

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services & HIT, Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 18, 2010

Contacts: **Susan Wagner**, traumatic brain injury program administrator, N.D. **Dept. of Human Services'** Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Division, 701-328-8941; **Landon Feil**, vice president of brain injury services, **HIT, Inc.** – Dakota Alpha, 701-663-0376; or Heather Steffl, public information officer, N.D. Dept. of Human Services, 701-328-4933

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month

NEW Services Help People Affected by Brain Injuries to Resume Recreation and Social Activities

BISMARCK, N.D. – Recreational and social opportunities help shape the North Dakota character and enhance our quality of life. A new program funded by the North Dakota Department of Human Services and offered by HIT, Inc. of Mandan, N.D., is working to help people whose lives have been changed by traumatic brain injuries to regain confidence and rediscover social, recreational, and leisure activities.

“When people experience injury to their brains, it can be life altering in so many ways,” said Landon Feil, vice president for brain injury services at HIT, Inc. “Their memory, ability to control impulses, decision making, social skills, energy level, and how they process and understand information and communicate are some things that can change.”

“Our goal is to help people with traumatic brain injuries get out of the house and become active in their communities by rediscovering interests or developing new ones. In the process, we also help them relearn some general life skills and build a support network,” he said.

The Department of Human Services has contracted with HIT, Inc. to operate the state’s new Brain Injury Social and Recreational Services Program. Trained HIT, Inc. employees work one-on-one with clients each week to expose them to recreational or social activities that the clients select, such as shopping, going to a movie, or participating in activities such as intramurals, volunteering, or other community opportunities.

HIT, Inc.’s Dakota Alpha program also hosts a social group twice a month to give clients a chance to meet and socialize with others affected by brain injuries. Programming helps participants learn skills such as using public transportation, managing money, interacting with others, and exploring vocational skills, in addition to enjoying general leisure and recreational activities. An occupational therapist leads the sessions, which involve hands-on learning.

The program will soon add a monthly social activity night and all participants will be invited. HIT Inc. is planning to hold the first activity night in April.

Feil said the initial response from clients has been positive.

“This is a terrific start as we work to help North Dakotans impacted by brain injuries to adjust to changes in their lives and resume recreational, social, and leisure activities,” said Susan Wagner, brain injury program administrator for the N.D. Department of Human Services.

- MORE -

New Social and Recreational Services Program for People with Brain Injuries – Page 2

The program can serve up to nine individuals at a time, she said. Four people have been referred to date.

It costs participants nothing; however they must be approved to participate. The program receives referrals from social service providers, the Head Injury Association of North Dakota, and other organizations.

The 2009 Legislature provided funding for the program when it approved Senate Bill 2198. This legislation appropriated funds to the Department of Human Services to increase services and supports for people affected by traumatic brain injuries and their families.

While firm statistics are hard to find, several thousand North Dakotans are affected by traumatic brain injuries. Often these injuries, which can cause lifelong significant changes in abilities, result from car accidents, falls, sports-related injuries, firearms, and assaults. Traumatic brain injuries have also been called the “signature injury” of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In recognition of the importance of supporting people affected by brain injuries in their recovery and of working to prevent brain injuries, Governor John Hoeven has proclaimed March Brain Injury Awareness Month. His proclamation is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/proclamation-brain-injury-awareness-month.pdf.

For more information about brain injury services and supports, contact the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division of the N.D. Department of Human Services at 701-328-8920 or HIT, Inc.'s Dakota Alpha program at 701-663-0376.

Families caring for individuals with traumatic brain injuries and individuals affected by traumatic brain injuries who need information and support should contact the newly reorganized Head Injury Association of North Dakota at 877-525-2724 or 701-255-2120 or via e-mail at braininjurynd@me.com.

###