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Telecommunications for the Deaf Client

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VI TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF CLIENT

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Charge: To prepare guidelines for telecommunication services through Vocational Rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

Telecommunication equipment has allowed the deaf person to expand his communication ability from direct face-to-face communication to that approaching the freedom and ease of a hearing person. The deaf person can now, with accuracy, utilize the telephone lines for communicating with his world.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 clearly identified that telecommunication devices may be included as part of the rehabilitation process. It also encourages the purchase and use of such devices. However, for this to be accomplished each Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor should consider certain issues.

ISSUES

Purchase of Telecommunication Devices (for individuals from Section 110 case service monies). There should be a clear establishment of the need for a TTY device in relationship to the uniqueness of the client and his vocational objective, consistent with his IWRP. If there is accurate, complete documentation of the need and its relationship to the vocational goal, TTY devices could be purchased for individual clients as follows (this list should not be seen as restrictive, but as a point for departure):

- a. To fulfill the vocational plan.
- b. To maintain employment (if documentation shows the need for communication with an employer is necessary to change schedule, advise of absence, etc.).
- c. As a tool necessary for employment.
- d. For follow-up counseling when distance and time prohibit a counselor from traveling to meet with a client provided it is related to employment.
- e. To be used for homemakers if the justification is appropriate.

Given appropriate documentation and justification, TTY's could be purchased for a client during any part of the rehabilitation process with the goal of obtaining or maintaining employment.

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Guidelines for Purchasing. Each state is now faced with the task of developing its own specific guidelines regarding the purchase of TTY equipment for individual clients. As part of these guidelines training in the use, costs of operation, etc. should be provided for the client. TTY devices may well expand the world of the deaf person, and assist in expanding his vocational horizons.

Financial Implications for the Client. Toll charges, because of the increased time necessary for TTY communication, may add up to an unbelievable amount to the unsuspecting deaf person. A comprehensive training program will help make a more satisfied TTY user with a lesser financial burden. In addition, agencies should consider TTY devices on the same basis as interpreters with regard to economic need as part of the agencies responsibility in extending service to clients to overcome the communications barrier, not based solely on economic need.

Unfair Long Distance Charges. Since communication via TTY devices requires more time, it would appear the deaf person is being discriminated against by long distance toll charges as they are now established. The telephone systems should be encouraged to equalize rates for non-hearing users of the telephone lines.

Expanding Availability of TTY's. Telephone systems should also be encouraged to produce and market on a rental basis a TTY type device for home use. If marketed at a reasonable cost, this would provide more alternatives for non-hearing persons.

Special Need of "Low Verbal" Clients. As counselors investigate their clients, one group of deaf clients could be easily overlooked. The "low verbal" or "high manual" deaf person can utilize TTY devices. He must however have an appropriate training program.

Communication Network. Each state should attempt to develop a communication network for deaf TTY users. This network should be established to provide equal opportunities and protection of the non-hearing person as compared with the normally hearing person. Such a network should include or provide immediate access to:

- a. Police (local and/or state);
- b. Medical/Hospital/Ambulance;
- c. VR offices;
- d. Some form of emergency answering service.

Service to Employer.

"Section 103. (a) Vocational rehabilitation services provided under this Act are any goods or services necessary to render a handicapped individual employable, including, but not limited to, the following:

(11) telecommunications, sensory, and other technological aids and devices."
(Public Law 93-112, pages 13 and 14).

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If an employer has two or more deaf employees, TTY devices could be supplied to help maintain communication related to employment for deaf workers. However, the machines would remain the property of VR so that they may be removed and installed elsewhere when indicated. If an employer hires a deaf employee, and if communication away from work is a necessity, the employer should be encouraged to purchase the TTY device himself. However, if the employer refuses to purchase such a device and if the equipment is documented and justified as necessary for continued employment, VR might be able to participate in the purchase. Purchase of such equipment could be justified under "other goods and services."

A consideration, however, should be the establishment of an adequate answering service. If such a service is established and functions properly, purchase of such devices for employers may not be necessary.

Any employer or professional (doctor, dentist, etc.) who purchases TTY devices could probably "write off" the cost on his income tax under the appropriate category.

Use of Innovation and Expansion Monies. Along with case 110 monies, Innovation and Expansion monies might be used to purchase TTY equipment for a new program or the expansion of an existing program serving deaf clients. These monies could be used to:

- a. Develop a communication network;
- b. Enhance training programs teaching basic use and maintenance of TTY devices;
- c. Tie in existing computer programs in subject areas to TTY's in the home as part of continuing education or adult basic education;
- d. Develop a news information service using TTY equipment. A deaf person could dial a number and receive updated news, national and/or local at the rate of 60 wpm. An inward WATTS line could be used to decrease user costs;
- e. Develop referral/answering services to aid deaf TTY users in reporting and receiving messages;
- f. Develop a non-profit system for deaf people to operate and provide service to TTY's in a state or community.

Other Potential Sources for Assistance: Other funding sources for TTY equipment are service oriented organizations such as the Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Quota, Sertoma Clubs, etc. These groups are interested in helping where there is a need. They could be approached to purchase such equipment as a local/state project.

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EQUIPMENT

TTY devices can be divided into two categories—hard copy and electronic.

Hard Copy

1. Old teletypewriter machines can be modified for use as telecommunication devices. These machines have a hard copy (paper) print-out of the conversation. Models range from the 15 to 28 to 32. Model 15 is the oldest, noisiest, and has good reliability. Model 28 is quieter than the model 15, and is the most reliable. Model 32 is a newer version of the 28 with many refinements. Reconditioned machines range in price from about \$300 to \$500. This price includes the coupler or modem device the phone receiver rests in. The cost of these machines may vary between vendors. This is true both between and within some states. The costs may vary because of three factors:

a. Transportation and storage charges. Some states are devoid of any used machines while others have an overabundance. The distance to pick up machines will affect the cost. Some vendors get used machines in their own cities, while others must travel varying distances. Once the machines are obtained they must be stored until they can be reconditioned and marketed.

b. Not all used TTY devices are in a similar state of repair. Some machines need be completely rebuilt while others only need cleaning. The cost will also vary according to whether new or used parts are used for replacement of worn components.

c. Costs will also vary according to who is doing the re-conditioning. The vendor may be a non-profit organization or a private individual working on a profit margin. The costs for labor, thus, will be affected. Re-conditioned hard copy TTY equipment is generally very reliable, although repairs are sometimes necessary. To repair malfunctioning machines one of the following avenues could be explored:

- a. Bell Telephone "Pioneers" will service TTY devices free for deaf people.
- b. Non-Profit corporations or those associated with TTY, Inc. will provide service at cost.
- c. Free lance servicemen or private vendors will service equipment and charge for parts and service.
- d. Deaf clubs or telecommunication clubs may offer services, but policies for charges vary.

The prevalence, reliability and charges of the above will vary according to area. Shop around for the best service.

Finally, TTY machines are reliable, provide a paper print-out, and are very suitable for non-portable operation where noise is not a problem.

Electronic Electronic TTY devices are produced by a few manufacturers. This equipment has an electronic display, is much smaller and noiseless. Machines vary with regard to number of characters displayed, portability, durability, size and manual or automatic line feed and carriage return. Prices are set by the manufacturer and repair must be by the manufacturer. The price is

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about double that for a reconditioned hard copy TTY. They may be carried about and often resemble a briefcase.

A somewhat different type of electronic TTY utilizes a CRT display system. The user must purchase the communication device and a TV set. The communication is seen printed on the picture tube. These characters have the appearance of "captions" on TV programs. The cost of this device is greater than the other electronic display units.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCD

The SCD is now faced with the task of helping his state develop specific guidelines for the purchase of TTY devices. He should also be looking at his state to determine what type of communication network would be most suitable as well as the need for training programs for TTY users.

Rehabilitation counselors are in the position of having enabling legislation for provision of telecommunication devices for non-hearing clients. There are a number of alternative TTY devices available to him and he must carefully match client, vocational objective, and communication device for maximum benefit to the client.