

Back at Work and Thriving, Thanks to RETAIN Kentucky

RETAIN Kentucky helped a participant receive work modifications, health care, and other supportive services so he could stay at a job he loved. A trusting relationship with RETAIN Kentucky staff and a personalized plan were key to the participant's success on the job and improved quality of life.

BACKGROUND

RETAIN Kentucky is improving the quality of participants' lives through its early intervention stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) program, which addresses the barriers that can affect a person's ability to work after an injury or illness. RETAIN Kentucky RTW coordinators work with participants to develop a SAW/RTW plan that identifies workplace accommodations they might need. Their plan may also describe additional services and resources they'll need to address other issues affecting work and health, such as housing, transportation, childcare, and access to medical services.

CHALLENGE

James (not his real name) is a full-time environmental services worker at a hospital. He loved his job but was concerned about losing it. After his second stroke in two years, James experienced problems with memory, speech, balance, and stamina that affected his ability to perform his job tasks. He was responsible for cleaning 15 to 20 rooms each day but found the pace too demanding. He was often tired and sometimes forgot instructions from his supervisor. He also had trouble remembering appointments and taking medication for his other chronic health conditions. Although his doctor had ordered some workplace accommodations, James did not know how to go about arranging them with his employer. James needed support to establish workplace accommodations and address other issues that were making it difficult for him to maintain employment. He wanted to keep working—a choice that he felt was best for himself and his family.

ACTIONS

James's doctor from the rehabilitation hospital was familiar with RETAIN Kentucky and referred his patient to the program. For James's RTW coordinator, building trust would be an important first step because James had concerns about privacy. The RTW coordinator shared the



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: RETAIN Kentucky participant had health issues and life stressors that affected his ability to perform his job tasks successfully.



Action: RETAIN Kentucky negotiated reasonable job accommodations and provided tools and strategies to address physical, cognitive, and other life issues affecting the participant's work performance.

Results: The participant's work performance, stamina, and attendance at appointments improved with the use of tools and strategies provided by RETAIN Kentucky.

program’s privacy safeguards and worked closely with James to develop a SAW plan that addressed his needs. James and the RTW coordinator had weekly phone calls, texts, or in-person meetings to check in and determine whether James needed any other supports. The RTW coordinator accomplished the following:

Negotiated workplace accommodations. James had difficulty performing his job duties effectively because he did not know how to implement the workplace accommodations his doctor had recommended. The RTW coordinator collaborated with James’s doctor and employer to establish reasonable accommodations, including short breaks during the day, so James could safely and successfully do his job.

Developed memory tools and strategies. James struggled to keep track of work tasks, medical appointments, and even meetings with his RTW coordinator. He also needed reminders to take his medication as prescribed. During weekly check-ins, the RTW coordinator reviewed upcoming tasks and appointments with James. Between meetings, the RTW coordinator would remind him about his appointments. The RTW coordinator helped James create an email account, set up phone reminders for appointments and medication, and maintain a calendar. He also coached James to use a notebook to track his work tasks. As James became familiar with these tools, he used them successfully to keep appointments, remember work tasks, and take his medication on time.



“We are here to make his life a little easier.”
—RETAIN Kentucky RTW Coordinator

Scheduled therapy appointments. Since James was having ongoing issues with balance and memory, the RTW coordinator helped arrange physical and speech therapy appointments.

Arranged additional supports. James was having problems with his car, his primary source of transportation. The RTW coordinator helped him find a mechanic to fix the vehicle. However, the repairs depleted the funds James needed to pay other bills. The RTW coordinator connected James to a local social service agency that provided one-time financial assistance for his utilities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

RETAIN Kentucky helps participants build skills that will foster independence and success at work after an injury or illness.

- James received reasonable workplace accommodations, including short breaks throughout the day. His job performance improved and his stamina increased. He is no longer worried about being fired.
- The RTW coordinator connected James with community resources to help fix his car and pay for utilities. If needed, James knows how to access these services again.
- The RTW coordinator coached James on tools to track appointments, medication, and work tasks. James began to attend more appointments, remember work tasks, and take his medication as prescribed.

RETAIN Kentucky plays a key role in building sustainable SAW/RTW best practices and strengthening the workforce across the state.

- RETAIN Kentucky is improving the quality of participants' lives through early interventions that address barriers that can affect one's ability to work after an injury or illness.
- These interventions include workplace accommodations and additional supports for other factors that affect health, such as stable income, consistent housing and transportation, and access to health care and other support services. The program connects participants to community resources that they can continue to access as needed after completing the RETAIN program.

"Imagine having so much stress, pressure, and all these other things going on. ...That can feel insurmountable. The RTW Coordinator can make it solvable. ...They take these burdens off, one at a time."

—Beth Potter, Division Director,
RETAIN Kentucky



Kentucky 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 newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce. The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation leads Kentucky RETAIN, together with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute and committed project partners, including the Council of State Governments. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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