

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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**Aram L. Terzian**

Good Morning. As you may know, there are approximately fifteen to twenty thousand deaf persons in the United States today who own and use communications equipment. This represents only a fraction of the 1,700,000 hearing-impaired persons that Schein and Delk describe as the population of persons who can neither hear nor understand speech. Many of these people could benefit from the use of a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD)\*. However, as we hope to convey to you today, there is a great need in each community to have a comprehensive program of services to assist the deaf person to make use of the telephone as a communications device.

This morning we will present an overview of a special telecommunications project now in its second year in Philadelphia. By the end of this discussion you will have a better understanding of how to help a community effectively use its resources to make TDDs available to a maximum number of deaf persons.

I would now like to introduce myself and the three panelists. My name is Aram Terzian and I am the Director of Programs for Handicapped Persons at Community College of Philadelphia. I will be discussing how the project was structured and a special needs assessment that preceded the development of the project. The second speaker will be Ms. Betty Broecker who works with me at the Community College and serves as the coordinator of the Community Service Center for the Deaf. Ms. Broecker will explain the college's role in evaluating, training and certifying persons as well as discussing the effective use of consumer

involvement. Dr. Philip Bellefleur is the Headmaster of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and as part of his responsibilities, is the Director of the Radio Telecommunications Project. Dr. Bellefleur will be discussing the role of the school for the deaf of providing a comprehensive news and information service to the community. He will be explaining an experimental radio station for the deaf that is the first of its kind in the country. Mr. Richard Tobert is Vice President of Girard Bank in Philadelphia and the administrator of the George W. Nevil Trust, a trust that serves the deaf and the blind in the Greater Philadelphia area.

I will now start the program by giving you an overview of the Nevil Telecommunications Project and by discussing a special needs assessment that was conducted by myself and Mr. Ralph Harwood, who unfortunately is now deceased.

In 1976, the Nevil Trust awarded a grant amounting to over \$600,000 for the purposes of: (1) providing telecommunications equipment to 500 deaf persons in the Philadelphia area; (2) providing telecommunications equipment to schools for the deaf and other facilities serving deaf persons; (3) evaluating, training and certifying 500 deaf persons. The inability to type was also found to be an inhibiting factor. Although knowing how to type is not an essential requirement of TDD communications, it is such an integral part of the process that persons without these skills evidently feel uncomfortable.

\*The abbreviation TDD will be used in this discussion. This term includes both the teletypewriter (TTY) and more advanced electronic equipment.

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### **ECONOMICS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE DESIRE FOR EQUIPMENT**

Twenty-seven percent of unemployed persons felt unable to afford a TTD. However, among higher income groups this percentage drops. Looking at this in a different way, 69% of all employed persons were willing to pay at least \$180 over time and 35% at least \$540 over time to purchase the equipment.

Of course, we cannot overlook many deaf persons on limited income, such as senior citizens, students, non-employed and marginally employed who cannot afford to purchase the equipment.

### **THE PRESENT MAJOR SOURCES OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL NEWS ARE NOT MEETING THE NEEDS OF DEAF PEOPLE**

Over half of the persons surveyed had some difficulty reading and understanding the newspaper. Eighty-three percent had difficulty with the news on television.

Nevertheless, 82% of the persons surveyed rely on the newspaper as a news source and 67% rely on television.

### **DEAF PERSONS HAVE AN INTEREST IN A NEWS AND INFORMATION SERVICE OVER THE TDD**

Seventy-seven percent of all employed deaf

persons were willing to pay at least \$12.00 per year to support a news and information service. The three most important types of information were *Emergency News*, *National and Local News*, and *News About the Deaf*.

### **Implications**

There must be an adequate outreach program to provide deaf persons with information about telecommunications devices and how they can serve to meet their needs.

Deaf persons must have an opportunity to see and use the equipment in a non-threatening situation as a means of helping them overcome their perceived doubts about their ability to communicate over a TDD. There must be an adequate training program to teach people how to use telecommunication devices. Emphasis should be placed on helping the individual overcome fears and embarrassment of English language usage. Typing should also be part of the training.

Because of the costs involved with owning the equipment, many deaf persons will need assistance in financing the purchase of a TDD. A telecommunications news and information service that targets its programming to deaf persons in the community will be well received and will provide a needed service.