

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 9, 2018**

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## **Vision Rehabilitation Specialists Help People Live Independently**

*North Dakota celebrates Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week April 8-14*

BISMARCK, N.D. – Underlying medical conditions, age-related changes in vision and injuries cause people to lose their vision. Each year, specially-trained vision rehabilitation specialists in North Dakota help over 900 people affected by blindness or significant vision loss to continue living independently in communities across the state.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind want to remind state residents during Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week, April 8-14, that experts and services are available. The two agencies together employ nine vision rehabilitation specialists, a profession that grew from work of "home teachers" such as Anne Sullivan, the teacher and advocate who worked with Helen Keller.

The seven specialists employed by DVR work with people age 55 and older who have serious vision loss or blindness. They provide services, equipment and training to help people read mail, medication labels, recipes, and other materials. They teach people adaptive ways to prepare meals, do laundry, identify money, use the phone, handle writing tasks, complete work tasks, identify safe routes to exit a home in an emergency, move safely at home or travel in their communities.

Vision rehabilitation specialists also help people determine what equipment can assist clients with everyday tasks. Their effort enabled over 763 North Dakotans to maintain a high level of independence last year.

North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind (NDVS/SB) has two vision rehabilitation specialists who primarily serve adults on an outreach basis doing home visits and providing instruction during adult training weeks in Grand Forks. They also work with NDVS/SB teaching staff to help prepare transition-age youth for post-secondary training and/or work. Several other professionals at NDVS/SB have graduate degrees in rehabilitation teaching and orientation and mobility.

As a legislatively-approved resource for people of all ages with visual impairment, NDVS/SB staff may collaborate with DVR vision rehabilitation specialists to determine which program best meets a client's needs. In a typical biennium, NDVS/SB serves over 200 adults.

DVR Older Blind Program services are provided at no cost to qualifying individuals and include assessment and training services provided by department vision rehabilitation specialists and initial equipment purchase costs.

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Individuals with serious vision loss affecting their independence or employment can access vision services and vocational rehabilitation services by contacting Vision Services and Independent Living Program Administrator Aimee Volk at 701-328-8954, toll free at 800-755-2745, ND Relay TTY at 800-366-6888 or [alvolk@nd.gov](mailto:alvolk@nd.gov). Volk will direct people to the agency and program that best meets their needs.

Information about DVR services for individuals, including Older Blind Program services, is online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr/individual/older-blind.html>. North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind information is on the Web at <http://www.ndvisionservices.com/>.