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MORE ABOUT THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEAF ADULTS' POOR IMAGE

TO THE EDITOR:

“The article, “Some Factors Contributing to the Deaf Adult’s Poor Image” in the January 1972 *Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf* (pages 29-31), mentions several well-known factors that do downgrade the image of the adult deaf. While I agree to some degree with the responsibility for these factors by the deaf themselves, I do not think and hope that the writer did not intend to lay the entire blame at the feet of the adult deaf.

There is one factor that was entirely overlooked which seems to me to be the most important problem that prevents greater success toward obtaining employment for the deaf and helping them keep their jobs. I refer to the fact that practically none of us has given thought to the great need for preparing the “Hearing World” that deafness even exists. The average hearing person visualizes the blind person when they are, for the first time, faced with a deaf person. How often have you heard them react by saying, “Oh, but they can read braille, can’t they?”

There are many negative image examples in the former article but there seems to be a very soft pedal used in saying who is to blame or perhaps erroneously without intent, blaming it entirely on the deaf. Those unpleasant voice noises are 100% chargeable to teachers who have kidded themselves into thinking that these are necessary and will eventually develop into the miracle of acceptable normal speech. The deaf child’s parents cannot be blamed for this because they have been brainwashed into agreeing with the teacher. Likewise, the houseparents should not be blamed because the only substitute is the use of some form of manual communication — which is generally taboo. The resulting situation is one of continuous

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grunting and simultaneously using "underground, horrible signs invented by the students" as a means of communication.

The real responsibility for this kind of a situation that builds and makes it habit-forming into adulthood is in the hands of the school's top executive administrator. Only his concern and leadership toward correcting it is the answer to this problem.

The previous article does say that to secure the necessary corrections, "full communication must first be established between the deaf child and his parents as well as his school teachers and counsellors." AMEN to that. And I hope that the author meant this to be a "two-way" means of communication, otherwise there could be no learning accomplished without it.

Total Communication seems to be the only answer to a deaf child's improved educational achievement. The Model Secondary School for the Deaf appears to be filling an important void in a deaf child's educational experience and probably most important of all – the new Kendall School Demonstration Project which involves pre-school age children with their parents attending together in order to develop this vital communication facility. All of these very new and innovative steps point to great things to come. I foresee, in due time, generations of much more highly educated and trained deaf people. But WHAT GOOD WILL ALL OF THIS BE when we still have the great majority of hearing citizens who control our society completely IGNORANT about DEAFNESS? If we do nothing about this "All-controlling factor" as to recognizing and understanding deafness and all of its related problems – we can be accused of gross short-sightedness and be responsible for even greater hardships facing future generations of the deaf.

I, for one, now plan to spend all of my spare time and energy, not WITH the deaf, but FOR the deaf by addressing myself to hearing groups about deafness. How many of you (including those deaf persons with good speaking voices) will join me and break away from talking to ourselves in the future? Many of you can and will, I hope. This is our next greatest "Breakthrough" that is needed.

Perhaps I should close this article with a more positive and pleasant revelation. The Alexandria Potomac Lions Club, the first service club to be organized by deaf men has taken tremendous strides to gain the attention and concern for the betterment of situations surrounding the deaf through patiently taking step by step actions to inform one million Lions all over the world about the plight of the deaf. This Club, first passed a Resolution to create a Lions Helen Keller Memorial Fund for the Deaf, Inc. We had the interest and help of our hearing Lions officials and friends. It became an immediate District-wide Lions project and by now it is recognized as one of the categories in Lions International Foundation, Inc. for gifts and bequests. Of greater importance, Lions International has created "Hearing Conservation and Work For the Deaf" as an official Lions Major Activity for over 23,000 Lions Clubs in the U.S.A.

What does all of this mean? It means the beginning of that "breakthrough" to John Q. Public about deafness. The funds that will be forthcoming at an increasing rate will enable the Council (COSD) through the Helen Keller Memorial Fund for the Deaf, Inc. plus the Lions Foundation to prepare suitable and effective informational pamphlets. Specialized groups as well as the general public must be served.

It should be generally known that there are two other similar Lions Clubs with deaf members, one in Austin and the other in Dallas. More such Clubs could be organized on their own or at least join the ranks of an existing local Club by hearing and deaf staff members of State schools for the Deaf.

It will be some time before all 23,000 Lions Clubs of U.S.A. become aware and familiar with this new dimension of Service by Lionism. Perhaps you would like to assist us in spreading the good word by offering yourself as a program speaker about Deafness in general and then quote from this article the actions that Lions International has taken. **KEEP ONE IMPORTANT** fact in mind. Each Lions Club is completely autonomous. It may accept or reject any or all International suggestions. We must **SELL** the Services that Lions would be performing toward the betterment of the social and economic situations many of our deaf people must endure. The sale usually is made easier by stressing the fact that Lions would be performing a more complete and authentic tribute to the memory of Helen Keller by Serving the Deaf because she was both deaf and blind.

Finally, Helen Keller said in a speech she delivered in London in 1933: "The problems of deafness are more complex, if not more important than those of blindness. Deafness is a much worse misfortune because of the loss of the most vital stimulus – the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thoughts astir, and helps us in the intellectual company of man."

Being the coordinator for all concerned with this important project, inquiries should be addressed to me at my home address as given below.

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DEAR EDITOR:

Two of the articles in Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf, V, 3 (January, 1972) bring to mind the jingoism of Rudyard Kipling:

Take up the White Man's burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and Heathen Folly
Bring all your hope to naught.

Is the "Hearing Man's Burden" still with us today?

The article, "Communication Accuracy in a Sign-Language Interpretation of a Group Test" describes a test on eight deaf and hard-of-hearing participants at a workshop in their ability to read simple questions rendered in American Sign Language. The author says:

... Reliance on a visual channel places deaf persons at a relative disadvantage, since environmental distractions may interrupt eye contact with the interpreter. Moreover, since the American Sign Language (ASL) has evolved primarily as a vehicle for informal social discourse, it may be poorly suited for formal presentations. Finally, ... Sign Language utterances structured so as to conform to English syntax may be frequently misunderstood by deaf persons who are more competent in ASL than they are in English. (p. 30)

Participants were invited consultants and without "subnormal intelligence." But then he says:

Nor can the results be explained by poor interpreting. A videotape record of the interpreter's performance was examined later by the experimenter and judged to be adequate based on his experience as a professional interpreter. (p. 42)

However, how can we be sure that the problem was not with the Interpreter? What words were fingerspelled in the test, and how were the other words signed? Just how was the "Sign Language structure patterned after an English original?" (p. 43)

The ten questions are somewhat tricky to render into the language of signs, and they may be interpreted very differently by different interpreters.

The author offers no solutions for the poor showing of the deaf participants, no methods in which a better score could have been made. Is it necessary for the deaf subjects to have scored so poorly? Only by knowing the method of interpreting the questions can we judge the validity of this experiment. Let's not decide so fast that ASL is less than suitable for formal presentations.

The "Hearing Man's Burden" is even more evident in the article, "Some Factors Contributing to the Deaf Adult's Poor Image," in the same issue. The paper is valuable in that it conveniently lists attributes of a deaf person's

personality which *might* be evident. It would serve as a useful introduction to a neophyte rehabilitation counselor.

But what bothers me, as a deaf person, is the negative attitude of the author. Twelve times he makes absolute statements—e.g., “Deaf people have developed these undesirable habits. . .” The statements which are qualified usually use such words as “many,” “frequently,” “often,” “likely” and “even more so.” We are given such statements as:

Because the deaf have never been taught so, they do not know that certain things are just not done. For instance, they do not think anything of asking people extremely personal questions. . . . They are never taught that age has its prerogatives, and so they address their elders by their first names or even nicknames. . . . Many deaf boys have never learned about ordinary courtesies that are usually extended to the opposite sex. They often create a bad impression by their crude attitude toward women. (p. 30)

Unfortunately, the author does not discuss a reverse situation that is all too common: gratuitous advice given by hearing “experts” to deaf people. How many times have well-meaning speech therapists, teachers and other “experts” met deaf people at conventions or informal affairs and immediately conducted an unasked-for speech evaluation and correction session? “Extremely personal questions” these are. It’s happened too often.

Most schools for the deaf and most rehabilitation agencies serving the deaf in this country have Boards of Directors composed entirely of hearing people. This, too, is “Hearing Man’s Burden” thinking. The addition of well-qualified deaf people to such decision-making levels would vastly improve the quality of schools and agencies. But how many have taken this step? Not many.

Indeed, the author has a way of separating “the more ignorant deaf” from “the better educated deaf person.” He uses the phrase, “the deaf” as a noun eleven times. *All* “the deaf” are persons. A small point? Perhaps, but at least in private we deaf people fed up with blanket statements about “the deaf,” are beginning to use the phrase “the hearies”.

The Hearing Man’s Burden is not to loftily “Fill full the mouth of Famine and bid the sickness cease.” Kipling spoke of “when your goal is nearest the end for others sought” What about deaf people’s goals, which may or may not coincide with hearies’ goals?

It’s a two-way problem, for respect is due to handicapped people, too. In one of the final paragraphs the author correctly points out the failures of parents, residential school counselors, teachers and rehabilitation counselors to foster a sense of responsibility in deaf children and youth. This only points out the necessity for the professional who wishes to work for deaf people, to understand the real life-situation that deafness causes. The grimaces, personal questions “undesirable attitudes,” and seeming lack of

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responsibility all arise from experiences inflicted on deaf people by hearing people.

We must keep in mind that people cope with their environments in the best ways they know. The so-called "undesirable attitudes" are all they have. Behavior may be odd, inappropriate or even repulsive to the initiated or the neophyte. There are plenty of hearing people with the same attitudes, too! The professional person who wishes to work with the deaf should seek out the reasons for such behavior and, when indicated, seek to modify it.

However, there is a subtle, two-pronged tendency among workers with the deaf either to try to make an "imitation hearie" out of the deaf person or to fail to accept him as a person. The workers must be on guard against such tendencies that will ultimately foster negative feelings towards deaf people in general.

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