

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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## **Vision Rehabilitation Therapists Help People Live Independently** *North Dakota Celebrates Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week April 9-15*

BISMARCK, N.D. – Underlying medical conditions, age-related changes in vision, and injuries can cause people to lose their vision. Each year, specially-trained vision rehabilitation therapists 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 Vocation Rehabilitation (DVR) and North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind want to remind state residents during *Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week*, April 9-15, that experts and services are available. The two agencies together employ nine vision rehabilitation specialists, a profession that grew out of the work of "home teachers" such as Anne Sullivan who worked with Helen Keller.

The seven vision rehabilitation therapists 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 also 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, and navigate safely at home or in the community.

DVR vision rehabilitation therapists also help people determine what equipment can assist them with everyday tasks. Their efforts enabled over 751 North Dakotans to maintain a high level of independence last year.

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

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 work. Several other NDVS/SB professionals 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 work in tandem with DVR rehabilitation specialists. In a typical biennium, NDVS/SB serves over 200 adults.

Individuals with serious vision loss affecting their independence or employment can access vision rehabilitation therapy services and DVR services by contacting Vision Services and Independent Living Program Administrator Aimee Volk at 701-328-8954, toll-free at 1-800-755-2745, ND Relay TTY at 1-800-366-6888 or [alvolk@nd.gov](mailto:alvolk@nd.gov). Volk directs people to the agency and program that best meets their needs.

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

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