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Social Services

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Fran Herrington
with remarks by **Bill Johnson**

I. Acknowledgments

1. Mr. Bill Gibbs, my ex-boss, who directed me to Mr. Homer Rodriguez as the person in the best position to consider the idea of "specialized services to deaf clients."
2. Mr. Homer Rodriguez who was then the Regional Administrator for the DHR Central Texas Region (30 counties) and who enthusiastically initiated and has supported this project.
3. Mr. Raymond Vowell, former DHR Commissioner, who approved the pilot project - and later approved, with the Board, state-wide expansion of services to the deaf.
4. Elizabeth Criswell of the Deaf Action Center in Dallas and Mr. Jack Blanton, Executive Assistant to the DHR Commissioner, who sought and encouraged state-wide expansion of the program.
5. Mr. Jerome Chapman, current DHR Commissioner, who has re-emphasized executive support of the state-wide program.
6. Mr. Jim Welch, Region 06 Coordinator, all the other Coordinators, Regional Administrators, deaf leaders such as Ralph White, Gwen Butler and Helen Sewell and countless others who have worked so hard and supported the program to make it as successful as it is.

II. History of the Program

In April of 1975, Mr. Homer Rodriguez was approached regarding the problem of serving deaf applicants and clients in the Austin area. At that time, there were no interpreters or caseworkers skilled in manual communications who were employed to serve deaf clients. It was also felt there were many deaf persons in the area who were eligible for DHR services but who were not receiving them because (a) they were unaware of these services, or (b) they were unable to access these services because of communication barriers.

Mr. Rodriguez was concerned about this problem and asked his staff to develop a proposal for a pilot project to do a needs assessment and to design and develop a delivery system for DHR services. The project was approved for funding on April 18, 1975, but funds did not become available until several months later.

While waiting for these funds, Mr. Rodriguez assigned two graduate social work students to conduct some preliminary research. They submitted their report and recommendations on August 12, 1975. Much of the present system was built on those recommendations, which were compiled as a result of conversations with deaf leaders and service providers in the Austin Community.

Mr. Rodriguez ordered a caseload count of deaf clients for Austin and four cases were identified. Since Austin has a rather large deaf

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community, Mr. Rodriguez felt this was a "red flag" showing that a problem did exist in the delivery of services to deaf individuals.

On October 8, 1975, Mr. Rodriguez met with selected leaders in the deaf community to discuss his plans to reach out to serve eligible deaf persons. This group became the nucleus of what later became the Region 06 Advisory Committee on Deaf Services. At that meeting, Mr. Rodriguez made a commitment to the leaders of the deaf community in connection with serving the needs of the deaf. With almost no substantive knowledge about deafness in general or about the characteristics of the local deaf population in particular, Mr. Rodriguez made a commitment which was essentially open-ended, to serve the deaf community within legal and funding restraints.

On October 28, 1975 the first meeting was held with members of the deaf community at night and at a place well known to the deaf community to explain child welfare services, aid to families with dependent children, food stamps, and services for the elderly. This was the first of several meetings of this kind.

The next step was to begin the process for selection of a specialized worker with the deaf. A screening committee was established to interview and refer competent applicants to appropriate program staff, who would make the final selection decision. The screening committee was composed of two deaf leaders and one CSC interpreter, thirteen applicants were interviewed for that first position of "interpreter, social service and outreach worker." The committee, the deaf community, and the staff all wanted and expected a "super worker" for this position, and all were extremely thrilled to see the selection become just that.

DHR's first specialized worker with the deaf, Carol Boatman Gage, was hired February 1, 1976, less than one year after the idea had been presented to Mr. Rodriguez.

By this time DHR's Advisory Committee was becoming more structured and active. Their meetings included discussions on topics such as:

- a) Explanations of DHR programs, i.e. protective services, foster home needs,

early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment program, food stamps, etc.

- b) Discussions of guidelines for extending services to the deaf state-wide.
- c) The need for a nursing home facility for the deaf. (DHR supplied information which was later used by a facility to establish a nursing home for the elderly deaf in Dallas.)
- d) A possible intern program for students from Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C.
- e) Outreach efforts to help the deaf community understand and access DHR services.
- f) Discussions about needed changes in DHR protective service policies when working with deaf clients. (Mr. Welch will discuss this later.)
- g) And many other topics.

This is only a partial list of the topics discussed by the Advisory Committee.

We had to secure inter-agency cooperation; and we had to tear down communication barriers. We did not fool ourselves into thinking these would be easy goals to accomplish.

III. Summary

The department has also been able to do some Title XX contracting with other agencies in the area of delivery of services. This will be discussed in more detail by another staff member. During the last session of the Texas Legislature funds were appropriated for telecommunication equipment. The Department of Human Resources and Texas Commission for the Deaf are jointly responsible for determining where this equipment should be located to best meet the needs of the Texas deaf community. These funds will provide approximately twenty machines the first year and twelve to fifteen the second year.

Because of the time it has had to develop, Region 06 has the most sophisticated delivery system in the state. The other nine regions, however, are catching up at various intervals, depending on the size of the region, available funds, and size of deaf populations. DHR

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Coordinators and their staff will meet Wednesday to exchange ideas and information.

We know we don't have all the answers - but what I think is important is that we want them. With that attitude I have every confidence that with the help of the deaf community we'll find them.

My name is Bill Johnson. I am the Coordinator of Services for the Hearing Impaired in Region 09 (San Antonio). I have been asked to speak to you on the Title XX contract between the Texas Department of Human Resources (TDHR) and the Texas Commission for the Deaf (TCD).

In Region 09, TDHR has a close and effective working relationship with TCD and their local council, the San Antonio Council for the Advancement of Services for the Deaf (SACASD). Interpreters for the deaf assist

TDHR public welfare workers in contacts with deaf clients who use sign language. These public worker - interpreter cooperative services are coordinated by our local council (SACASD) through their Coordinator of Services in cooperation with TDHR through my office.

State wide the system works in a fashion similar to San Antonio. TDHR provides monies to TCD for interpreting and other services for deaf clients of TDHR or deaf persons who would be eligible for TDHR services. TCD provides these interpreting monies to each of their nineteen councils for payment of interpreting services provided by individual interpreters. Local council coordinators are the link between TDHR-TCD contract monies and the individual interpreters. These coordinators submit payment vouchers on behalf of individual interpreters to TCD.