

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 325, Bismarck, N.D. 58505**

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Agency reminds employers of a valuable workforce resource: people with disabilities

BISMARCK, N.D. – Employers competing for workers in North Dakota’s tight labor market where the unemployment rate hovers around two percent cannot afford to lose experienced employees, especially due to permanent injuries or impairments. The Department of Human Services’ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) team is available to help employers retain current employees and connect with qualified applicants.

“We offer individuals with disabilities counseling, training, education, assistive technology, and job search and placement support so they can become employed or stay employed. We also connect businesses with prospective employees and resources to assist with on-the-job training, workplace accommodations and modifications, and ADA concerns,” said acting division director Robyn Throlson.

While North Dakota is among the leading states in the employment of people with disabilities, this workforce resource is underutilized, Throlson said. In 2015, about half of the 38,112 working-age adults with disabilities in North Dakota were employed.

During October, which is *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*, Throlson encouraged employers to learn more about vocational rehabilitation services by contacting the regional office serving their area. Contact information is available online at www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/about/regional-contact.html.

Last federal fiscal year, the division made over 2,200 employer contacts and helped 613 North Dakotans with disabilities obtain competitive, integrated employment in their community.

“The people we work with are motivated,” she said. “Last fiscal year, 87 percent of our clients were still working nine months after achieving their employment goal.”

To receive DVR services, individuals must have a disability that is an impediment to employment, and they must want to work and be available to work, said Throlson who described the average client as age 37 with a physical or cognitive disability.

“Our team of vocational rehabilitation professionals assists North Dakotans with all types of disabilities who range in age from teenagers in high school to people over age 65. Clients appreciate the career exploration, counseling and guidance DVR offers,” she said.

In addition to helping employers fill job openings with qualified applicants, DVR staff also offer rapid retention services to employers when an existing employee is at risk of losing his or her job because of a disability.

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The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation works in cooperation with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, the centers for independent living in North Dakota, Job Service North Dakota, Adult Education, and other workforce development partner agencies to address workforce needs and to develop an inclusive, high-quality workforce in the state.

Employers and people with disabilities can learn more about vocational rehabilitation services at www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/index.html or by contacting the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at 1237 W. Divide Ave., Suite 1B, Bismarck, N.D., 58501, 701-328-8950, toll-free 800-755-2745, ND Relay TTY 800-366-6888, or dhsvr@nd.gov.

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