

CASE STUDY

At a Glance



Employer: Salem-Keizer Public Schools



Locations: Salem, Oregon, and Keizer, Oregon



Industry: Education administration



Covered employees: 4,000+

Standing Up to Back Pain

As a federal program coordinator for Salem-Keizer Public Schools, in the cities of Salem and Keizer, Oregon, Bradley Capener often is on the move. Planning, coordinating and monitoring the implementation and evaluation of federal elementary and secondary programs, such as Title I, across multiple schools and grade levels is no easy task — especially considering Salem-Keizer is the state's second-largest school district.

It's a job that keeps Capener busy as he heads from one school to another multiple times throughout the day. Active days transition into long nights in the office, where Capener generates reports, writes documents and manages the paperwork and emails that accumulate throughout the day.

In fall 2012, Capener began experiencing acute sciatica, as well as low back pain secondary to lumbar disc degeneration. His pain was exacerbated by extended time periods spent sitting at his desk. At 6 feet 4 inches tall, Capener reported consistent pain levels that prevented him from sitting at his desk for more than 15 minutes at a time.

“The pain I experienced in my back, neck and wrists made it difficult to focus on tasks for any substantial period of time, and my productivity suffered as a result,” Capener said.

Time to Stop the Pain

After weeks of consistent pain, Capener reached out to the school district's Risk Management Department to see if help was available to remedy his condition. Salem-Keizer uses Workplace PossibilitiesSM, an absence and disability management program from Standard Insurance Company (The Standard) that helps employers find solutions to help employees stay at work or return to work from a disabling condition.¹ To help Capener, the school district's Risk Management Department connected with Workplace Possibilities coordinator Debbi Cross to start developing an accommodation plan.

Cross acts as the facilitator between the school district and the Workplace Possibilities team, gathering medical information and determining which of the Workplace Possibilities consultants — vocational, nurse or mental health — could best help an employee. Once Cross had the information she needed, she connected with Ben Lumsden, a Workplace Possibilities consultant

¹ The Workplace Possibilities program is available with Group Long Term Disability insurance from The Standard.

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and occupational therapist, to schedule an in-person workplace ergonomic evaluation with Capener to better assess his pain and identify accommodations to help reduce it.

“One of the advantages of the Workplace Possibilities program is the autonomy under which the workplace consultants work with our employees,” said William White, risk manager for Salem-Keizer Public Schools. “Once we connected The Standard directly with Bradley, the process was out of our hands and conveniently handled by the Workplace Possibilities team.”

Workplace Evaluation

During an on-site visit, Lumsden reviewed Capener’s job tasks, along with his pain symptoms and how they manifested throughout the day, and which tasks specifically caused spikes of pain and discomfort. Lumsden also reviewed treatment Capener received from physical therapists and other specialists and what steps he took on his own to mitigate symptoms.

“Prior to determining recommendations, we talk with the employee regarding any workplace limitations and restrictions as noted by the physician or specialist,” Lumsden said. “In Bradley’s case, his medical team recommended physical therapy to help reduce his pain, but the workstation dynamic hadn’t been addressed.”

Lumsden conducted an ergonomic evaluation to determine if any of Capener’s current office equipment contributed to his pain and what additional equipment could help mitigate his condition. When Lumsden evaluated Capener’s workstation, he quickly noted the low desk height and also identified poor keyboard and mouse placement. Lumsden’s evaluation included ergonomic seated and standing measurements, femur length, knee height, elbow height and eye line measurements while seated and standing to verify if Capener’s workstation was ergonomically sound.

Lumsden also observed how Capener used his computer equipment and performed daily tasks and recommended minor changes that could help mitigate Capener’s pain while the official equipment procurement process took place. This education included a lesson on ergonomics and how computer equipment placement can stress the body, along with a chair fitting that helped Capener understand the proper height and distances he should maintain while seated.

“After this education process, employees tend to make voluntary adjustments in other aspects of life, including in the car and at home,” Lumsden said.

Equipment Solution

Lumsden’s workstation equipment recommendation centered on a solution that suited Capener’s height. Specifically, an adjustable three-stage work surface would allow Capener to transition from a seated to standing position throughout the day to minimize lower back discomfort. Lumsden also recommended dual-articulating monitor arms to ensure Capener’s computer monitors could be adjusted to meet his line of sight — mitigating neck strain. An ergonomically designed keyboard tray would ensure proper wrist and elbow alignment to alleviate the stress and resulting tingling sensation he previously experienced.

Equipment, installation and other vendor costs totaled just more than \$3,000. The purchase of all equipment was covered through the Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit from The Standard, which covers the cost of equipment or tools that help an employee in his or her workplace.²

² The Reasonable Accommodation Expense Benefit provides for up to \$25,000 in approved employer workplace accommodation expenses.

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Full-service Pain Relief

Lumsden and Cross also collaborated with the district risk management team and facilities department to schedule the new workstation installation, old equipment removal and information technology equipment setup.

As part of the Workplace Possibilities service, once workplace recommendations were implemented, Lumsden remained in contact with Capener to determine if the new workstation helped reduce Capener's pain at the office and to see if any additional adjustments were needed.

"The workstation changes have been extremely helpful and have alleviated my chronic back pain now that I stand most of the time at my desk," Capener said.

"My wrists don't hurt anymore, my neck feels more relaxed and I'm more productive as a result."

Now that Capener's pain has been drastically reduced, he can devote all his time to ensuring federal funding continues to flow into the Salem-Keizer school district.

"We're happy to have Bradley comfortably back at work," White said. "Knowing that the Workplace Possibilities team at The Standard can jump in and manage the accommodations process on our behalf takes the burden away from our risk management team."

About The Standard

The Standard is a marketing name for StanCorp Financial Group, Inc., and subsidiaries. Insurance products are offered by Standard Insurance Company of 1100 SW Sixth Avenue, Portland, Ore., in all states except New York, where insurance products are offered by The Standard Life Insurance Company of New York of 360 Hamilton Avenue, Suite 210, White Plains, N.Y. Product features and availability vary by state and company, and are solely the responsibility of each subsidiary. Each company is solely responsible for its own financial condition. Standard Insurance Company is licensed to solicit insurance business in all states except New York. The Standard Life Insurance Company of New York is licensed to solicit insurance business in only the state of New York.

About the Workplace Possibilities™ program

The Workplace Possibilities™ program is a unique, proactive approach to helping employers prevent and manage employee absence and disability. A Workplace Possibilities consultant helps to connect employees with their health management programs and identifies opportunities to keep at-risk employees on the job or return to work faster. The program delivers rapid and measurable reductions in absence- and disability-related costs while also improving the efficiency of the HR team and increasing employee satisfaction. For tips and tools HR professionals can use to help re-imagine the way they manage absence and disability, visit www.workplacepossibilities.com.