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USE OF INTERPRETERS IN THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROCESS

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Charge: To define problems and make recommendations related to effective utilization of interpreters in the Vocational Rehabilitation process.

INTRODUCTION

The National Interpreter Training Consortium (NITC) is currently in its first year of operation. It is nationwide in operation and has as its purposes to:

1. Upgrade interpreter skills;
2. Develop ongoing interpreter training programs;
3. Develop training programs for interpreters for "low-verbal" deaf persons;
4. Train interpreter trainers;
5. Educate deaf persons in how to use an interpreter (cooperative program with the National Association of the Deaf).

At least three states (California, Connecticut, and New York) have established, or are in the process of doing so, coordination of interpreter services through state or private agencies. These services are intended to improve services for deaf people and agencies through a program whereby requests for interpreter services will become a centralized operation.

PROBLEMS

As should be anticipated, almost all of the problems which were identified had to do with the various aspects of interpreting. Seventeen specific problems were identified and were generally common during each of the different discussions. In addition, two other problem areas, not specific to interpreting, were identified (18 and 19) and are incorporated in this report because of the number of SCD's who expressed concern.

1. Most states indicated that there are difficulties in developing an Interpreter's Fee Schedule which compensates for skill level, certification vs. non-certification, and difficulty of interpreting situation.

2. Obtaining competent interpreters when they are needed is a major problem especially in rural areas.

3. Many SCDs felt that their State RID Chapters need help in improving their effectiveness as resources for identification and evaluation of interpreters.

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4. Evaluating the skill level of an interpreter seems to be a responsibility for which no satisfactory solution is apparent.

5. The SCD's feel that many general counselors are not using interpreters when there is an obvious need for one. This problem is of great concern if implementation of the IWRP is to be realized.

6. The growing need for interpreters versus the availability of case service monies presents a problem which should be a concern of agency administrators.

7. There is no generally accepted document for use by the agencies which spells out performance criteria and expectations for an interpreter to follow when hired or contracted.

8. How do we justify the provision of one-to-one interpreting for long-term training programs for the deaf (four year college)?

9. How do we deal with job security for interpreters? Most interpreting is short-term, intermittent, contractual work with no Social Security, medical coverage or retirement benefits.

10. Many workshops are inadequate for/or resistive to serving the low functioning deaf person. The use of an interpreter in this type of setting does not really meet the client's needs in too many instances.

11. RID certification of interpreters has not solved our problems. Some good interpreters do not wish to be RID certified for various reasons. There are also problems with the preparation and certification process.

12. There have been situations in which an interpreter did not respect the confidential aspects of a client's case. This happens in the community and sometimes "in-house" in casual conversational or "gossip" situations.

13. There are many classes in manual communication being taught by individuals with little or no apparent qualification as instructors.

14. Who has the legal responsibility for interpreter services in postsecondary education settings? The burden has fallen on the Vocational Rehabilitation agency. It is felt that the colleges and universities must assume at least some responsibility for providing the necessary supportive services needed for the education of the deaf client.

15. Many deaf individuals do not know when or how to use an interpreter.

16. There are very few interpreters skilled in working with the very low verbal deaf client or the foreign born deaf person.

17. Many first line supervisors do not understand the need for using interpreters.

18. Many SCD's are not completely sold on the concept of Regional Centers for low functioning deaf clients at this time. The concern centers around the follow-up services once the client leaves the center. The individual may have adjusted to the center program, but will this transfer over to his return to his former environment?

19. Some RCD's are sponsoring deaf clients in out-of-state training settings for 1 or 2 semesters, then telling the client to apply locally. No contact is made with the local office with information or to ascertain whether they have the means to take over the case.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Explore funding resources (e.g., Innovation and Expansion Grant monies) and potential legislation to establish an office or service to provide interpreters for all deaf individuals in need of them.
2. Develop interpreter fee schedules using a sliding scale and including incentives for the interpreters to become certified.
3. Most states' fee schedules fall in the range of \$3.00/hour to \$7.00/hour. It was recommended that a range be included in all schedules, but no set amounts were agreed to.
4. The SCD should work with appropriate local organizations and the deaf community to develop performance criteria for contracted interpreters.
5. The Vocational Rehabilitation Agency should develop an ongoing dialogue with local organizations and encourage their growth in the areas of identification, evaluation and certification of interpreters.
6. State agencies should seek additional funding resources:
 - a. Emphasis should be placed on investigating the availability and use of SSI and SSDI monies.
 - b. Ask that more Federal VR dollars sent to the local level be earmarked for interpreter services.
 - c. Seek more Adult Education and Vocational Education funds for service to deaf clients.
 - d. Seek additional State funds, through legislative appropriation, for services to deaf clients.
7. Each State agency should attempt to establish interpreter staff positions, at least in metropolitan areas.
8. The Model State Plan should be reviewed annually and revised, as necessary, by the PRWAD, CSAVR Committee on Deafness, NAD, etc. specifically to emphasize interpreting services as an essential service.
9. Use of Establishment Grants or Innovation and Expansion Grants to develop interpreter services in public or private agencies should be explored.
10. Contacting and working with social service organizations (i.e., Lions, Elks, Quota, Sertoma) to raise funds for special, continuing projects such as interpreting services for deaf persons is encouraged.
11. Investigate the possible use of Title XX funds for interpreting services.
12. RID should consider establishing a provisional certificate for interpreters not ready for the comprehensive certification evaluation.
13. A rationale needs to be developed to support, under civil service, the interpreter position. The career ladder concept should be explored.
14. SCD's should investigate the possible use of Affirmative Action to develop the use of interpreters in industrial settings.
15. Regional training projects for orientation of new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors should include a brief orientation to deafness, including the use of interpreters.

16. State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies should encourage other state and private agencies to provide interpreter services without being dependent upon VR agency assistance.

17. The SCD should encourage the training and hiring of VR clients as interpreters, if they appear to have the capabilities.

18. The SCD should take the initiative to inform his agency of the implications of the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan in working with the deaf client, especially as it relates to interpreter services.

19. State agencies should consider hiring and using an interpreter as a "floater" between several offices with deaf clients, especially in a dense urban area.

20. Each RSA Region should consider establishing a deaf advisory council which would include consumers, RCD's and educators.

21. The SCD should investigate the legal responsibility for the provision of interpreter services in colleges and universities.

INTERPRETER REACTIONS

A number of interpreters were present during discussions and their reactions were solicited and are briefly stated as follows:

1. In general, support for the recommendations was expressed.
2. Interpreters expressed the view that they would not like an "RID Certified Interpreters only" policy by a State agency.
3. Interpreters agreed that the client must have the right to refuse an interpreter.
4. They recommend using the State School for the Deaf as a resource for identifying interpreters.
5. There needs to be more emphasis on ethics. No one seems to be taking the responsibility for this, according to the interpreters.
6. They strongly support the idea of educating deaf persons in the use of interpreters.
7. They feel that the VR agency must continue to emphasize and accept the interpreters should work closely with an experienced one to observe or be observed. The RID nor its state chapters can do this in the very near future.
8. The RCD's must make a point of asking the client for feedback on his interpreters.
9. They feel the interpreter should use a personal evaluation form to assess himself periodically.
10. The RCD should periodically observe the interpreter on the job. New interpreters should work closely with an experienced one to observe or be observed.
11. They feel interpreters are frequently asked to assume responsibility beyond their skill level or outside of the area of interpreting.
12. They would like to see publications prepared and disseminated for colleges, courts, hospitals, etc. on the need and use of interpreters, with local resources identified.

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13. Information should be sent to Adult Education programs on recommended qualifications for instructors for manual communication classes. They feel the SCD's should initiate this.

14. They recommend that the SCD's contact their Regional Offices to support the provision of interpreting services without any consideration of financial need.