

## Benefits Assistance

### How does it work?

Income is an important factor in a formerly homeless individual's journey towards self-sufficiency. The Regional Commission on Homelessness recognizes how much of a difference benefits, such as social security or disability, can make in a person's life. Receiving benefits is a long process that can sometimes take over two years.

Waiting for two years, especially if someone is disabled, can tremendously hinder his or her progress towards independence. Local agencies such as First Step and the Georgia Department of Human Resources' SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) recognize that people need assistance with the application process and work to expedite and ensure benefits for those who need them.

According to the Georgia Department of Human Resources, every year, up to \$41 million in social security entitlements go unclaimed by homeless Georgians with mental illness. First Step is greatly improving the system.



A man who used First Step to receive benefits



A disabled veteran who received benefits

### Success:

- There is an 86 percent approval rate to receive benefits for homeless individuals applying with assistance from First Step or SOAR, compared to 15 to 20 percent for those applying without assistance.
- Currently, there is an average wait time of 119 days for approval of Social Security benefits for homeless persons, compared with more than two years prior to 2005.
- Since January 2008, more than 300 homeless individuals have been approved for SSI/SSDI benefits.
- More than 2.5 million dollars in combined income for homeless individuals with mental illnesses has been generated.

### SSI/SSDI Facts

- According to the Social Security Administration, there is an exponentially larger amount of applications than in past years.
- More than 60 percent of applications are denied due to high volume.
- During the reconsideration stage of appeal, over 80 percent of applicants are denied.

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