

## From a Broken Back to a Better Job

November 2022 RETAIN Success Story

*“Before my injury, I was working 100 to 150 hours per pay period and was completely underappreciated and underpaid. Then, I was fired due to restrictions. After six months working with RETAIN, I am now a director of nursing, making almost double what I made at the time of the accident, and never work more than 40 hours per week. I have never been happier professionally!” – Mason*

### BACKGROUND

Mason was an assistant director of health services for an assisted-living facility when he was admitted to the Mayo Clinic after a serious car accident.

“I was stopped in traffic and the person behind me was texting and rear-ended me doing 75 [miles per hour],” Mason said. Mason’s back, neck, and skull were broken. Through a review of his electronic medical records, the Minnesota RETAIN team at Mayo discovered he was out of work because of his injuries and approached him about enrolling in the Minnesota RETAIN program.

The RETAIN program was created for people like Mason, who faced a lengthy recovery that would delay his return to work. Minnesota RETAIN provides access to supportive resources for food, transportation, and rental assistance to help ill or injured workers while they recover. Minnesota RETAIN’s medical care team and return-to-work (RTW) coordinators create stay-at-work or return-to-work (SAW/STW) plans individualized for RETAIN participants. These plans may identify workplace accommodations that participants may need to continue working in their jobs. The program also partners with agencies that offer vocational assistance to help workers find new employment, if needed.



### Challenge-Action-Results

**Challenge:** After being involved in a car accident, Mason was no longer able to walk or read and had difficulty swallowing and talking.



**Action:** Minnesota RETAIN assessed Mason’s needs, collaborated with his health care team, and connected him with supportive and vocational services.

**Results:** After a six-month recovery period, Mason secured a higher paying job.

## CHALLENGE

Because of the injuries Mason sustained in a car accident, he lost control of the left side of his body. These injuries made it difficult for him to perform activities of daily living, such as swallowing food and talking. To get to work, he had to rely on using only his right hand and foot to drive the 1.5 hours to his workplace and also have someone help him get to his desk.

“I electrical-taped a little pen to my finger so I could type,” Mason said. “I was still doing 18-hour to 20-hour days. After two weeks of that, it kept getting worse.” Mason’s condition continued to decline until he was unable to read. “And then [my employer] fired me for my restrictions anyway.”



## ACTIONS

To help Mason recover from his injuries and return to work, Minnesota RETAIN implemented several strategies:

**Assessed needs.** The Minnesota RETAIN team spoke with Mason to determine how best to support his recovery. They found that his biggest obstacle was coordination of care. Mason had

multiple care providers and did not know who was in charge and writing his orders. “Working with RETAIN kind of pulled it together and took the excessive confusion out of it because I’ve never had to deal with a long-term injury before,” Mason said.

**Tailored a comprehensive SAW/RTW plan.** Minnesota RETAIN helped Mason manage his appointments with various providers, including his primary care doctor and specialists. Mason’s RTW plan was two-pronged. Orthopedic surgeons and neurologists addressed Mason’s physical injuries, while behavioral health professionals treated his depression. “There were a couple times I would feel depressed because I wasn’t allowed to literally move for eight weeks. I was supposed to stay on my couch in the same place,” Mason said. He added that he felt like the world had stopped moving around him for a while, and he did not know how—or even if—he could move forward. “There’s nothing else that’s really there to help,” he said. “You’re just stuck.” His RTW plan gave him concrete steps to follow and provided the hope he needed to recover and find a new job.

**Coordinated supportive services.** At the same time, Minnesota RETAIN addressed Mason’s frustrations over losing his job and source of income. They connected Mason with Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI) to address his career and financial concerns. Having been let go from his previous job, Mason was eager to recover and begin an employment search. WDI helped Mason navigate job search websites and format his résumé. “[RETAIN] said, ‘How can we help you more?’ Whatever was on my mind, they helped me with it. It was pretty great,” Mason added.

RETAIN provided other supportive services to address Mason’s financial concerns so he could focus on his recovery. “They helped me with my truck payment too, and I would have ended up losing my house *and* my truck if they hadn’t done that, so that was awesome.”

After a six-month recovery, Mason secured a job as a director of nursing, making almost double the salary of his previous job, while working fewer hours. “I look forward to work now. I’ve never had that,” he said. “I don’t think I would have turned out this well without the help I got from [RETAIN], so I appreciate it.”

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

- Minnesota RETAIN empowers ill and injured workers during their recovery by providing them with the resources to manage workplace accommodations or find new employment.
  - Minnesota RETAIN worked with Mason and his care team to develop a plan to treat his physical injuries, address his mental and emotional needs, assist him financially, and create a strategy to return to work.
  - Because Mason lost his job due to his injuries, Minnesota RETAIN connected him with vocational services to help him find new employment as a director of nursing. He is now making nearly twice his previous salary and working fewer hours.
  - Minnesota RETAIN is improving the quality of participants’ lives by creating a safety net for ill or injured employees and providing appropriate support. This support helps them maintain employment, housing, transportation, access to health care, and other services.



*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. Minnesota RETAIN is a collaboration between 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. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.*

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