

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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## **Youth with disabilities encouraged to plan ahead for summer work experience**

BISMARCK, N.D. – As spring approaches, students are reminded it's not too early to think about a summer job and gaining valuable work experience. The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is offering job search assistance and other support to high school students with disabilities who want to work this summer.

Last year, 57 students participated in the program statewide, and the division hopes to serve more students.

"We want young individuals with disabilities to have opportunities to succeed in the workplace. Experience matters," said division director Russ Cusack. "Involving students in the summer work experience program is part of our overall commitment to ensure students become employed, which supports a successful transition from high school to careers and adulthood."

Cusack said most participants have limited work experience, and the program helps them develop needed skills. Learning the importance of a strong work ethic, communicating effectively with others, working as a team member, and meeting employer expectations are experiences that lead to success, he said.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors address not only these issues, but help students search job openings, prepare a resume, complete job applications and go through the interview process. The program can also offer some support after a job placement.

To participate, students must qualify for vocational rehabilitation services. The division encourages students to participate in at least two work experiences before they leave high school.

Participants typically work in the hospitality industry including food service, movie theaters, hotels, and retail, which are common for first-time job seekers. The ideal placement, Cusack said, is 20 hours per week from late May through August. Occasionally an employer hires a participant for a more permanent position after the summer work experience ends.

The program is a collaborative effort involving the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Public Instruction, Job Service North Dakota, secondary school transition teachers, community rehabilitation providers, parents, students and employers.

Interested individuals should contact the vocational rehabilitation office in their region. Contact information is available on the Web at [www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/about/regional-contact.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/about/regional-contact.html). For information on vocational rehabilitation services benefitting individuals and employers, go online to [www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr), or call 701-328-8950, or ND Relay TTY 1-800-366-6888.

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