



Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Partnership

Improving Care and Conditions for Chronically and Terminally Ill Nebraskans

PILOT PROJECT WORKS TO ADDRESS PAIN, SYMPTOMS SO NEBRASKANS CAN RETURN TO WORK

By Tracy Rathe, Communications Coordinator
Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Partnership

Jennifer Schrodt literally took a step that changed her life. While at work, she missed the bottom two steps of a staircase and received what is called a Lisfranc injury to her left foot. The fracture is rare and commonly misdiagnosed.

Living on a limited budget, Jennifer tried treating her injury on her own with ice and elevation. She maxed out the dosage charts for over-the-counter pain medications.

“In the morning, I would take something for the pain an hour and a half before I had to get out of bed because I knew I wouldn’t be able to walk on my foot,” said Jennifer.

Jennifer’s demanding job as a hair styling instructor was becoming impossible; she could no longer stand on her foot. She loved the outdoors but couldn’t even take her lunch-hour walks. She began to put on weight.

The pain ultimately forced Jennifer from the 25-year career she loved.

Seven months after her injury, Jennifer visited a doctor, where she learned about the Ticket to Work Palliative Care Demonstration Project. The pilot program gives participants access to a team of professionals to help keep pain and symptoms from getting in the way of holding or keeping a job.

Ticket to Work Palliative Care is implemented through the state’s palliative care association, the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Partnership, and is funded through the Ticket to Work Program of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Nebraska Department of Education’s Vocational Rehabilitation. Forty-eight percent of participants are employed after taking part in the program. Thirty-five percent of participants that were not previously employed have returned to the workforce. Since 2006, the program has provided services in Lincoln and northeast Nebraska and is set to expand to Omaha later this summer.

“I was struggling for months and months on my own. I couldn’t keep wearing an air cast, a splint or a boot,” said Jennifer. “I was physically in a great amount of pain and, emotionally, I felt like Ticket to Work Palliative Care was my last hope.”

Last September, Jennifer began meeting with the Ticket to Work Palliative Care team, which included a coordinator, a nurse, and a social worker. The team looked at every aspect of Jennifer’s life: home, professional and personal goals, and obstacles. They provided medical interventions and referrals to community services, including Vocational Rehabilitation. Most importantly, the team listened.

“I liked how they looked at me as a whole. I believe your body, mind and spirit have to be connected together. Our conversations would revolve that way too.

“When you hear yourself tell your own story, it’s nice to feel the love and compassion in a safe zone. The team gave me the referrals and connections that I needed, and they let me know it wasn’t the end.”

They stayed in touch with me – emails, phone calls. They kept me on track and helped get me off the meds. It was easy to start taking a little bit more acetaminophen for the pain. I was probably taking too much, too often. From a medical standpoint, the team educated me on the meds.”

“The team’s social worker gave me a journal. Instead of writing statements, I would draw my thoughts. It was almost like a wall and I drew how I felt,” said Jennifer.

In January, with the help of her new Voc Rehab counselor, Jennifer landed a job assisting with the development of a new distance education program. Since beginning her new job, Jennifer has lost 25 pounds. She attributes that to a decrease in her stress level and the ability to take walks again. She now takes no medication.

Now, instead of focusing on her pain, Jennifer can focus on her new goals. She is working to obtain a master’s degree and would like to advance at her new workplace. As a mom, Jennifer looks forward to watching her three kids “blossom.”

Jennifer says she is willing to tell her story because, “What I went through, I know I am not alone. If this program can benefit just one person then it was worth my time. It worked, I believe in it. It just needs to be publicly known so it can benefit others.”

“I got my life back,” added Jennifer.



Left: Jennifer Schrod, Ticket to Work Palliative Care Program Participant

If pain is keeping you or someone you know from work call 402-477-0204 or visit nepalliativecare.org.