

## Employer Case Study

### Preventing and Addressing Substance Use Disorder (SUD) in the Workforce: *Finding the Information You Need*

#### **A Conversation with Laura Ingalls, Wellness Program Manager, Steel Partners Holdings, L.P.**

##### Background

**Steel Partners Holdings, L.P.** (Steel Partners) is a diversified global holding company in industrial, energy and finance business segments. Annual revenue in 2018 was over \$1.5B.

**Laura Ingalls**, is the Wellness Program Manager at Steel Partners. She supports the company's efforts to help employees and their families make meaningful, healthy transformations. She is a USAT Certified Triathlon Coach and Running Coach. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Syracuse University.

##### Discussion

**Grayken Center:** Describe Steel Partners to us.

**Laura Ingalls:** Steel Partners is a diversified holding company. Our holdings include a whole or partial ownership interest in 17 companies with 70 locations in 11 countries. Based mainly in the United States, Steel Partners companies operate facilities in 26 states. The companies employ approximately 5,300 people representing a wide array of profiles.

**Grayken Center:** And you were hired to help with the execution of the wellness plan?

**Laura Ingalls:** Steel Partners created a Wellness Council about a year ago made up of volunteers from all of our affiliated companies. The Council is made up of HR, EH&S, Marketing, Administrative, and Operations representatives. I was hired to help develop the wellness program and support the Council. We have constructed and are in the process of executing a strategic plan. We have promoted several successful initiatives targeting physical activity, financial wellbeing, and good nutrition.

**Grayken Center:** So how did addressing substance use disorder become a part of the Council's plans?

**Laura Ingalls:** Warren Lichtenstein, Executive Chairman of Steel Partners, was committed to addressing opioid misuse prior to the formation of the Council. When the Council first started working together, we were considering ways in which we could have an impact on our workplaces and the communities in which we live and work. He urged us to focus on educating our employees and their families on the opioid crisis and the dangers of misusing prescription medication. It was a natural fit for the Council and the wellness program.

**Grayken Center:** Were there substance use disorder incidents in the workforce that motivated action?

**Laura Ingalls:** Opioid misuse is a significant societal issue, and SUD is impacting both our employees and their families. Addressing SUD is not just good for our people and for the communities where we live and work; we believe it is a necessity.

**Grayken Center:** How did you get started?

**Laura Ingalls:** Our Executive Chairman, Warren Lichtenstein, already was active in this initiative prior to the formation of our Wellness Council. He backed the efforts of the Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation to promote “If Only,” a film on the dangers of teen opioid misuse. The Wellness Council, during its first few months, has organized company-wide participation in several national DEA Rx “Take Back Days.” We have worked with several external resources to develop an educational presentation on opioids and responsible drug disposal. We trained the Council to deliver this training at their companies. We have also created questions on pain management that employees can ask their medical providers. We wanted to “raise their awareness and improve the quality of the conversations they have with their doctors.” Finally, we targeted adding Narcan to each company location’s emergency response kits and training our first responders on administering it properly.

**Grayken Center:** How did your Narcan (naloxone) distribution efforts evolve?

**Laura Ingalls:** When we began, we didn’t have a single source that could guide us. There was no roadmap. We didn’t know a great deal about the topic, so we “went on the hunt” for useful information from knowledgeable sources. This turned out to be a heavy lift. There were many time-consuming hurdles. We put a small team together made up of Council members and internal safety specialists to focus on the project. We created an action plan and met weekly to track our progress against our goals. The biggest struggle was the standing order, which is necessary to allow pharmacies to dispense Narcan without a prescription. Initially, we thought we would need a standing order in every state we intended to store Narcan. We contacted multiple state health departments and physicians asking for help, but they were busy and didn’t know us, so getting responses was tough. When we did make contact, most people didn’t know what to do about a Narcan standing order for a company. They were also concerned about the liability of writing a standing order for our purposes. This significant expenditure of time seemed to be leading nowhere until the search led us to a pharmaceutical distributor.

**Grayken Center:** What did the distributor tell you?

**Laura Ingalls:** We learned from the pharmaceutical distributor that the standing order was only required in the state to which the distributor ships Narcan. We were able to take delivery as Steel Partners in one state and distribute the Narcan internally to our various facilities across the United States. This was a big revelation, but it required us to find someone in Massachusetts, where we took delivery of the medication, to write the standing order. This time, a wellness consultant we use connected us with Dr. Alex Walley.

[Editor's Note: Alexander Walley, MD, MSc is the Medical Director of the Opioid Overdose Prevention Pilot Program in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Director of the Inpatient Addiction Medicine Consult Service at the Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston Medical Center.]

**Grayken Center:** What did you learn from Dr. Walley?

**Laura Ingalls:** Most importantly, he encouraged us. We needed some encouragement. Ultimately, he would write the standing order, but he did much more. He helped make certain we had all the t's crossed and the i's dotted. He was concerned about training and suggested educational resources. He described the organizational structure required - there must be individuals responsible for the overall program and at each site that has Narcan. Dr. Walley connected us with a vendor who sold a kit to store Narcan properly. It has the required temperature control, manages expiration dates, and has lockbox security.

**“Addiction is a disease. It is not a moral failing. All of us in the company know that everyone has a story involving substance use disorder. We feel that there is no one face of addiction. It touches all of us.”**

**Grayken Center:** Clearly, you, Steel Partners leadership, and the Wellness Council have made good progress. Along the way did you run into any stigma?

**Laura Ingalls:** Fortunately, our leadership team and the Council understand the negative impact of stigma. They have demonstrated this simple view in all their interactions on substance use disorder: Addiction is a disease. It is not a moral failing. All of us in the company know that everyone has a story involving substance use disorder. We feel that there is no one face of addiction. It touches all of us. This working environment has helped diminish stigma. Our SUD communications plan reinforces these themes and encourages everyone to seek help from our Employee Assistance Program and other company resources without any stigma.

**Grayken Center:** Now that you have gotten to this point, what's next?

**Laura Ingalls:** We are now in the process of preparing to store Narcan and training the staff to intervene if someone overdoses. We are partnering with a non-profit called The Steve Rummier Hope Network to develop and deliver training to our first responders. We continue to inform our workforce about substance use disorder. Our goal is not only to have Steel Partners employees ready to act onsite but to contribute to the safety of our communities outside the company. Because of all we are doing, we believe that our employees will be able to talk about substance use disorder wherever the opportunity arises. Ultimately, we want to prepare and encourage them to respond to an overdose anywhere. In addition, we intend to monitor the use of Narcan at each of our company sites. This information could help us better assist our employees. The sites using Narcan will receive additional substance use disorder support and other resources.

**Grayken Center:** How did you find out about the Grayken Center?

**Laura Ingalls:** Unfortunately, we didn't find out about the Grayken Center until we were well into the project. Dr. Walley told us about your organization. We wish we had discovered it earlier. It would have been very helpful to hear what other companies are doing and to brainstorm on approaches to address this important wellness issue. We like what the Center is doing. We want to help inform others about what we've done at Steel Companies and what we will do going forward.

**Grayken Center:** How will the Wellness Council assess the value – tangible and intangible – of the substance use disorder efforts you have made and will make?

**Laura Ingalls:** We have already thought about ways to measure value. We most likely will not use the return on the financial investment model because the cost is low compared to any benefit we realize. What we really want to know is if we are changing behaviors. Ideally, we want to buy the stuff (Narcan) and never use it because of the education and support we offer our employees to help them alter any harmful behaviors. We will measure the cost of our healthcare, and absenteeism, although it will be difficult to tie any decrease directly to a reduction in SUD. Indirectly, we will look at employee engagement and changes in behavior. We want to see if the efforts we are making to educate and alleviate stigma result in seeing the people who can most benefit from our resources coming forward to get help. Whatever the method, we plan to find a way to understand and measure the impact of our actions on our people, business, and communities.

**Grayken Center:** If you could offer only one recommendation, what recommendation would you make to organizations starting a substance use disorder program and what one major misstep would you hope they'd avoid?

**Laura Ingalls:** My recommendation: Find good sources of relevant information - like the Grayken Center - early in the process. The misstep to avoid: Giving up. Do not give up. The answers are out there, and the result will be worth the effort.

#### **For More Information**

To contact Laura Ingalls about the material discussed in this case study, you can email her at [lingalls@steelpartners.com](mailto:lingalls@steelpartners.com) or call her at 413-789-0252 x1022. She would like to share Steel Partners' progress on improving the health of their employees and help other organizations pursue their own solutions.