

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | April 12, 2021

Vision rehabilitation specialists increase independence for North Dakotans

North Dakota celebrates Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week April 11-17

BISMARCK, N.D. – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about nine million individuals in the U.S. are blind or have a significant vision impairment. North Dakota is making a difference in the lives of individuals impacted by blindness or low vision with its specially-trained vision rehabilitation specialists who helped over 600 North Dakotans maintain a high level of independence last year.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation wants to celebrate and remind residents during Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week, April 11-17, that experts and services are available. This week of appreciation is to honor the work of Anne Sullivan, the teacher and advocate who worked with Helen Keller.

The seven vision rehabilitation specialists employed by VR work to increase the independence of individuals with vision impairments. They work with the Older Individuals who are Blind program to serve 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.

Vision rehabilitation specialists also teach people adaptive ways to prepare meals, do laundry, identify money, use the phone, handle writing tasks, complete work tasks, and identify safe routes to exit a home in an emergency.

The Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center just released a new campaign, *Time To Be Bold*, to increase awareness about free and low-cost services to those 55 and older who have a vision impairment that impacts daily life and independence. To learn more, visit www.TimeToBeBold.org.

For individuals who are involved in the VR employment program, a VR counselor works with a vision rehabilitation specialist to help the individual achieve their employment goals and recommends appropriate assistive technology, lighting and other accommodations to a workplace, school, home, or community setting.

"Our goal is to ensure North Dakotans have quality services by partnering with other agencies and organizations to help better the lives of individuals affected by blindness or low vision," said Damian Schlinger, director of the DVR.

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Individuals with serious vision loss affecting their independence or job can access vision rehabilitation therapy services and vocational rehabilitation services by contacting Vision Services and Independent Living Program Administrator Aimee Volk at 701-328-8954, toll free at 1-800-755-2745, 711 (TTY) or alvolk@nd.gov.

Information about the department's VR services for individuals, including Older Blind Program Services, is online at 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/>.

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