

Physical Education Teacher Is Back on the Move, Thanks to RETAINWORKS

RETAINWORKS helped Lindsay, a busy physical education (PE) teacher and mom, develop an effective stay-at-work (SAW) plan after a serious knee injury sidelined her from her work and active lifestyle. For Lindsay, RETAINWORKS is “amazing people that [put] you at the center of everything. It’s a group of people that want you to get back doing what you need to do for your job, for your life, for your mental health, for your physical wellness.”

BACKGROUND

As a PE instructor, Lindsay, 39, spends most of her days on her feet teaching middle-school health and fitness classes. She loves her job and takes an active, hands-on approach to keep her students engaged. Outside work, Lindsay parents two high-energy sons, hikes and camps with her family, plays pickleball with friends, and volunteers in her community.

CHALLENGE

Until the fall of 2022, Lindsay had never experienced an injury that interfered with her work or active lifestyle. Then Lindsay got seriously hurt while playing kickball with her students at work. She had knee surgery, followed by several weeks of full-time recovery at home, with limited physical activity.

Lindsay’s injury and slow recovery took a toll on her mental health. Having an active lifestyle and participating with her students was important to her. After the injury, she had to learn different ways to relieve stress and interact with her family and students. “My knee doesn't always want to do what I want it to do,” Lindsay says. “[But] my job is I'm always on my feet. I’m always moving.”

Lindsay connected with workers’ compensation services to handle doctor’s appointments and claims. “But that was all injury related. It wasn’t mental health related,” she says. “It wasn’t a person saying, ‘Hey, are you OK? I know you’re injured, but are you OK?’”

ACTIONS

Jodi Hearn is the RETAINWORKS referral and enrollment lead at Ascension Via Christi Health in Wichita, Kansas. She knew Lindsay through the parent-teacher organization at her school. She heard about Lindsay’s injury and thought the RETAINWORKS program could help. Jodi reached out to Lindsay while she was at home



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: A PE teacher with a serious knee injury struggled with returning to the work and active lifestyle she loved.



Action: RETAINWORKS developed a personalized plan with the participant that included physical therapy (PT) and workplace modifications. At regular check-ins, RETAINWORKS staff coached her on strategies to accommodate her injury and recovery.

Results: The participant returned to work with modifications that fit her teaching style. She followed through on PT recommendations at home and school. These tools helped support the participant through a second surgery.

recovering from surgery and unable to put any weight on her injured knee. Lindsay helped Jodi accomplish the following:

Reviewed stay-at-work strategies and available supports. Jodi explained that RETAINWORKS could help Lindsay develop a plan with the supports she needed to safely get back to work and to her day-to-day life. Available supports included additional health-care referrals, guidance on workplace modifications, connections to financial support, help with job searches, or even job retraining.

At first, Lindsay was hesitant to participate with RETAIN, “but Jodi thought it would help me out a lot,” Lindsay says. “So, I thought, ‘OK, I can do this.’ And I’m very glad I did.”

Assessed needs. Lindsay met with Jodi to assess the support and services she would need for a successful SAW plan. “That was definitely a learning curve of figuring out how I could be on my feet and still get from place to place, but also not go home at the end of the day and just want to cry because my leg was so swollen and hurt,” Lindsay says.

Coordinated support. Once Lindsay’s SAW plan was complete, she connected with a RETAINWORKS nurse navigator. The nurse navigator helped Lindsay obtain physical therapy services and learn how to use a scooter and knee brace to get around at school. Together, Lindsay and the nurse navigator created a schedule for icing and elevating her leg during the day. They also developed a strategy to continue her at-home physical therapy exercises.

Following Lindsay’s return to work, the RETAINWORKS nurse navigator checked in regularly by phone and text for eight weeks. The navigator asked Lindsay how she was doing, both physically and emotionally, at home and at work. The navigator coached her on strategies to manage her injury and recovery. Lindsay says the calls motivated her to follow through with the recommendations from her doctor and physical therapist. She appreciated the personal and caring approach.

The RETAINWORKS nurse navigator also reviewed notes from Lindsay’s health-care appointments and provided Lindsay with clear, written summaries. “Sometimes when you go to the doctor, you don’t always remember everything that was said. Or you kind of took it a different way,” Lindsay says. “So, the paper that I got after each doctor visit was really beneficial.”

RESULTS

Lindsay is thrilled that she was able to stay at work despite her knee injury. She reports that RETAINWORKS supported her every step of the way.

According to Lindsay, the regular check-ins and follow-up notes were the most helpful parts of the program. “That personal check-in was huge. I was not in a great mindset because I’ve never experienced anything like that,” Lindsay says, noting that her injury “changed my whole world.” Initially, the nurse navigator checked in with Lindsay more often to offer support, answer questions, and give encouragement to follow through with physical therapy and doctor’s recommendations. “As I got back to work and my recovery progressed, the check-ins were less frequent, which felt right,” Lindsay says.

After completing the RETAINWORKS program, Lindsay learned she would need a second surgery to improve her range of motion. This time, she was prepared with the tools she needed to support her recovery and return to work quickly. She knows that if she needs further assistance, she can turn to RETAINWORKS. For Lindsay, RETAINWORKS is:

“amazing people that [put] you at the center of everything. It’s a group of people that want you to get back doing what you need to do for your job, for your life, for your mental health, for your physical wellness.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

By assessing the individual needs of the participant, RETAINWORKS ensures that each participant has a plan that is tailored to the supports they need to successfully stay at work or return to work.

- Together, RETAINWORKS and Lindsay developed a SAW plan that provided services and supports in addition to those Lindsay received from workers’ compensation. The plan incorporated physical therapy and workplace modifications so Lindsay could continue teaching while she recovered from her injury.
- RETAINWORKS coached Lindsay on various options and strategies for following through on recommendations from her health-care provider. The regular check-ins and summaries of her health-care appointments kept Lindsay motivated and on track with her recovery and return to work after her first knee surgery.
- The tools and support Lindsay received from RETAINWORKS helped her successfully navigate a second knee surgery and quickly return to her job.

RETAIN WORKS

Kansas is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health-care providers, and other key parties to help workers with new injuries and illness stay in the workforce. The Kansas Department of Commerce leads RETAINWORKS in coordination with several partners. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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