

NORTH
Dakota

Be Legendary.

Vocational Rehabilitation

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



ND State Capital in the spring

Annual Report 2023



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 3 | Message From the Chair |
| 4 | Purpose and Vision |
| 5 | Guiding Principles |
| 6 | Scope of Services |
| 8 | Pre-Employment Transition Services |
| 9 | State Rehabilitation Council Overview |
| 11 | 2023 Award Recipients |
| 14 | FFY 2023 at a Glance |
| 15 | Primary Impairments |
| 16 | Occupational Categories |
| 17 | Case Service Expenditures |
| 18 | Vision Impairment Services |
| 20 | Success Stories |

MESSAGE FROM THE SRC CHAIR

Honorable Doug Burgum
Governor of North Dakota
600 E Boulevard Ave
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Governor Burgum:

The ND State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is pleased to present the 2023 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
Chair, ND SRC



Our Purpose

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



Kayaking the Missouri River in December near Kimball Bottoms.

Our Vision

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

“I had an amazing experience working with Vocational Rehabilitation.” - Amy Giordano, Amy’s Angels

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 - helps 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 - to 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
- Tax Credits
- Disability Consultation
- On-the-Job Training
- Job Site Recommendations



PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Working with Students

Services provided to students with disabilities ages 14-21.

Job Exploration

- Identify career interests.
- Find and explore jobs in the community.
- Locate in-demand jobs.

Work-Based Learning Experiences

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

Counseling for Post-Secondary Education

- Explore information on careers, degree programs, and other training paths.
- Referrals to college resources and supports.
- Prepare for college or training programs.

Workplace Readiness Training

- Work on listening, communication, time management, and problem-solving skills.
- Financial training and independence.
- Understand what is required at work.
- Peer mentoring and group activities.
- Independent living and community living skills.

Instruction on Self-Advocacy

- Learn about student rights and expectations.
- Be part of youth leadership activities.



Accomplishments Include:

- Successfully worked with 77 schools to provide pre-employment transition services.
- Served **2,406** students with disabilities through contracts and VR counselor services.



STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL OVERVIEW FFY 2023

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

- Informs and advises VR on the effects its programs may be having on North Dakota communities and consumers,
- 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 Recommendations for 2023

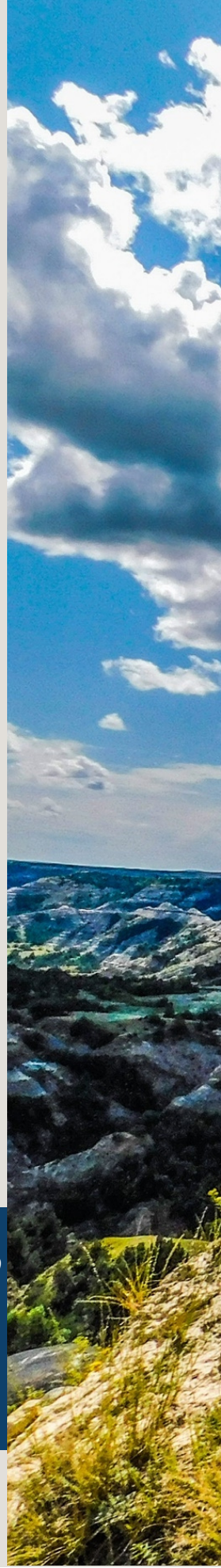
- Approved the *Client Purchases Operational Policy* and *North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Positions Policy*.
- Selected the Statewide 2023 VR Employer of the Year.
- Reviewed the Client Satisfaction Surveys and quarterly Strategic Plan data.
- Analyzed the employee survey results.
- Competitive Integrated Employment grant applications were evaluated and award recommendations were made.

SRC Committees

- Planning and Evaluation
- Resource
- Membership and Public Relations
- Employment

“I am excited to be part of the process of providing equitable access to integrated employment. I am hoping this great work will reduce the disproportionately high unemployment rate of those with disabilities.”

Amy Arenz, SRC Chair





SRC MEMBERSHIP

The Council must have at least 17 members representing:

- 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/Former VR Applicant/Recipient
- 1 - American Indian VR Program
- 1 - Department of Public Instruction
- 1 - Developmental Disabilities Division Director
- 1 - ND Association of Community Providers Executive Director
- 1 - VR Counselor
- 1 - VR Agency Director

***More than fifty percent of the members must have a disability. The council members are selected to serve on the SRC by the Governor of North Dakota.**

Current SRC Membership:

- Shannon Cook**
Business/Industry/Labor Representative
- Amy Arenz**
Business/Industry/Labor Representative
- Kevin Phelps**
Business/Industry/Labor Representative
- Trampes Brown**
Business/Industry/Labor Representative
- Russ Cusack**
State Independent Living Council
- Angie Dubovoy**
Client Assistance Program
- Renee Speidel-Wetzsteon**
Disability Advocate Representative
- Terry Peterson**
Community Rehabilitation Service Provider
- Landis Larson**
State Workforce Investment Board
- Jacey Enget**
Current or Former Applicant for or Recipient of VR Services
- Lea Kugel**
State Education Agency
- Raena McIntyre**
VR Counselor
- Damian Schlinger**
VR Director
- Chaz Brobst**
Additional Member

2023 AWARD RECIPIENTS

NEWS RELEASE | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | OCTOBER 30, 2023

Hugo's Family Marketplace in Grand Forks and Minot Automotive Company receive awards for recognizing the value of employees with disabilities

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

BISMARCK, ND - North Dakota Health and Human Services (HHS) Vocational Rehabilitation division has recognized two businesses for supporting an inclusive workforce by hiring, training and inspiring people with disabilities to excel in the workplace.

The agency and State Rehabilitation Council selected **Hugo's Family Marketplace of Grand Forks** as the 2023 North Dakota State VR Employer of the Year. **Minot Automotive Center** was recognized with the You Make a Difference Award.

Hugo's Family Marketplace was selected from among 10 nominees and was recognized for efforts to support and inspire individuals with disabilities to achieve employment goals and reach their full potential in their community.

The Grand Forks Vocational Rehabilitation office team member who nominated Hugo's Family Marketplace for this honor said it was because of their long-term commitment to help students with disabilities build job skills and gain valuable work experience in a welcoming and supportive environment.

"We are honored to receive this recognition. We believe all our associates have unique abilities that make them a valuable member of our team," said Hugo's Family Marketplace President and Chief Executive Officer Kristi Magnuson-Nelson. "Being able to provide job training and careers to individuals with disabilities is something that has been integral to our mission for many years."

Other nominees for VR Employer of the Year award that received honorable mention include:

Dakota Center for Independent Living, Bismarck; Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Tribal Headquarters, Belcourt; MaryAnn's Place, Devils Lake; Griffon Theaters, Dickinson; Community Living Services, Fargo; Hugo's Family Marketplace, Jamestown; Kennbecks Jack and Jill, New Town; Cash Wise Foods, Tioga and Amy's Angels Childcare, Williston.

2023 AWARD RECIPIENT CONTINUED

The statewide You Make a Difference Award honors one business for providing work experience opportunities for students with disabilities that support, develop and inspire them to achieve their goals in a competitive and integrated employment setting.

Minot Automotive Company was recognized for providing students with disabilities work or job shadowing opportunities in the field of automotive technology. They also work with local high schools to provide learning opportunities for students.

Jake Adams, service manager at Minot Automotive Company is grateful for the opportunity to work with students to help them discover their strengths and interests.

“Every single one of us has talent,” Adams said. “Our job as employers and people in the community is to recognize that talent and help people grow their skills to support a strong workforce.”

Other nominees for the Make a Difference Award include Two Rivers Activity Center, Jamestown and Alexander Public Schools, Alexander.

The awards were announced during a ceremony at Vocational Rehabilitation’s annual training conference earlier this month.

“These businesses are model employers who understand what it means to meet the expectations of their customers and foster a positive and inclusive workforce,” said Damian Schlinger, Vocational Rehabilitation director.

The agency’s Vocational Rehabilitation team helps people with disabilities find and retain meaningful work or advance their careers. They also work with employers to help connect them with qualified applicants, retain trained workers whose abilities may have changed and find solutions to disability-related issues.

Rehabilitation counseling and consultation are available at no cost to qualifying individuals, businesses, nonprofits and government agencies.

To receive Vocational Rehabilitation services, North Dakotans must have a disability that is an obstacle to employment, and they must want to work and be available to work.

Information about Vocational Rehabilitation services is available online at hhs.nd.gov/vr or by calling (701) 328-8950, toll-free (800) 755-2745, 711 (TTY) or emailing dhsvr@nd.gov.

VR Employer of the Year - Hugo's Family Marketplace of Grand Forks



(L-R) Torrie Enget, Hugo's Family Marketplace Area Director; Jeff Westrem, Hugo's Family Marketplace Human Resources Director and Lori Rodgers, VR Business Services Specialist.

VR You Make a Difference Award - Minot Automotive Company



Front Row: (L-R) Damian Schlinger, VR Director; Jerry Leiss, Minot Automotive Company Sales Manager; Jake Adams, Minot Automotive Company Service Manager and Cindy McGovern, VR Counselor.

Back Row: (L-R) Angela Barczik, Easter Seals Goodwill Minot; Tanya Ide, Minot Regional VR Administrator and Dawn Anderson, VR Business Service Specialist.

FFY 2023 AT A GLANCE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

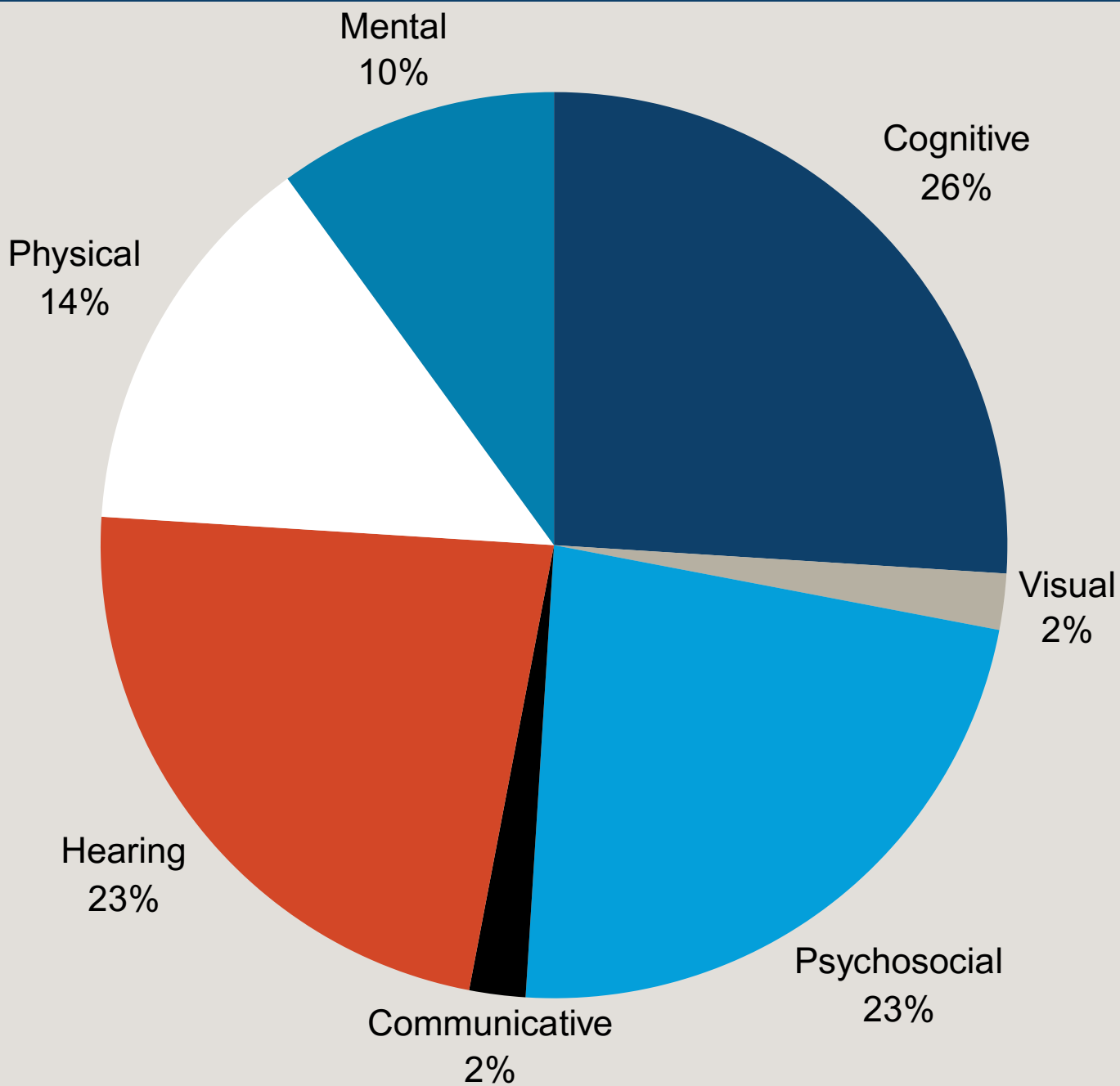
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|---|----------------|
| Program Expenditures | \$13.8 Million |
| Individuals Employed | 737 |
| Average weekly earnings before rehabilitation | \$323.20 |
| Average weekly earnings after rehabilitation | \$627.00 |
| Individuals receiving training and other services | 4505 |
| Percent of individuals served who have a significant disability | 94% |

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 \$10.03.
- For every dollar spent by VR, the clients pay back \$2.01 in taxes.

PRIMARY IMPAIRMENT OF INDIVIDUALS ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT



Pie Chart Indicates

Cognitive impairments - 26%

Psychosocial impairments - 23%

Hearing impairments - 23%

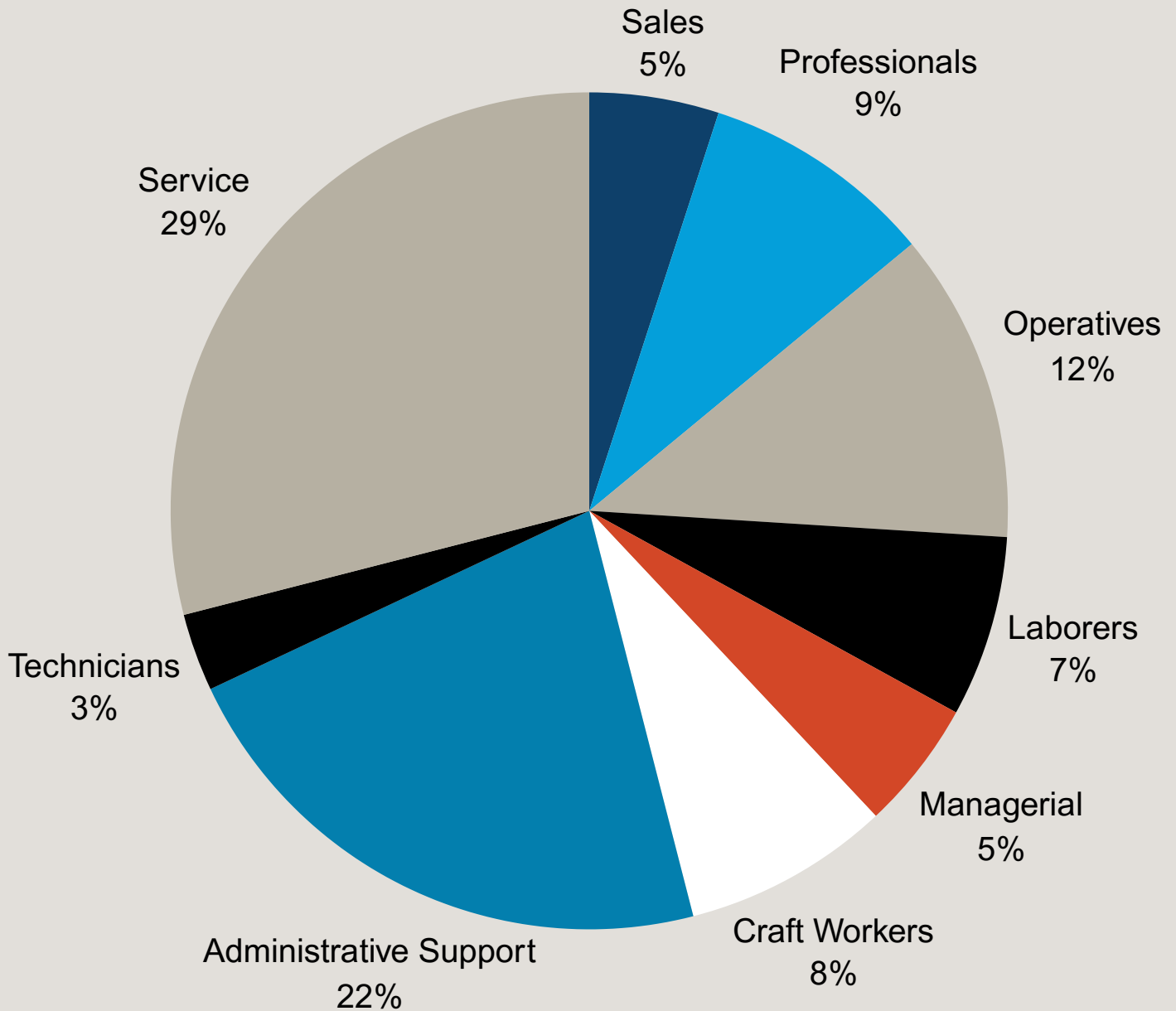
Physical impairments - 14%

Mental impairments - 10%

Communicative impairments - 2%

Visual impairments - 2%

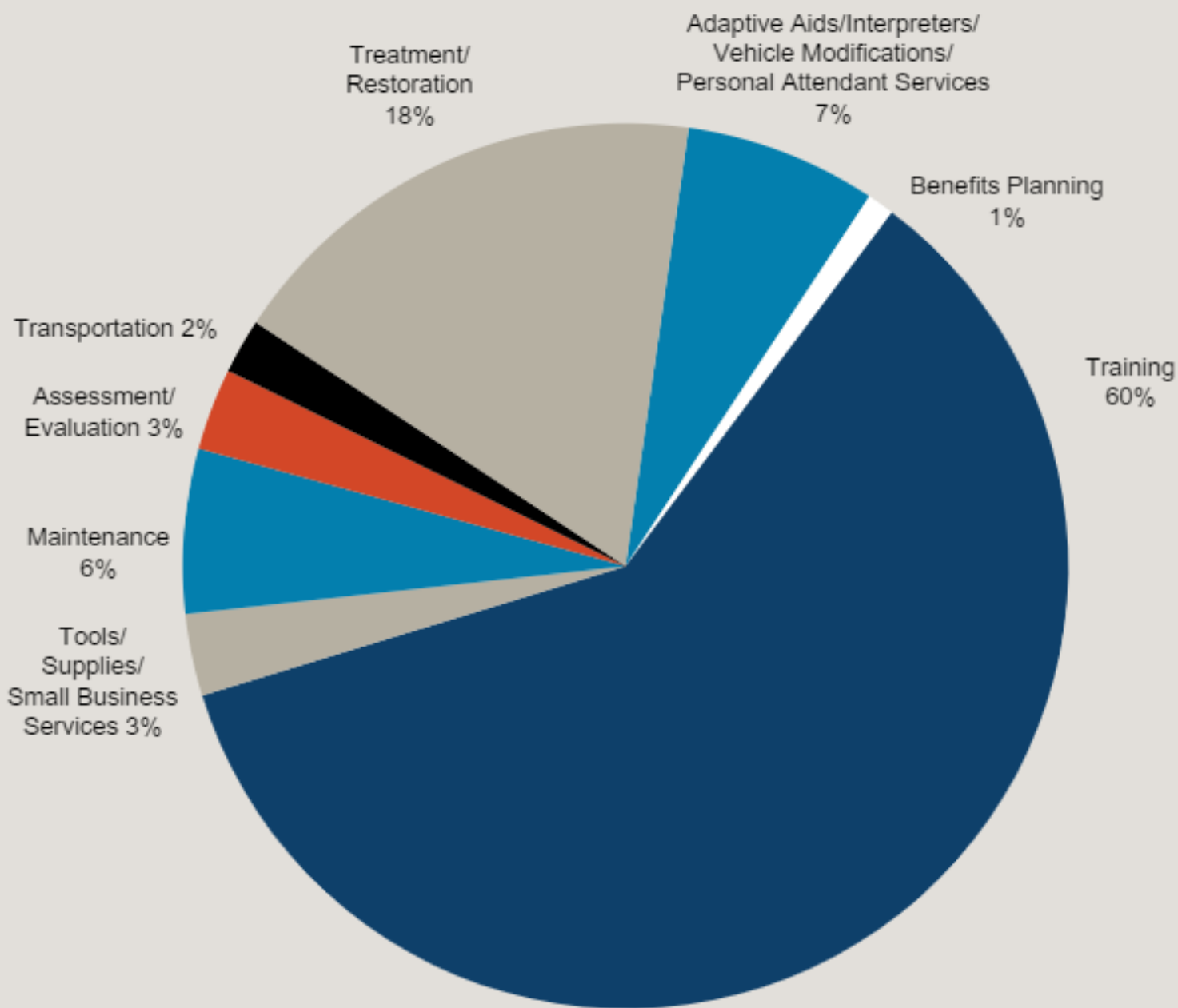
OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES OF INDIVIDUALS ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT



Pie Chart Indicates
Professionals - 9%
Operatives - 12%
Laborers 7%
Managerial - 5%
Craft Workers - 8%

Administrative Support - 22%
Technicians - 3%
Service - 29%
Sales - 5%

CASE SERVICE EXPENDITURES



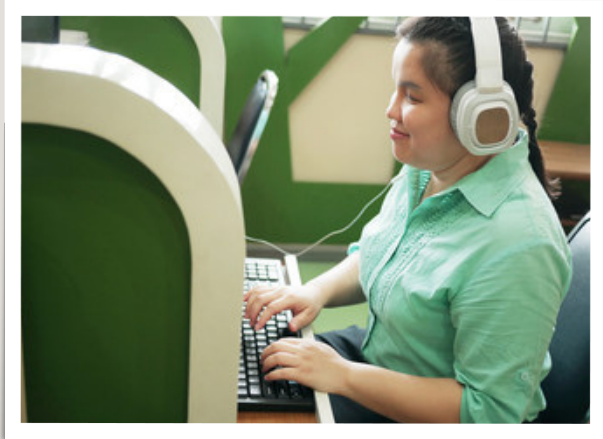
60% of North Dakota's Case Service Expenditures were for training individuals with disabilities.

Training Services Include:

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

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, but not limited to:

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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.

Accomplishments of the OIB Program for FFY 2023.

- 384 applications were completed.
- 691 North Dakotans were able to remain in their home.
- 82% of consumers are over the age of 75.
- 98% of consumers received assistive technology devices (e.g., magnifier, lighting, talking watch, etc.) through our OIB grant.

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

John Olstad

Portable power lift sitting next to a tractor that is easy-to-use anywhere on the farm.



92-year old gets a second chance at farming

Farming has been a way of life for Hope, N.D. native John Olstad for nearly six decades.

“I’ve always enjoyed watching the crops grow,” he said.

This love for the land is also a family affair involving John’s son, Robert, and grandson, Parker. Together, they farm about 1,500 acres of corn, beans and wheat.

At age 92, John’s daily summer routine involved climbing ladders to get behind the wheel of a tractor or combine until a knee injury sidelined him from the farm.

“He was a little blue and pouty about the injury,” Parker recalls with a smile. “So, I started reaching out to anyone I could to try and figure out a way to keep him going in field.”

Getting help was easy

Parker called a family friend who worked for the North Dakota State University Extension Service. She referred John and Parker to the Fargo Vocational Rehabilitation office.

A VR counselor partnered with a ND Assistive occupational therapist to help John. They drove to the farm to complete a functional assessment on him and discuss potential options to get him back in the tractor or combine cab.

The assessment showed John would benefit from a portable power lift, and six months later it was delivered to the farm. It safely elevates him from the ground to the top step of a tractor or combine in less than two minutes using easy-to-use hand controls. The portability gives him flexibility to use the lift on any piece of farm machinery.

“I can now continue doing what I like to do,” John said.

The whole experience was a win-win for everyone.

“It was a very seamless process. Everybody was extremely helpful and informative,” Parker said. “Everyone went the extra mile for us.”

Building priceless memories

The power lift has allowed John to remain engaged in farming and build family memories.

“Every day when we get to the farm, he’s dressed, his lunch is packed and he’s sitting ready to go before we have even started working,” Parker said. “This has given him a lot of excitement and renewed energy for the job he gets to do.”

The power lift also has neighbors talking in the small-town community.

“I’ve had a couple of people ask me about the process, so they can start looking into this for their parents to help them keep farming,” Parker said.

BUSINESS SUCCESS STORY

AMY'S ANGELS



Amy Giordano received an honorable mention for 2023 VR Employer of the Year award

Williston child care provider creates inclusive workforce

With the need for quality, licensed child care in Williston, Amy Giordano is making an impact on children of all abilities and their families while helping create an inclusive workforce.

“I was a young working mom who needed child care that would accommodate my kids who had medical needs, and it was really hard for me,” she said. “I wanted to find a way to be a good mom, provide for my family and build a community.”

That’s when Amy’s Angels was born in Giordano’s home.

Fast forward 12 years and Amy’s Angels has expanded, moved to a new location and is now a licensed child care center providing care for nearly 60 children. Amy’s Angels works with parents to accommodate children with special needs.

“I’ve even learned how to cook tofu for a child,” she said. “We make sure that every child is taken care of, no matter their needs. Everyone is thriving, functioning, learning and growing here.”

Hiring made easy

When it came time to hire more staff, Giordano used traditional methods to try and attract workers. A simple phone call from the Williston VR office opened a new door that would make her workforce even more inclusive.

A VR counselor and a client who was interested in working in child care did an on-site visit with Giordano. They all discussed necessary accommodations, job responsibilities and requirements to ensure successful placement for everyone.

Creating an inclusive workforce

Even though Giordano has team members with varying abilities, this was the first time she worked with VR.

“It was a very easy process and a great experience. I would do it again in a heartbeat,” she said. “We share a lot of the same vision of connecting people and creating community for people. It has been a very positive experience for the children in my care, their families, my staff and for me.”

Giordano encourages all North Dakota businesses to consider working with VR to solve their part-time or full-time workforce needs.

“People with disabilities have a ton to offer,” she said.

If you are looking to expand your workforce or have questions on how to expand your workforce, contact Vocational Rehabilitation toll-free at (800) 755-2745 or visit hhs.nd.gov/vr.

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To learn more about the North Dakota State Rehabilitation Council and the North Dakota Section of Vocational Rehabilitation visit www.hhs.nd.gov/vr

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