

North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation

Annual Report 2025

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Message From the Chair | 3 |
| Message From the Director | 4 |
| Purpose and Vision | 5 |
| Guiding Principles | 6 |
| Scope of Services | 7 |
| Scope of Services for Businesses | 8 |
| Business Impact Story | 9 |
| Pre-Employment Transition Services | 10 |
| State Rehabilitation Council Overview | 11 |
| 2025 Award Recipients | 14 |
| VR Program Services and Data | 15 |
| Client Impact Stories | 19 |
| Vision Services | 21 |

Message from the SRC Chair



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

Dear Governor Armstrong:

On behalf of the North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am pleased to present the 2025 Annual Report for the North Dakota Health and Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) section. This report highlights the collaborative efforts of the SRC and VR in delivering high-quality services to individuals with disabilities across North Dakota. It also fulfills the requirements of 34 CFR Part 361.17(h)(5).

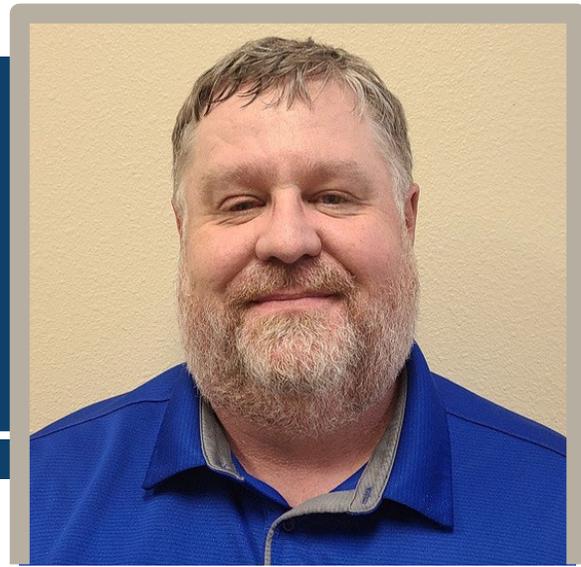
As we look ahead, the SRC remains committed to partnering with VR to advocate for and support North Dakotans with disabilities in achieving competitive integrated employment. Together, we aim to strengthen our state's workforce and promote employment opportunities for all.

Respectfully,

Jacey Enget

Jacey Enget
Chair, ND SRC

Message from the VR Director



Dear Governor Armstrong,

I am pleased to be working with the great people of North Dakota (ND). In October 2025, I was honored to be hired as the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Director. I bring with me a wealth of experience with VR and am excited to continue building opportunities for individuals with disabilities across our state.

Our dedicated staff work tirelessly to help people achieve their career goals, increase independence, and enjoy a better quality of life. This past year, VR had 2,256 applicants and 724 successful employments. For every dollar spent by VR, clients earned \$9.59 and returned \$1.92 in taxes – clear evidence of the impact on both the participants and the ND economy. We have strong partnerships with high schools across the state, serving 2,470 students with disabilities.

Looking ahead, VR remains committed to the HHS strategic priorities: supporting strong, stable, healthy families and communities; advancing well-being through access to high-quality services and supports closer to home; and delivering best-in-class, customer-centered experiences. In doing so, we will continue empowering individuals with disabilities while strengthening the North Dakota workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darrel Hannum". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Darrel Hannum, VR Director

Vocational Rehabilitation

Our Purpose

We assist individuals who have 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.



Photo Credit: Impassioned Images, Sunrise over a golden wheat field in ND.

Who We Serve

VR provides individualized services to help participants achieve their employment goals.

We help businesses meet their workforce needs.

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 individuals address limitations related to their disability and explore options for successful employment.



Employment

Help prepare for, gain, keep, or advance in a job.



Accommodations

Assess and find solutions for adaptive aids, assistive technology, and accessibility.



Training

Training options 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

VR is committed to helping employers and businesses meet their workforce needs at no cost.



Photo Credit: kerkezz

VR has support services to assist:

- Find and retain employees
- Business awareness and training
- Workforce needs
- Disability consultation
- On-the-job training
- Provide information on tax incentives



Photo Credit: Halfpoint

“Working with Vocational Rehabilitation has been a positive experience and the people are very pleasant.”
Roslyn MacKenzie, Valley Bus LLC

Business Impact Story

Valley Bus Grand Forks, ND



Opening doors: Valley Bus in Grand Forks creates inclusive team

Getting nearly 1,000 students to and from school safely every day is no small feat - but for Valley Bus, it's all in a day's work.

Since arriving in Grand Forks in 2022, Valley Bus has become more than a transportation provider - they've grown into a community partner that fosters a culture of respect, teamwork and meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities.

Recently, Valley Bus was recognized as the 2025 Employer of the Year by North Dakota Health and Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) for championing an inclusive workforce.

"Creating opportunities for people with disabilities isn't just good for business - it builds confidence and opens the door for individual success," said Roslyn MacKenzie, Valley Bus manager.

A route to opportunity

VR strives to ensure all individuals can participate in meaningful employment. Oftentimes, VR clients apply for jobs just like other candidates without businesses even knowing they are receiving support from VR.

For Roslyn, this was the case. She hired several paraprofessionals with disabilities to support students on their daily bus rides, ensuring they have the care and attention they need.

"People with disabilities bring so much to the workplace," she said. "They strive to do a good job and they are reliable and committed. These are important contributions that make a big difference."

Opportunity isn't the only thing that Valley Bus invests in - they also provide individualized training that uses real-life scenarios to help their team feel more confident when working with students with disabilities.

"We've seen positive benefits, including improved interactions with children, helping them remain calm and relating more to their experiences," Roslyn said.

The training curriculum has been so successful, it has been implemented at their main operation in Fargo.

With workforce shortages, Roslyn urges other North Dakota employers to partner with VR and not let stigma stand in the way.

The accommodations Valley Bus made required no financial investment - just adapting training to match the way employees learn best.

"It doesn't cost anything to take a chance on people," Roslyn said. "Sometimes it might take a little extra patience or training, but it's well worth it."



2,470
Students
Served



182
Schools
Received
Services



Pre-Employment Transition Services

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

Job Exploration

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

Work-Based Learning Experiences

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

Instruction on Self-Advocacy

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

Counseling for Post-Secondary Education

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

Workplace Readiness Training

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



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 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.

Committees

- Membership and Public Relations
- Resource
- Planning and Evaluation

Current SRC Membership

Josh Villibrant
Business/Industry/Labor

Angie Dubovoy
Client Assistance Program

Lea Kugel
State Education Agency

Trampes Brown
Business/Industry/Labor

Kaycee Johnson
Disability Advocate Rep.

Mercedes Drechsel
VR Counselor

Trevor Vannett
Business/Industry/Labor

Amy Bergan
Community Rehab Provider

James Fleming
VR Interim Director

Mistie Bouly-Clementich
Parent Training & Info Center

Gillian Plenty Chief
American Indian VR Program

Chaz Brobst
Additional Member

Robyn Soiseth
Statewide Independent Living Council

Landis Larson
State Workforce Investment Board

Jacey Enget
Current/Former VR Client



Council Composition

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 4 Business and Industry | 1 SILC Member | 1 VR Counselor | 1 Disability Advocate | 1 VR Director | 1 Community Rehab Provider |
| 1 Workforce Investment Board | 1 Current or Former VR Client | 1 American Indian VR Program | 1 Dept. of Public Instruction | 1 Parent Training & Info Center | 1 Client Assistance Program |

FFY 2025 Overview

Oct. 1, 2024 – Sept. 30, 2025

SRC Recommendations

Service Evaluation and Improvement

- Evaluated and analyzed VR services, provided recommendations to enhance quality, and client satisfaction.
- Reviewed the appeal outcome.

Membership and Policy Development

- Recruited new members to maintain council requirements.
- Reviewed and approved the recommendations to four policies:
 - Client Financial Participation
 - Client Purchases
 - Conflict-of-Interest
 - Maintenance, Transportation, and Vehicle Repair

Training and Professional Development

- Supported the Quality Service Professional (QSP) training plan and mentorship program to ensure quality services.
- Sponsored an SRC member to attend the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference.

Regional and Tribal Engagement

- Heard reports from six regional offices and one tribal program, celebrating successes and addressing challenges.

Employer of the Year Award

Valley Bus LLC Grand Forks, ND



Roslyn MacKenzie, Manager of Valley Bus LLC

This award goes to a business that supports the VR mission. A business that supports, develops, and inspires people with disabilities to achieve their full potential.

It honors a business that strives toward the highest level by devoting time and energy to work with VR and their community in a meaningful way.

You Make a Difference Award

Divide County Public Library Crosby, ND

The Divide County Library is doing more than lending books – they're opening doors to opportunity! The library has become a valuable training ground for students with disabilities. Because of their supportive, inclusive workplace, our Vocational Rehabilitation program has recognized them with a You Make a Difference Award for helping students with disabilities achieve their employment goals.



Traci Lund, Director of Divide County Public Library

Program Overview

FFY 2025



Program expenditures

\$15,304,814



Individuals employed

724



Average weekly earnings before rehabilitation

\$378.43



Average weekly earnings after rehabilitation

\$699.77



Individuals receiving training and other services

5151



Percentage of individuals served who have a significant disability

95%

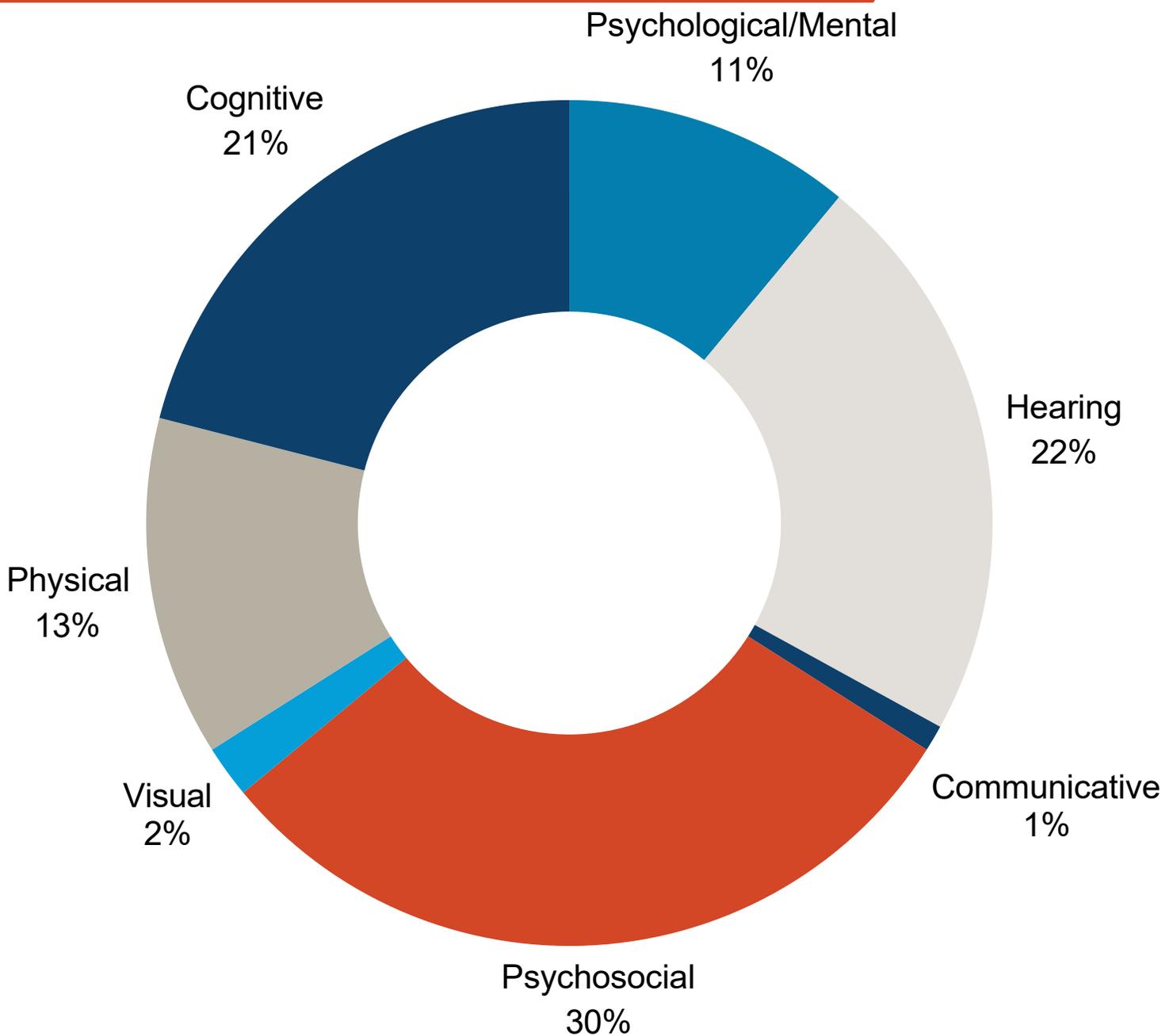
Return on Investment (ROI)

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 \$9.59.
- For every dollar spent by VR, the client pays back \$1.92 in taxes.

Primary Impairment of Individuals Achieving Employment

FFY 2025

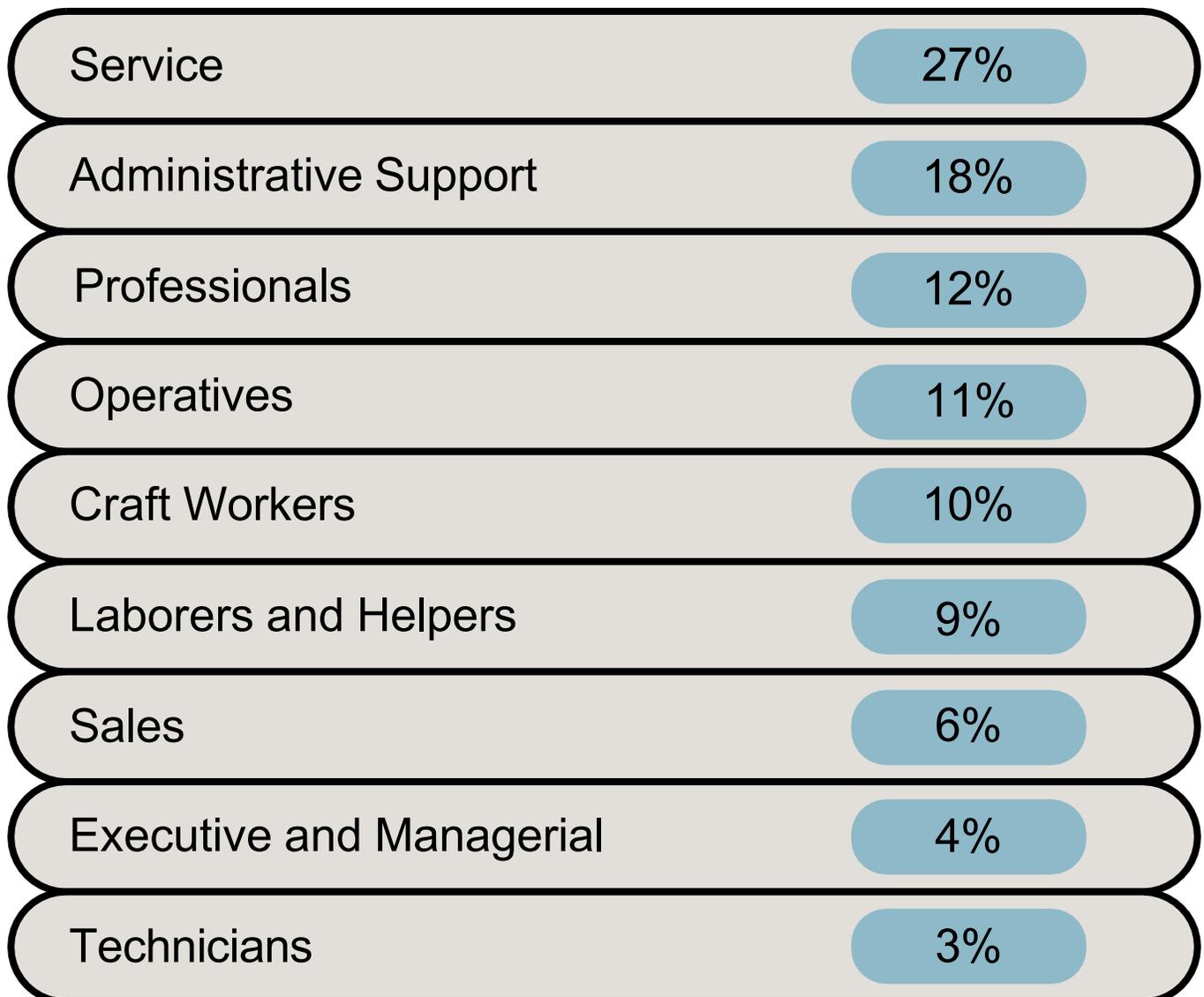


Description:

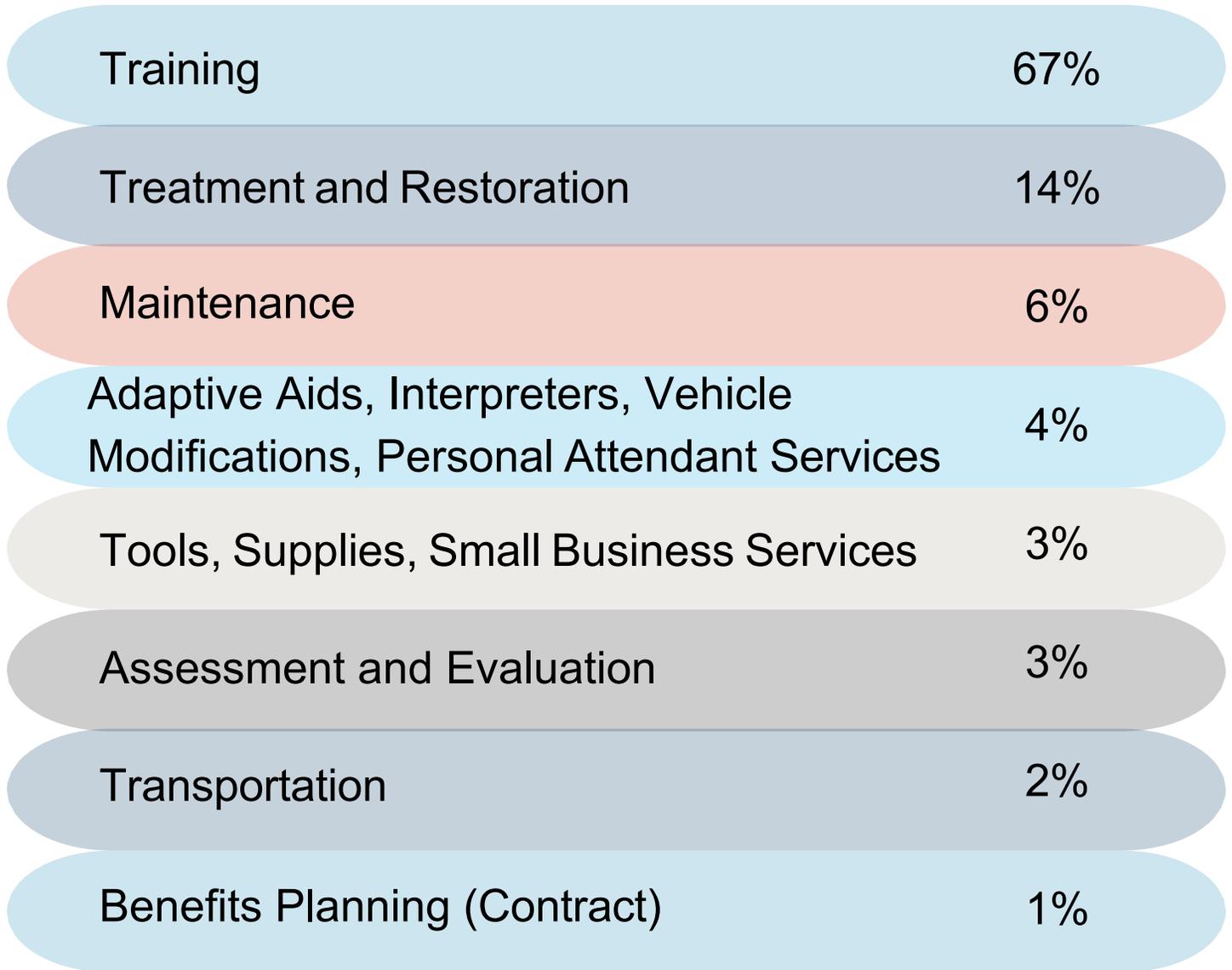
Primary Impairment of Individuals Achieving Employment in 2025 is a donut chart showing Psychosocial (orange) 30%, Hearing (light gray) 22%, Cognitive (navy) 21%, Physical (gray) 13%, Psychological/Mental (blue) 11%, Visual (light blue) 2% and Communicative (navy) 1%.



Occupational Categories of Individuals Achieving Employment



Program Service Expenditures



67% 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 Impact Story

Alissa Patterson

Occupation: VR Counselor



From VR Client to Counselor: A Passion Comes Full Circle

For Alissa Patterson, childhood was much like that of any other North Dakota kid. She grew up on a farm near Strasburg, did chores after school and shared a lively home with brothers and sisters.

“We were always outside unless my mother would make us come in,” she said with a smile.

Suddenly at age 12, her life took an unexpected turn. “My dad was watching me carry a bucket of feed across the yard, and he noticed I was having a hard time walking and keeping my balance,” she said.

Alissa was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, a disability that gave her a new perspective on life.

A path forward

Feeling unsure about her future, Alissa was connected to HHS' Vocational Rehabilitation's (VR) pre-employment transition services in high school. These services help students with disabilities ages 14 to 21 prepare for life after graduation.

Elton Lassiter, a VR counselor, has spent 10 years traveling to schools helping students discover their futures.

“Our student services help young people explore career paths, build self-advocacy skills and access training opportunities after high school, all tailored to their skills and abilities,” he said.

The experience helped Alissa see her full potential. She succeeded by earning a master's degree in social work and began helping people improve their well-being as a mental health specialist.

This work was fulfilling, but her true passion drew her back to VR.

“I love helping people with disabilities, like me, find their way in life,” she said.

A homecoming

Years later, Alissa returned to VR not as a client, but as a VR counselor ready to give back to the program that opened doors for her.

“People with disabilities bring skills, unique perspectives and strengths to the workplace,” she said. “They can help employers meet their workforce needs.”

Alissa manages a caseload of about 50 clients helping them explore careers, build job skills and connect with resources to gain meaningful employment.

“I tell my clients that if they're willing to put in the effort, I'll work just as hard alongside them,” she said. “We might take a different path than expected, but together, we'll reach their goal.”

Client Impact Story

Jenna Roe

Occupation: Food Service Crew Member



CSAVR 100 Stories in 100 Days

Jenna Roe has a bright smile and big dreams. Her journey with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) started in high school and is one of teamwork and the joy of finding your stage. Her mom, Lindy states, “she loves being in the spotlight and being around people”.

Her VR counselor provided guidance and counseling to explore her strengths, abilities, and passions. She received soft skills training that enhanced her confidence and interpersonal skills which she needed to be successful working with people.

With support from Triumph, a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), Jenna received job placement and short term supports. Through job coaching she learned her job tasks, and her VR counselor collaborated to create visual cues which allowed Jenna to be independent on the job. She has been successfully employed with the same employer for two years.

Watching her daughter flourish, Jenna’s mom was inspired and went back to school. She is now a VR counselor and brings empathy, insight, and lived experience to every person she works with.

Vision Services



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

VR Employment Program

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

Some Employment Services include:

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

Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB)

The goal of the OIB program is to assist individuals age 55 and older that are blind or low vision improve their independence in their homes and communities.

OIB Services include:

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

OIB Accomplishments FFY 2025

A team of specially trained vision rehabilitation specialists work with both our VR employment program and our OIB program to increase independence in the home and community.



355

Applications were completed.

639

North Dakotans were able to remain in their home.

539

Clients are over the age of 75.

631

Received assistive technology devices (e.g., magnifiers, lighting, etc.).

98%

Overall OIB client satisfaction.

Client Impact Story

Older Individuals Who are Blind Program

Jeanette Friedt



Recipe for success: Dickinson woman thrives despite low vision

At 85 years old, Jeanette Friedt spends most of her time in the kitchen, where the scent of sourdough bread and cinnamon rolls fill the air.

Sixty-eight years ago, she married, and together she and her husband built a life on their farm in Mott, N.D. With eight children and her German Russian roots, she found joy in the kitchen.

“Cooking wasn’t just a task, but a passion for me,” she said.

About 10 years ago, Jeanette was diagnosed with macular degeneration (MD), which runs deep in her family. Her mother and six of her 12 siblings also have MD.

“I’ve always been nervous that one day I’d lose my vision,” she said.

While driving from Mott to Dickinson, she soon realized how bad her vision was when she hit a car.

“I have not driven since that day,” she said.

Seeing beyond limits

With her vision fading, she learned from her local senior center about the Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) program provided through North Dakota Health and Human Services’ Vocational Rehabilitation.

With their support, she started to see a whole new life and quickly realized with the right support and tools, she could be independent and reignite her love of cooking.

Six years ago, she and her husband moved to Dickinson in a senior living community.

Her kitchen is now full of small, but powerful tools including bump dots on the stove and microwave, long oven mitts, a bread slicer, high contrast cutting boards and most importantly, an electronic video magnifier.

“I use it for everything from reading recipes to medication labels and my mail,” she said with a smile. “I could not live without it.”

A vision of sharing joy

Living independently and following a passion is possible for people with low vision — just ask Jeannette.

Now, her neighbors often find fresh baked bread and canned goods waiting for them. It’s her way of living a fulfilling life.

“I am happy to have good neighbors to bake for. This is my happy place,” she said.

To learn more about the North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council and the North Dakota Section of Vocational Rehabilitation visit www.hhs.nd.gov/vr or scan the QR code below with your phone's camera.



Contact VR:

1000 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Phone: 701-328-8950 Toll Free: 800-755-2745 Fax: 701-328-1884 TTY: 711



Funding for this was provided through a combination of Federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Education under the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) program and State appropriated funds. Federal funds pay 78.7% of the program costs. For FFY 2025, the VR agency was awarded \$13,630,265 in Federal VR funds. The remaining 21.3% of funding of \$3,689,004 was provided by State appropriated funds.