

School District Return to Work Success Stories

Although we recognize that return to work success occurs because of a variety of causes, we have found that there is one common theme among all successes – communication. The Standard's Return to Work team will work as a coordinator between your school district, the member, the health provider and the worker's compensation carrier to ensure that all are aware of what the goal is.

Many times we have found that an employee who is not at work is not there because the employer is not aware of their capabilities, the employee is not aware that work is available or there is a misconception regarding the possibilities of even bringing that employee back to work within limitations and restrictions. The majority of our returns to work successes are not complex. We act as a return to work conduit, reviewing every claim where return to work may be possible – our follow-up may be as simple as a few telephone calls that result in coordination of a start date, contact to a physician's office to clarify restrictions or ordering a simple ergonomic device. These things are often completed in a day. Other successes do take more time and the stories outlined below show what happens when all parties, through a coordinated effort, work together toward the common goal of successful return to work.

Stay at Work Success Story #1

Occupation: Secretary

Situation: The employee had a condition of the spinal canal in the neck region that was likely causing nerve and/or spinal cord compression. It was corrected by surgery to fuse the neck vertebrae (fusion). The employee's doctor recommended that the employee be off work for six weeks.

Onsite Return to Work/Stay at Work Specialist Intervention: Working with the treating physician, the employer and the employee, the RTW Specialist facilitated a comprehensive worksite modification and discussed the potential of part-time progressive return to work with the treating physician prior to the six week period. The proposed worksite modification included relocation of the workstation a specialized keyboard, monitor, chair and wireless headset. The physician agreed to an immediate part-time return to work at 20 hours per week with an increase in hours weekly up to 40 hours per week at the four week point.

Outcome: Employee successfully returned to work, at first part-time five days per week and then full-time four weeks later. This resulted in a disability duration reduction of 2 weeks. The physician was updated weekly and approved the increase in hours due to the work hardening nature of the return to work.

Return to Work Success Story #2

Occupation: Clerical

Situation: Due to improper positioning of their keyboard and mouse, the employee was not experiencing proper neck and back support. This resulted in a chronic strain and inflammation of a tendon in their elbow and ongoing neck and back pain.

Onsite Return to Work/Stay at Work Specialist Intervention: The RTW/SAW Specialist performed a thorough ergonomic assessment and facilitated a worksite modification to help the employee stay at work and maintain productivity. The worksite modifications included a specialized chair, computer support platform, mouse and keyboard arm and wrist rests, and an adjustable document holder.

Outcome: A disability claim was prevented and the employee reported, “I love the document holder and the chair is really amazing and awesome. It makes me sit straighter.”

Return to Work Success Story #3

Occupation: English Teacher

Situation: Employee was interesting in returning to work but had many barriers for a successful return to work. An English Teacher ceased work due to cervical and back fusion. The employee was reviewed by The Standard’s Return to Work Team for return to work and vocational intervention. The employee was interested in returning to work.

Intervention: The Standard’s Return to Work Team contacted the school district who was open for her return to work despite her restrictions. The Standard’s Return to Work Team negotiated with the school district to provide her with a student aide in the classroom, assistance going to and from her vehicle, and being provided with a data projector to allow her to sit while teaching her class. The Standard coordinated these accommodations with her department. The Standard provided the employee with an ergonomic chair with cervical and lumbar support, laptop and book desk slants to eliminate downward neck flexion and forearm supports to reduce bilateral forearm discomfort. The Standard coordinated delivery of the ergonomic equipment and provided the employee with a specialist to set up her equipment and arrange her classroom. She recently completed her first semester of teaching and sent The Standard’s Return to Work Team a thank you note that said, *“I am so grateful to be back at work with my students and doing a job that I love.”*