



Podcast Transcript

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Interview with Success Story Participant Armida Stokes

Opening: You are listening to the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work podcast series. Get answers to your questions, access information and resources, and receive expert advice on Work Incentives and the Ticket to Work program.

Interviewer: Today we're speaking with Armida Stokes. Armida is a mother of four who has encountered health- and work-related setbacks. Armida experienced multiple back injuries that resulted in chronic pain and limited mobility. On the advice of her doctors, she gave up her two jobs as the head cook at a restaurant and as a child care provider; both jobs involved physical activity she could no longer perform. Armida applied and was approved for Social Security Disability Insurance or SSDI. She appreciated the cash benefits, but after the loss of her husband, Armida knew she needed to increase her income to be able to support her family. Through Social Security's Ticket to Work program, Armida found the help she needed. Thanks to her own persistence and Ticket to Work, she is now working and supporting herself and her family. Let's talk with Armida about her journey to financial independence. Armida, will you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

Armida: I'm fifty six years old, a single mother of a 17 year old who I'm raising. Um, I work full time at a vitamin supplement company here in Batesville, Arkansas where I live. Um, I also have a second job working for the Ozarks Foothills Literacy Project in which we tutor Spanish-speaking individuals to learn to speak English, read and be able to communicate here in our community.

Interviewer: Why role does employment play in your life?

Armida: Um, it plays a big role in my life. Again, I stressed that I'm raising my 17 year old daughter who at first was my granddaughter. I've raised her since she was six months old. She's turned out to be a big blessing in my life from the first day that she was born back in 1996. For me to be employed means a lot. It has changed my life in

many different aspects. [It] has given me a sense of security and a sense of worth[iness] to myself and to my kids and grandkids.

Interviewer: That's great. Now how did you become aware of Ticket to Work and Work Incentives?

Armida: I became aware of that through the White River Area Agency on Aging when I was assigned a, I guess, case worker, is what you would call it. They sent me a letter telling me about their program and [inaudible] Blazek has been tremendously helpful to me, been there for me to answer any questions I might have, any fears I might have of losing benefits, mainly if I were to become unemployed, would I still be eligible to continue to receive my cash benefits as well as my Medicare benefits.

Interviewer: What motivated you to pursue the program?

Armida: Just everything that they had to offer – the support, the help, which, I mean, they gave me a lot of information as to what they're there for. They've been very informative of different questions I've had throughout these past, uh, almost three year of my recent employment.

Interviewer: And Armida, when you felt you were ready for work, what concerns did you have?

Armida: My main concern was my financial benefits because I had a child to raise and support.

Interviewer: Tell me about working with your Employment Network White River Agency on Aging. What types of supports and services did they provide?

Armida: They provided a lot of information about my status on Social Security Disability such as not losing it completely if I went back to work full time, which I was, and losing my Medicare. They kept in touch with me constantly, making sure I was okay with working, physically, mentally and emotionally.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. Now where are you working now, and how did this come about?

Armida: Um I tried going back to school - went to Ozarka College, there in Melbourne. Um, I just couldn't handle the stress of that mentally and physically. It was becoming hard for me. So I was just at home for quite some time and I felt like I was just existing but not doing anything productive with my life so um, through much prayer and guidance from my God because I'm very spiritually strong, I believe in God. I started pursuing employment. I just felt led to look for employment here so I went to a job search agency and applied there. I thought I would have to wait months before I heard from them and within a week or two I was called for an interview to a vitamin

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supplement company. My bilingual - my [fluency] in Spanish was one of the big reasons I was hired because they needed a Spanish phone sales operator. I just felt welcome, I felt needed. It just changed my life completely. Being able to be employed and being able to use my second language.

Interviewer: How would you describe what it has meant to you on a personal level?

Armida: Being able to work full time has allowed me the freedom to live where I live now. Um, it has given me a sense of security. It has helped me appreciate the little things in life just like, being able to get up every morning, um to go to work every morning has just been... it has renewed my self-esteem. It has just allowed me to know that um, I'm still valuable as a person, um even though I have physical limitations. Mentally and emotionally I'm still capable of being able to get up and go to my job.

Interviewer: Would you recommend Ticket to Work to others in your situation?

Armida: Oh absolutely. Absolutely yes because um, like I said, they've been a tremendous help for me. They have been there for me every step of the way. Yes, I would highly recommend Ticket to Work to others who are disabled. I no longer receive Social Security Disability but that's okay because I earn a paycheck and that's not the example I want to set for my daughter. I want her to know and to see that if you want something in life, you have to go out there and work for it and be a productive citizen of society.

Interviewer: Armida, thank you for sharing your story with our listeners. I appreciate your thoughts about your experience with the Ticket to Work program, employment and more.

Armida: Thank you for allowing me to share it.

Interviewer: With support from Ticket to Work, Armida and many others have found their path to a better future. Let us help you find yours.

Ticket to Work supports career development for people with disabilities who want to work. For more information about how Ticket to Work can assist in the transition from benefits to financial independence, visit [w-w-w dot social security dot gov forward slash work](http://w-w-w.socialsecurity.gov/forward/slash/work), or call the Ticket to Work Help Line at one, eight six six, nine six eight, seven eight four two for voice, or one, eight six six, eight three three, two nine six seven for TTY.

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