

# North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation 2024 Annual Report



Photo Credit: Matthew Leitner  
Sunrise, Little Missouri National Grassland

NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services

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# MESSAGE FROM THE SRC CHAIR

Honorable Kelly Armstrong  
Governor of North Dakota  
600 E Boulevard Ave  
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Governor Armstrong:

The ND State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is pleased to present the 2024 Annual State Report for the Vocational Rehabilitation Section. The report highlights the activities of the SRC and the ND Section of Vocational Rehabilitation in the delivery of quality vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities throughout North Dakota. The report fulfills the requirements of 34 CFR Part 361.17(h)(5).

We look forward to working with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services, Section of Vocational Rehabilitation in the coming year to advocate for and assist North Dakotans with disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment.

Respectfully,

**Amy Arenz**

Amy Arenz  
Chair, ND SRC



# PURPOSE AND VISION

## OUR PURPOSE

We assist individuals with disabilities to improve their employment opportunities and help businesses in solving disability-related issues.



## OUR VISION

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

“VR is the best program for anyone who wants to stay working. It was a godsend to me.” - Lori Davidson

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Effective partnerships are critical in achieving results for consumers.

All people have value regardless of age, race, creed, color, gender, or disability.

Change is inevitable and provides opportunities for innovation and creativity.

Serving our consumers is the primary focus of everything we do.

Collaborative partnerships with employees are essential to our success.

Good communication is essential when delivering quality rehabilitation services.

Quality outcomes are a result of the commitment of consumers and qualified staff working together towards mutually agreed upon goals.

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.



# SCOPE OF SERVICES



**Counseling and Guidance** - help the individual deal with important issues or concerns related to their disability as well as explore options for successful employment.

**Employment** - help prepare for, gain, keep, or advance in a job.

**Accommodations** - find solutions for adaptive aids, technology, accessibility, and worksite assessments to assist in achieving the employment goal.

**Training** - assist with meeting the career goals through various options which may include on-the-job experience, internships, job mentoring, job coaching, and academic training.

## **Job Placement**

- Resume Writing Skills
- Interview Strategies
- Job Referrals

# SCOPE OF SERVICES FOR BUSINESSES

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is committed to working with employers and businesses to meet their workforce needs at no cost.



VR has support services to assist in finding and retaining employees:

- Business Awareness and Training
- Workforce Needs
- Disability Consultation
- On-the-Job Training
- Job Site Recommendations
- Provide information regarding tax credits

**“In any business, you can always find a job for someone.”**  
**Scott Johnson, Manager Northwest Auto Body, Inc. of Fargo**

# BUSINESS SUCCESS STORY

## Northwest Auto Body, Inc. of Fargo



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**“Businesses should be there for everyone”, said Scott Johnson**

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### **Fargo collision repair business meets workforce needs with inclusive team**

Located on Fargo’s busy Main Avenue, Northwest Auto Body is a family-owned collision repair business that is having an impact on the community.

Inside, it’s more than just a repair shop, which is why they were named 2024 North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Employer of the Year.

Manager Scott Johnson and his team have made it a warm and welcoming place for people of all abilities.

Being familiar with VR, Johnson was excited at the opportunity to work with VR to help people with disabilities gain valuable work experience.

“People need chances, and I feel that just giving someone a shot is important,” Johnson said. “In this industry, there are so many different jobs that a person can do.”

#### **Painting a career path**

The North Dakota Health and Human Services VR program is about employment for everyone.

VR business service specialists and counselors act much like match makers in a business sense.

They work one-on-one with businesses to assess their workforce needs and then connect a person with a disability who is looking for a job or to advance in their career.

“You can always find a job for someone,” Johnson said. “It might be a little harder to figure out what that job might be, but that’s a good challenge for a business owner.”

Johnson is also excited about possibly mentoring high school students with disabilities to help them identify potential careers.

“There are so many opportunities out there that parents are nervous for kids to go into the trades, because they think it’s going to be a dirty job,” he said. “All trades are an art and people can make great careers in the trades.”

With an abundance of available jobs in the state, Johnson encourages businesses to connect with VR to help them meet their workforce needs. It has been a win-win for Northwest Auto Body.

“Businesses should be there for everyone,” he said. “Some people have a few more hills to climb, but helping them be whatever they want to be, that makes a good business.”



# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Services are provided to students with disabilities ages 14-21.



## Job Exploration

## Work-Based Learning Experiences

## Instruction on Self-Advocacy

- Identify career interests.
- Explore in-demand jobs.

- Participate in job shadows, mock interviews, and work experiences.
- Try different jobs in the community.

- Learn legal rights and responsibilities.
- Be part of youth leadership activities.



## Counseling for Post-Secondary Education

## Workplace Readiness Training

- Explore careers, degree programs, and other training paths.
- Learn about college resources and supports.
- Prepare for college or training programs.

- Work on listening, communication, time management, and problem-solving skills.
- Learn financial and independent living skills.
- Understand basic skills required for work.



# PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION ACHIEVEMENTS



Successfully worked with 77 schools to provide pre-employment transition services.



Served 2,424 students with disabilities through contracts and VR counselor services.

“My favorite thing about working with students is watching their personal growth and seeing how proud they are of their accomplishments. We help them prepare for their future.” Cindi McGovern, Senior VR Counselor

# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



## Purpose

The purpose of the SRC is to advise VR on policies and services. They work with the VR director and look for ways to help people with disabilities.

## The Council

- Helps with planning public comment prior to completing the VR State Plan,
- Advocates for consumer rights and services, and
- Talks to the public and community leaders about the purpose and need for VR.

## SRC Committees

Planning and Evaluation  
Resource  
Membership and Public Relations  
Executive

## Council of 16 Members

Must have at least 16 members:

- 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 - Developmental Disabilities Division Director
- 1 - VR Counselor
- 1 - VR Agency Director

**\*More than fifty percent of the members must have a disability.**



# FFY 2024 OVERVIEW (Oct. 1, 2023 - Sept. 30, 2024)

## SRC RECOMMENDATIONS

- An SRC representative assisted with evaluating the proposals received and finalizing the recommendation for leading offeror for the new Client Satisfaction Surveys contract.
- Reviewed and approved two policies: Closure and Job Readiness, Placement and Short Term-Training.
- Approved dissolving the Employment Committee and adding the Executive Committee.
- Analyzed the employee survey results.
- Competitive Integrated Employment grant applications were evaluated and award recommendations were made.
- Reviewed and approved the state plan.

## CURRENT SRC MEMBERSHIP

<b>Shannon Cook</b> Business/Industry/Labor	<b>Angie Dubovoy</b> Client Assistance Program	<b>Lea Kugel</b> State Education Agency
<b>Amy Arenz</b> Business/Industry/Labor	<b>Renee Speidel-Wetzsteon</b> Disability Advocate Rep.	<b>Mercedes Drechsel</b> VR Counselor
<b>Josh Villbrandt</b> Business/Industry/Labor	<b>Terry Peterson</b> Community Rehab Provider	<b>James Fleming</b> VR Interim Director
<b>Trampes Brown</b> Business/Industry/Labor	<b>Gillian Plenty Chief</b> American Indian VR Program	<b>Chaz Brobst</b> Additional Member
<b>Robyn Soiseth</b> State Independent Living Council	<b>Landis Larson</b> State Workforce Investment Board	<b>Jacey Enget</b> Current/ Former Applicant or Recipient of VR Services
<b>Mistie Bouly</b> Parent Training & Info Center		

# VR EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

## Northwest Auto Body, Inc. of Fargo



Scott Johnson, Manager at Northwest Auto Body, Inc. of Fargo

# YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE AWARD

## Once Upon a Child of Minot



(L-R): Angela Barczik, Community Rehabilitation Provider - Easter Seals; Daneille McNail, Store Owner and Cindi McGovern, Senior VR Counselor

# FFY 2024

## AT A GLANCE

### Program Overview

Program Expenditures	<b>\$15.4 Million</b>
Individuals Employed	<b>797</b>
Average weekly earnings before rehabilitation	<b>\$324.28</b>
Average weekly earnings after rehabilitation	<b>\$657.40</b>
Individuals receiving training and other services	<b>5107</b>
Percent of individuals served who have a significant disability	<b>93%</b>

### Return on Investment

VR uses ROI to show how clients benefit economically from VR services as well as how their increased income positively impacts the economy.

- For every dollar spent by VR, clients earn \$10.82.
- For every dollar spent by VR, the clients pay back \$2.16 in taxes.

# PRIMARY IMPAIRMENT OF INDIVIDUALS ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT

Psychosocial	29%
Cognitive	24%
Hearing	22%
Physical	12%
Psychological/Mental	8%
Visual	3%
Communicative	2%

# OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES OF INDIVIDUALS ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT

Service	27%
Administrative Support	19%
Operatives	12%
Professionals	11%
Laborers and Helpers	10%
Craft Workers	7%
Sales	6%
Executive and Managerial	4%
Technicians	4%

# PROGRAM SERVICE EXPENDITURES

Training 68%

Treatment and Restoration 13%

Maintenance 6%

Assessment and Evaluation 3%

Benefits Planning (Contract) 3%

Tools, Supplies, Small Business Services 3%

Adaptive Aids, Interpreters, Vehicle Modifications, Personal Attendant Services 2%

Transportation 2%



68% of North Dakota's Case Service Expenditures were for training individuals with disabilities.

Training Services Include:

- Post-Secondary Tuition
- Work Experience
- Customized Employment
- Job Development
- Supported Employment
- On-the-Job Training
- Pre-Employment Transition Services



# CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

## Lori Davidson

**Occupation: Patient Access Representative**

### Overcoming hearing loss to remain in the workforce

Having crystal-clear hearing at work is a must for Lori Davidson. She spends her workday answering phone calls and interacting face-to-face with patients at a Grand Forks clinic.

"I love working with people," she said.

Three years ago, she noticed that her hearing started to change. It began impacting her work productivity, performance and efficiency.

"I was struggling to hear on the phone and had to ask people to repeat themselves to make sure I heard their information correctly," she said.

Davidson is not alone. Last year, nearly one in four people who were successfully employed and received services from North Dakota Health and Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) were deaf or hard of hearing, which impacted their job.

To continue working, Davidson knew she needed help. She made an appointment with an audiologist who did an assessment and recommended hearing aids, but the cost was too much and not covered by her insurance.

The audiologist then referred her to the Grand Forks office for help.

#### Workplace Win

Feeling down, Davidson immediately drove across town and met with a VR counselor.

Together, they completed an application and intake and reviewed the audiologist's assessment to see if she qualified for the VR employment program, which helps people with disabilities find, keep or advance in a job.

The process was easy. On the same day, she left the office happy, and as it turned out, Davidson was the perfect candidate for the program.

"It was so nice to not have to struggle trying to figure things out by myself," she said.

She received several employment services and VR was able to assist with a portion of the cost for the hearing aids, so Davidson could remain working.

With the hearing aids, she is now able to engage in conversations with confidence, which has positively impacted her work and quality of life.

"It's an excellent program for anybody who wants to stay working," she said. "It has been a godsend to me."

# SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS

North Dakota has resources to assist individuals with vision impairments. VR can assist individuals looking for a career or to maintain their independence and safety.



## VR Employment Program

We help individuals who are blind or visually impaired to get, keep, or advance in employment. Our team works with clients to meet their career goals.

### We offer several employment services including:

- Guidance and Counseling
- Training
- Job Exploration
- Job Search and Placement
- Jobsite Assessment, Accommodations, and Assistive Technology
- Information and Referral



## Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB)

The goal of the OIB program is to assist individuals 55 and older that have a vision deficit improve their independence in their homes and communities by enhancing their quality of life.

### OIB Services include:

- Advocacy Training & Support
- Assistive Technology Devices
  - Magnifiers
  - Lighting
  - Glare Control
- Assistive Technology Training
- Communication Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Information and Referral