

FORMER SOCCER STAR NOW CARES FOR OTHER ATHLETES

Not too many people can say they got their dream job right out of college. Angel Flores is one of the lucky ones.



Flores is the assistant athletic trainer for women’s soccer at the University of Texas–El Paso (UTEP). Practice is every day during the season, and she’s at work by 6:30 a.m. and at the field by 8:00 with her medical equipment and enough water for the players. She tapes ankles and knees before practice; then back inside after practice, she provides therapeutic treatments and helps players with any pain they’re experiencing.

“It was an absolute goal of mine to pursue a career in D1 women’s athletics, especially soccer,” Flores says. The NCAA’s Division I (D1) is comprised of the intercollegiate athletics programs at the country’s largest universities.

Angel was a star soccer player in Alamogordo. She came to the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation after being diagnosed as a high school freshman with dyslexia and dyscalculia—sort of dyslexia with math and numbers—which led to anxiety. Although she often found relief while on the soccer field, she needed NMDVR to help arrange classroom accommodations with the school. These included extra time for homework, being allowed to take exams in an empty classroom, and a special pen that recorded while she wrote.

Then, during her junior year, she suffered a traumatic brain injury in an auto accident that ended her chance of playing D1 soccer. Through perseverance, support from her family, and encouragement from mentors at school, she graduated from high school.

“I was done playing, but I could still be involved in soccer by helping other athletes,” Flores remembers. She enrolled at New Mexico State University—first at the Alamogordo campus, later transferring to the Las Cruces main campus—studying sports medicine. In doing so, she became the first person in her family to go to college.

Leaving her hometown was an eye-opener. “I was in a new city and didn’t know anyone, but I fell in love with the campus. I knew I was there for a reason,” Angel recalls. “The professors wanted me to succeed once they saw I wanted to be there and wanted to learn. Even though they knew about my learning disability, I wasn’t treated differently.”

Flores especially thrived doing the hands-on portions of the curriculum and earned her Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training in spring of 2023. NMDVR continued to assist Angel through her college years, both with financial assistance for tuition and fees and



in helping to provide necessary technology to help her in her studies. Upon graduating, she was immediately hired at NMSU as athletic trainer for the cross country team. She got the soccer job at UTEP just a few months later.



“These athletes make it worth it,” Flores says. “They’re kind because they know I’m there to help them. When they’re vulnerable, they can rely on me.” She travels with the team, staying in hotels and eating meals with the players. “It’s awesome to be part of that journey with them.”

As for Angel’s future, she is pursuing a master’s degree in education and would like to take her current career to the next level, as an athletic trainer for professional women soccer players, maybe even for her favorite team. “Ideally, I would love to work for the Portland Thorns (of the National Women’s Soccer League). Although my plans have changed through the years, I knew I always wanted to be in soccer and I’m doing it. That’s the coolest thing ever!”

For information about how NMDVR can help you or someone you know, contact your nearest office. There are two dozen locations across the state: 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 is \$24,099,900. 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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