

# News Release

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## **DES helping clients with disabilities learn the skills to succeed in business**

**PHOENIX** – Kristian Newton grew up with a love for comic books. “Being able to read the stories, and see the graphics, whether they were black and white or color, fascinated me and was something I started sharing with my children,” said Kristian, now forty-five years old.

Five years ago, Kristian noticed he was having trouble focusing and reading his comic books. He was eventually diagnosed with a progressive disease that will eventually lead to total vision loss. While Kristian does have some vision currently, he has been diagnosed as 100 percent legally blind and has had to make changes to his life. Luckily, the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) was there to help.

Vocational Rehabilitation is a program within DES that works with people who have disabilities to achieve their goals for employment and independence. RSA employs nearly 200 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors statewide who have extensive specialized training, making them uniquely qualified to work with individuals with disabilities for the following client populations:

- Behavioral Health
- Transition Aged Students
- Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injuries
- Developmental Disabilities
- Blind/Visually Impaired
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Deaf and Blind

Kristian was referred to RSA by his doctor for vocational rehabilitation and life-skills training. “I had to learn how to live again,” said Kristian. “I had to learn how to cook, clean house, prepare for my day, take the bus, and how to read and use the braille alphabet.” Helping Kristian on his journey is RSA colleague, Angela Dial. “The key to success in RSA is building a long-term, trusting relationship between counselor and client,” said Angela. “We want to create a comprehensive program of services that not only meets the clients’ basic needs, but can help them with their business dreams, if appropriate.”

VR counselors are able to provide an array of services to assist individuals to help them ameliorate or circumvent the impediments to employment or independence that their disability may cause. Services

such as job training, rehabilitation instructional services, and the provision and training of assistive technology are just a few of the services available through RSA.

When Kristian began to lose his sight, he realized there were very few limited technologies designed to help visually impaired individuals read and experience comics. “It’s not just about reading the story; to fully appreciate a comic, you have to see the picture, understand the background, even the colors used can help set the scene,” said Kristian.

After thinking about it longer, Kristian approached Angela with a proposal. He wanted to work on creating technology that would describe each panel of a comic to the person reading it. The technology would describe the scenery; the colors, the characters involved in the panel, and then would go over the text dialog used during that scene. Word of Kristian’s idea reached the community, and he was invited to host a panel at the 2015 Phoenix ComicCon regarding his idea. “It was great, people were coming up to me telling me how this idea would help others, and they wished me the best of luck,” said Kristian.

Kristian decided to work on his project, as any artist and comic book lover would, he decided to create his own comic using technology to meet the goals he set. Kristian had been working on an idea for an outer space-based comic for a few years. *Stan’s Adventures*, follows the experiences of alien lifeform Stan, his best friend Bunwalla, and their robotic maid, Vera. Kristian has assembled a team and is working on creating *Stan’s Adventures* as the first-ever comic book for individuals who are visually impaired.

Because RSA is a state-federal partnership, DES is able to extend federal funds to clients like Kristian to help create and operate their own businesses. The clients have to develop a complete business plan, and present that plan to a committee of RSA members who will decide if the plan is sustainable.

“RSA wouldn’t be successful without the work of our community partners and vendors who assist the clients in achieving their goals,” said Angela. “Kristian is currently working with Odyssey Services Corporation on the *Stan’s Adventures* business plan while he writes more stories that he hopes to one day have accessible to all.

To learn more about how RSA can help people with disabilities achieve their goals for employment and independence, please visit [www.azdes.gov/rsa](http://www.azdes.gov/rsa).

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