

October 2019

Preface

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Recommended Citation

Schein, J. D. (2019). Preface. *JADARA*, 9(4). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol9/iss4/5>

PREFACE

SCD—Coordinator, Consultant or Commissioner?

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The Model State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation of Deaf Clients (MSP) urges every state to employ “a staff person who has as his chief responsibility planning, developing and implementing structured, identifiable programming of rehabilitation services for deaf persons” (Schein, 1973, p. 12). The MSP views this position as its focal point. The Statewide Corrdinator of Services for Deaf Clients (SCD) makes tangible the state commitment to improved programming for its deaf population. Unfortunately, the MSP description of SCD’s allows room for misinterpretation of their role and functions. Some ways of construing the SCD’s position could be counterproductive. Indeed, as this paper will attempt to show, the SCD could be a hindrance to implementation of the MSP, rather than the key to its success.

What needs to be said first is that the SCD functions within an agency devoted to the rehabilitation of all physical and a number of psychosocial disabilities. At this stage in the maturation of most VR agencies attitudes toward deafness, the SCD usually faces substantial competition for the agency funds. How the SCD fulfills his position in the state agency is apt to play a major role in the share the administration allocates to deafness.

The state agency definition of the SCD role will vary from state to state. Usually the SCD fulfills a staff position, advisory in nature. Direct supervision of counselors is seldom a part of the SCD functions, though one or two SCDs do have such responsibilities now. Also differing among agency organizational patterns is the status of the SCD. The SCD may report to one of a number of administrative offices. Most desired is direct access to the agency head, in which case the SCD acts as advisor to the director on deafness. Regardless of the organizational pattern, the SCD will in all states be the principal official concerned solely with deafness and, hence, with implementation of the MSP.

Since the specific means by which the SCD will aid in implementing the MSP will depend partially upon these structural details, this discussion must deal with the generalized case, one which likely will not apply strictly to any particular SCD. Nonetheless, the issues raised touch virtually all SCDs.

However he accomplishes it, the SCD’s major objective should be to raise the states commitment to deafness rehabilitation up to a level adequate to the needs of all deaf clients. Attaining this objective requires input to budget planning. How the state director chooses to gain that input will, or course, not be the same in all states. But in one way or another, every state director will look to the SCD for assistance in assigning the state VR resources.

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To fulfill his role in planning, the SCD must be knowledgeable about the budgetary process, the state priorities, and the needs and desires of the deaf community. With respect to preparation of the state VR budget, the SCD must be aware of the time lines for its construction. State agency budgets are prepared two and three years in advance. Many persons outside the VR agency are involved; e.g., the governor, key legislators, various fiscal agents. To be effective the SCD should be able to adopt a longrange view, as well as to react to short-range condtions and the objectives of numerous state organs. Justification of budget requests must be in terms persuasive to the readers inside and outside the VR agency.

The SCD may not necessarily be asked to contribute to the budget in dollars and cents. The administrator more likely will ask for estimates of clients to be served and of facilities needed. The fact that the SCD does not respond in monetary terms does not alter the contribution to budget planning. Every counselor, every service has an equivalent dollar representation. Whether or not the SCD makes the translation of needs to dollars is unimportant. What is critical is that the state expressed commitment to deafness rehabilitation be matched by its budget allocation.

Achieving the desired support for deaf clients will depend, in the long run, on good information properly presented. Planning should not be the victim of emotionalism. The SCD advocates improved services for deaf clients, but these improvements occur in the context of an agency serving all handicapped persons. A reasoned approach—one which recognizes the agency mandate to serve handicaps other than deafness—will be most successful. To say this does not imply that the SCD should be shy and retiring. Not at all. The extent of aggressiveness, however, must be balanced against arousing the antagonism of colleagues and administrators.

Recognizing the needs of other disabilities can help the SCD in gaining parity for the deaf clients. The SCD influences agency policy; he does not direct it. Therefore, he must have the confidence of the state administrator and the support of his colleagues on the staff.

It can also be said that the SCD influence will be no greater than the strength that the deaf community permits. To the state administrator, the SCD will likely be the deaf community representative. As a representative, the SCD can provide information about the deaf community needs and desires. In conference with the state administrator, the SCD reflects the probable reactions of the deaf community to changes in agency policies.

To truly represent the deaf community, the SCD needs to be known by and thoroughly familiar with deaf people in the state. The SCD must expect to spend time meeting with his constituency, attending conventions, talking with leaders in the group. The deaf community, as is true of most groups of individuals, has many factions. On a particular issue, more than one point of view will exist. The SCD must be skillful in recommending a decision to the state agency which will best further the deaf community interests. A tender skin or a boor-

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ish manner will ill become the SCD. Deftness in avoiding confrontation with, and eloquence in communicating the agency policies to, deaf people are the hallmarks of the successful SCD.

Not only to the agency and the deaf community, but also to the general public, the SCD will represent deaf people. The SCD needs to know, then, what he does not know. The SCD should be an expert on sources of information about deafness. He should not expect to have all the answers. Modesty in "speaking for" deaf people will be appreciated by the general public and the deaf community, even if the SCD happens to be deaf.

Staying in touch with the deaf community will entail meetings at nights and on weekends. The SCD should not, however, consider himself as needing to work a seven-day week. Such a view of the SCD demeans the deaf community. Deafness is a severe disability, but those who are deaf are not incompetent. They need vigorous support, not paternalism. The SCD superiors will certainly adjust the working schedule to provide the necessary freedom to meet at odd hours, as well as the time off for rest and relaxation. When the SCD is deaf, the scheduling problem becomes complicated. The deaf SCDs should assure themselves of time free from the cares of the office. They may occasionally explain to their deaf friends (as well as reminding themselves) that relief from workday problems is essential to good health.

The manner in which the SCD comports himself reflects on the deaf community. Since serving deaf clients is his job, the SCD naturally has a full-time concern about deafness. An overconcern, however, would imply that deaf people lacked the capacity for self care. The example the SCD would be setting is of a weak, dependent constituency requiring custodial care, rather than that of a capable, industrious group of people fully cognizant of its own needs and desires, requiring only liaison with government officials to achieve the goals it set for itself. The SCD must remain aware that deaf persons, individually and collectively, accurately perceive their own conditions. The function of the SCD is to assist, to facilitate, to communicate, and to serve the deaf community and the VR agency in expediting the work of concern to both.

In the title SCD does the "C" stand for Consultant, Coordinator or Commissioner? The last alternative is a joke, of course. The SCD does not head an agency. He represents a program. Perhaps an occasional SCD in his enthusiasm, forgets his true role and conducts himself like a commissioner. But even commissioners report to others. The SCD simply needs to be reminded of his interdependent status within the VR agency.

As a consultant, the SCD is the agency "answer man", the person to whom others turn for information and advice. The role is sufficiently demanding not to make added responsibilities attractive.

The SCD may have coordinating functions along with consulting duties. A coordinator facilitates the work of other divisions of his agency and of other agencies. He strives to minimize duplication and conflict, to increase communication between the agency and the deaf community, to strengthen the ser-

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vices provided deaf clients. Those are substantial tasks. Nothing more needs to be added to make the position vital to implementation of the MSP.

The SCD aims to improve the vocational rehabilitation of deaf clients. He knows what the deaf community needs and what the VR agency can provide. He follows both. And by doing so, he leads both.

REFERENCE

Schein, J.D. (Ed.) *Model for a State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation of Deaf People*. Monograph No. 3. PRWAD, Silver Spring, Md., 1973.