

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck ND 58505**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 9, 2016**

Public Information contacts: Heather Steffl at 701-328-4933 or LuWanna Lawrence at 701-328-1892

Program helps students with disabilities gain summer work experience

BISMARCK, N.D. – As the end of the school year approaches, students may be thinking about summer jobs. 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 gain summer work experience.

"We want young individuals with disabilities to have opportunities to succeed in the workplace," said Division Director Russ Cusack. "The students involved in the summer work experience are part of our overall commitment to ensuring students will be engaged in employment, which supports a successful transition from high school to careers and adulthood."

Last year, 35 students participated in the program statewide including five students from the Bismarck region, and the division hopes to double program participation this year.

Cusack said most participants have limited work experience, and the program helps students develop skills they need to get started in a career. 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.

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

Students must qualify for vocational rehabilitation services in order to participate in the summer work experience program. Vocational Rehabilitation encourages eligible students to participate in at least two work experiences before they leave secondary school.

According to Cusack, 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, he said, is 20 hours per week from the end of May through the end of 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.

-MORE-

Summer Work Experience Program available for youth with disabilities – page 2

The Bismarck regional Vocational Rehabilitation Office is located at 1237 W. Divide Ave., Suite 2, and can be reached by calling 701-328-8800, toll-free 888-862-7342, ND Relay TTY 1-800-366-6888, or by emailing regional director Tom Schiwal at tschiwal@nd.gov.

For more information on the services and supports offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to individuals with disabilities and to employers, go online to www.nd.gov/dhs/dvr, or call 701-328-8950, or ND Relay TTY 1-800-366-6888.

#