

Return to work achievement (large or self-insured) – Ruth Pfeiler

When 62-year-old regional curriculum consultant and grandmother, Ruth Pfeiler, slipped on an icy pathway at the UNESCO Peace Centre in South Korea, she knew something was terribly wrong. She couldn't find her kneecap anymore.

With a snapped patella, she was taken by ambulance to a Korean hospital where she stayed for three days. She immediately realised the gravity of the situation – she was in a foreign country where English was not the language and she knew very little Korean. Plus she had no understanding of the South Korean health system.

UNESCO officials provided her with a Korean interpreter who helped her negotiate between the Korean and Australian specialists and the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) for her return to Adelaide for surgery.

Ruth was determined to recover from her injury, she was self-motivated and refused to give up. She always enjoyed her work and found working closely with others and seeing goals achieved very satisfying. Keeping in touch with colleagues meant there was less to catch up on when she returned to work in the coming term.

The shock of going from being an independent person who looked after others to being incapacitated had a huge impact on Ruth, who has always been very healthy. Her role with DECS required a high level of commitment to a range of stakeholders and one of her main concerns was that she might not be able to meet those commitments and may have to rely on others to complete projects.

"When much of your work is research, communication, thinking and problem solving, suddenly moving from that to focusing entirely on your physical repair and rehabilitation takes some adjustment and patience," says Ruth.

Throughout her convalescence, Ruth continued to work from home, sending resources, plans and other materials electronically and having online discussions. This meant her work continued despite her immobility. She was able to meet with people in her own home and continue to provide input, and that helped her stay connected with her workplace and colleagues. It also ensured others could keep going with their own projects.

Getting back to the normality of her work life was a big motivator for Ruth. At a time when she could have been thinking about retiring, Ruth persevered through her rehabilitation and is now back full-time.

Ruth says her case manager was empathetic, which helped her to achieve her goal of returning to work on pre-injury duties and feeling confident and well supported in her journey. She says she feels useful and productive and is enjoying participating and communicating in an environment that is familiar to her, and one that affirms she is valued and was missed during her recovery.

"After many years in schools where we have done OHSW, I am now critically aware of the importance of work safety – from a preventative perspective and also for the people who have limited mobility or are recovering from any level of injury," says Ruth. "I have far more empathy and an absolute respect for others who have had injuries that have impacted on their lives."

WorkCoverSA

100 Waymouth Street, Adelaide South Australia 5000

General enquiries: 13 18 55

Fax: (08) 8233 2290

Email: info@workcover.com

Website: www.workcover.com

Free information support services: TTY (deaf or have hearing/speech impairments):

(08) 8233 2574. Languages other than English: call the Interpreting and Translating

Centre - (08) 8226 1990 and ask for an interpreter to call WorkCover on 13 18 55.

Braille, audio, or e-text: call 13 18 55 and ask for help in an alternative format.

Document: Ruth Pfeiler (Return to work achievement - large).doc

Last updated: August 2011

The information produced by WorkCover Corporation of South Australia in this publication is correct at the time of printing and is provided as general information only. WorkCover is a statutory authority funded by employers to rehabilitate and compensate South Australians injured at work.