

Promoting Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Best Practices Through Virtual Learning Series

RETAIN Kentucky’s virtual monthly Employment Seminar Series provides timely and relevant information about stay-at-work/return-to-work best practices, supporting employers, health care professionals, program participants, and other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

RETAIN Kentucky promotes stay-at-work (SAW)/return-to-work (RTW) policies and best practices that employers and health care providers can use to help injured or ill workers. The team also encourages participants to speak up about their needs to providers and employers. During the first phase of the program, the team identified challenges that employers faced when assisting employees with an injury or illness. The team also asked participants to share what helped them stay employed or return to work after an injury or illness. From this feedback, the team identified a need to engage experts to discuss these challenges and share relevant SAW/RTW best practices with the program’s stakeholders (employers, health care providers, workforce professionals, and participants).



THE CHALLENGE

RETAIN Kentucky aims to increase adoption of SAW/RTW best practices and policies. It also encourages those with an injury or illness to speak up for themselves. The team needed an effective platform to inform and engage stakeholders. In selecting a platform, the team considered the effect of the pandemic on hosting in-person events. The team also needed a user-friendly platform that could accommodate provider and attendees’ schedules.



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, is sponsoring RETAIN.

ACTIONS

In May 2021, RETAIN Kentucky began a virtual monthly Employment Seminar Series. Each 30-minute seminar offers helpful information and take-aways that can enhance attendees' SAW/RTW experience, practice, and/or work policies. The seminars are live, so attendees can connect with the presenters and each other through a monitored chat box. Seminars are also archived on the program's website for later viewing and sharing. RETAIN Kentucky has developed several useful strategies to achieve the series' goals:

Selecting session topics based on stakeholder input and trend data. RETAIN Kentucky solicits topic ideas from stakeholders via email, social media, and presentations. The program looks at trends in case management and service delivery. It also reviews participants' reports about their SAW/RTW experiences, including any challenges. For example, RTW coordinators found that many participants feel uncomfortable or do not know how to discuss their needs with health care providers. As a result, providers may not have the participant information they need to develop effective SAW/RTW plans with employers. The team felt that a seminar on improving communication with health care providers, participants, and employers would be helpful. In response to this expressed need, the team arranged for a physician to share best practices on how employers and participants can clearly provide the information needed for providers to develop effective SAW/RTW plans.

Engaging experts to share best practices. RETAIN Kentucky works with experts who deliver presentations on relevant SAW/RTW topics. Presenters have included employers, health care providers, and workforce experts. Moving forward, participants will also be featured.

Focusing on being flexible and responsive. The team arranges easy-to-access seminars that respond to stakeholders' needs. Seminar topics have included RTW after COVID-19, trauma-informed workplaces, and employee well-being. The team designs each seminar to appeal to diverse stakeholders and encourages communication among attendees.

Scheduling seminars during convenient times. The team scheduled seminars on different weekdays and times to see how it affected attendance. Scheduling seminars on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday during lunchtime allowed for the greatest attendance.



Challenge–Actions–Results

Challenge: Develop a learning platform for stakeholders that promotes SAW/RTW best practices



Actions: Started a monthly employment education series; involved stakeholders and experts in its development; promoted the series widely; focused on lasting changes to SAW/RTW policies and practices and helping participants speak up for their needs and interests

Results: Created a learning platform to promote SAW/RTW best practices and encourage system change; increased series attendance and video views.

Promoting the series through new and existing networks and channels. RETAIN Kentucky invites community, employer, workforce, and health care partners to the seminars and asks them to share the series with their networks. The team markets the series on its social media pages and websites, and emails personal invitations to the series through subscription lists. The team also asks program staff to share the series with their work or other relevant contacts. It shares best practice clips from the series on RETAIN social media.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

The Employment Seminar Series provides a learning platform that increases awareness of SAW/RTW best practices. It also strengthens SAW/RTW policies by emphasizing effective strategies that employers can implement. The series may improve outcomes for workers with injuries and illnesses and also positively influence SAW/RTW policies within the larger employment system. RETAIN Kentucky’s Employment Seminar Series has achieved the following:

- ✓ *Promoting and sharing best SAW/RTW strategies and practical solutions to create a workforce that helps workers with injuries and illnesses stay at or return to work.*
 - The series provides 30-minute seminars in which attendees learn and apply effective SAW/RTW strategies using real-world examples and challenges. The series fills a gap in existing learning opportunities on SAW/RTW practices.
 - Each seminar averages 60 live attendees and an additional 65 video views. This number is increasing as the series becomes more established. For instance, nearly 200 people registered to attend the February 2022 webinar. The team also shares clips with best practices from the series on the program’s social media platforms and in other promotional materials.
- ✓ *Engaging and connecting health care and employment leaders.*
 - The series engages employers, health care professionals, and workforce development leaders so they can learn and share SAW/RTW practices and policies that can lead to system and policy changes.
 - The program works closely with its stakeholders to create the seminars. Stakeholders identify relevant topics, promote the program, and serve as presenters, when appropriate.



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