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TRENDS IN DELIVERING REHABILITATION SERVICES TO SEVERELY HANDICAPPED DEAF PERSONS

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This paper might serve no better purpose than to give tribute to the individuals, organizations and agencies in later and recent times that have through their work, concern, compassion, and persistence in behalf of severely handicapped deaf people helped to influence lawmakers to pass increasingly liberal legislation affecting their welfare.

Legislation for the Severely Handicapped

Starting with the 1943 Amendments to the original Vocational Rehabilitation Act which broadened the program in authorizing services to eliminate or reduce disabilities, vocational rehabilitation legislation has steadily expanded the service base for severely handicapped persons.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1954 (Public Law 83-565) which among other modernizing authorizations provided a new system of project grants to State agencies and a funding structure for research, demonstration and training activities opened the gateway to programs and projects that have had a profound effect on the rehabilitation of the severely disabled. This is well-chronicled in the annals on deafness in the floodtide of projects for deaf people that took place in the late fifties and the decade of the sixties.

The 1965 Act (Public Law 89-333) was another giant step forward carrying much further rehabilitation services to severely handicapped persons. This enlightened legislation authorized new and expanded vocational rehabilitation programs to make service benefits available to all disabled in need of them including innovative projects to meet the needs of the most severely disabled. The Act served as a tremendous spur to research in behalf of severely handicapped deaf adults whose rehabilitation potential until then was largely unknown. Project work undertaken expressly for this group demonstrated beyond a doubt that given time and appropriate training and services provided by personnel with deep understanding of their needs, severely handicapped deaf persons were indeed rehabilitable. While little of the work begun at the projects went beyond the demonstration stage due to dollar problems that ordinarily beset such efforts when Federal funds are terminated, the evidence of the rehabilitability of severely handicapped deaf people remained. Scores of former project clients are working at jobs today and enjoying the normal privileges of employed persons due to their participation in these pioneer rehabilitation programs.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) with its mandate that individuals having the most severe handicaps are to be served first brings to a climax the

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acknowledgment expressed in progressively liberal terms in earlier rehabilitation legislation that our country has an obligation to provide to its most handicapped citizens equal opportunity in fact, not just in label.

The passage of the 1973 Act which in addition to its overall emphasis on service to the most severely disabled provides authorization for the establishment of rehabilitation projects for the handicapped, especially for those with the most severe handicaps, including the deaf, whose maximum vocational potential has not been reached, must give much satisfaction to those who pioneered in the early work with severely handicapped deaf people. The enactment of this legislation gives new hope to parents despairing of ever seeing their grown severely handicapped deaf children achieving their potential. The thousands of severely handicapped deaf individuals who have not yet been reached by rehabilitation but are in desperate need of services will swell the ranks of the many now standing by.

Rehabilitation counselors continually faced with the perplexing problem of serving severely handicapped deaf people for whom no appropriate facilities exist should in the years ahead see gradual easement in their large inactive caseloads. This hope of the parents, this acceptance for vocational rehabilitation services of thousands, who have been ignored, this reduction in counselor frustration are products of the New Act. They are not in themselves the significant social advances that the Congress intends. Such come only from the actual implementation of the law. A law is not really much until it is exploited, fully developed in every possible way and that will not happen in a vacuum. It is you people in PRWAD who must eliminate that vacuum by demanding and securing the necessary action to mount appropriate service programs that the Act authorizes.

The Role of the PRWAD

In accepting the challenge in the Act through dedication of its fifth biennial conference to the severely handicapped, the PRWAD has assumed the goals and the spirit that has carried work with severely handicapped deaf people thus far. The task it has set for itself in laying the groundwork for action to improve the lives of the severely handicapped deaf people of this country is yet another indication of its continuing commitment to the principles on which the organization was founded. The important work that will ensue from this conference which has brought together disciplinarians from many fields will form the bridgehead needed to attack the consuming problem of providing to severely handicapped deaf people whose maximum vocational potential has not been reached the type of services they need.

The Early Foundations

In reviewing the early literature on vocational rehabilitation of deaf people it is interesting to note among the broad statements addressed to the needs and problems of deaf people in general, remarks directed to the urgency for attention to the most severely handicapped.

At the Institute on Personal, Social and Vocational Adjustment to Total Deafness held at the New York School for the Deaf in White Plains in 1957, Powrie Vaux Doctor and Boyce R. Williams brought sharp focus on the plight of severely handicapped deaf people. At this historic institute which marked the first formal gathering of professionals and deaf consumers to discuss the vocational rehabilitation of deaf people, Doctor (1) expressed these growing feelings:

“We have been oriented in the past, with a few exceptions, to thinking of people as being deaf, or as being blind, or as being crippled, but in this modern twentieth century we must adjust our thinking and our acceptance to include

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individuals who are both deaf and blind, deaf and aphasic, blind and crippled, and even those who suffer not only from a physical handicap, but also from a mental handicap and for this group we need not only schooling, rehabilitation, and social service but a genuine acceptance of them into our present day scheme of life." (p. 409)

In the twenty-seven years that have passed since these words, we have gone a very long way in formulating concepts about the severely handicapped. Would it be that we could say as much about meeting the obvious needs.

In delineating the problems of deafness complicated by other handicaps Doctor made this observation:

" . . . it is difficult to make a person realize that deafness may also mean a weakness in language and in reading, and it may also mean emotional and social handicaps. When communication breaks down between a mature deaf person and his environment, handicaps may occur worse than deafness." (p. 410).

In 1974 we continue to be confronted with this difficulty which has become even greater as the world has become more communicative leaving far behind deaf people with poor communication skills and other problems interfering with their rehabilitation. In considering the impact of the hundreds of sign language classes conducted over the country in the last few years, there is the comforting realization that severely communicatively handicapped deaf persons are among the most benefited by these classes in their acute need for a communicative environment.

At the White Plains Institute, Boyce Williams (2) in discussing rehabilitation personnel shortages stressed the need for trained personnel to work with severely handicapped deaf persons:

"These are the people whom we must have to provide the wide selection of services that our marginal and sub-marginal deaf people need if they are to attain the capacity for independence necessary to sustained competitive employment. We do not currently have people like this except such teachers as might qualify and be available. . . The critical aspects of the dearth of this personnel resource is clearer if we take a look at the kinds of service that they will provide. It will be patterned to the given individual's needs. They may teach him some of the three R's, enough language, writing, reading and arithmetic to achieve a reasonable degree of independence in the community. With another person they may strive to improve personal appearance, personal hygiene, and performance in interrelationships. Such persons will give the necessary sustained supportive work to emotionally involved deaf persons who cannot otherwise cope with environmental demands. Perhaps it is proper to think of a worker of this kind as being almost as important in rehabilitation of the deaf as the counselor himself, especially in reference to the marginal deaf." (p. 296).

In his speech at the 1957 institute, Williams outlined the type of facility that he envisioned was needed by workers serving the marginal and submarginal deaf.

"It is apparent that these highly specialized workers must have a place in which to extend their services to the severely handicapped deaf people who need them and that such a place should probably be a residential institution. In our early thinking on this problem we have labeled this proposed unit a personal adjustment training center because that is the classification given to the types of services these people need in the vocational rehabilitation program. Although we do not have enough experience to assign a priority rating to any given facility for the deaf, we would place none higher than personal adjustment training centers where deaf adults whose handicapping condition is compounded by personal problems may be served." (p. 297).

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Program Development

The torch lit in 1957 has passed through many hands. In 1959 the Maryland School for the Deaf under the leadership of Lloyd A. Ambrosen served as sponsor for a national workshop to develop *Guidelines for the Establishment of Rehabilitation Facilities for the Deaf* (3). The guidelines served as the foundation for research projects for severely handicapped deaf people undertaken in the 1960's sponsored by the Michigan Association for Better Hearing and Speech, by the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service in St. Louis, by Morgan Memorial, Inc., in Boston, by the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center, and by the Jewish Vocational Service in Chicago. The Lapeer State Home and Training School in Michigan which undertook a research project for mentally retarded deaf people, the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Center for Deaf People in Delavan and the Rehabilitation Center for the Deaf in Cave Spring, Georgia, were among other programs that developed during this period of heightening activity in the special area of program development for severely handicapped deaf people.

A subsequent set of guidelines on establishment of rehabilitation facilities for the deaf developed at the University of Wisconsin in 1962 along with research and workshop reports concerning services to severely handicapped deaf people has formed the nucleus of the available literature on program development in this area.

Workshops for the Severely Handicapped

Workshops have been an important vehicle in carrying forward program development for severely handicapped deaf people. Not the least of these have been workshops for religious workers for deaf people who traditionally have been the main support of deaf people with serious personal problems. The large number of religious workers who are members of the PRWAD attests to their cooperative relationship with those from other sectors represented, that is so vital in service to the most severely handicapped.

A Workshop on Comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Multiply Disabled Deaf Persons held in 1968 helped to identify the services needed by deaf persons additionally handicapped by such disorders as mental retardation, emotional disturbance, learning disability, vision impairment, palsy, orthopedic conditions, and low vitality. Joseph Hunt (4) who was then Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration observed succinctly in the Foreword of the workshop report that appropriate practices and inspired services are the keys to the rehabilitation fulfillment of multiply disabled deaf people.

Communication Tools

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is giving special attention to the interpreting needs of severely handicapped deaf people including the deaf-blind. This will be of increasing importance as vocational rehabilitation agencies prepare to meet the anticipated deluge of requests for assistance from severely handicapped deaf people as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 comes into gear. The new requirement in the Act that the rehabilitation client and the counselor are to prepare jointly a written rehabilitation plan for the client and renew it annually will, in the case of counselors to deaf people without adequate communication skills, create new demands for skilled interpreters simply because joint preparation, joint review, joint planning require agreement, require exchange of thinking and consequently an appropriate level of communication between counselor and deaf client.

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The Georgia Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is already preparing a cooperative working plan with the Georgia RID to assure that State interpreter needs can be met.

The Communicative Skills Program will conduct this year at five selected State rehabilitation agencies a demonstration Total Immersion Program in Manual Communication to facilitate the development of manual communication skills in agency personnel.

Guidelines for Special Projects and Demonstrations for the Deaf

The Office of Deafness and Communicative Disorders, RSA, has prepared on the basis of several years of work by a task force (5) chaired by Vernon Glenn, then, a committee (6) working under Larry Stewart, a set of guidelines describing the purpose of the special projects and demonstrations, the population to be served, the services to be provided, staffing and community services needed by severely handicapped deaf people to guide agencies and organizations interested in entering this work in submitting applications for grants.

Postsecondary Training

The past five years has been a period of bustling activity the country over as postsecondary program development for deaf people finally became a reality. Beginning with the establishment of the OE-SRS jointly supported demonstration programs at Delgado College, at Seattle Community College and at St. Paul Technical-Vocational Institute, and followed by the development of programs at Lee College in Baytown, Texas, at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California, at Community College of Denver, at the Columbus Technical Institute in Ohio and at approximately twenty other schools, postsecondary training for deaf people has become a decisive force in improving their employment outlook. A search is on for funds to continue and expand the important work begun at the levels of excellence that have been demonstrated. Section 302 (Vocational Training Service for Handicapped Individuals) in the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (7) (p. 23-24) is a logical source if sufficient funds are appropriated and made available.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications, a new case service available to vocational rehabilitation clients, opens the way for counselors to provide teletype equipment to their deaf clients as a means of breaking the instant job plateau that telephone communication barriers have created for them in the past. A state-of-the-art paper on teletype equipment for deaf people will become available in the spring.

Higher Education

The vocational rehabilitation role in supporting higher education for deaf people is uncertain now. Section 103(a)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (8), reads in part: *Provided*, That no training services in institutions of higher education shall be paid for with funds under this title (Title I Vocational Rehabilitation Services) unless maximum efforts have been made to secure grant assistance, in whole or in part, from other sources to pay for such training. (p. 14).

We do not know how this might affect the approximately two thousand deaf persons now attending colleges and universities through assistance they receive from their

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State vocational rehabilitation agencies. It will depend on how each State interprets the law and on the financial aid available elsewhere.

The foregoing genesis of program development for severely handicapped deaf people is history. We must take care now of the present. Whether or not these bright opportunities for at last coming firmly to grips with the urgent needs of deaf people are grasped and utilized depends upon your action, singly and collectively. The time has come for aggressive, courageous action from you people in the front lines who are daily faced with the frustrations of much, much too little being available for even the most obviously needed services to render employable and independent the thousands of trainable deaf persons whose birthright to share responsibilities and opportunities in accordance with their potentials has been shamefully ignored since our beginnings. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, if properly exploited by you and you and you can be the mechanism by which this national shame is expunged. Surely we who have conquered the infinity of space can put together the known and proved parts to bring our deaf brethren their entitlements. The answers and the actions lie with you.

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