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REHABILITATION OF DEAF-BLIND ADULTS: THE ROLE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ADJUSTMENT TRAINING CENTER

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The rehabilitation of handicapped persons is a very multi-faceted and, sometimes complicated process. As we all know, when the person's disabilities are extremely severe, such as is usually the case for those with the combined loss of hearing and sight, the planning and carrying through of an individualized written rehabilitation program becomes even more complex and challenging. In some cases, deaf-blind persons encounter additional problems from such things as diabetes, heart disease, epilepsy, mental retardation, orthopedic impairments, etc., all of which singly would likely prove to be a difficult rehabilitative challenge.

The successful rehabilitation of deaf-blind adults can often be achieved with the help of a thorough and indepth evaluation at a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation adjustment training center coupled with, when necessary, an individually prescribed training program based upon the findings of the evaluation.

Deaf-Blind persons entering the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults located in Sands Point, New York, begin with a comprehensive eight week evaluation to provide the basis for a plan of training to develop all of the person's assets as fully as possible, and to make full use of any residual hearing or sight the trainee may possess. Areas of the evaluation include: communications, daily living skills, mobility, home management, audiology, low vision aid assessment, speech

pathology, medical, industrial arts, recreation and physical conditioning, psychological, and basic education. The medical evaluation specifically includes a general physical, eye/ear/nose and throat, dental, neurological (if indicated), psychiatric (if indicated) examinations and others, when indicated.

Upon the conclusion of the eight week evaluation period, an individually prescribed rehabilitation program is planned with the trainee by the Helen Keller National Center rehabilitation counselor and social worker assigned to each trainee. Counseling and social case work is necessary throughout the entire Center training program for each trainee. This is essential in order to insure the successful and progressive movement of each trainee through their respective rehabilitation program while in training at the Center.

The evaluations specifically identify and measure the client's capabilities in each respective area. Then, with careful planning and prescribed instruction, the training phase offers the trainee an opportunity to improve his skills where deficits have been identified. Many of the benefits of Center training in the various areas in which the trainee's deficits have been identified are obvious. For example, communication skills training in braille, sign language, speech, use of the teltetouch machine, language development, typing, use of the optacon (a device which converts print into a

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tactile stimulus), etc. enables the trainee to improve his or her communication abilities. Also, orientation and mobility instruction provides the trainee with the improved traveling skills which are required if deaf-blind persons are to travel as independently as possible. Likewise, improved daily skills, basic education, and home management training offers trainees an opportunity to improve specific skills enabling them to do many things for themselves for which they previously needed assistance. The audiological and low vision aid assessment may result in the prescription of special high amplification hearing aids and/or special visual lenses to help the trainee make full use of any residual hearing or sight he or she may possess.

Crafts, recreation, and physical conditioning are often neglected in many rehabilitation training programs but are essential and should be given special attention and consideration. An individual's work performance is often affected by how well or how poorly he or she is able to cope with the long leisure hours at the end of each work day and on weekends.

The industrial arts area of the Helen Keller National Center is designed to evaluate and develop the basic work ability skills that a trainee brings to the program and those work ability skills that a trainee demonstrates are either completely lacking or which may need further development. The specific work skills which are evaluated and developed include: communication skills and counting ability, learning ability, retention, finger dexterity, bi-manual coordination, tactual perception, initiative, time and motion economy consciousness, hand-foot coordination, imagery ability, adaptability to power machinery, emotional stability, safe use of residual vision, safety consciousness, general coordination, application to work, punctuality, orderliness, facial expression, and cooperativeness. Based on the development of these transferrable work ability skills, many deaf-blind persons may be prepared for and placed in employment for on-the-job training commensurate with their skills and aspirations based on their demonstrated

capabilities to perform the tasks required in the job in which they are placed.

One of the most important contributions the comprehensive vocational rehabilitation adjustment training center offers its trainees is unfortunately not so obvious. In addition to specific skills improvement, the adjustment training center program usually contributes substantially to improving the person's self-esteem and self-confidence. As the trainee's skills continue to improve and he becomes aware of his various achievements, the Center's social caseworker and rehabilitation counselor help in enabling him to perceive himself in a more realistic manner providing the internal strength necessary to cope with the problems he must face in the future. With the learning and improvement of the various skills, the trainee realizes his capabilities to a greater degree and is often motivated to pursue additional training for maximum development. As a result, his rehabilitation success is often greater and of longer duration.

One final advantage of a comprehensive adjustment training center is its value to the professional field as a training institution. The Helen Keller National Center fulfills this responsibility by conducting occasional specialized in-service training seminars throughout the country and, periodically, an intensive one week seminar in services to deaf-blind persons conducted at the Helen Keller National Center in Sands Point, New York. After a temporary interruption in our offering of these one week seminars, we have now resumed them and are willing to set aside the July seminar for six deaf persons in the field of work for the deaf. For additional information about these one week training seminars, the services and objectives of the Helen Keller National Center, etc. inquiries should be directed to the regional representative serving the state in which you reside, Mr. Louis Bettica, Assistant Director, Helen Keller National Center, 111 Middleneck Road, Sand Point, New York 11050; or to Dean Wyrick, Field Services Coordinator, 1111 West Mockingbird Lane, Suite 1540, Dallas, Texas 75247.