

FORUM

Over 19 years ago, Boyce R. Williams prepared a list of the eleven most important needs of the deaf community. The Needs list is reproduced here for the purpose of reflection . . . reflection upon whether the professional community has responded.

WHAT DO DEAF PEOPLE NEED FROM THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY?

1. **TO BE UNDERSTOOD.** This includes communication, both the sending and receiving of thoughts. It also includes understanding of the impact of the disability upon the physical, social, vocational, emotional, and spiritual growth and functioning of the person affected.
2. **TO BE TREATED AS INDIVIDUALS.** There is widespread vocational, psychological, and educational stereotyping of deaf people. Teachers, counselors, audiologists, psychologists, placement officers speak of "the deaf". They too frequently use this label as a guide, ignoring the psychology of individual differences.
3. **TO BE HELD TO THE SAME STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE AS THEIR HEARING PEERS.** In education in particular, deaf people are permitted to perform at levels less than their potentials. This may sometimes be true in social intercourse also.
4. **TO BE SERVED BY REAL PROFESSIONALS IN ALL AREAS.** Their teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, psychologists, social workers, ministers, audiologists, medical workers, must all be top notch professional people, not visionary "do gooders". The latter do not usually understand the basic importance that deaf people be treated as individuals and that they be held to regular standards of performance.
5. **TO BE ALLOWED TIME.** The story of deaf people is replete with examples of too little time being taken to give them the tools for living up to their potentials. It should be understood that the majority of graduates from schools for the deaf require training beyond that which they acquire during their years in school. Diversified training opportunities should be seriously considered for each person rather than the limited patterns prevailing in the fixed school situation. Do professional workers serving deaf people allow or have the much greater time necessary to do more effective work?
6. **TO BE HELD EQUAL, TO BE INTEGRATED.** The prevailing pattern of paternalism shown toward deaf people thwarts integration into the larger community. Moreover, it is a heavy damper on social and professional growth, because it avoids recognition and use of opportunities to involve deaf people in social and work situations appropriate to their overall competencies.
7. **TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL MATURITY.** The immaturity of the society of deaf people, its naivete, its unsophistication, have been demonstrated in research and training efforts and in other ways. The society of the deaf

FORUM

- moves pretty much alone, without any real help from hearing colleagues. Hence, it feeds mainly on itself, fails to keep pace with society in general.
8. *TO ATTAIN OPPORTUNITIES COMMENSURATE WITH CAPACITIES.* In Vocational Rehabilitation we are aware of the pressing need to expand sharply and elevate job opportunities. Too many high grade deaf people with college degrees are running automatic machines, thus depriving society of their creative potential. Limitations in educational opportunities are a fundamental cause. One of those built-in limitations results from too much precious time being spent on weaknesses rather than strengths.
 9. *TO BE ACCEPTED AS FULL-FLEDGED PARTNERS.* The special knowledge and skills of qualified deaf people are seldom used or solicited by workers who serve them. This retards development as special programs for them often miss the proper target. Involvement of the proved creativeness, drive, and motivation of deaf people results in practical solutions to needs.
 10. *TO BE GIVEN EQUAL SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES.* The dearth of needed sources such as halfway houses, sheltered workshops, personal adjustment centers, other rehabilitation centers, to meet the urgent needs of the more severely handicapped deaf persons illustrates the serious inequalities prevailing. The persistent professional personnel shortages complicate the solution.
 11. *TO REPLACE ATTITUDES OF COMPLACENCY AND APATHY AMONG DEAF PEOPLE REGARDING ATTAINMENT OF VOCATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL LEVELS EQUAL TO HEARING PEERS.* For many reasons deaf people and their friends share an apologetic attitude regarding their relative competencies. The resultant low level aims keep the whole deaf society functioning at a needless disadvantage which compounds itself as time moves on.

These fundamental needs of deaf people cannot be denied. Nor can we pass them off as impractical or unattainable, for the whole fabric of our aspirations for the group depends upon the extent to which we find solutions for these basic problems.

—BOYCE R. WILLIAMS