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MANPOWER — THE CONSUMER VIEWPOINT

By JACK LEVESQUE, Student, Gallaudet College

I believe that consumer viewpoint on vocational rehabilitation services can best be offered from the standpoint of a college student who has had the opportunity of being a client under three separate State vocational rehabilitation agencies.

I have found the one big issue with these vocational rehabilitation agencies to be *communication*. I do not mean to go into the old-time issue of communication in terms of sign language and fingerspelling but rather to touch various aspects of communication in regard to *relationship between counselor and client, relationship between the place of training and vocational rehabilitation, community communication, and coordinated communication on actual planning and approaches towards goals*.

Let us tackle each one separately. It is necessary that the counselor and the client have at least a few sessions together in order to evaluate the over-all picture of the client. It is also necessary for the counselor to obtain from the client information regarding his goals, his hopes, and his preferences. The counselor should take steps to coordinate the program being planned for the client to fit within the preferred goals as closely as possible. Quite often, the client goes to a suggested place of training because the counselor thinks that it is a good place for him and possibly regardless of the client's preferences and goals.

It should be obvious that this second category, place of training, should play a most important role in the counselor's book. One does not sell a product without endorsing it. It is essential that the counselor or the director of a State vocational rehabilitation agency visit every major training center for deaf adults, such as Gallaudet College, St. Paul Technical-Vocational Institute, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Delgado College, California State University, Northridge, and others. It may look like an expensive venture, but it is important and may save money in terms of proper placement of clients seeking training. A visit to these sites will tell much more about them than can be obtained from brochures and catalogs. This will also afford the counselor opportunity to meet with the program

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administrators and to gather first-hand knowledge about each place and evaluate their appropriateness for his individual clients. The visit should preferably cover a few days to allow the counselor to become familiar with all aspects of the program.

Frequently, clients need counseling and advice in regard to community communication. It is a fact that many counselors do not know much about the community affairs in which deaf people participate. There is a wealth of information in these circles that the counselor could familiarize himself with and utilize when the situation requires it. Vocational rehabilitation district offices should be equipped with teletypewriters so that the deaf client can communicate with his counselor whenever the need arises. This would be helpful in establishing a sound relationship and a quick means of communication with the client able to receive assistance when he needs it. A TTY would provide the counselor with a means for communicating with the general deaf community also.

The last point, coordinated communication on actual planning and approaches towards goals, is the most important in my book. The client and the counselor must work together in planning his future. It may happen that the client just goes on to school and picks his courses with no particular goal in mind other than to graduate. Many client problems could be prevented through careful program planning involving the counselor as well as the client. Also, the goals of the client need to be constantly evaluated against the backdrop of his training experience with opportunity for change when that should be necessary or feasible.

I hope that I have expressed adequately my concern for the need of effective communication between the deaf client and his vocational rehabilitation counselor.