

## Minnesota RETAIN Works With a Local Employer and Landlord to Help a Program Participant

*The Minnesota RETAIN Program helped a participant find employment, stable housing, health care, and other supportive resources during the pandemic. Developing a comprehensive individualized plan to address the participant's needs was key to her returning to work successfully.*

### BACKGROUND

Minnesota RETAIN (MN RETAIN) is working with Workforce Development, Inc., to provide job training programs for workers who have lost their jobs and/or homes. The program teams up with more than 55 job centers across the state to help participants find meaningful and competitive employment. Participants can remain in the workforce while building skills. The program helps employers too, by offering them help in filling out paperwork and training employees. The program also identifies accommodations needed for employees with an injury or illness to remain in the workplace and helps decrease the number of employees who leave their jobs.

One of the program's main goals is to provide services that support diverse groups of people throughout the state. These groups include people who live in rural areas or are members of communities with little to no access to health care and other support services. People in these communities may be hesitant to receive services from health care organizations that have not treated them fairly in the past. They may also be wary of working with unfamiliar organizations. To address these concerns, MN RETAIN hired an expert to work closely with these communities to help them learn about the program. The program also hires staff from the communities they serve and trains all staff to appreciate people of different backgrounds.



*Minnesota 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. MN RETAIN is a collaboration among the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry; Minnesota Department of Health; Governor's Workforce Development Workforce Board; Workforce Development, Inc.; and Mayo Clinic.*

MN RETAIN works closely with health care providers. The program informs these providers about ways to refer people to MN RETAIN. The program also partners with health care providers who have served communities with little to no access to health resources.

To support sustainability, MN RETAIN also partners with the workforce development and health care industries to offer a range of services that can meet the needs of all participants. Partners include state agencies, employers, and health care providers.

## CHALLENGE

MN RETAIN participants may have other issues that make it hard for them to keep a job after an injury. For example, Sally (not her real name) lost her job and home after having an injury that required surgery. Because she had worked there for less than a year, she could not get unemployment benefits. She found that many companies do not hire workers with injuries. In addition, her lease expired. To save money for rent and a security deposit, she began living in her car. However, because of her surgery, she needed to keep her foot elevated for extended periods of time, thus limiting the time she could spend walking.

Sally’s medical issues made it difficult to find a job and an apartment. MN RETAIN realized that it needed to work with local businesses and landlords in order to help her. Its work provided Sally the support needed to return to work and find stable, safe housing.

## ACTIONS

**Develop an individual plan to address Sally’s needs.** MN RETAIN reviewed Sally’s interests and skills and identified tasks that she could perform. The program also considered her health care provider’s recommendations. After this review, the program created an individual plan with Sally that helped her get a job, an apartment, and medical care.

**Provide short-term paid work.** MN RETAIN helped Sally get a job as a COVID-19 screener for at least 200 hours at \$16.50/hour. Because Sally also needed to go to doctors’ appointments for her injury, MN RETAIN worked with her employer to give Sally the flexibility to both recover from her injury and work productively on the job.



Challenge-Actions-Results

**Challenge:** Assist an injured MN RETAIN program participant in finding a job and a home.



**Actions:** MN RETAIN worked with a local employer and landlord to arrange for paid work and housing.

**Results:** The participant got a job at a local civic center as a COVID-19 screener, an apartment, and other services.

**Address Sally’s housing issues.** During the pandemic, federal law prevented landlords from evicting tenants. MN RETAIN used this knowledge to negotiate with a local landlord. The landlord agreed to give Sally a 50% discount on rent and did not charge a security deposit. MN RETAIN gave the landlord a letter verifying that the rent would be paid. MN RETAIN also paid Sally’s first month’s rent, enabling her to use her funds to pay other bills.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

MN RETAIN works with participants to address the issues that make it hard for them to return to work or stay in the workforce after an injury or illness. These issues may include health concerns, housing instability, and outdated job skills. In Sally’s case, the program worked with local employers, landlords, and health care providers to address her needs and other concerns by using the following strategies:

- ✓ *Assisting participants like Sally to achieve stable housing through employment-related services.*
  - Through a local organization, the team helped Sally get paid work that strengthened her job skills. The experience also gave Sally a source of income while she recovered from her injury.
  - The team worked with local landlords to find stable housing for Sally.
  - The team built trust with a landlord by paying the first month’s rent and assuring them that the rent would be paid moving forward.
- ✓ *Connecting Sally to other resources, including stay-at-work (SAW)/return-to-work (RTW) supports and wrap-around services.*
  - The team provided referrals for Sally to utilize once she completes RETAIN. These referrals will help her access other local resources and continue to receive support for her SAW/RTW plan.
  - The team used emergency COVID-19 relief funds to help Sally pay for her housing. Stable housing allowed her to access basic needs while staying at or returning to work.



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