

## FORUM

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We are reprinting, by permission, two recent editorials which are particularly pertinent to the times. In one, Dr. McCay Vernon implies that the Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and the Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf "have been summarily eliminated" by the Federal government, which is not completely accurate. The COSD is no longer receiving federal support; that is true. However, it is entirely within the realm of possibility that the COSD will continue, albeit in a different way. The PRWAD and the RID have lost federally sponsored projects, but neither has ceased to exist. The point is minor and is really of little consequence in terms of larger considerations suggested by Dr. Vernon and by Mr. Jack Hutchison in their respective editorials.

The key concept with which members of the several organizations professing an interest in the problems of deaf people and the securing and provision of services for deaf people should be concerned about is the very crucial point made by Mr. Hutchison so clearly that "there exist some 17 national organizations functioning in various areas of services to persons who are deaf. Yet the person who is deaf is less adequately served than any other disability group."

It does seem that if there are 17 organizations purportedly interested in services, yet services are sadly lacking, we should assume logically that there is something wrong with the *modus operandi* separately and collectively with organizations. It may be rather difficult to identify all 17 organizations, but the fact that they exist and function separately apparently without regard to commonality of interests or goals should suggest that we begin identifying one another for the purpose of seeking a way or ways of unification of effort.

Abraham Lincoln expressed it best when he illustrated the concept of strength in unity with the bundle of sticks. Just as his point was valid then, so does it remain valid today. If organizations are to be heard they must speak with a voice loud enough to *be* heard. At the present time there are

too many “voices”, and each one not much more than a whisper. With unity the several whispers which cannot be heard, could swell to a shout. And these are days when we have to “roar like a lion.”

We recall an editorial we published in the May 1973 issue of the Newsletter in which we suggested that it was high time to call a Congress for the purpose of unifying the efforts of the several key organizations which exist to serve deaf people. We were thinking more, at that time, about harmonizing our objectives than about political effectiveness. However, now that Dr. Vernon and Mr. Hutchion have raised the point, we believe that a coordinated effort to effect the kind of support that rehabilitation of the deaf requires should now receive top priority. Perhaps we can deal with the alignment of objectives at the same time. One thing seems certain – if we are to combat whimsical treatment by public agencies we must be able to speak with a collective voice.

With this thought in mind, we urge you to read and ponder the editorials reprinted herein: on the one hand, the emphasis of too many weak voices (Mr. Hutchison) and on the other, the loss of vital support monies affecting the delivery (non-delivery) of services to deaf people (Dr. Vernon).

### **H.E.W. DEVASTATES DEAFNESS**

Twenty-five years of work in rehabilitation of the deaf is being wiped out with elimination of many federal programs. Highly successful projects, such as Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf which involved deaf consumers in leadership roles, have been summarily eliminated with no explanation. The Registry of Interpreters and the Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf have met similar fates. There is no knowledge of who made the decisions or why.

It is especially sad that in an area such as deafness, where for years there had been a dearth of services, certain embryonic programs have been arbitrarily wiped out. The work in mental health which served young deaf children and their families through the Langley-Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute had changed the entire picture for deaf youth and their parents in California. Yet funding was pulled out despite appeals from all over the nation. The few services which have survived, such as Terry O'Rourke's Communicative Skills Program and Dr. Ray Jones' Leadership Training Program in Deafness, do so on token budgets.

A country which ceases to invest in its major asset, people, has assumed a self-destructive policy. Business principles of profit and loss do not generalize to a government agency such as H.E.W. which is responsible for human services. Whereas, the Edsel car could be eliminated by Ford Motor Company because it ceased to be profitable, the wholesale eradication of

already minimal services to deaf people simply denies these individuals a fair chance to survive economically and to make a contribution to our society. It does not eliminate deaf people or their needs.

Two successes of programs which have been slashed or eliminated completed their doctoral degrees recently. Dr. Allan Sussman and Dr. Victor Galloway, prelingually deafened men now making major contributions to the field of deafness, are examples of the dividend paid by the kind of services H.E.W. has devastated. Taking Dr. Sussman as a case in point: here was a man working as a printer until H.E.W. established the New York University Research and Training Center which made it possible for bright deaf people to go to graduate school. Dr. Sussman has pioneered mental health services in New York City which reach deaf mental patients with whom no hearing psychologist or psychiatrist could ever learn to communicate. Both he and Dr. Galloway are now making contributions to their fellow man at higher levels than would have been possible before.

For years members of the deaf community were denied any leadership or administrative role in the field of deafness. The problem was compounded by an educational methodology that kept communication in the homes of deaf children to a minimum and then denied deaf youth active student governments and adequate autonomy during school years. Such limiting early environments, followed by a lack of opportunity at the adult level, left an understandable unevenness of available leadership and administrative personnel in the deaf community. This was especially pronounced among the prelingually deafened. However, within the last decade, changing educational methods and the availability of interpreters and scholarships have provided changes never before possible. Consequently, a nucleus of competent young deaf persons with tremendous potential for leadership is coming on the scene who are able to help those who have carried the responsibility almost single handedly.

To have this entire process reversed by the elimination of the very programs that have brought it about is a preventable tragedy. Prevention in this case requires political action. Representatives of key organizations such as the N.A.D., C.A.I.D., C.E.A.S.D., I.A.P.O., F.R.A.T., G.C.A.A., etc., need to be given decision-making authority and budgets by their organizations. They should meet and coordinate a massive campaign directed toward support of the interests of deaf children and their families and deaf adults. They should do this, not for selfish reasons, but as a way to serve the country and the deaf community.

To fail to take this aggressive and essential step is to delegate by default the fate of deaf people to federal budget analysts from the world of commerce whose knowledge and concern about deafness are most kindly characterized as "Indifferent ignorance." — McCay Vernon, Editor, American Annals of the Deaf.

## WHO PLANS FOR THE DEAF?

This is the nonvisible disability that develops second class citizens. Persons who are deaf are denied full citizenship in our society. There are 13,500,000 deaf and hard of hearing persons in the United States. About three million persons have no usable hearing for speech communication, and the pre-vocational deaf number 400,000. Noise pollution may greatly increase the number of deaf persons by the year 2000. It is possible by that time we will still be attempting to function under the same archaic statutes and rehabilitation delivery systems, and the problems of deaf persons will continue.

Lack of communication tends to offer second-class citizenship to persons who are deaf. It is not only that the deaf cannot communicate with the hearing, but the hearing cannot communicate with the deaf. The burden is placed on the deaf person. He must learn to express himself so the hearing person can understand, as the deaf person lives in a hearing world. Survival requires adaptation.

Although rehabilitation services for deaf persons are available through the state-federal rehabilitation program, less than 17,000 of the 326,000 persons rehabilitated last year were deaf. Are we avoiding this categorical disability group, or is this group too difficult to rehabilitate? Granted, early detection of hearing problems and focused programs of special education could ease the rehabilitation problems of deaf persons: it still falls to the expertise of rehabilitation to complete the job. Only 45 out of 50 state rehabilitation programs have counselors specially trained to serve the deaf; and only 31 states have state supervisors for services to persons who are deaf. It is doubtful that any state rehabilitation program has an adequate number of trained personnel to serve the people constituting this largest single chronic disability group.

Constraints to successful rehabilitation of persons who are deaf include:

1. archaic statutes (e.g. the oral system of communication is the only system allowed in some state schools for the deaf);
2. only persons who are deaf learn a system of communication: hearing persons are not expected to master any useful system to communicate with deaf persons;
3. organizations dedicated to persons who are deaf vie among themselves for membership and status, subsequently services continue to be fragmented;
4. low expectations of ability of the deaf persons to perform; and
5. human service systems focus so much on the loss of hearing itself, that they forget this person as an individual with other needs as well.

Among the forces at work on behalf of persons who are deaf is the NRA Task Force on Deafness, which is to bring to the attention of the NRA membership potential for services to the deaf. The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation has a Committee on Deafness charged with the responsibility of explicating possibilities of services for the deaf and encouraging other state directors to incorporate such services into

their programs. There exist some 17 national organizations functioning in various areas of services to persons who are deaf. Yet the person who is deaf is less adequately served than any other disability group.

There are some positive trends. In the future, persons who are deaf may fare a little better. There is a movement toward total communication, a combination of manual and oral methodologies, for both deaf and hearing persons. The Baltimore, Md., schools are teaching total communication beginning in the lower grades of the public schools. A Congress on Deafness Rehabilitation is being recommended for early 1974 by the NRA Task Force on Deafness. It is designed to draw together knowledgeable persons throughout the United States in an effort to agree upon needed services, service areas, and rehabilitation delivery systems. — Jack Hutchison, Director of Rehabilitation, Goodwill Industries of America. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, July-August 1973.