm not able to – I don't want to – I'm not able to accurately mention all twenty programs, because again, I don't focus on those. But the three pillars are homecare, community supports, and employment supports, employment services rather. So those three broad categories, and you know again, just anyone who has more specific questions, or not sure, you know, who to contact could go through our main number and speak to our INR individuals.

Terry: So before I let you go I just want to clarify one more thing around the community supports maybe to save your INR people a lot of phone calls, but if a family is eligible for receiving services through a waiver through the Area Agency they are not then eligible for the community supports through Granite State Independent Living, is that true?

Doug: I can't answer that specifically because it's so individualized. I don't know the answer to that –

Terry: Terry.

Doug: - offhand.

Terry: I appreciate that. I always much prefer somebody to say I don't know rather than give incorrect information.

Doug: Yeah. Yeah, and it's – I – just again, it's so individualized I wouldn't rule it out. I would always call and inquire about, you know, if some – so in other words you're suggesting someone enrolled in one of the programs, Medicaid waivers –

Terry: Right. Somebody who has the DD waiver –

Doug: Yeah.

Terry: - and is receiving. So because my son's part of the DE waiver he receives those kinds of supports through that bucket of money. And knowing how things are funded –

Doug: Yes.

Terry: - I just –

Doug: Yeah, it very well may be the case, you know? Because –

Terry: Yeah.

Doug: - all the Medicaid waiver programs are funded through Medicaid.

Terry: Right. Right. So, but you're right, it never hurts to ask. The worst that you're going to get is no, you don't qualify. And then okay, I move on to the next place.

Doug: Exactly. Because if you don't ask you'll never get the answer.

Terry: Right. And every once in a while something changes, so.

Doug: Right. Every once in a while, it can be pretty frequently too.

Terry: Yeah.

Doug: Things change all the time. All the numbers just came out for the cost of living adjustments for January 1st, 2022 from Social Security. So, you know, things are always changing, at least in the benefit world.

Terry: Yup.

Doug: Yeah.

Terry: I know. Well, I thank you very much. I have to say that I have used benefits counselors, and I shouldn't say used, but I've worked with benefits counselors from GSIL over the years and always found you guys to be a wealth of knowledge. So I really appreciate you spending the time to do this with us and appreciate it.

Doug: No, thank you very much. No, that's good to hear. That's what we want to hear, you know, that you're very pleased with the services, great. It's my pleasure. I was only able to answer generally some of the other programs. But yeah, we are, you know, again GSIL is here to provide a broad array of services for individuals with disabilities to help them improve their circumstances.

Terry: We appreciate it. And we'll let you know when this up and on the website.

Doug: Okay. Great. Thank you for inviting to speak to New Hampshire families, Terry.

Terry: Thanks. You know, this was relatively painless.

Doug: It sure was.