



Thank you for being part of the SEEKS Study!

First off, thank you so much for being part of the SEEKS research study. We are sharing what we learned with policy makers, service providers, and other researchers but we also wanted to share it with you. Our hope is that we can continue to build on what we learned, make changes based on what you taught us, and make it easier for you and other persons with disabilities to gain financial security.

Thank you for willingness to be part of this project! The SEEKS Research Team (Yvonne, Chris, Olivia, and Deborah)

The goal of the SEEKS research project was to:



increase employment for adults (ages 18-60 years of age),



increase total income, and/or



increase social connection for persons with disabilities who were likely eligible for SSI/SSDI.

As a reminder, when you joined SEEKS you were placed into one of two groups.



- One group worked with a team of providers including (1) a specialist trained to provide SSI/SSDI application assistance using the SOAR model, (2) an employment specialist, and (3) a certified benefits planner who worked to help you understand your options for financial security. This was the intervention group or the NEW way we were testing.

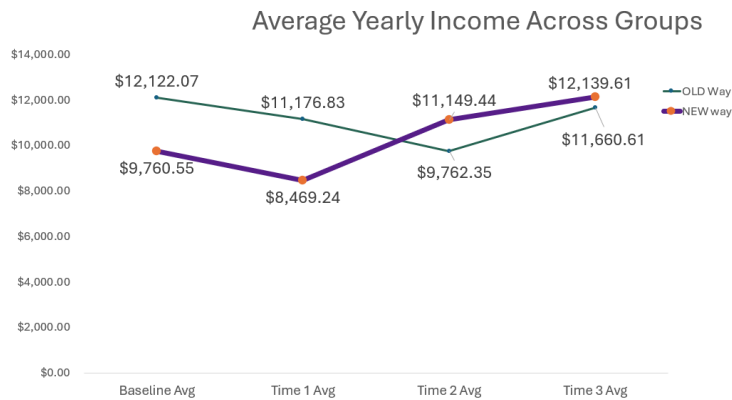


- The other group worked with their local Center for Independent Living who could help them with – or connect them to services in their community to assist them with -applying for SSI/SSDI, seeking employment, and/or benefits planning. This was the control group. This was the OLD way we were comparing to the new way.

We looked to see if the groups differed in a statistically meaningful way – meaning any difference in outcome was due to a difference in service delivery and not because of chance.

Our Findings

1 While there were no statistically meaningful differences between the groups in SSI/SSDI approval rates, average yearly income, or level of social connection, the graph below demonstrates that **the new way we tested shows promise.**



For participants in the new way, the average income steadily increased over time. Average income for participants in the old way (the thinner line) stayed about the same each time.

2 **We learned having a benefits planner was important. 55.5% of participants in the group using the OLD way and 84.1% of participants in the group using the NEW way who talked to a benefits planner reported they were motivated to get a job.** In Colorado, the benefits planning model can focus on state and local benefit programs such as Medicaid, food assistance, cash assistance etc., not just SSI/SSDI. Also, you can talk to a benefits planner while you are applying for SSI/SSDI, not just after you get approved. Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) can help pay for benefits planning services. <https://dvr.colorado.gov/dvr-programs-services/benefits-planning>

3 **The employment rate for participants in both groups was higher than the 2024 national employment-population ratio for persons with disabilities.** This might have been due to a DVR connection. A few of you mentioned that you found the connection to DVR very valuable. *“Interviewer: And what was the most valuable resource? Participant: Probably the DVR [connection]. [The DVR connection is the] one I seem to have used the most so far.” (Treatment group participant). “I was able to start a bootcamp that DVR funded to do software development.” (Treatment group participant).*

4 You mentioned costs such as caring for a service animal, needing durable medical equipment, and the cost of running your own business that we did not consider. **These costs need to be considered when we look at income because income alone does not tell the full story.** We are sharing this with DVR and will consider this in our future studies.

Thank you again! The time you took to be in the study was meaningful to us and will be used to inform policy and services moving forward.