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MULTIHANDICAPPED DEAFNESS: THE PARENT EXPERIENCE:

Shirley Smith Parent of a Deaf-Blind Son Macon, Georgia

I am a parent of a 17-year-old deaf-blind son. Bucky is a student at the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon, Georgia.

I am so desperately concerned about the future of our deaf-blind children. I cannot, even vaguely, see a suitable avenue ready and waiting for us to take with our deaf-blind son's future.

I have other children who range in age – 24 – 22 – 17 (Bucky) – and a 6-year-old son.

You people who have children, may I ask you a question? “How would you handle the problems of having to pioneer facilities that are to educate, maintain, rehabilitate and above all, accept your child into the society we do take so for granted?” For our “normal” children this is all out there to choose and yes, even to select from.

I am so very happy to know that Vocational Rehabilitation and others are willing and ready to access the needs of our deaf-blind population. We are a minority in number compared to some of the other handicap groups, but this doesn't minimize our needs. The majority of these people will require your service at some time during their future.

But I do not believe you are to find many Helen Kellers within our bulk population of deaf-blind children. We have no exact peer group to fall behind. Our children will require substantial maintenance, rehabilitation, and supervision for the remainder of their lives.

There are parents of these deaf-blind children

who have totally committed themselves and their families to the well being of their deaf-blind member. We have, many times, been through literal blood – sweat – and many, many tears. (This, I speak from experience.) Some families have fallen apart, some strengthened, and there is such a need for relief. We need to know that our children will have a place for themselves within a minimal, but restricted, environment.

State and federal monies have, to date, provided our children a good program to be involved in. I believe it should continue in a similar respect with no gap in services. I envision the adult life of a deaf-blind person being — group-type homes or cottages situated on or near the grounds of a state hospital facility; preferably, in a metro area. This could offer our deaf-blind population the back-up facilities from several agencies and needed medical attention. I do hope this will not just be *my* dream and might one day become a reality.

You who are in Vocational Rehabilitation can be very instrumental in gearing this dream to come to pass. At least, you have begun to express out loud that there is a definite need for our deaf-blind population. I commend each of you for your fine work. Keep it up and keep plugging for “our” deaf-blind people.

If I may in any way ever be of service as a parent representative at your future workshops or at other rehabilitation meetings, please let me know. It would be my pleasure.