

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | October 7, 2020

ND celebrates Disability Employment Awareness Month and first place ranking, as job openings hover around 12,700 statewide

BISMARCK, N.D. - In September, North Dakota had 12,700 job openings. * Connecting employers and job seekers is vital to the state's ongoing economic recovery.

As the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Division joins partner agencies this October in observing the 75th Anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, they continue working hard to connect employers with qualified job applicants and to ensure people with disabilities have access to training, education and other supportive services so they can find fulfilling careers.

In support, Gov. Doug Burgum has proclaimed October 2020 as Disability Employment Awareness Month in North Dakota. The [proclamation](#) announces that North Dakota leads the nation in employment of individuals with disabilities at 56.5 percent and invites employers and others to become more familiar with the services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) team and its partners. Nationally, 35 percent of working age people with disabilities are employed (2019 date). **

VR Division Acting Director Robyn Throlson expressed gratitude for her team's dedicated service to individuals and employers and for the opportunity to collaborate with partners, including Job Service North Dakota, North Dakota's four centers for independent living, ND Assistive, and other agencies serving people with disabilities.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors and other VR professionals help individuals with disabilities explore interests and access training, education and other support so they can maintain or gain employment and earn competitive wages. VR team members also help employers fill job openings with qualified individuals and can review workplace accommodation needs and recommend solutions.

"Our focus in VR matches this year's Disability Employment Month theme: increasing access and opportunity," Throlson said. "Individuals with disabilities remain a relatively untapped labor pool. They are dedicated employees and have the desire and ability to work, making them a valuable resource for meeting workforce needs."

Partner agencies collaborate with VR to provide services to individuals with disabilities.

-MORE-

Scott Burlingame, executive director of Independence, Inc. said, “At the centers for independent living, we believe employment is a key aspect of independence and community inclusion. In order to reach these goals, we help people get the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to become gainfully employed.”

“We are committed to continuing to raise awareness of the many opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve their employment goals in the 21st century workforce and in the new workplace, and to inform employers of the value of people with disabilities as part of a successful and productive workforce,” he said.

For some people with disabilities, assistive technology (AT) makes work possible.

VR partner Mike Chaussee, who is the executive director of ND Assistive, said, “Technology can make the difference between work and an amazing, fulfilling career. At ND Assistive, our ability to match North Dakotans with devices that will work best for them and meet their unique situation is both rewarding and exciting.”

North Dakotans who have a permanent disability and need assistance returning to work or resolving other employment needs are encouraged to contact Vocational Rehabilitation at 701-328-8950, toll-free 1-800-755-2745, 711 (TTY) or dhsvr@nd.gov.

To learn more about VR services and find links to partner agencies, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr.

###

SOURCES

- Job Service North Dakota. Labor Market Information Center. September 2020 Online Job Openings Report. <https://www.ndlmi.com>.
- Lauer, E.A., Boege, S.L., & Houtenville, A.J., 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.