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## A CAREER PLANNING PROGRAM FOR DEAF WOMEN

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This paper attempts to show the kind of program that can be offered to deaf women who are ready to return to the job market. This paper outlines a program that was established in Rochester, New York during the spring of 1981 to meet the career needs of deaf women. The subjects of this study are in their thirties and early forties, have a hearing loss, and find themselves with some free time on their hands while their children are enrolled in school. These women feel the need to enrich their lives as well as contribute to the family income.

Some of these women who have jobs are now facing mid-life career crises. They are presently working part-time and feel that they are not using their full potential. They are now ready to go on to better jobs, but are not sure how to go about accomplishing this. Three of these women have college degrees in home economics. They do not know how they can apply their skills or knowledge of home economics to new career fields. They are either not sure if they want to focus on that career area or/and do not know of other job opportunities open to them.

There is a strong possibility that there are other women in the United States who fall into the same category. These women need a program to assist them in making career decisions. This paper intends to point out the need to establish a career planning program for deaf women who are considering a change in careers.

### Rationale for the Program

As more women between the ages of 35

and 45 return to the labor market, we wonder what kind of services are available to them. The rate of inflation and the high cost of living is forcing many women to return to work. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (1979), 63.2% of all women between the ages of 35 and 44 were employed. Statistics also reveal that 55.9% of all married women who live with their husbands are now working (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). According to Schein and Delk, (1974), 49.4% of deaf females between the ages of 16 and 64 were in the labor force. This increased participation by women in the world of work can be attributed to a number of factors; changing attitudes toward careers for women outside the home, the trend toward smaller families, the increase in the number of households headed by women, an increasingly service oriented economy, and the landmark legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sex (USDLS, 1974; Khosh, 1977).

While there are several career centers for women in the cities, the hearing impaired population does not make use of these services. How do women who have stayed home to raise a family prepare for entrance into the job market? What about those who are working but are experiencing job dissatisfaction? To whom can these women turn for help with their career plans? What options are open to them?

The Career Planning Program for Deaf Women was started when three women approached this writer and asked for assistance with their career plans. At that time, this writer worked as a Career Development

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The author wishes to thank Mrs. Jean Bondi-Wolcott for her help with the evaluation instruments and for her assistance with this program.

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Counselor. One woman was referred by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The women wanted to get jobs but were either not sure about what they wanted in a job or how to go about getting the kind of job they wanted. These women were looking for a sense of direction. All had other personal concerns that were not being resolved. Some of these personal concerns hindered their career search.

### Description of the Program

The Career Planning Program for Deaf Women was scheduled to meet for two hours weekly over a period of three months. The program started with five women who met at the home of this writer. It was decided to start with a small group so that each woman could receive individual attention.

In order for the women to know what kinds of jobs they could do, it was important for them to understand their skills, their interests, their personal values, and their work values. The following instruments were utilized: *Edwards' Personal Preference Schedule*, (Edwards 1954, 1959); *Work Values Definitions* (NTID Career Counselors, 1978); *Value Clarification* (Swell, 1976), *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (Strong, 1961; Campbell, 1974).

The women were given exercises to increase their self-awareness, determine their attitudes, and rate their assertiveness. The following instruments were used; *Who Am I?* (Khosh, 1977); *The Attitudes Toward Women Scale* (Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp, 1973); *How Assertive Are You?* (Khosh,

The program outline consisted of six sessions. Session I dealt with orientation and covered such topics as "What is Career Planning?" "How can it help me?" "What are the objectives of the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women?" "Who am I?"

Session II focused on self-awareness, attitudes and assertiveness. Session III focused on role clarification and dealt with such topics as "How do I see myself?" "How does my family see me?" "How does my husband see me?" Session IV covered personal and work values clarification. Session V utilized

interests and decision-making strategies. Session VI covered educational and career opportunities through the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women.

In addition, each woman had a two-hour individual session with this writer to discuss her interests, skills, work, personal values, and career goals. That took place prior to Session V.

### Characteristics of the Group

The women ranged in age from 30 to 45 years. All of them had attended college and three of them had completed their baccalaureate degrees in Home Economics. All the women possessed good communication skills. While two were primarily oral and two were primarily manual, all four used the simultaneous communication method. Two women were born deaf. One woman became deaf at age two while the fourth became deaf before age three. One woman experienced a progressive hearing loss during the past three years. Even with her residual hearing, she had difficulty following the conversations of the group. Her speechreading skills were poor and her knowledge of sign language was minimal. Her communication problem hindered the cohesiveness of the group and put a strain on several members. At the group's request, she was referred to another agency.

All the remaining members of the group were married and each had two or three children ranging in age from 2 years to 20 years.

One woman had worked in the past and had quit her job due to job dissatisfaction. Two others held part-time jobs and felt they were not using their full potential. One woman had worked at several jobs prior to raising a family and was ready to return to the labor market.

In a survey distributed to the participants at the beginning of the program, they were asked the following questions and told to check as many as applied to them.

What do you expect to learn from attending the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women?

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- 4 – learn about other careers
- 4 – learn more about my abilities and attitudes
- 4 – learn more about my interest
- 3 – understand what my personal and work values are
- 2 – set career goals for myself this year

What goals have you set for yourself?

- 2 – go back to college
- 1 – finish my degree requirements
- 2 – get a part-time job
- 1 – find a better part-time job than the one I have now
- 3 – learn what careers are available to me
- 1 – I have not set any goals for myself.

### Description of Group Activities

The participants were given an orientation to the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women. They were informed of the objectives of the program and received a course outline. They were given a survey which asked them what they expected to get out of this program. The participants discussed their educational background, their previous and/or present jobs, their personal goals, and their career goals. They participated in an exercise called "Who am I", where they described the kinds of hats they wore in their lives. This session lasted four hours as the women continued the discussion over coffee and dessert.

In Session II, the women focused on self-awareness. They were encouraged to answer several questions, such as: "Who am I?" "How do I perceive my life?" "How does my husband perceive me?" "How do my children perceive me?" "What goals did I set for myself?" In discussing these questions, all four women felt they had put their families' and their husbands' needs above their own and consequently did not have any firm career goals for themselves. They expressed their feelings of frustration because they had no time for themselves. They felt overwhelmed because they had so much work to do that it was difficult for them to set their own

priorities. They also felt responsible for everything that happened in the family. They shared their feelings openly with the group. Many women felt relieved to learn that they were not alone in their complaints and that they were not the only ones feeling frustrated with their lives. They were able to offer suggestions for coping with different problems and to give moral support to each other. They felt they achieved a better understanding of themselves after they got a better perspective of their problems through group sharing. Many wished they had had the opportunity to share their concerns in the past and were glad the group gave them the opportunity to share their problems with each other.

Their self-awareness increased when they were given a copy of the *Attitudes Toward Women Scale* (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973) and asked to measure the attitudes towards the rights and roles of women in contemporary society. They discussed how they perceived women's roles. A lively discussion followed when they compared their reactions to various attitudes in the past with how they were reacting today. They were given a copy of the *How Assertive Are You* (Khosh, 1977) questionnaire. They were advised to identify whether they fell into the aggressive, assertive, or non-assertive group. Several members had different opinions about whether some behaviors could be identified as assertive or non-assertive. It proved to be a learning experience for all members of the group as they shared their opinions. Three of the women acknowledged that they had become more assertive over the past few years. They felt it was due in part to society's changing expectations of women as well as to the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. All women felt that their self-concept improved as they took on more assertive behaviors. Not all agreed on how assertive they should be in varying situations, but it was interesting to hear how they would have acted years ago as opposed to how they were acting today.

During Session III, the women listed some of the problems they experienced when they had a job and their role changed within the

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family. They talked about the problems the family experienced when a second paycheck was added to the family income. Various solutions were offered by the group when some women complained that they had problems getting the family members to help with the chores around the house. Each woman discussed ways she handled the problem in her family. The group members became more open and shared their problems with one another. They all said that they felt better just knowing other women were facing the same problems. They appreciated learning how other women were able to cope with the problems.

In Session IV, the group discussed their personal and work values and got to understand their own values better. In the course of the session, it was necessary for the women to identify and prioritize their own values. They were given the *Work Values Definition* sheet and asked to rate their own work values. They were told to identify specific careers that incorporated their preferred work values. The list of *Work Values Definition* covered such values as prestige, helping people, creativity, leadership, and job security.

The women also took the *Edwards Personal Preference Schedule* (Edwards, 1954, 1959) to rate their own personal values. Some of the personal values listed included the need for achievement, dominance, affiliation, change, and endurance. A lively discussion followed each value as the women gave examples of each value based on their own experiences. By examining their own personal and work values and having a better understanding of what they would like to have in a career, the women could then focus their attention on the kinds of careers they wanted.

The women were given the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (Strong, 1961; Campbell, 1974) during Session II as part of their homework assignment. This test identifies those career areas in which they are interested. This test measures interests in six areas; realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. The partici-

pants each received a chart listing each interest area along with a list of characteristic activities and another list of characteristic abilities/traits. The *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (Strong, 1961; Campbell, 1974) is broken down into three scales; 1) The general occupational themes which give standard scores for each of the six areas mentioned above; 2) the basic interest scales which give more career areas; and 3) the occupational scales which give a list of various careers under each general occupational theme. Each woman made a two-hour individual appointment with this author for an interpretation of the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* (Strong, 1961; Campbell, 1974). During each individual career counseling session, the women's personal and work values, as well as her career goals, were discussed and integrated with the interest test. They were encouraged to use the *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1980-1981* (USD, 1980), to get more information on their career choices. The group got together during Session V to share their responses on their interest sheets with each other.

Prior to Session VI, each woman was given an action plan worksheet that listed 1) the steps they had to take to implement their career plans, 2) when they planned to begin their career plans, 3) when they projected they would meet their goals, 4) what or who was needed to carry out their goals, and 5) possible obstacles to implementing their career plans. The women wrote down what their goals were and how they planned to achieve them. These plans were shared with the group. Various ideas were brought up in the group. These ideas expanded the women's career options, and each felt they had learned a lot about various careers from this session. They were given an evaluation form and asked to rate the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women.

### Individual Results of the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women

One woman quit her part-time job and returned to college to pursue a baccalaureate degree in social work. She had at-

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tended college on a part-time basis and decided to pursue her studies on a full-time basis. Another had to postpone her entry into the job market when she became pregnant. A third woman postponed her job search until the fall so that she could be home with her two daughters during the summer. At the group's suggestion, she agreed to teach a class in sign language during the spring. She found she enjoyed this job so much that she decided to teach sign language during the summer. She subsequently enrolled in a program to become a teacher of sign language. A fourth woman wanted to gain more experience in photography and was seriously thinking about trying her hand at writing and public speaking. She discussed her feelings of not using her full potential in her job with her boss, who agreed with her. She was promoted in her job and given a variety of responsibilities. She has a better feeling about her job now.

### Evaluation of the Program

The Career Planning Program for Deaf Women met several objectives that were established. The women learned more about themselves, their roles in their families, their personal and work values, and their career interests. They explored various careers/options open to them and learned how to get the kind of job/career they wanted.

The women were given an evaluation form and asked to rate each of the six sessions. The rating scale was on a continuum with the following ratings: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) not sure, 4) disagree, and 5) strongly disagree.

All four women agreed that they learned a lot about themselves by taking "the Attitude Toward Women Scale". Three women agreed and one disagreed that they learned a lot about their feelings and actions by taking the "How Assertive Are You" test. When asked to evaluate whether they learned a great deal about the problems that existed when they played many different roles, three women either strongly agreed or agreed.

The following tests were evaluated on

the basis of whether they helped the women to identify their personal and career goals.

Value clarification:

3—agree, 1—not sure

Edwards Personal Preference

Schedule:

2—agree, 1—not sure, 1—disagree

Work Values:

3—agree, 1—not sure

Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory:

1—agree, 1—not sure, 2—disagree

They all agreed that they felt comfortable in sharing their educational and career goals with the group. They agreed that the Career Planning Program for Deaf Women was very helpful to them in clarifying their career goals.

The success of this program was due to the ability of the group to be open and to share their problems with each other. Group cohesiveness is an important factor in the outcome of this kind of program. These women were close enough to each other in age and were experiencing similar kinds of problems. They felt the group offered them an unusual opportunity to share their frustrations and to learn from each other. Sessions that were set up for two hours often ran to four hours as the participants continued to discuss their concerns over dessert. They felt they got the kind of moral support they needed at this stage in their lives.

The women complained that while they found the various handouts helpful, they felt they had too many papers to work on. They felt they benefited more from group discussions and preferred to have more time for discussion of their problems. The group expressed dissatisfaction with the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory*. They felt it was too broad and that many of the careers did not apply to them. They would have preferred to use a simpler interest test. Since the members were actively involved in social and committee work, the group met on a different day each week for seven weeks.

### Summary and Future Recommendations

The Career Planning Program for Deaf Women met a need that was there. The

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women were ready to consider a career change. The group was small enough to permit a kind of counseling support group to develop. All five women were willing to participate in a three-month program. After the program started, two other women asked to join the group. This supports the need for such a program.

It is recommended that the *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* be replaced with the *California Occupational Preference System* (Edits, 1975/1978. The *Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory* listed jobs that were not realistic for deaf women.

Since several sessions turned into counseling sessions, as the women shared their problems with the group, it is recommended that more time be allowed for counseling

sessions to take place within the group. Career goals can only be accomplished when personal concerns are taken care of.

It is also recommended that career planning groups for deaf women be set up nationally (on a local basis) since so many deaf women, just like their hearing peers, need help in clarifying their career goals. They also need help in resolving their personal concerns when they enter the job market.

This program should be set up by trained career/personal counselors who have strong counseling background, have experience in leading groups, and who possess the necessary sign language skills to work with the hearing impaired population.

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