



2015 ANNUAL REPORT

— OF THE —

NORTH DAKOTA STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



“We assist individuals with
disabilities to be
successfully employed.”

– Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
State of North Dakota

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MESSAGE FROM THE DVR DIRECTOR & SRC CHAIR

On behalf of the members of the North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, we present the 2015 Annual Report. This report documents the status of the North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program and a summary of the SRC's activities.

The VR program has a very active statewide SRC. This past year, approximately 16 gubernatorial appointees served on the SRC to provide oversight and guidance to staff working in all areas of the VR program.

For close to a century, North Dakota's VR program has been a leader in efforts to realize greater employment possibilities for individuals with disabilities. Our dedicated staff of rehabilitation professionals, in partnership with the SRC, has developed policies and practices that continuously serve to eliminate barriers to employment, which creates greater participation in the economy of North Dakota.

In 2015, according to U.S. Census data, North Dakota is ranked as a top state for the employment of individuals with disabilities, with an employment rate of over 50 percent. Businesses in North Dakota recognize individuals with disabilities as a valuable asset to meet workforce needs.

Developing and sustaining partnerships between businesses, the vocational rehabilitation program, and the SRC remains an important function. VR has enhanced services and outreach to businesses to include the implementation of a rapid retention program. The program helps businesses retain their current employees who experience a permanent disability. In addition, VR has reassigned staff as full-time business service specialists to be a direct line of communication with businesses to understand and meet their workforce needs.

On behalf of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and State Rehabilitation Council, we welcome the opportunity to serve and provide leadership and ongoing support for North Dakotans with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Harley Engelman, ND SRC Chair

Russ Cusack, ND DVR Director



Harley Engelman
Chair
North Dakota State
Rehabilitation Council



Russ Cusack
Director
North Dakota Division
of Vocational Rehabilitation



VISION, PURPOSE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF DVR

VISION

North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is the leader in disability-related solutions.

PURPOSE

We assist individuals with disabilities to be successfully employed.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Serving our consumers is the primary focus of everything we do.
- Collaborative partnerships with employers are essential to our success.
- All people have value, regardless of age, race, creed, color, gender, or disability.
- Good communication is essential to delivering quality rehabilitation services.
- Quality outcomes are a result of the commitment of consumers and qualified staff working together toward mutually agreed upon goals.
- Change is inevitable and provides opportunities for innovation and creativity.
- Effective partnerships are critical in achieving results for consumers.
- Informed choice is central to sound decision-making and allows decisions to be based on all relevant information, options, and consequences.
- When all things are equal, legal, and based on good rehabilitation counseling, decisions will be made in favor of the consumer.

CLIENT COMMENT

Working with my VR Counselor has been a pleasure. He has been extremely helpful in maintaining a great experience with my work commitments and maintaining my mental health.



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

PURPOSE OF THE DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation services include:

Professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling & Guidance – evaluations of strengths and how your disability may affect your ability to work, a comprehensive assessment of your rehabilitation needs, planning and implementing strategies to overcome barriers, and helping you adjust to and live with a disability.

Employment – identification of an employment goal that is consistent with your strengths, resources, abilities, capabilities, priorities, concerns, interests, and informed choice.

Accommodations – adaptive aids, assistive technology, accessibility and work site evaluations to assist you in achieving your employment goal.

Training – tailored to meet your individual rehabilitation needs and attain your employment goal. This may include on-the-job training, internships, job mentoring, job coaching, and/or academic training.

Job Placement – develop résumé writing skills and interview strategies, job referral, placement, and follow-up services.

Through a “dual client” approach, the division also guides business owners and employers through a variety of business and disability-related services, including:

- Staff Retention
- Accessibility and ADA Consultation
- Recruitment Source
- Financial Incentives
- Disability Consultation
- On the Job Training/Job Coach Services
- On Site Consultation and Recommendations

These services are available to any legally operated and registered North Dakota business, non-profit organization, or government agency. There are no costs associated with services except for those accommodations or modifications chosen as a result of DVR recommendations.

CLIENT COMMENT

My VR Counselor was great, helpful, flexible and very professional. Thank you for your support.

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL OVERVIEW

FFY 2015

The purpose of the North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is to advise the North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on issues concerning policy and program, delivery of services, and methods for reaching potential consumers.

THE COUNCIL

- Informs and advises DVR on the effects its programs may be having on North Dakota communities and consumers.
- Facilitates public input for the Vocational Rehabilitation State Plan.
- Advocates for consumer rights and services.
- Communicates to public and community leaders the purpose and need for vocational rehabilitation.

The council members are selected to serve on the SRC by the Governor of North Dakota. They are selected to serve based on their interest, knowledge, and understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities. Members are advocates for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in their communities and throughout North Dakota.

The Council must have at least 15 members representing:

- 4 Business, Industry & Labor Sectors
- 1 Statewide Independent Living Council
- 1 Parent Training & Information Center
- 1 Client Assistance Program
- 1 Disability Advocacy Group Advocate
- 1 Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider
- 1 State Workforce Investment Board
- 1 Current or Former VR Applicant or Recipient
- 1 American Indian VR Program
- 1 Department of Public Instruction
- 1 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- 1 Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Director

SRC COMMITTEES

- Planning/Evaluation Committee
- Resource Committee
- Membership/Public Relations Committee

SRC RECOMMENDATIONS

- DVR should develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for an outside company to perform the client satisfaction surveys by telephone or electronically.
- DVR should support the ND Provisional Hiring Program to enhance the state of North Dakota as a model employer for individuals with disabilities.

CLIENT COMMENT

VR Counselors help make a difference in people's lives.

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

MEMBERSHIP AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2015



Harley Engelman, Chair
KAT Communications
Bismarck, ND

Pat Anderson
Job Service North Dakota
Bismarck, ND

Scott Burlingame
Independence, Inc. CIL
Minot, ND

Christina Coughlin
Minot, ND

Russ Cusack, Director
Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation
Bismarck, ND

Tim Davenport
BEK Communications
Steele, ND

Kirsten Dvorak
Pathfinder Parent Center
Bismarck, ND

Rodney Gillund
Statewide Independent
Living Council
Crosby, ND

Vickay Gross
Client Assistance Program
Bismarck, ND

Deborah Jendro
Fargo, ND

Marshall Longie, Director
Spirit Lake
Vocational Rehabilitation
Fort Totten, ND

Kevin McDonough
Department of
Public Instruction
Bismarck, ND

Darren Moos
New Salem, ND

Gillian Plenty Chief
Standing Rock
Vocational Rehabilitation
Bismarck, ND

Darcy Severson
Pride, Inc.
Bismarck, ND

Sherry Shirek
Fargo, ND

Kelly D Smeltzer
Cando, ND

Sheri Wilson
Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation
Bismarck, ND

COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The purpose of the Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities is to further the goal of considering competitive and integrated employment as the first option when supporting individuals with disabilities who are of working age to obtain employment.

The Committee was reconstituted through 2013 Senate Bill 2271, which expanded membership and placed a greater emphasis on competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities.

The Committee must have the following members:

Five Ex Officio Members – Director or Designee of:

1. Department of Commerce
2. DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
3. Department of Public Instruction - Special Education
4. Protection and Advocacy Project
5. DHS Developmental Disabilities

Four Members of the Public Appointed by the Governor:

1. ND association of community providers
2. One community employer representative
3. One individual with a disability
4. One family member of an individual with a disability

Activities of the Committee have Included:

- Approved funding in the amount of \$5,000 to the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities to help cover the cost of replicating the 2012 Survey of Employment Services Offered by ND Community Rehabilitation Providers. The main goal of the research study is to establish the current level and types of pre-employment and employment services provided and available to individuals with disabilities in ND, and the employment outcomes of those services, by replicating the baseline survey conducted in September of 2012. Comparison of both survey outcomes will be analyzed to determine current levels of employment and employment supports provided in ND and changes in community integrated employment outcomes.
- Approved \$500 to assist the Employment Learning Community in funding the training titled Organizing for Action on Employment First: Strategic Steps and Best Practice for Realizing the Vision of Employment First held in Mandan in August 2015.

Committee Membership

Tina Bay

Division of
Developmental Disabilities
Bismarck, ND 58501

Vickay Gross

Client Assistance Program
Bismarck, ND 58501

Chad Kourajian

Lee Enterprises
Bismarck, ND 58504

Barb Murry, Chair

ND Association of
Community Providers
Bismarck, ND 58507

Gerry Teevens

ND Department of
Public Instruction
Bismarck, ND 58505

Paul Vardanega

Mandan, ND 58554

Ryan Volk

ND Department of Commerce
Bismarck, ND 58503

Cheryl Wescott

Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation
Bismarck, ND 58501

Eric Wittliff

Minot, ND 58701



2015 AWARD RECIPIENTS

2015 DIRECTOR'S AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Brenda Vennes of Minot was honored with the Director's Award for Excellence. Brenda was nominated for this prestigious award by her peers for demonstrating dependability, productivity, creativity, and boundless energy. Brenda is leading the North Dakota VR agency's constant and effective approach to Business Services. She is the agency's point of contact for the National Employment Team (NET) of over 80 VR agencies that promote one single approach to national business partners. Brenda provides leadership and training to VR Counselors and VR Business Specialists on implementing effective strategies to assist employers with hiring pre-screened applicants with disabilities, consultation to businesses regarding reasonable accommodations, worksite modifications, and workforce retention. Brenda also works to insure consistent quality of Business Services to employers seeking qualified VR talent and consultation on disability-related workforce issues and resources. A significant number of individuals with disabilities throughout the state have achieved employment as a result of Brenda's efforts.

Quotes from the 2015 Director's Award for Excellence Nomination Letter:

"Not only does Brenda make the world of her co-workers better, she works tirelessly to make the Minot community, as well as the state of North Dakota, a better place for everyone. Her work in the Minot community is boundless and if she isn't working, you can probably find her in the community volunteering."

"Anyone who knows Brenda knows that her dependability is one of her best qualities and if you ask for help or need something done, you can count on Brenda to help you accomplish it."



Russ Cusack, DVR Director and
Brenda Vennes, Business Services Specialist

CLIENT COMMENT

I expected a rather "heavy/slow" process, but I was surprised at how fluid everything went.

REGIONAL EMPLOYER AWARD RECIPIENTS

The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) announced that **Bread Pan Bakery** of Langdon, N.D., has been named the 2015 North Dakota State DVR Employer of the Year award recipient.

The award honors North Dakota business owners and employers for their efforts to support, develop, and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve employment goals and to reach their full potential in their community.

The Division and the State Rehabilitation Council selected **Bread Pan Bakery** from among eight regional employer award recipients.

Other businesses honored included: **Bader Maids**, Bismarck; **Hornbacher's**, Fargo; **Little Caesars**,

Grand Forks; **Sheyenne Care Center**, Valley City; **Super 8**, Williston; **The Hub**, Dickinson; and **Trinity Health**, Minot. Award nominees have established ongoing partnerships with the Division and its eight regional offices.

"This year's award recipients include a wide range of businesses who all have demonstrated their commitment to the recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities to meet their workforce needs," said Division director Russ Cusack.

He said, "Their inclusive recruitment strategies have created outstanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities to become employed and engaged within their communities."



2015 STATE DVR EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

BREAD PAN BAKERY, LANGDON



(L to R): **Nancy Lundon**, VR Regional Administrator; **Jim Balk**, Owner, Bread Pan Bakery; **Russ Cusack**, DVR Director; **Mark Abney**, Employee, Bread Pan Bakery; and **JoAnn Burt**, Vocational Rehabilitation.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) announced that Bread Pan Bakery of Langdon has been named the recipient of the 2015 North Dakota State DVR Employer of the Year Award.

The award honors North Dakota business owners and employers for their continued work with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and for their work within their communities to support, develop, and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve their full potential.

DVR Helps Business Make Some Dough

Every business needs to make a little dough in order to survive, but this year's Employer of the Year takes the art of bread-making to a whole new level. Bread Pan Bakery owners Jim and Cheryl Balk partnered with DVR in 2015 and soon realized the added value that comes from employing people with disabilities.

Over the years, the Balks have earned a reputation in the community as two of the most thoughtful and generous people you'll ever meet. Therefore, it didn't come as much of a surprise to anyone when the Balks hired Mark Abney as their baker's assistant after discovering that Mark was told at a prior job, "you'll never be anything more than a dishwasher." Mark's employment aspirations were higher, as were the Balks'.

After Mark was hired, a caring member of the Langdon community found out about the situation and called the Devils Lake Vocational Rehabilitation office to ask about any services they could offer to the bakery. A follow-up phone call was then made to the Balks. Soon afterwards, DVR's Regional Administrator and Rehabilitation Technician drove to Langdon to assess Mark's work environment and tasks. From this information, DVR was able to recommend accommodations and methods that would enable Mark to better transition into this new career.

During this process, it was established that Mark would also benefit from further assessments including neuropsychological and hearing evaluations. The results garnered additional recommendations for work site modifications and the need for updated hearing amplification, both of which were provided by Vocational Rehabilitation. Additionally, Jim was provided On-the-Job Training funds to assist with the cost of his ongoing mentorship.



Jim considers himself extremely blessed to have found such a reliable employee in Mark Abney. “He comes in early in the morning to fry donuts, which gives me a little more time to sleep in,” says Balk. After forty-two years in the bakery business, twenty-five of those in Langdon, Balk is happy to give someone else the key and the early morning shift. Mark doesn’t mind the early hours. He is just thankful that someone has given him an opportunity to learn the skills and art of baking. “I watch Jim make donuts, he’s so fast, and they come out perfect,” says Mark in his slow Texas drawl. “I am not that fast, and they aren’t perfect, but I’m learning.”



Employee Doesn’t Let Disability Limit His Career

Mark’s disability is a result of a fall onto a concrete slab at the age of three. His brain injury left his doctors questioning whether he would ever be able to lead a full and independent life. All he needed was someone to give him a chance to prove he could, and Jim Balk was that someone.

Balk describes Abney as loyal, gracious, and dependable. Abney describes Jim, his wife Cheryl, and their daughter Heidi as his family and his friends. According to Mark, the best part of his job is hanging out with all the nice people, eating jelly donuts and working hard.



CLIENT COMMENT

Very friendly and kind staff and I thank you for providing this service.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION JOINS FORCES WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

PILOT PROJECT RESULTS IN STUDENT SUCCESS



Front (L to R): **Mari Wanzek**, Work Experience Educator and **Rikki Trageton**, Vocational Program Supervision
Back (L to R): **Jeff Anderson**, Vocational Director and **Tom Seim**, DSP Webster

Educating and training young people with disabilities has been a collaborative effort between North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Fargo Public Schools, and Community Living Services, Inc. (CLS) for over 13 years.

More recently, these organizations have partnered in offering the Pre-Employment Skills Program, a successful pilot project funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The project serves “potentially eligible” students as young as 14 years of age who do not have an open case with North Dakota VR.

VR’s role in the project has been to work with the schools and CLS to identify the type of job experience and training needed for each student. CLS and Fargo Public Schools co-facilitate the plan and acquaint themselves with students who may not have an open VR case, but possibly will in the future. The expectation is that when VR counselors become involved with students at an earlier age, students are better equipped for employment and somewhat familiar with VR, should they become VR eligible.

VR’s training typically begins when students are two years away from exiting high school, and are determined to be eligible for receiving VR services.

“In short, the pilot project has added to our traditional programming by involving students at an earlier age, giving students paid and unpaid work experience, and working on job readiness skills,” says Mari Wanzek, Work Experience Educator at Fargo Public Schools. “It’s our hope and desire that no student leaves Fargo Public Schools without having meaningful volunteer or work experience.”

Students Earn High School Diplomas through inVest Program

The inVest program, (in Vocational, Educational, & Social Transition) is another successful collaborative effort between Fargo Public Schools and CLS for students aged 18 to 21 who have not yet received their high school diploma. Upon evaluation a curriculum is designed specifically to maximize their potential.

“What’s really cool for the kids is that this program has created a continuum of services that we weren’t previously able to provide,” says Mari Wanzek, Work Experience Educator with Fargo Public Schools. “Combining the inVest program with the existing Pre-Employment Skills and Summer Work Experience programs has provided more options to meet the needs of our students.”

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Peter takes the MAT bus to Jefferson Elementary to help serve food in the cafeteria over the lunch hour, and as a janitor at the Children’s Academy, a daycare facility. He lights up when asked what he likes best about this job. “I clean the classrooms,” says Peter. “I am a hard worker and I work very fast.” Peter works six hours every weekday and spends the rest of his time at inVEST classrooms at Agassiz school.



Tyler is in his first year with the program. He attends school from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. every day, and works as a janitor at Quality Suites, a hotel that is contracted with Community Living Services, Inc., (CLS) for housekeeping duties. He also works as a dishwasher at NDSU, which is different from his position at the hotel, in that he was hired directly by NDSU. He can continue to work in his position at NDSU after he completes the transition program. The ultimate goal of the transition program is for students like Tyler to gain employment without assistance.



Kam is in his second year in the program. He works as an usher at West Acres Cinema, a position he enjoys most of the time. He also works at the Shaggy Dog Wash, where cleaning tubs and folding towels are just a couple of his responsibilities. He loves animals, and hopes to work at the Red River Zoo someday.



Michael works at Horace Mann School during the school year, counting trays, serving food and sweeping the kitchen area at the end of the day. He returns to Agassiz School for his classes, and most days boards the MAT bus for his second job at Courts Plus. There he works to keep the common areas clean and racquet-ball court floors spotless. Michael is proud of his accomplishments at Courts Plus. Initially, his employer had some concerns about hiring Michael, but Michael’s hard work and positive attitude has dispelled his concerns.



Lacey loves babies, and despite the frustrations she and her job coach experienced in landing Lacey a position as a daycare provider, her determination was rewarded when she was hired at the Children’s Academy. Lacey works from 11:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the baby room, which is exactly where she wants to be. Employers often are not aware of the programs that involve young adults like Lacey. Once employers understand the coaching that DVR clients receive, they are more comfortable allowing them the opportunities. Lacey loves her job and Children’s Academy loves her.



FFY 2015 AT A GLANCE

Program Expenditures

Program Expenditures	\$10 Million
People completing training and becoming employed	531
Average weekly earnings before rehabilitation	\$112.00
Average weekly earnings after rehabilitation	\$423.00
People receiving training and other services	3088
Percent of individuals served who have a significant disability	92%

Based on 2013 Disability Statistics from Cornell University, the employment rate for 21-64 year olds with a disability was 56.0% in North Dakota compared to the national average of 34.5%.

Social Security Reimbursement Program

The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Reimbursement Program. Under this program, VR agencies are reimbursed by SSA for the cost of services VR provided to individuals who were current recipients of Social Security disability benefits. The services must have resulted in the individuals achieving work at or above a specified earnings level for a given period of time.

During FFY 2015, DVR received \$333,788 to further assist individuals with disabilities.

CLIENT COMMENT

My VR Counselor was an awesome advocate. He helped me with ergonomic issues for my home office & always had an answer to any question that I sent his way.

FFY 2015 AT A GLANCE

Employment Placements

Service	23%
Management, Business, Professional.	21%
Office/Admin. Support	18%
Healthcare Support, Personal Care	9%
Sales.	8%
Installation, Maintenance, Repair	5%
Transportation	5%
Production.	5%
Agriculture.	3%
Construction	3%
Other	Less than 1%

Types of Impairments of Individuals Employed

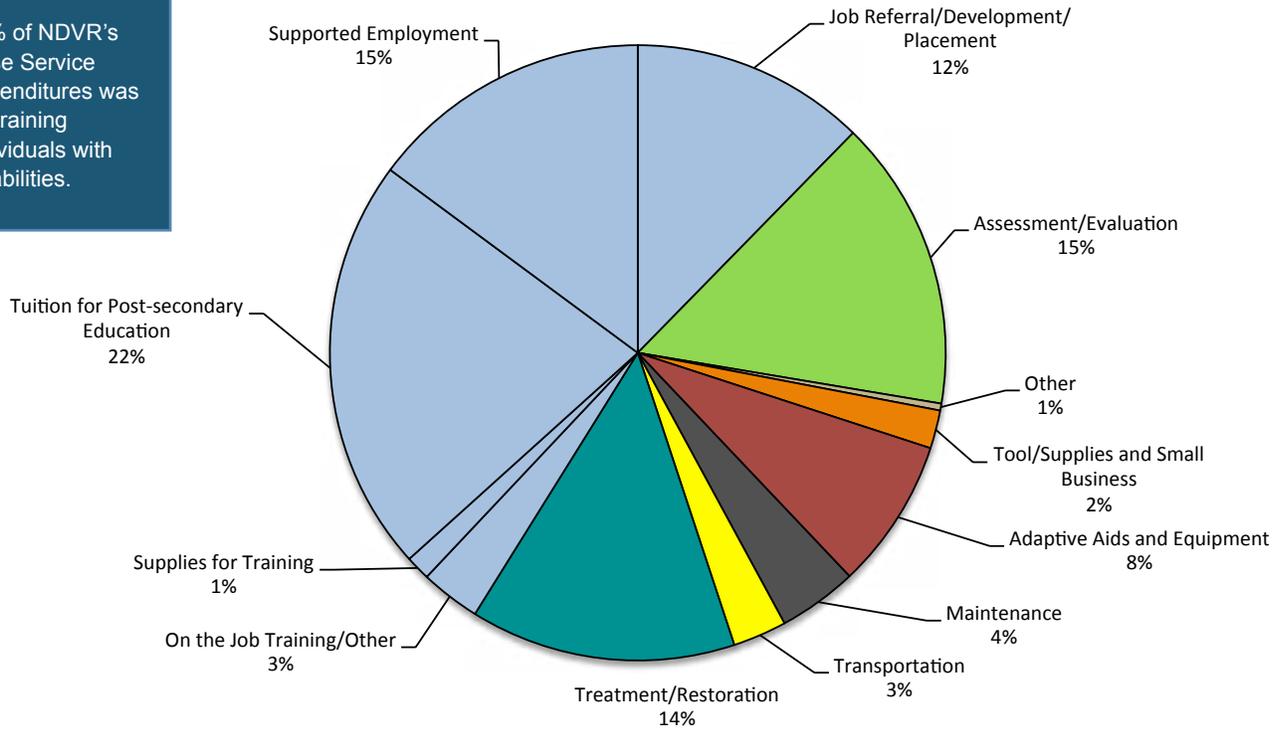
Cognitive Impairments	34%
Physical Impairments.	22%
Psychosocial Impairments	18%
Hearing Impairments.	16%
Other Mental Impairments	7%
Visual Impairments	2%
Communicative Impairments	1%

Types of Service Expenditures

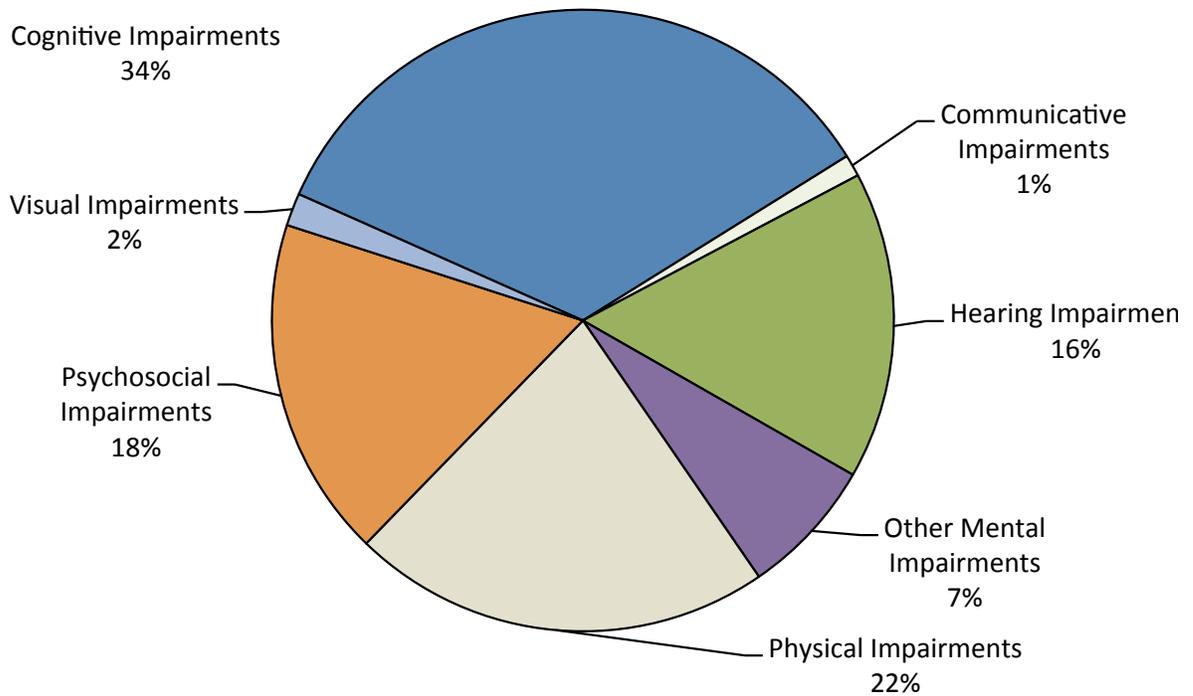
Tuition for Post-Secondary Education	22%
Supported Employment	15%
Assessment/Evaluation	15%
Treatment/Restoration	14%
Job Referral/Development/Placement.	12%
Adaptive Aids and Equipment.	8%
Maintenance	4%
On the Job Training/Other	3%
Transportation	3%
Tools/Supplies and Small Business	2%
Supplies for Training	1%
Other	Less than 1%

Case Service Expenditures

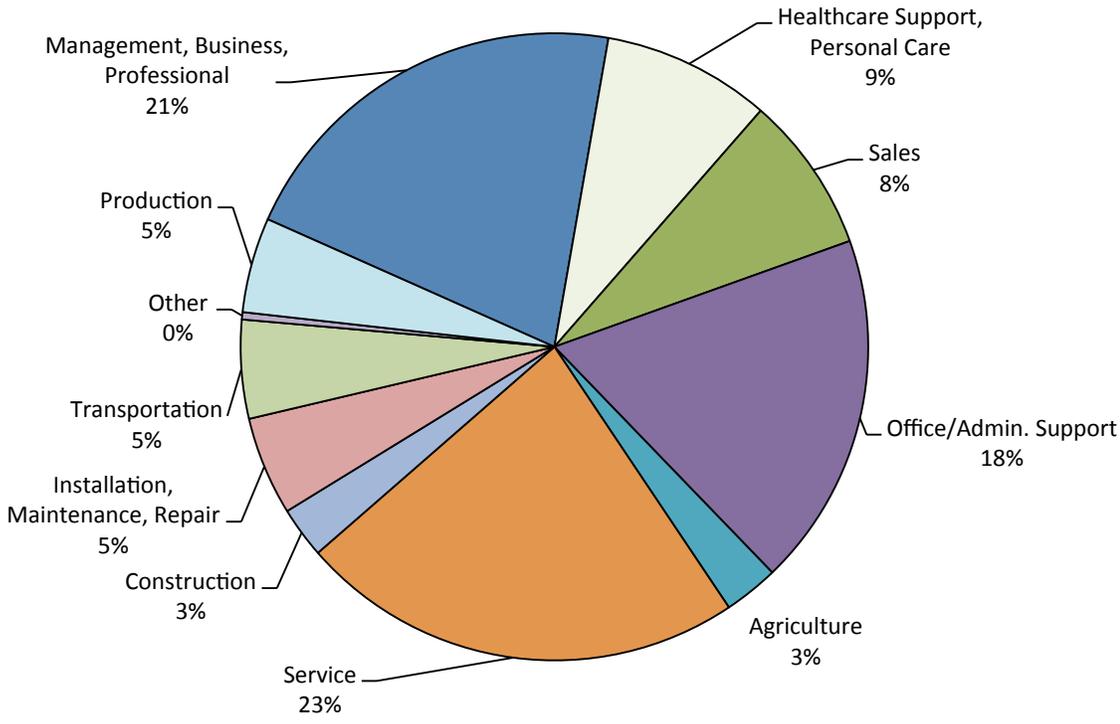
53% of NDVR's Case Service Expenditures was for training individuals with disabilities.



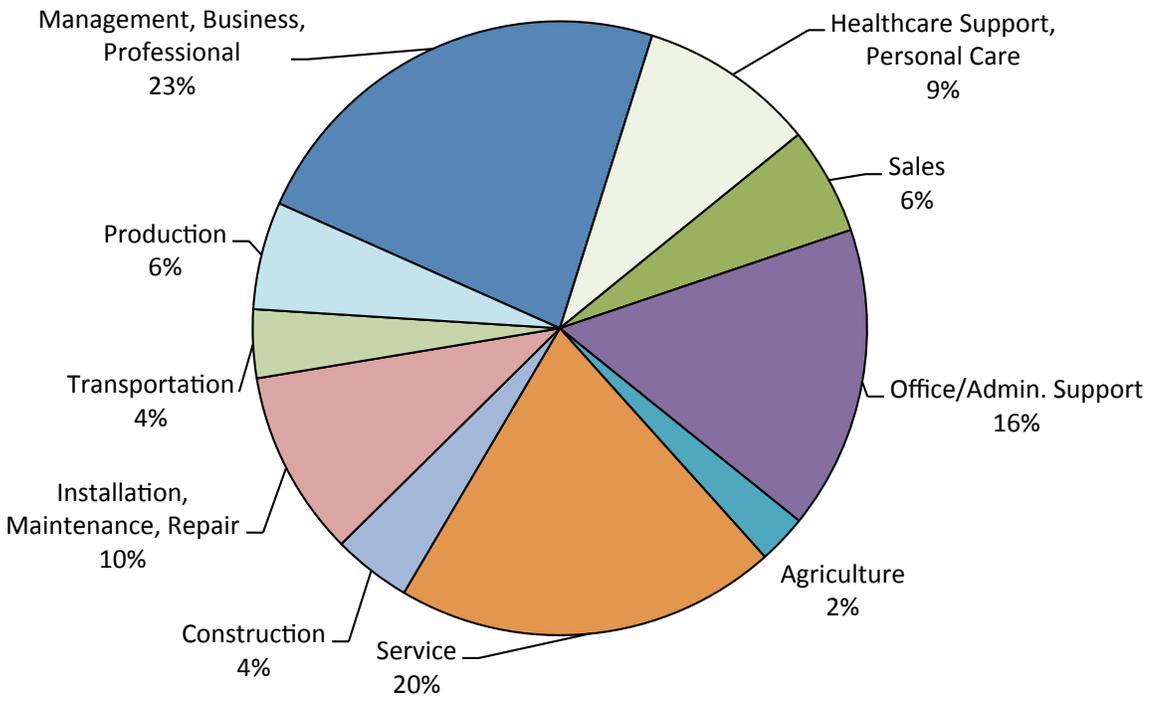
Primary Impairments of Individuals Achieving Employment



Occupational Categories of Individuals Achieving Employment

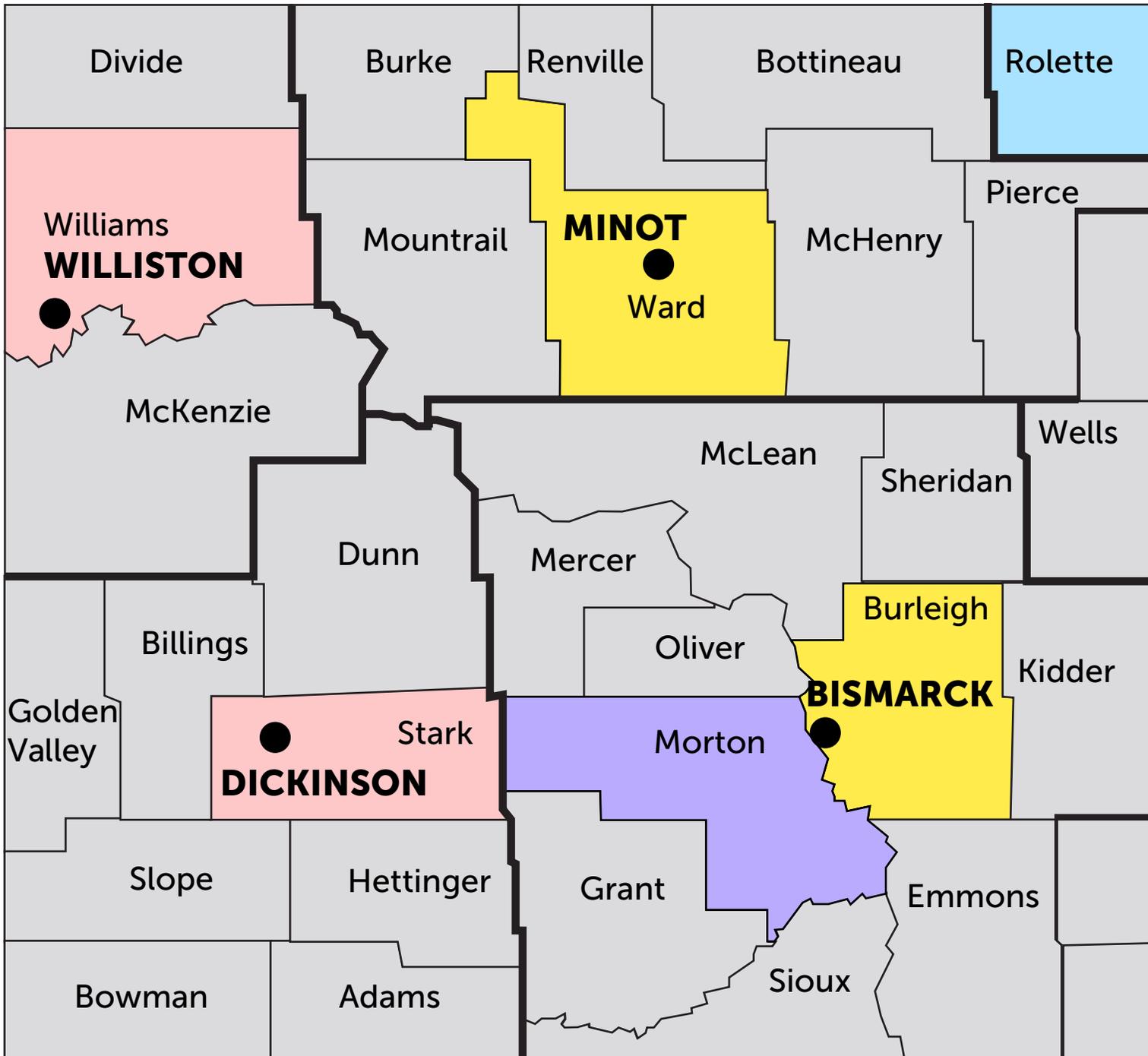


Occupational Categories of Individuals Achieving Employment Age 21 and Younger at time of Application



CLIENTS EMPLOYED

This map of North Dakota depicts the location of each of the eight regional DVR offices and the counties they serve including total clients employed.



Williston Region
14 Employed

Minot Region
105 Employed

Devils Lake Region
21 Employed

Grand Forks Region
72 Employed

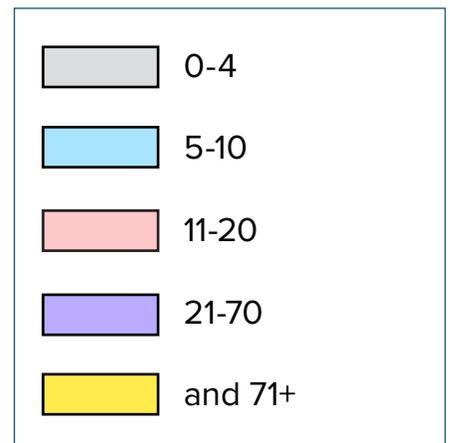
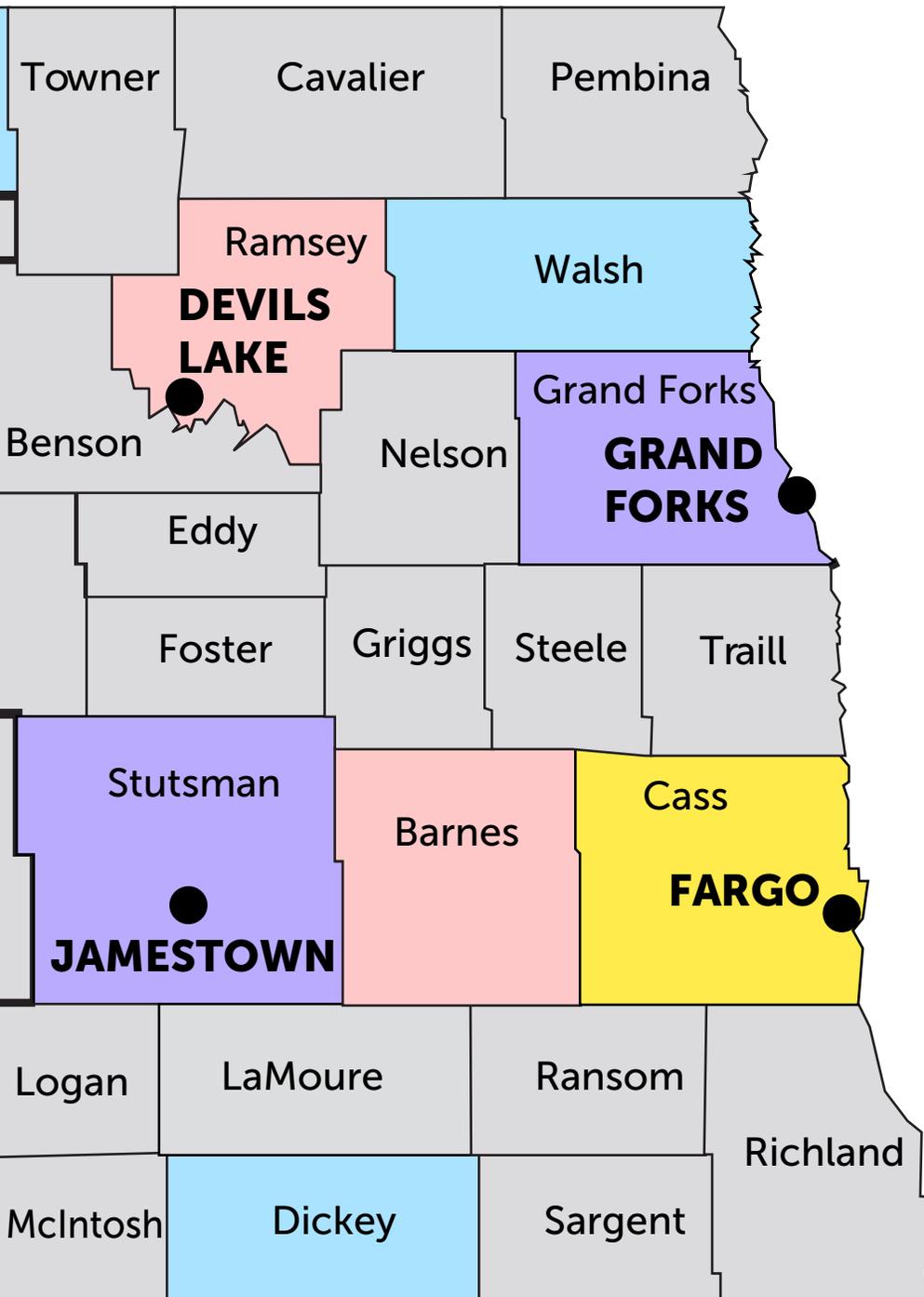
Dickinson Region
113 Employed

Bismarck Region
79 Employed

Jamestown Region
106 Employed

Fargo Region
21 Employed

**Total Clients
Employed:
531 (FFY 2015)**





**To learn more about the
North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council and the
North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,
visit www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr**

DVR is a partner in



1237 West Divide Avenue, Suite 1B | Bismarck, ND 58501
Phone (701) 328-8950 | Toll Free 1-800-755-2745
Fax (701) 328-8969 | ND Relay 800-366-6888