

# FORUM

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## NEW INTERPRETER TRAINING PROGRAM

Cleveland (Ohio) State University has recognized the need for qualified interpreters and is the first university in the United States to offer a baccalaureate degree in Speech and Hearing/Interpreter Training. The program includes courses in Language Development, Audiology, Non-Verbal Communication, and Sign Language courses from basic through the interpreter level. Practical experience is offered in conjunction with the Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center and the Fairmount Theatre of the Deaf. For further information, please contact:

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## JOB ASSISTANTS FOR DEAF PEOPLE IN SWEDEN

In the Fall of 1979, I was fortunate to receive a fellowship under the International Exchange of Experts in Rehabilitation Program, administered through the World Rehabilitation Fund, Inc. My award was to study programs for the deaf in Sweden. I had submitted a proposal to study programs in that country because, in my correspondence with Swedish people working in the field of deafness rehabilitation, I learned that many of the Swedish practices were unique and advanced. I was particularly interested in programs which assisted deaf people in job placement. As a vocational rehabilitation counselor working with deaf clients since 1975, I have been aware of the problems and barriers that deaf people must overcome in their pursuit of a satisfying job. Too often qualified deaf people are denied employment and promotions because of the communication problems related to their deafness. Sweden has made some interesting efforts to deal with these problems.

In November and December, 1979, I spent thirty days traveling in Sweden, and had the opportunity to visit with the National Labour Market Counselors in Stockholm, Orebro, and Gotenburg. These counselors are the equivalent of our state rehabilitation counselors of the deaf. Through discussions and visits to various programs, I had the opportunity to learn about Sweden's job development and placement practices.

The program that I would most like to see implemented in the U. S. is the provision of "assistants at work" for deaf employees. Assistants are available to all handicapped people, and in the case of the deaf, it means a person who can assist with communication on the job. The assistant is trained in sign language to interpret phone calls, instructions from supervisors, meetings, training programs, etc. At other times, the assistant has regular job duties. The cost of the training and a portion of the assistant's salary is paid by the government for an indefinite period of time. The assistant can either be selected by the employer from volunteers, or the deaf employee can make the choice. The latter is considered to be a better method since the employee may have developed a good rapport with a fellow worker, and wishes to choose him or her as the assistant. The assistants are trained in sign language at the Swedish Association of the Deaf headquarters in Leksand.

This program is considered to be extremely important in the successful job adjustment of deaf people. The representatives of the Swedish Association of the Deaf feel strongly that a

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great deal of information about job promotions, special training possibilities, and general information about the work situation is missed by the deaf employee. This makes it more difficult for the deaf worker to adjust to the work setting. With an assistant to keep the deaf person informed, a better relationship is possible between the deaf person and his fellow workers.

This program is relatively new and, according to the Swedish Association of the Deaf, is not being fully utilized. I interviewed deaf employees at two very large manufacturing firms, Saab-Scania and SKF. I found that the workers were unaware of the possibility of an assistant. The deaf employee has the right to request an assistant at his or her place of work, regardless of whether telephone work is part of the job duties. The Swedish Association of the Deaf is currently in the process of writing to all its members and urging them to make these requests.

I did talk with a deaf teacher and his assistant at the Manilla School for the Deaf in Stockholm. The assistant is available to interpret phone calls, parent meetings, etc. The teacher expressed a great deal of satisfaction with this arrangement because he did not feel he was depending on the person to interpret for him as a favor. Because she was receiving a salary, he was entitled to the interpreting service.

Although there is a feeling of underutilization of this program, the mechanism is available, and it is expected that there will be an increased use of assistants in the near future. In its annual report for 1978-79, the National Labour Market reports 480 grants for work assistants were approved, an increase of 78 over the previous year. With the urging of the Swedish Association of the Deaf, it is hoped that deaf people will participate more fully in the program.

I believe that this program has implications for rehabilitation of the deaf in the U. S. Similar programs of assistants at work could be developed in this country with minimal expenditures on the part of the government. When a state Vocational Rehabilitation client is ready for placement, arrangements could be made with the prospective employer to select an assistant or the new deaf employee could choose an assistant after a few weeks on the job. Then, using the client's case service funds, the assistant could be trained in sign language. Employers should be willing to release the assistant for these lessons, since this would be a way of meeting Section 504 requirements. We could not expect the state to pay a portion of the assistants salary, as it does in Sweden, and the employer would have to be convinced of the merits of this arrangement, so that the assistant would not feel a conflict between his own job duties and his interpreting duties. The rehabilitation counselor of the deaf would have to meet the challenge of enlisting the employers' support.

I feel that this kind of program would lead to more job stability for deaf people, and that employers would be more amenable to hiring deaf workers.

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