



# T'áá hwó ájit'ée'go

Navajo Nation Department for Self Reliance Customer Newsletter

## DSR Customers obtain certifications in CDL and HEO

Department for Self Reliance (DSR) Customers Andrea Benally, Malcolm Begay, and Malcolm Boyd received Certificates of Proficiency in Heavy Equipment Operation, and Jersen Martin received his certificate in Commercial Driver's License (CDL) on August 12, 2021.

The three DSR Customers completed 15 weeks of hands-on training at Utah State University (USU) Blanding's Heavy Equipment and Trucking program during the months of May, June, July, and August of 2021.

Students attending the heavy equipment and CDL program are guided through hands-on training on a range of commercial vehicles and heavy equipment. Students are also drilled on state and federal laws on regulations that apply to driving diesel trucks on highways.

USU Blanding students are provided the opportunity to get endorsements that are necessary for a successful driving career. A CDL endorsement is a certification in a specialized skill such as driving a school bus. Endorsements are not required for obtaining a CDL, however, it helps add to the driver's resume and potential for earning higher wages.

For example, having an Air Brake Adjustment certification would keep a driver on the road. The driver would be able to adjust their own brakes and not have to wait until a certified technician adjusted them. Some endorsements that USU Blanding helps students acquire include: Hazardous materials, double or triple trailers, and tank vehicles

In addition to classroom lectures, heavy equipment students use heavy

equipment simulators to develop and refine their skills and learn safety habits through repetition. The simulators also track the student's ability to maneuver the machines as well as tracking their loading techniques, time on a job, and bucket weight distribution.



Andrea Benally (middle) receives her certification in HEO from USU Blanding. Instructors, Brad Stevens, HE Instructor (left); Justin Bergeman, Associate Professor, Director of Career & Technical Education.

### Andrea Benally

Andrea Benally was working at a casino in the four corners area before she became a DSR Customer. While employed at the casino, she worked as a line cook, a keno runner, and in maintenance. Heavy equipment was not on her radar when she planned for a career.

After receiving her certificate, Andrea said, "It's great that I can do something, I can work with machines. I'm looking forward to going back to USU and getting my CDL license."

"Companies want to hire heavy equipment operators who have CDLs in addition to having a heavy equipment

operator certification," explains Andrea. "Because I want to stay close to my home near my family, having both certifications will allow me to work in the area."

"I'm looking forward to getting my permit. We had exams this morning," said Andrea, excited about graduating and taking the Commercial Learner's Permit (CLP) test. Obtaining a CDL license requires passing a background check and getting a CLP in order to practice driving commercial motor vehicles on the road lawfully.

All drivers must also pass a state sanctioned physical exam to ensure the driver meets the health requirements set by the U.S. Department of Transportation for commercial drivers. DSR Customers must be in good physical health to enroll in this extended training.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and a national truck driver shortage, some regulations may be relaxed such as the age requirement. Currently, licensed CDL 18-year-old drivers may drive intrastate. To cross state lines, drivers must be at 21 years of age. To lower age to 18, legislation must be passed by the U.S. House and Senate.

"I heard about the heavy equipment and truck driving classes, that's when I became interested," Andrea said at the time, "I was doing home care for my Mom. Now, that she has passed, I told my senior caseworker I was interested," said Andrea.

"The instructors are nice, they teach what's needed and from their own

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The Department for Self Reliance (DSR) is established under the Navajo Nation Division of Social Services within the Executive Branch of the Navajo Nation government. The DSR is responsible for administering the Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for eligible families residing on the Navajo Nation and near reservation communities within the states of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.

The DSR provides short-term cash benefits to families with minor children for their basic needs while assisting the adult(s) to secure sustainable employment through appropriate support, work experience opportunities, training and education.

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## **DSR renews Tribal Family Assistance Grant for next 3 years**

Every three years, the Department for Self Reliance (DSR) must renew its Tribal Family Assistance Plan (TFAP), which describes how the DSR plans to operate its Tribal TANF program, including eligibility criteria, service area and the types of assistance and services to be provided. The DSR's TFAP for the period of Oct. 1, 2021 to Sep. 30, 2023 was approved on Sep. 20, 2021. An amendment to the TFAP was approved on Jan. 20, 2022 to be effective Feb. 1, 2022.

The major changes to the TFAP are as follows:

### **Orientation**

New DSR Customers must attend an Orientation Session within 30 working days after approval, unless exempted.

### **TABE**

New DSR Customers must complete a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment within 30 working days after approval, unless exempted.

### **Monthly Change Report**

All DSR Customers must submit a Monthly Change Report (MCR) each month to report changes which have occurred in the last 30 days, if any, which may affect their eligibility for DSR assistance. A monthly assistance payment will not be processed until an MCR Report is submitted and the Customer's eligibility is verified.

### **Caretakers**

All Caretakers will be required to have Legal Guardianship/Custody of the minor child(ren) on whose behalf they are applying. If a relative Caretaker does not have Legal Guardianship/Custody of the minor child(ren) at the time they are applying, they will be provided a one-time opportunity to apply for the minor child and, if eligible, receive assistance for up to 12 months without establishment of Legal Guardianship/Custody on the condition that they agree to comply with established requirements.

### **Parents residing with their children**

Parents residing with their child(ren) must be included in the benefit group,

unless an exclusion applies. For two-parent households, both parents will be required to apply together for DSR assistance.

These are previous requirements which are being reestablished in order to improve services and to verify eligibility for DSR assistance and services.

### **Work Participation Activities**

Subsidized Employment whether private or public, "may be approved for a Customer once, for up to six months, in a twelve-month period".

### **Academic Support**

Academic Support: Removed "Academic Support" as an authorized work activity since this activity does not provide Customers with work skills or prepare them for employment. If a parent chooses virtual learning over sending their children to school due to pandemic safety concerns, they may be granted a good cause exemption from penalty for not meeting the work participation hours requirement.

### **New Benefit**

A new benefit, Emergency Non-Recurring, Short Term Benefits (ENRSTB), will be available to assist eligible families during a federal, state, county, or Navajo Nation-government declared natural disaster, emergency or pandemic. ENRSTB may be provided to eligible families whose Monthly Countable Gross Income does not exceed 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines for the applicable family size, this amount shall not exceed \$1,000 for each event.

### **Negotiated Work Participation Rate**

The Negotiated Work Participation Rate was increased from 32 percent to 33 percent for each of the three fiscal years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

### **Good Cause Exemption from Penalty**

Added the definition "Good Cause" which is a temporary condition or circumstance that prevents or significantly hinders an individual's ability to reasonably fulfill their weekly work participation requirement. Good cause exemptions may be granted only

for the circumstances listed.

Added the following circumstances for good cause exemptions: Government (federal, state, county or Navajo Nation) declared Natural disaster, emergency, or pandemic; Temporary lack of transportation; Temporary lack of acceptable child care; Illness verified in writing by a physician; Extreme weather conditions; Homelessness; Awaiting disability determination; Psychosocial conditions verified by a licensed medical professional; Traditional ceremony; and Domestic Violence verified by supporting documents.

### Penalties

The following reasons for penalty were added:

1. Develop an initial Personal Responsibility Plan within thirty working days from the date of approval.
2. Meet the Minimum Work Participation Hours requirement, for a month of assistance they received.
3. Review and, if necessary, update their Personal Responsibility Plan at least once every four months.
4. Failure to attend and complete a DSR Customer Orientation within thirty working days of approval.
5. Failure to complete a TABE within thirty working days of approval.

### Penalty Levels

Prior to imposing a First Level Penalty, a Written Warning shall be issued to a Customer. After issuing a Written Warning, subsequent non-compliance with a DSR requirement will result in imposing a penalty to reduce the benefit group's calculated monthly assistance amount in part, or in full, in accordance with the following:

First Level: 20 percent Reduction.

Second Level: 40 percent Reduction.

Third Level: 60 percent Reduction.

Fourth Level: 80 percent Reduction until the Customer returns to compliance with the program requirements.

The Department for Self Reliance's (DSR) Policy Manual is being revised to include the following changes:

### 1. Parents residing with their children

Our federal funding agency requires parents who live with their child(ren) to be included in a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit group, unless one of the following exclusions apply:

- a. Is not a United States citizen;
- b. Is ineligible to receive DSR assistance due to a felony conviction for welfare fraud;
- c. Is a fleeing felon or is currently violating a condition of probation or parole imposed by Federal or State law;
- d. Is receiving Supplemental Security Income;
- e. Is disabled, receiving disability benefits and chooses to be excluded from the benefit group;
- f. A Caretaker has court ordered Legal Guardianship/Custody of the children

When the policy revision goes into effect, a parent who lives with their child(ren) must be included in a DSR benefit group, unless one of the above exclusion criteria applies.

### 2. Customer Orientation

The DSR will require all adult Customers to attend and complete a DSR Customer Orientation session within thirty (30) business days after approval for DSR assistance. The purpose of the Customer Orientation is to provide adult Customers with information on Welfare Reform, Customer Rights and Responsibilities, DSR program requirements, penalties for not complying with DSR requirements, DSR assistance and services which are available, fraud and other pertinent information.

### 3. TABE Testing

The DSR will require all adult Customers to attend and complete a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE),

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*Andrea Benally learns the daily maintenance of one of USU's big rigs, and is part of the curriculum at USU Blanding's Technical Education program in CDL certification. (Image courtesy of USU)*

experiences as truck drivers. There's lots of homework. I recommend this to others if they're willing to put in the time," said Andrea.

"What I like about the training at USU is that I got to experience hands on training with the heavy equipment," Andrea said about USU's curriculum.

"School at USU was a mixture of dorm-life, classes, studying, and going back and forth from school to home to be with my kids," said Andrea, describing her life as a student. "My kids did like that fact that I was in school. They saw me driving the heavy equipment and were impressed. Now, they want to do what I do," she said about her two children.

"School was Monday through Thursday, I liked going to USU Blanding, it's a small school, not crowded and I like the area." DSR Customers either stayed in the student dorms or commuted to Blanding Monday through Thursday when classes were held.

Andrea explains she will have to obtain a CDL in order to be employable, "I will be going to the next cohort and getting my CDL. Graduation is right before Thanksgiving, I'm looking forward to getting my CDL and a job," said Andrea.

"I chose the heavy equipment program to try something different,

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better pay, and to challenge myself,” said Andrea.

“My hopes and dreams are to give my family a better life and to know that they are well taken care of,” said Andrea.



*Malcolm Boyd (middle) receives his certification in HEO from USU Blanding. Instructors, Brad Stevens, HE Instructor (left); Justin Bergeman, Associate Professor.*

### Malcolm Boyd

Malcolm Boyd of Chinle, Ariz. also received his certificate in heavy equipment, “I was always interested in heavy equipment. Finding the time and finances to get certified isn’t easy,” said Malcolm, “When I saw that the DSR paid for extended training, I jumped at the chance.”

He heard about the opportunity when DSR first partnered with USU Blanding and always kept it in the back of his mind, “I expected hard work, it was not work at all. Once you put your mind to it, it’s easy. I found it easy,” said Malcolm who received high grades.

Malcolm said, “You may have a certification in heavy equipment but a lot of companies require that the applicants have a certification in heavy equipment and a CDL. Most companies will send their potential new hires to the cheapest driving school available to get a CDL.” Malcolm is enrolled in the next cohort to get a CDL license, “Companies that are hiring now, they want operators to have certifications

for both heavy equipment and CDL,” explaining why he will continue school.

“There are so many things to like about the training I received at USU, but what I like the most was how the instructor was so passionate about teaching MYSELF the necessary skills to becoming a great operator,” said Malcolm.

“My hopes and dreams are that I get my CDL, then seek employment,” said Malcolm. He added, “Plus, truly fulfilling the lifelong commitment of being the best Daddy in the world.”



*Jersen Martin (middle) receives his certification in CDL from USU Blanding. Instructors, Loran St. Claire, CDL Instructor (left); Justin Bergeman, Associate Professor.*

### Jersen Martin

DSR Customer Jersen Martin completed the CDL classes in 10 weeks, “The instructors were fast-paced, as long as we were able to pass our driving skills test and finish our class work. Plus, the stuff we needed to know such as inspections, brakes, engine components, and pre and post-tests, I was able to complete the classes earlier.”

Getting a CDL license was always a goal for Jersen, “I am aiming for some sort of trucking job, I always wanted to get a CDL.”

Enthusied about getting the opportunity was a godsend for Jersen, “I liked the classes, they intrigued me. The instructors were helpful, they



*Malcolm Boyd practices the fine art of bucket loading, unloading and distribution at USU's Heavy Equipment program. (Image courtesy of USU)*



*Jersen Martin attaches electrical harnesses to a trailer on USU's diesel truck, as the students prepare for the truck for a trip to Salt Lake City. (Image courtesy of USU)*

made it fun and interesting. Since there were only three of us in the class, it was great! We had more driving time,” said Jersen.

“The CDL program at USU is a great learning experience. The location in Blanding, Utah is an amazing location. The instructors, and admission staff are amazing. They were always ready and available to help me. The dormitory, wellness center, and the CDL training center were well taken care of, I have no issue with USU, they made my learning experience easy,” said Jersen.

“I would like to own my own semi-truck one of these days. After starting my driving career, I hope to support my family just as they did for me while I was in school myself. My wife and our children are my biggest support system. I would like to have a promising career in truck driving to support them throughout their lives,” said Jersen.

“I am happy about this! I’m glad I did it! Having a CDL, really rounded out my resume.” He continued, “Now that I have my CDL, I look forward to getting out on the road.”

Department for Self Reliance (DSR) Customers Francine Begay and Regina Leonard participated in Subsidized Adult Employment (SAE) at Bashas' Diné Market in Chinle, Ariz., beginning Dec. 2019 through May 2020.



*Regina Leonard*

"I started working at the Chinle Bashas' in Dec. 2019, as a deli clerk and worked in the deli for the first six months," said Regina.

"At Bashas' they cross train you to work in every department. In July 2020, I became a cashier, which I enjoy."

Regina learned that the DSR was offering certified nursing assistant (CNA) training and wanted to apply, "Originally, I wanted to go back to school and attend nursing school and become a CNA. I really thought that was where my interests were at the time," said Regina.

"I learned about the Bashas' orientation through my caseworker and I also saw a flyer of an upcoming orientation at the Chinle office, so I decided to give it a shot."

"I went to the orientation, it sounded cool and I wanted a job at Bashas'. So, I applied online and I was selected," Regina was happy at the opportunity to work at Bashas'. "I like working at Bashas' as a cashier," said Regina.

Regina's family keeps her busy, "I am

from Chinle and am a two-parent case. I have five kids, two are in school, the twins are in pre-Kindergarten, and a one year old."

"Right now, I am working part-time at Bashas'," said Regina.

Regina wants other DSR Customers to consider SAE as a way to get job experience, "I want to recommend SAE to everybody, there are not many jobs around here but getting job experience is important. Having job experience shows employers that you are capable of working," said Regina.

### *Francine Begay*

DSR Customer Francine Begay's interest in SAE began by attending a Bashas' orientation at the DSR Chinle office.

Francine applied online and hoped for a bakery clerk position. She was selected and was placed in Bashas' Deli as a deli clerk, "Working in the deli was fast-paced and there are temperature checks all the time on all of the food items and lots of hand washing."

Francine cross-trained in all departments within Bashas' including cashier, courtesy clerk, bakery clerk, and deli clerk. She enjoyed cashing and working in the bakery the most, "In the bakery, the work load was slower and I had to learn how to write on a cake which isn't as easy as it looks."

Francine was hired permanently in May 2020 and she said, "I like working at Bashas'!"

"The last job I had was a home care assistant for senior citizens for 10 years on the Salt River Pima reservation. There's not a lot of jobs in that field in this area," said Francine.

"I took every opportunity the DSR offered, since I started with the self reliance program," said Francine. She added that she worked with her Senior Caseworker, Tonita Tsosie at the DSR Greasewood sub-office, who inspired her and pushed her to succeed.

Francine adds that life experiences are good teachings, "As parents we

don't think we have any experience but we do as parents raising children, I don't think we recognize that within ourselves."

"I wanted to go apply to Bashas' on my own but the orientation came up and I thought of it as my opportunity, so I applied and I was selected," she said.

"My passion is working hard. Once I was hired at Bashas' I worked really hard. This is my second career and I felt it was important to give it my all," said Francine.

"My current job title is deli clerk," said Francine. She continues, "It's not very difficult work but I like it because it's fast-paced and keeps me busy, seems like the day goes by fast and pretty soon its already time to go home."

"Customer service is a part of any of the jobs at Bashas'. I enjoy waiting on customers, and serving them," said Francine. Francine lives in Greasewood and works at Bashas' Diné Market in Dilkon, Ariz.

Francine said, "I've been a DSR customer for two years as a two-parent case. I have five kids, three boys, and two girls. My youngest child is two years old and the oldest is a high school sophomore going on to a junior this year."

Francine spoke about how the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic affected her job duties and how the store managed the pandemic, "Since the pandemic started we changed how we serve our customers. I do feel safe at work because we constantly clean in between customers, we wipe down the counters and wash our hands between every customer we serve. And of course, we wear masks."

"All of our customers wear masks and are good about keeping their distance when they order their food." Francine said, "Bashas' does temperature checks, they make sure that too many people aren't in the store, so I do feel safe at work."



Department for Self Reliance  
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unless one of the following exemptions apply:

- i. Adults who have been accepted into, or are currently attending, a post-secondary education institution;
- ii. Adults who have taken the TABE within the six (6)-month period prior

to their approval date and submit their TABE results.

- iii. Adult Caretakers who are not included in the benefit group.

The TABE provides Principal Caseworkers or Senior Caseworkers with an assessment of a Customer's educational level to be utilized in

developing the Customer's Personal Responsibility Plan and identifying appropriate work participation activities.

If you have any questions or need additional information regarding this notice, please contact your assigned Principal/Senior Caseworker.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- May 30, 2022 - HOLIDAY Memorial Day
- June 1, 2022 - HOLIDAY Navajo Nation Memorial Day

- July 4, 2022 - HOLIDAY Independence Day
- August 15, 2022 - HOLIDAY Navajo Nation Code Talker Day

Email the DSR at [info@nntanf.org](mailto:info@nntanf.org) with your feedback, comments, questions or concerns.