

A SIMPLE REFERRAL THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

by Kathleen Daniel, former NMDVR participant



I moved to Clovis shortly after surgery and treatment for oral cancer. I had had a little more than half my tongue removed and replaced with a flap to anchor it to the floor of my mouth so I could eat and speak.

Although I was pronounced cancer-free, after all was said and done, I was still trying to adjust to my new way of speaking and eating. Plus, the entire ordeal had been traumatic. I had lost my job at a rehab facility in Texas after using up all my sick and vacation time (plus some that my coworkers donated). Social Security was not enough to live on in the Austin area, so we decided to move to New Mexico, where our kids and grandkids lived, to “retire.” It was difficult living on SSI even in Clovis, and I really was not ready to retire.

I have always enjoyed working—feeling like I was contributing something to society at large, so I began looking for a job. After a couple of false starts, I met with Kayla Damron at NMDVR to explore my options. My confidence was low, and I was depressed and anxious about having a speech impediment—phone work and verbal communication had always been a huge part of my making a living—and about having to start over. I started volunteering doing phone work for a community organization and found I was able to make myself understood for the most part. It increased my confidence, although I still have to remember to enunciate.

Initially, I was looking for part-time work, hopefully in some service field where I would be helping people. Kayla asked me simply, “How are you feeling now?” And I answered honestly that some days I felt that I could conquer the world, and other days I had a hard time getting out of bed. She said I needed to feel the “conquering” thing every day if I was going to have a steady job. I agreed.

NMDVR referred me to Mental Health Resources and that referral changed my life. A short time after I started counseling there, my therapist suggested that I might make a good Certified Peer Support Worker, and MHR was going to need one in their housing department. My counselors there guided me through the process of taking the course, obtaining my certification, and applying for the Housing Specialist job where I was hired and am very happily working full-time today.

So, it was a simple referral, but I have been thanking NMDVR every single day for it, not just for the job, but for pointing me to a place where I could get the counseling I needed to help me

adjust to the new life that had been thrust upon me. Instead of just finding a job, they broadened my horizons and encouraged me to go after what I wanted instead of settling for anything I could get.

At 74, I have finally found my dream job! And I have NMDVR to thank for that. I want to make sure people knew exactly how much of a difference Kayla Damron and NMDVR have made in my life and how grateful I am for it.

For information about how NMDVR can help you achieve your employment goals, contact your nearest office: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/.

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with disabilities find suitable employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit dvr.state.nm.us or call 505-954-8500.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025, the total awarded was \$26,800,619. 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.

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