



2023 Annual Report

“RISING TO NEW HEIGHTS”





Our Vision:

Every New Mexican with a disability is empowered with the resources to contribute to their quality of life and the economic prosperity of the State.

Our Mission:

We are committed to ensuring that every New Mexican with a disability achieves their employment goals and thrives in their communities.

Our Values:

Inclusivity–Diversity–Empowerment–Collaboration–Innovation–Respect

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MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM,
Governor

ARSENIO ROMERO, Ph.D.,
Secretary of Education

CASEY STONE-ROMERO,
Director

Dear Honorable Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Secretary Arsenio Romero, Participants, and Partners,

The theme of this year's Annual Report is "Rising to New Heights." The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR) continues to expand our work in fulfilling our mission of assisting New Mexicans with disabilities in achieving their employment goals.

I am pleased to share with you the NMDVR Annual Report for fiscal year 2023. In FY23 we were able to assist 439 individuals with gaining employment. These New Mexicans have increased their independence by earning wages and contributing to their local communities—and they are returning dollars to the State Treasury as taxpayers. The total combined salary of participants exiting the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program for FY23 remained steady at close to \$11 million dollars.

One of NMDVR's greatest accomplishments of FY23 was the elimination of the waitlist for vocational rehabilitation services. While NMDVR remains on an order of selection, all categories are open. This means any New Mexican with a disability, starting at age 14, may access valuable vocational rehabilitation services. To further strengthen vocational rehabilitation services, an updated Manual of Operating Procedures (MOP) and training related to federal regulation was implemented, reinforcing federal regulations that guide the VR program and financial requirements.

NMDVR also created four Business Outreach Coordinator positions to serve as a resource to New Mexico employers, providing training and technical assistance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), reasonable accommodations, and disability etiquette, as well as information on available tax credits.

An emphasis was also placed on creating additional transition-specific Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions to reach students between the ages of 14-21 to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Pre-ETS are critical in ensuring that students with a disability effectively and successfully transition from high school to their next phase of life, whether work, higher education, and/or post-secondary training.

In addition, the New Mexico Disability Determination Services (NM DDS), funded through the Social Security Administration (SSA) and administered through NMDVR, exceeded all workload targets while implementing a rigorous hiring campaign taking their vacancy rate to the lowest in the history of the agency at 11%.

FY23 has been a meaningful and transformational year for NMDVR. Please enjoy this snapshot of the effect NMDVR has on the entire state of New Mexico. NMDVR will continue to collaborate with partners and explore innovative and transformational ways of providing valuable resources and employment outcomes to New Mexicans with disabilities.

Respectfully Submitted,

Casey Stone-Romero
Director



To Whom It May Concern:

It is my great pleasure to write this letter on behalf of the NMDVR State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) in support of this year's NMDVR Annual Report. The members of the SRC are dedicated to understanding the specific needs of people with disabilities within our state. Working in partnership with NMDVR, the council helps to track and to increase satisfaction with NMDVR services, to expand partnerships with local schools and businesses, and to build bridges that support people with disabilities as they seek to gain and maintain employment outcomes that accommodate their disability needs.

This report summarizes the outstanding work done by the NMDVR team to promote agency goals and services while helping New Mexicans with disabilities to achieve their educational and employment goals. The SRC's membership is particularly pleased with the increase in successful employment outcomes for agency participants as well as the increased publicity highlighting the efforts that have occurred throughout this year! While not yet complete, the council also looks forward to receiving the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment conducted in partnership with NMDVR this year. The feedback and input of consumers, local business partners, and statewide disability stakeholders will help to guide agency progress and services moving forward.

The SRC is pleased to support NMDVR in sharing this summary of their successes with you. We look forward to continuing our partnership in FY24 and to building on these successes.

Sincerely,

Sarah Michaud

Sarah Michaud
SRC Chair

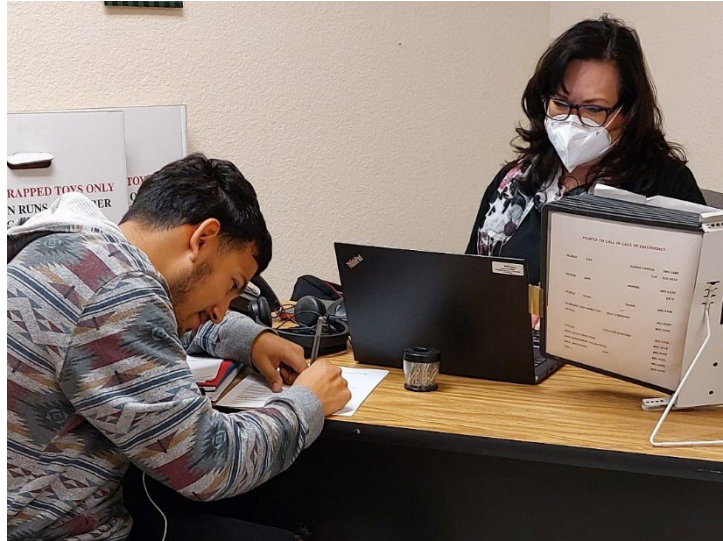
WAITLIST FOR NMDVR SERVICES CLEARED

As of late October 2022, there is no longer a wait for vocational rehabilitation services in New Mexico for anyone determined eligible. The waitlist for NMDVR services—which in fall 2021 was more than 1,300 individuals—has been cleared.

“We could not have done this without the hard work and extra effort of our vocational rehabilitation staff all around the state,” said Nash Sisneros, deputy director of NMDVR’s Rehabilitation Services Unit. “We aim to increase the quality of life and growth of our participants in New Mexico.”

NMDVR technically remains on what is referred to as an Order of Selection. But, while previously only those deemed to have a “Most Significant Disability” could receive supports from the agency, now individuals who fit the lesser criteria of “Significant Disability” or “Not Significantly Disabled”—as defined by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration—may now immediately begin planning to receive services.

“Our doors are open, and we are pleased to now be able to assist any person in New Mexico with a disability who is seeking employment,” said NMDVR Director Casey Stone-Romero.



Some of the RSU Leadership Team (from left): Christine Fuller, Mario Lucero, Antoinette Holmes, Nash Sisneros, Kathy Abernathy, Rudy Grano

SERVICES TO ASSIST PARTICIPANTS IN ACHIEVING LOFTY EMPLOYMENT GOALS

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR) provides employment and training services for individuals with a disability who find it difficult to obtain or keep a job. Services are individualized and depend on each participant's job goal and what is needed to achieve that goal.

Some of the direct vocational rehabilitation services we provide:

- Career guidance and counseling
- Resume development
- Job search and placement assistance
- Transition-to-work services for high school students
- Post-secondary education assistance
- Supported employment services
- Assistive technology
- Vocational training
- Occupational licensure, tools, and other equipment
- Assistance with developing small business plans
- Interpreter services



Stevens Amendment Notice

Pursuant to Public Law 101-166:

The services described in this report are funded, in part, with federal funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services programs.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2024, the total awarded is \$24,698,300. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

GOVERNOR LUJAN GRISHAM RECOGNIZES IMPORTANCE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued an official proclamation naming October 2022 as Disability Employment Awareness Month throughout the State of New Mexico.

In proclaiming Disability Employment Awareness Month, the governor stated that “New Mexico employers can reap the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, who are skilled, loyal, and committed to their success” and that “workplaces welcoming of the talents of all people—including people with disabilities—are a critical part of our efforts to build an inclusive community and strong economy.”

The proclamation also refers to NMDVR’s mission as it relates to disability employment.

“New Mexicans with disabilities are a huge untapped resource, with a range of skills and abilities to help businesses grow,” said NMDVR Director Casey Stone-Romero. “We bridge that talent, helping both companies and employees succeed, and we’re committed to helping employers find candidates who are skilled, loyal, and committed to their success.”

Each October, the agency engages in efforts to spread the word to businesses regarding the benefits of employing New Mexicans with disabilities. The New Mexico endeavors are part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which aims to educate Americans about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of workers with disabilities.

The original proclamation from Governor Lujan Grisham is prominently displayed at the NMDVR State Office in Santa Fe.

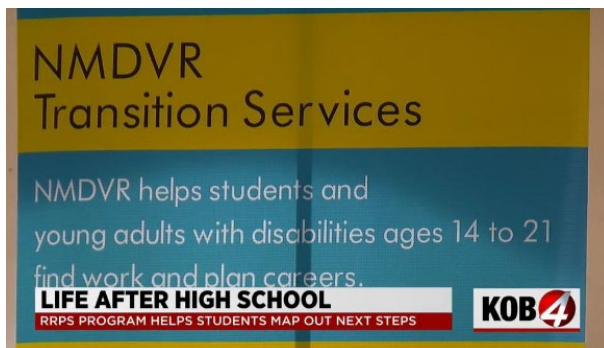


BIG SCREEN, SMALL SCREEN, AND IN THE PAPERS—Soaring with Positive Media Coverage

NMDVR had many quality media placements during FY 2023. The agency and its programs were featured on KRQE and KOB television, KUNM radio, the *Albuquerque Journal*, 'Round the Roundhouse state employee newspaper, and several other outlets—all sharing the news of the valuable work being done by NMDVR staff in pursuit of our mission and the successes of our participants.



In addition, an advertisement that ran in theaters in Albuquerque and Santa Fe during the *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* blockbuster season was seen by more than 200,000 moviegoers!



‘Best job ever’

BY ESTEBAN CANDELARIA
NOVEMBER 7, 2022

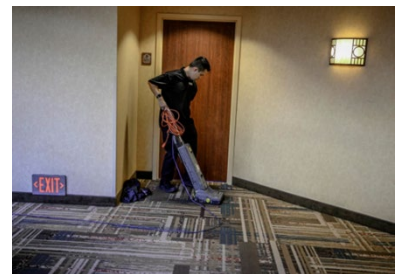
The sixth floor of the Albuquerque Embassy Suites was a ghost town on Halloween. With just a few hours to go until the night’s festivities, guests were out and about, making for a slow morning for hotel staff.

All that could be heard was the dull roar of Luc Nguyen’s vacuum as it swept over every square inch of the hallway’s patterned carpets. That day, Nguyen, a 20-year-old intern, was tasked with vacuuming almost every floor of the hotel.

But he didn’t mind the work—in fact, he welcomed it.

Nguyen’s one of five interns working at the Embassy Suites as part of **Project SEARCH**, an international network of programs dedicated to giving high school graduates with intellectual and developmental disabilities the skills they need for work and life after high school.

The Embassy Suites program, one of seven in New Mexico, is a partnership of several organizations. Those include Embassy Suites, the host business; Best Buddies, which helps the interns find long-term jobs; **the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**, which provides stipends and work attire; and Albuquerque Public Schools, among others.



MANUAL OF OPERATING PROCEDURES UPDATED



(from left) Field Operations Directors Antoinette Holmes, Mario Lucero, and Rudy Grano present at a MOP public meeting in March 2023.

In March 2023, NMDVR hosted three in-person meetings and one virtual session regarding updates to the agency's Manual of Operating Procedures (MOP).

In-person sessions were held in Taos, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces. The online meeting allowed for people in the rest of the state to provide input on the proposed changes to the document that guides how vocational rehabilitation services are provided to New Mexicans with disabilities.

Following a review of all input from the meetings, plus written comments from the public—and extensive training of all field staff—the new MOP took effect on July 1, 2023.

MOP staff training in Albuquerque, June 2023



PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES AND PROJECT SEARCH

Per established federal law outlined in the



Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), NMDVR dedicates 15% of its federal grant

funds towards providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students between the ages of 14 and 21 with disabilities. NMDVR staff collaborates with local education agencies throughout New Mexico to provide Pre-ETS and School-to-Work Transition Services.

Over the past year, NMDVR made excellent strides in reaching out to students across the state with disabilities. NMDVR met with students and families by attending Individual

Education planning meetings, attending transition fairs, meeting with students in group settings and individually, and most importantly, providing Pre-ETS to interested students.

NMDVR has contracts to collaborate with three school districts (Las Cruces, Taos, Rio Rancho) and four private vendors (Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Mandy's Farm, Best Buddies, UNM Center for Disabilities) supporting our efforts to provide Pre-ETS to all eligible students in New Mexico. These contracts are an extension of the vocational rehabilitation program and, with NMDVR funds, they help to reach students across the state. These contractors support the referral process while providing self-advocacy and pre-employment services.



Project SEARCH & Work-Based Learning

Project SEARCH sites continued to thrive and achieve success in supporting students with extremely valuable training and work-based learning experiences. Project SEARCH at the Embassy Suites (through Albuquerque Public Schools) received a national award for 100% placement for the second consecutive year. The program at Hilton Garden Inn (Gallup-McKinley Public Schools) earned national recognition for placing more than 70% of their interns in jobs.

NMDVR is supporting the launch of additional Project SEARCH sites in rural parts of the state.

Staff also worked to develop work-based learning with many schools and community partners to offer experience at sites like Habitat for Humanity, Polk Middle School in Albuquerque, and Bernalillo County Open Spaces. Overall, NMDVR expended more than \$3 million in the fiscal year to students with disabilities in New Mexico.

New Dedicated Transition Counselors

During the fiscal year, NMDVR grew its transition department to eleven transition counselors who are wholly dedicated to working with schools across the state to provide Pre-ETS to students with disabilities. In addition, transition and vocational rehabilitation counselors attend Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), transition fairs, college fairs, and School-to-Work meetings, and work closely with Workforce Boards across New Mexico.

Pre-ETS provided by NMDVR staff includes:

- Guidance to Employment
- Self-Advocacy
- Work Readiness
- Guidance to Post-Secondary Education
- Work Experience

School-to-Work Transition Teams (SWTT)

SWTT provide local interagency teams a forum for collaborating on students' IEP transition goals, facilitating job exploration and work-based learning experiences, providing linkages to opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational or internship programs, and enhancing the embrace of person-centered practices and student self-advocacy.

2023 FISCAL YEAR BY THE NUMBERS

- **6 days** average improvement from FY22 in moving participants into an Individual Plan for Employment
- **\$15.69** average hourly employee wage of participants successfully rehabilitated
- **24** offices throughout the state providing services to New Mexicans
- **26** average number of days to complete eligibility (an improvement of four days from FY22)
- **67** more participants in a service plan than FY22



- **89** percent of individuals applying were accepted
- **375** more applications than FY22
- **439** New Mexicans with a disability who were successfully rehabilitated
- **1,357** Students received Pre-Employment Transition Services
- **7,708** New Mexicans engaged in vocational rehabilitation services
- **26,968** SSA disability claims processed by the Disability Determination Services team
- **\$10,807,031.56** total wages for successfully rehabilitated individuals with disabilities

Performance Indicators vs. Negotiated Targets

For Fiscal Year 2023, NMDVR significantly outperformed the negotiated targets in all of the five main performance indicators outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

	Employment Rate 2 nd Quarter after Exit ¹	Employment Rate 4 th Quarter after Exit ¹	Median Earnings 2 nd Quarter after Exit ¹	Credential Rate ²	Measurable Skill Gains ³
Negotiated	40%	35%	\$4,500	26%	32.5%
Actual	41.3%	40.8%	\$5,033	37.6%	52.9%

¹Employment rates and median earnings refer to participants who are in unsubsidized employment in the time period outlined after exit from vocational rehabilitation program.

²Credential rate refers to percentage of participants in an education or training program who attain a recognized post-secondary credential, diploma or equivalent either during or within one year of exiting the vocational rehabilitation program.

³Measurable skill gains are defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress towards a recognized postsecondary credential or employment.

NMDVR SUCCESS STORY: PROVIDING SECOND CHANCES

“I reached out to DVR and the people there helped me change my life and give me a good career,” says Walt Deiter. “And it’s working out well.”



After getting out of prison in 2009, Deiter attended a seminar that the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR) presented in conjunction with a drug rehabilitation program in which he was participating.

But just a few months later, he found himself back in prison after an arrest on weapons charges. He never forgot about what he heard at that seminar, though, and when he was released in 2022, he contacted the NMDVR office in Las Cruces.

A history of drug addiction, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and post-traumatic stress disorder—from a 1995 prison riot in which he says he was almost killed—qualified the Albuquerque native for agency services as a New Mexican with disabilities.

Deiter received counseling and then took a battery of tests to help determine the kind of job that might be a fit. That led to him earning a certificate in truck driving at Doña Ana Community College and achieving his Commercial Driver’s License.

With his instructor vouching for his reliability and punctuality, at age 64 he was hired by Nutrien Ag Solutions as a truck driver. He delivers chemicals, seeds, and pesticides to farms throughout southern New Mexico.

“It’s a good career path,” says Deiter, who estimates he has spent half his life behind bars. “There’s a lot of work for truck drivers and it’s not minimum-wage menial labor that can lead to relapse. It gives you some self-esteem and aspirations and to be able to realize your hopes and dreams.”

While those with addiction might seem to require instant gratification, for Deiter it was a long process of meetings and schooling. But with his NMDVR counselor, Linda Fisher, helping along the way, it was all worthwhile. “They are there to help. I highly recommend it for someone who wants to change their life and put themselves on a better path.”

Despite the late start to his career, Deiter plans to continue driving at least into his 70s. “I’m in good health and I enjoy driving. I wish I had made other choices in life, but at some point, you’ve got to face what you can work with,” he says, adding, “This has given me a good opportunity and I’m taking it!”

SUCCESS STORY: TURNING CREATIVITY INTO A CAREER

Danni Andrew has been an artist since she began painting at age 14. Into adulthood, she developed a penchant for the fiber arts and became adept at tie-dying. At the same time, she was a professional seamstress.

“So I blended the two, and began making wearable art,” Andrew says of her venture, Danni Andrew Creates. “I started dying my own fabrics, getting into designing a bit.”

The self-proclaimed child of the 1970s explains, “I take clothing that doesn’t have much life left in it—maybe like a jeans skirt—and embellish it. I recycle clothing, making it look new again. It’s not totally a ’70s vibe, but it has a vintage look to it.”

Dealing with bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) kept Andrew from turning her calling into a successful business. That is, until she applied for services from NMDVR. Danni’s sewing machine had recently died, and she couldn’t afford a new one. The agency was able to secure funding for equipment, fabric, and more.

“They set me up with not only the equipment I needed, but also a business coach,” the lifelong Farmington resident recalls. “That helped get me into the business mode. I can get scattered easily. Working with the coach got me organized. I was able to focus. The key to having your own business—especially working from home—is being organized.”

Andrew says she no longer “freaks out” if something doesn’t sell. It’s just a matter of finding the right outlet. If there isn’t much interest in one of her creations at a farmers’ market, then maybe Etsy, the online craft marketplace, is where to sell it.



Danni Andrew's stand at the Durango Farmers Market in Southern Colorado.



Danni Andrew with her creations at the Downtown Makers Market in Farmington.

She credits NMDVR with helping her take Danni Andrew Creates (danniandrewcreates.com) “from a somewhat part-time, weekend hobby to something that will take me to retirement and beyond.” In fact, during the short time Danni was being interviewed for this article, she received two orders over her phone.

Ready to expand her business, Andrew is moving into working with other kinds of fabrics and making artistic hats, purses, and other accessories. And she is working on creating a better system for her tie-dye, as she has begun dealing with arthritis. Danni has also written several books about living with bipolar disorder.

“Be open to the possibilities,” she advises anyone who isn’t sure where to begin when it comes to vocational rehabilitation services. “Have an idea of what you want to do, but be ready to pivot a little bit. Listen to people who have been doing this: the counselors and coaches. Let them do their jobs. I had blinders on (at first). But everything evolved into something much better than what I had in mind.”

SUCCESS STORY: PART OF THE TEAM AT HER JOB

Lauria Cournoyer is a buswoman at Viola's Restaurant in Los Alamos.

"I wash dishes and clean tables," she says. "I like the people, the customers and the workers, and especially my boss Belinda."



Lauria Cournoyer at work

Belinda is Viola's owner Belinda Jaramillo, who hired Cournoyer to work two days a week at the restaurant. "She is very eager to learn, and we all love having her here," says Jaramillo. "She livens things up every time she's here. She's definitely part of our team."

The 27-year-old Cournoyer has volunteered at a senior center and animal shelter in the past, but this is only her second paying job. "It feels good making my own money. I'm a very busy buswoman!"

Speaking of buses, the White Rock resident takes the bus to work and has become an expert on the Los Alamos County public transit system. Her father Michael says when he needs to take a bus, he checks with Lauria to make sure he's reading the schedules correctly.

Lauria, who has autism spectrum disorder, is the second member of her family to use the services of the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Her brother Gabriel has also participated in the agency's employment services program. In Lauria's case, her counselor, Alix Dean, helped her determine the kind of work she might like to do. Then they worked together to develop a resume and practice answering interview questions. And NMDVR provided Cournoyer with a job coach to assist her while she's on the job.

"We're thankful to DVR for everything they've done," Michael Cournoyer says.

Also helping Lauria stay "on task" and focused at work is a software program called AVAIL, which lists tasks that need to be done. "It's not hard to get confused. AVAIL tells me what I should be doing next and gets me back on track," she says. Lauria was recently invited to the national Association of People Supporting Employment First conference in Ohio, where she served on a panel with the software designer, demonstrating how AVAIL works.

Jaramillo is glad her staff at Viola's has a chance to work with Cournoyer, "because it teaches everyone, all the way around." She adds there was not a lot of reticence in making the decision to hire a local resident with a disability. "I was just like, 'Let's do this and see how it goes.' So far it has worked out."



Lauria Cournoyer (left) at 2023 APSE conference.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS—Giving Businesses a Lift

New Mexicans with disabilities are an untapped resource, offering employers the potential for increased productivity, revenue growth, and improved community relations. NMDVR is committed to helping employer partners find candidates who are skilled, loyal, and committed to their success.

In fiscal year 2023, NMDVR created four Business Outreach Coordinator positions, dedicated to serving employers in New Mexico—providing businesses and organizations with training and technical assistance in increasing inclusive hiring and employment practices.



Through the On-the-Job Training program, employers can determine, without obligation, whether the job and business are a good fit with a potential employee.

NMDVR assists employers in other ways, including reasonable accommodations and ADA guidance, liaison services between employer and employee, federal tax incentives, no cost business services, and post-hiring support.

Benefits to businesses seeking to hire New Mexicans with disabilities:

- A larger pool of qualified applicants
- No cost for business services
- Reduced recruitment and training costs
- Reduced turnover costs with employees who tend to stay on the job longer
- Federal tax incentives, when available, for employers who hire individuals with disabilities into permanent positions
- Create more efficient work processes
- Increase revenues by having a workplace that reflects the customer base
- Employing people with disabilities helps generate revenues by allowing businesses to tap into the disability market, build brand trust and loyalty, and create new products and services

EMPLOYER SUCCESS STORY: BUILDING CAREERS

Since launching a partnership with NMDVR in early 2023, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 1319 in Albuquerque has taken on almost a dozen people with disabilities as apprentices.

The union's carpenter apprenticeship is a four-year program accredited through Central New Mexico Community College. Apprentices spend one week in the classroom every three months and the rest of the time at job sites, getting hands-on experience and expanding their skills and knowledge of the trade. Every six months, as the men and women go up a level, they receive a raise of about \$1.20 per hour. That's no small motivation.

Jesus Madrigal-Lopez is at level four in his eight-level apprenticeship. "I do patching, framing, and sheetrock," says the 37-year-old. "I have a pretty good job. It's something that is pretty cool."

In addition to having post-traumatic stress disorder, Madrigal-Lopez does not read English very well, so he turned to NMDVR for help in finding the right job. Not only did his counselor help direct him to a future in carpentry, but the agency was also able to assist in paying for tools, union dues, transportation to meetings and job sites—previously he could only go as far as he could pedal on his bike—and is helping him further his English education.

"The guys coming from DVR have been motivated, they've been good, and they've been grateful for the opportunity," says Local 1319 President Rosendo Najar. "Once we got the first person in, we knew it was a great idea."

Najar never considered that bringing people with disabilities into the union was taking a chance. "I see it more as an opportunity to fill a void that we have in the trades right now," he says. "(A disability) doesn't exclude them from being able to do the work that we do. It's just a matter of finding the right spot for the right person."

Even as apprentices, the NMDVR participants are full-fledged members of the union, receiving medical insurance and benefits in addition to their education. "That helps them tremendously," says Najar. "We give them the tools to make money. If they take those tools to the next level, it's up to them. We don't only teach working skills; we teach life skills. We're actually teaching people how to be better people, not just better craft workers."

On a project, the apprentices could be working with 50 or 60 carpenters of all backgrounds. And Najar is confident they will all find their niche.

"At the end of the day, it's a brotherhood and they fit in well. They're great people and they just need an opportunity to succeed." Najar adds, "Don't judge a book by its cover. You'll be surprised at how much potential these people have."



Three NMDVR participants at their induction into the carpenters' union. Jesus Madrigal-Lopez is in the center, Local 1319 President Rosendo Najar on the right, and NMDVR Vocational Rehabilitation Technician Patricia Sainz is in front.

DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES—Rising to Meet the Challenges

The federal Social Security Administration (SSA) collaborates with—and provides 100% of the funding for—the New Mexico Disability Determination Services (DDS) to make disability determinations for the citizens of New Mexico. SSA administers its Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability programs through DDS.

Primary Services Provided/Beneficiaries, Current Service Levels

New Mexico has more than 130,000 citizens receiving more than \$1 billion annually in Social Security and Supplemental Income disability benefits.

DDS closed more claims than were received during Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023, as 24,586 new claims came in and 26,968 were cleared. This represents an increase in both areas compared to FFY22.

Accomplishments During FFY23

- DDS met and exceeded all budgeted SSA workload targets, while maintaining high accuracy.
 - New Mexico DDS was #1 in the region and #2 in the nation in Reconsideration Claims accuracy.
 - New Mexico DDS was #1 in the region and #5 in the nation in Initial Claims accuracy.
 - New Mexico DDS was #1 in the region and #8 in the nation in Continuing Disability Review claims accuracy.
- 57 new employees were brought on during the fiscal year, the largest hiring of staff in the history of New Mexico DDS, and the year ended with a historically low vacancy rate.

- In addition, there were 19 internal promotions in FFY23, demonstrating career advancement opportunities within DDS and NMDVR as a whole.

“The New Mexico DDS is fortunate to have a very dedicated, mission-focused staff, many of whom volunteered to take on additional duties/tasks above and beyond their full normal duties to ensure the best public service possible,” says DDS Administrator Alan Hamlin of his team’s efforts this year. “Staff exhibited tremendous teamwork across the agency to accomplish goals with changing priorities and a steadfast willingness to assist each other.”

Saving Taxpayers

The Albuquerque Cooperative Disability Investigations Unit (CDIU) **saved taxpayers more than \$4.2 million** this year. CDIU is a partnership between the Social Security Administration (SSA), DDS, and State and Federal law enforcement partners to identify and reduce SSA fraud.

During the fiscal year, the CDIU:

- Opened 37 investigations.
- Closed 43 claims.
- Denied or ceased 30 claims.

These efforts realized \$1,939,296.90 in SSA savings, \$2,100,932.55 in non-SSA savings and \$183,086.05 in SSA monies and civil monetary penalty, for a total of **\$4,223,315.40** in savings to New Mexico taxpayers.

FY24 Priority

Training and retention of current staff is the top priority for the current fiscal year.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—Rising in their Careers

In fiscal year 2023, NMDVR hired a staff development trainer. In that newly created position, Dominique Nunez helps employees in the field acquire the skills and experience to successfully assist NMDVR program participants in achieving their employment goals, while giving them the experience and certifications that will help them earn promotions and make a career in vocational rehabilitation.

Certifications

Nine vocational rehabilitation counselors and technicians earned new certifications from the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). They completed an intensive 15-week competency-based training course in collaboration with Partners for Employment at the UNM Center for Development and Disability. Overall, 113 NMDVR staff members hold ACRE certification, with 20 more pursuing that professional goal beginning in January 2024.

The staffers received instruction and participated in field work assignments based on the foundations of employment services, principles of career development, strategies for job development, business perspectives, performance coaching and support, using work incentives toward self-sufficiency, funding employment services, Ticket to Work, networking, and job creation.

Another eight NMDVR employees hold the prestigious Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credential from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.

Conferences

Numerous staffers, as well as NMDVR leadership, attended conferences around the country to increase their knowledge base and network with fellow vocational rehabilitation professionals to share best practices. Some of these conferences were the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (both fall and spring), Association of People Supporting Employment First, Project SEARCH, National Employment Network Association, National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute, National AgrAbility Workshop, Project Echo, Reaching New Heights in Supported Employment, Brain Injury Alliance of New Mexico, and the Northern Region Workforce Professional Development Conference.



Advancement Opportunities



There were 18 internal promotions. In addition, nine employees completed the State of New Mexico's "Essentials of Supervision and Management" program. Graduates had to complete 10 eLearning courses, a Managing Employee Performance class, and a final capstone course. These employees—from all throughout the organization—are now ready to take on leadership roles in NMDVR. All of this helps motivate employees and has strengthened retention. In fact, the vacancy rate for the agency ended the year at or near an all-time low.

“THE GROUND CREW”

Balloon pilots can’t get off the ground without the support of a whole team of professionals. Such is the case with the boost provided by the administrative team to NMDVR’s vocational rehabilitation counselors and technicians, and other field staff who directly assist the thousands of agency participants each year.

Information Services Unit (ISU)

The Information Systems Unit (ISU) provides information technology systems and services throughout NMDVR. The effective and efficient IT support of agency staff results in more cost-effective, quality services to New Mexicans with disabilities. Some ISU highlights for FY23:

- Achieved excellent cybersecurity scores.
- Upgraded infrastructure, significantly increasing backup capacity for disaster and recovery purposes.
- Created new virtual servers to replace legacy systems while enhancing technology and security.
- Implemented new AVAYA phone system, including softphone and voice-to-text features, for NMDVR employees statewide.
- Created an effective data team that immediately significantly improved critical data reporting to the federal government.
- Joined with four other state agencies on a longitudinal data system data sharing agreement. The project, launching in FY24, is called RISE NM.



Administrative Services Unit

Administration Services provides leadership, internal control development, financial analysis, budgetary control, and administrative support to NMDVR. Its function is to ensure the agency achieves the highest level of accountability and excellence in services provided to the people of New Mexico. The financial services area consists of: Budget and Grants Unit, General Ledger Unit, Building and Fleet Management Unit, Accounts Payable, and Procurement and Contracts Unit.

Other areas of NMDVR that work to keep the agency rising to new heights include **Human Resources**, the **Legal Team**, and a **Public Relations Coordinator**.

NEW MEXICO DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION LOCATIONS

FIELD OFFICES

Alamogordo

2300 Indian Wells Rd
Alamogordo, NM 88310
Phone: 575-437-6550
Toll-free: 888-901-7868

Albuquerque-Lomas

111 Lomas Blvd NW, Suite 422
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Phone: 505-383-2500
Toll-free: 888-818-3259

Albuquerque-Quail

5205 Quail NW
Albuquerque, NM 87120
Phone: 505-836-1774
Toll-free: 888-818-3263

Albuquerque-Research

10510 Research Rd. SE, Suite 800
Albuquerque, NM 87123
Phone: 505-841-6450
Toll-free: 866-526-0863

Albuquerque-South Valley

1710 Rio Bravo SW
Albuquerque, NM 87105
Phone: 505-877-7673
Toll-free: 888-815-2981

Carlsbad

3605 National Parks Highway
Carlsbad, NM 88220-1448
Phone: 575-885-8821
Toll-free: 800-645-0258

Clovis

100 E. Manana Blvd. #17
Clovis, NM 88101
Phone: 575-763-3437
Toll-free: 800-645-2143

Española

710 B La Joya St
Española, NM 87532
Phone: 505-753-2908
Toll-free: 888-901-3647

Farmington

3401 E. 30th St. Suite B
Farmington, NM 87402
Phone: 505-327-5123
Toll-free: 888-901-7901

Gallup

312 East Nizhoni Blvd
Gallup, NM 87301
Phone: 505-726-1429
Toll-free: 800-279-5681

Hobbs

2120 North Alto #109
Hobbs, NM 88240
Phone: 575-393-3330
Toll-free: 888-201-5859

Las Cruces

3381 Del Rey Blvd.
Las Cruces, NM 88012
Phone: 575-524-6135
Toll-free: 888-901-7866

Loretto Towne Center
505 South Main Street, Suite 142
Las Cruces, NM 88001
Phone: 575-524-6135

Las Vegas

32 NM 65 Hot Springs Blvd.
Las Vegas, NM 87701
Phone: 505-425-9365
Toll-free: 888-901-7865

Los Lunas

445 Camino Del Rey SW, Suite D
Los Lunas, NM 87031
Phone: 505-864-1617
Toll-free: 888-901-7902

Rio Rancho

3791 Southern Blvd. SE, Suite 210 (Physical Address)
PO Box 15430 (Mailing Address)
Rio Rancho, NM 87174
Phone: 505-896-4500
Toll-free: 866-585-5446

Roswell

1014 S. Atkinson Ave.
Roswell, NM 88203
Phone: 575-624-6024
Toll-free: 800-644-7732

Santa Fe

525 Camino De Los Marquez, Ste 200
Santa Fe, NM 87505
Phone: 505-827-3526
Toll-free: 800-773-4072

Silver City

3088 32nd St. Bypass Suite A
Silver City, NM 88061
Phone: 575-538-5351
Toll-free: 888-901-7861

Socorro

1014 N. California
Socorro, NM 87801
Phone: 575-835-4243
Toll-free: 888-901-7903

Taos

145 Roy Road, Suite C
Taos, NM 87571
Phone: 575-758-4348
Toll-free: 888-901-7869

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES**Santa Fe State Office**

2935 Rodeo Park Drive East
Santa Fe, NM 87505
Phone: 505-954-8500
Toll-free: 800-224-7005

Albuquerque-Oakland Administration Office

5200 Oakland Ave NE
Albuquerque, NM 87113
Phone: 505-954-8500

Disability Determination Services

7421 Bartlett Dr. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
Phone: 505-841-5600
Toll-free: 800-432-5868

Office locations and contact information can also be found at: www.dvr.state.nm.us/locations