D.C. Vocational Rehabilitation for The Deaf: A High Rise Model

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Vocational Rehabilitation is the seed of anti-poverty, the grace of economic survival and the power of social transformation for the handicapped. The program has no substitute. Its scope and purpose are clear.

As we know it, state vocational rehabilitation consists of services that range from case finding thru job followup. Case services are the vital organs of the rehabilitation process. Without them, vocational rehabilitation would be a skeletal structure, a set of bones. Yet, even in this condition, vocational rehabilitation looks like an emaciated and atrophied program. It needs muscle, flesh, strength and coordination.

The season for a new era in vocational rehabilitation is at dawn. A series of highly cogent workshops by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration have brought into focus the needs of the deaf for state rehabilitation agencies. The states are recognizing that counselors for the deaf are professionally sterile unless they have a special sensitivity to their client's needs. Casework service standards have been defined. Counselor training programs are turning out new personnel with a higher level of refinement. Case services for the deaf is about ready to enter a new dimension, that of developing a "high rise" multi-purpose program. One could call the new dimension a vocational rehabilitation program for the deaf that has flesh and muscle.

It goes without argument that the depth and breadth of a vocational rehabilitation program for the deaf rely primarily on a counselor's resourcefulness and ingenuity. He can use his case service funds to

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build as well as buy services. He can use his position as a community service agent to make himself comfortable behind his desk, or he can use it as a spring board for stimulating inter-agency action in the community. He can “string along with Butch” from July through June and take refuge in satisfactory statistical achievements. Or he can develop a high powered, comprehensive and flexible program for the deaf that supplies a wealth of quality without detracting from the quantitative aspects.

WHAT ARE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS?

There is operational difference between providing case services and providing programs. Case services are for the individual client, based on his specific needs. Programs, while based on specific needs, are developed to meet the needs of a community of individuals.

This calls for an introduction to current rehabilitation thinking. It isn't possible to refer to the literature without coming up with terms like “job upgrading,” “preventive rehabilitation,” and “rehabilitate the whole person.” The average person changes occupations from seven to ten times in a lifetime. Vocationally rehabilitating a client is no longer a terminal plan, a one shot deal. Life deals with growth and development on a continuing basis. The labor market, it seems, is changing faster than life itself. The kind of vocational and personal life that we live in requires that we learn to be flexible and amenable to change. We are expected to adjust to new events, almost daily.

It would be unrealistic to expect vocational rehabilitation to ignore its role in the continuously changing life of the handicapped individual. Whenever a drastic vocational change is about to take place vocational rehabilitation has to be prepared. There is no advantage gained by waiting until the client is “knocked out” of the employment world. Preventive rehabilitation would frown on this. It is as difficult as it is tardy to help the client to regain “vocational consciousness” so that he might return to the “employment ring” and regain his competitive status. Rather than have each counselor operate like a “battle front medic” with each client as he is put out of action; a Vocational Rehabilitation Program would supply a “field general's approach” to the entire vocational and employment front. This type of approach enables clients to grow and to adjust, to develop their abilities and to correct their disabilities to whatever extent possible.
before they lose their jobs and become a drain on the taxpayers. Vocational rehabilitation is the identical twin of unemployment prevention.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs are not little isolated clouds of activity. They are an “Expo 67” of community service programs all related to and directed towards the maximum rehabilitation of the adult deaf client. These programs are a continuum of services. They have years and levels of gradation as does most everything in life. They operate more like a galaxy; separately but in harmony, comprehensively but purposefully supplementing and rounding out the case service deficiencies that exist. A maid at eighteen, who has grown into a computer operator at nineteen could be prepared for court stenographic work at twenty and even enroll at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at twenty-one. Programs allow for these adjustments.

Nor can Vocational Programs be all things to all men. These programs cannot move down the index of community services and hire a specialist for every type of service that is available. The counselor may have to show a little more boldness, acquire a wider sense of community participation, and he will have to stimulate inter-agency action so that other community agencies will set aside a proportionate share of their service programs to supplement his own programs. This is one of the roles of the counselor. It is both a responsibility and an opportunity to bring about community action. Such programs, agency and interagency, as they revolve around the basic case service process, are the high-rise multipurpose programs in vocational rehabilitation.

THE ROLE OF CASE SERVICES

Case services will always be the essential means for vocationally rehabilitating deaf clients. Programs give them the breadth and depth factor, a wider dimension of operation, and offer a spectrum of continuing services that can alter a client’s vocational level or direction before he is abruptly or untimely discharged from his job.

There are many areas that do not have their own programs for the deaf. This would leave case service purchasing at a standstill. Some counselors who haven’t thought of building their own programs for the deaf are merely giving token case services to their deaf clients. They are putting them “through the mill” and not really caring one
way or the other about the vocational growth and development of their clients. Others may have tried to develop creditable programs but may not have been able to distinguish the needs of the disabled population that they are serving. Whatever the situation case services without programs are very limited.

These remarks may come out as a little threatening or critical of current practices in some areas. The use of sheltered workshops, evaluation centers, and other forms of case service facilities for the deaf have much merit, especially for the unemployed. However, many of these same states have the resources, it seems, to expand into meaningful programs for the underemployed, the growing employed, the potentially unemployed, and the misemployed. Thus, without negating the good work already accomplished, it might be ripe for some of these states to push on to the program level of operation.

On the other hand, this article should serve as an upsetting device to the neat little "polaroid snapshot" services that for years have sent deaf clients step by step into jobs pre-determined by statistic-conscious counselors, factory assembly line monsters, and sheltered workshops that continually keep capable deaf workers underemployed. The vocational world is filled with "match box" jobs and hand assembly or packing chores. These jobs are appropriate for deaf individuals if they have been selectively placed and if these jobs are actually commensurate with their abilities. Otherwise the client is being exploited and usually to no-one's advantage since an unhappy employee will not produce well.

Case services and vocational rehabilitation programs go hand in hand. The latter must focus on clients individually and collectively if it is to mean anything. A program provides the client with the opportunity to grow and to develop. (Note, I did not say "help the client to grow" but, rather, "provides the opportunity.") The client always reserves the right to refuse to help himself. The program sees what the client's needs are and then provides the client with the opportunity to meet these needs of his own free will.

The following is a general view of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program for the Deaf in the District of Columbia. Its programs operate directly from its case service allotment and work in close harmony with other community agencies to bring about a comprehensive program of rehabilitation and pro-rehabilitation services for the deaf.

The District of Columbia Department of Vocational Rehabilitation
established a Unit for the Deaf in the late 1965. Three reasons were primary. The deaf client needed more than straight case services and could not get them elsewhere; the multitude of community service programs were unable to reach the adult deaf and vice versa; finally, there was need for a program that included these pro-rehabilitation services under a somewhat comprehensive vocational program for the deaf. Since then it has become a Unit for the Communications Impaired which serves the deaf, the hard of hearing, and the speech impaired. This paper, for obvious reasons, will adhere to the programs for the deaf.

THE STAFF

The entire staff in the unit works with deaf clients in one way or another, even though there is one counselor for each disability area. The current staff consist of a Chief Counselor who administers the Unit, three vocational rehabilitation counselors, two counselor aides who serve primarily as clerk typists but carry out minor service roles with deaf clients. There are two positions for psychologists (one vacant). One position for an Interpreter-Teacher is being anticipated.

The staff is able to provide straight case services throughout the usual rehabilitation process. This means that clients receive medical and psychological evaluations, counseling, guidance, physical restoration, vocational evaluation, training, selective job placement, job follow-up and interpreting services. These services appear to be elementary rather than sufficient since they tend to merely get at the symptoms of problems that swirl about in the deaf community as a whole. This requires group-type rehabilitation and a community-wide approach to the problems of the deaf. Just as certain professions say that the whole person rather than a part of him should be treated, sociologists will advise that a society rather than just one person should be treated if the problem has community-wide significance. Special programs seem to provide the answer.

THE PROGRAMS

The following program areas have been and are being developed to provide not only a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation program for the deaf, but also to lay a foundation for future staffing
and more service programs if they can be secured: Group Rehabilitation, Registry of the Communications Impaired, Interpreter Service Programs, Adult Education Program, Pre-Vocational Training Program, News Information Program, Sign Language Classes, Adult Education Teacher Training, Group Socio-Vocational Training Program, Operation Night Owl, Workshops and Inter-Agency Conferences, Case Finding Program, Project Development Program, Staff Training and Development Program, Mental Health Program, and a program for evaluation and testing which will not be described until it is completed.

**Group Rehabilitation.** Usually case services are provided for clients individually. The Unit has discovered that when there are several deaf clients who desire training in the same type of work, it is better to train them as a group. This approach is not only economical but also vastly increases the training benefits for the clients. If a sizeable group is available the training center may agree to hire a person who is qualified to teach the deaf, or an interpreter at no extra charge. The Unit can add several side-training projects to the group such as group counseling, typing classes (or other) under adult education, special instructions related to their training, manners, deportment, etc., special classes on how to apply for a job and the do's and don'ts of holding a job. In addition, each client is up for individual counseling and for exchanging his experiences with others on the project.

The Unit for the Deaf has had two such groups and two more are being planned. There is no question in the minds of Unit staff members that this program will contribute immensely towards the provision of a well-rounded program of vocational rehabilitation services for the deaf.

One such project trained six ladies as card punch operators. There was one casualty on this project due to personal problems. The result was a more mature than usual group of deaf employees. All were upgraded from laundry and shirt presser positions. They have been securely employed for nearly a year.

**Registry of the Communications Impaired.** A registry for the hearing and speech impaired was launched during the last year. Close to one thousand names and addresses have been collected. The com-
pleted total, based on national estimates for persons so handicapped, would come close eighty thousand names.

The register has many advantages. It is a case finding resource, a vehicle for overall case followup, a means for information releases, a source for additional case finding and referral and is the recipient group for every specialized type of service that can be made available to them. One could compile a separate paper on the numerous advantages a registry can bring to a service unit.

*Interpreter Services Program.* In response to the growing number of requests for interpreters, from clients and from the general community, the Unit decided to establish an interpreter services program. The program, with the anticipated addition of a full time teacher-interpreter, should be an ongoing operation in the near future.

The Unit has interpreted for the deaf in courts, mental health hearings, legal aid conferences, psychotherapy sessions, family and child counseling welfare services, adult education meetings, and countless vocational training, evaluation and employment situations. Although the main force consists of six interpreters, there are available in the general community persons who are “on call” when the need for them arises.

Recently, a workshop on the interpreting needs of the deaf in civil service employment was held in the District of Columbia. Nearly seventy people took part in the workshop which was sponsored by the Project to Promote Civil Service Employment for the Deaf, another Unit operation made possible by a grant from the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. The participants came up with a multitude of areas where interpreters are needed. The workshop, which was coordinated by the Civil Service Committee of the National Association of the Deaf, recommended that an inter-agency pool of government interpreters for the deaf be established to meet these needs. The next step would be to develop a training program for interpreters, perhaps as part of the Adult Education Program.

*Adult Education Program.* The Unit established a pilot project in adult education in conjunction with the District of Columbia School system in January of 1966. Classes were offered in Intermediate English and in Typing. The typing class had eighteen students while
the English class totaled twenty-six students. Although the numbers taught were pedagogically unsound, it was expected that a large number of dropouts would bring the group down ten or twelve. However, the dropout ratio did not materialize. Only ten dropped out for employment reasons.

The adult education program can be expanded to train interpreters, dramatists, painters, civil service examinees and many other adults with novel pursuits. A pre-vocational program can be offered that closely parallels the rehabilitation process for clients. The program was and will continue to be an important ingredient of group rehabilitation.

This program should not be limited to only clients. Some persons entering the program can become clients, others may not be clients but can contribute to the continuity of the program by merely being a student. This is useful in case the counselor has only one or two clients who can utilize a certain adult education class.

**Pre-Vocational Training Program.** Initially this program began as a teaching project for deaf pupils about to graduate from Kendall School for the Deaf. Information related to vocational and consumer living were relayed and discussed in seminar fashion. Pupils who had received this training were much more disposed towards reaching their vocational objectives than were those who had not received this training.

The Unit is now working on a multi-faceted plan that will serve the pre-vocational needs of the severely retarded deaf, the multiple-handicapped deaf, the average and the above-average deaf clients. This program will be a part of the rehabilitation process throughout and closely allied with the adult education program. It will involve training from the time the case is referred through the job follow-up period and may involve post-closure services.

**News Information Program.** It is difficult to reach deaf clients through the regular news media and the mail unless special techniques are employed. The current staff has been trying out different ways to reach its clients through news articles, specially designed letters and picturesque letters. Check list postcards have been used. Data is slowly being gathered.
Brochures, information articles and surveys have been very ineffective for getting through to the average deaf population. Eventually a project will be set up for clients, interested adult deaf and hearing persons to develop journalistic ability and ideas that will stimulate the reading interests of the people that the Unit is trying to reach. The project, which will be tied in with case services and adult education, could have further implications for journalism in general, just as the National Theatre of the Deaf has implications for the professional theatre.

**Sign Language Classes.** This program needs little amplification. One of the counseling staff holds sign language classes twice a week for interested agency people. These classes will be offered to clients who need this service, and non-agency parties who employ deaf clients or who may be interested in the sign language as a new knowledge. Other persons may desire to develop their skills as interpreters, as clerical workers for deaf professionals, or for some other reason. The entire operation will flow in and out the staff development, case service, interpreter training and adult education programs.

**Adult Education Teacher Training.** This is a program at an embryonic stage. It is generally acknowledged that teaching adults and adult education is different from teaching children and public school education for elementary and secondary children. The approach to teaching adults and the techniques are different. During the pilot project, the two classes had assistant instructors merely so they could gain exposure to the overall teacher-student atmosphere. Later special classes will have to be set up to provide adult education teacher training. Eventually, the program may come up with teaching characteristics and techniques that are unique to teaching deaf adults. These will then be incorporated into the teacher training classes.

**Group Social-Vocational Training.** This program has two main objectives: to help the client gain insights to his own feelings about his teacher or employer, and to gain valuable feedback concerning his own impact that he makes on other members of the group. The group also discusses problems that clients face when trying to get along with co-workers and other deaf adults in the community. This training is a combination of both T-group training and group vocational counseling. All three counselors for the deaf participated in these group sessions.
Two client groups have been served. Although the training began as an experiment, it is scheduled to become a regular part of the program. Both client groups showed considerable appreciation for the training. They were able to come up with several ways each in which the clients felt that they benefited from the training. One client was referred to the Unit by her employer since she was on the verge of being dismissed from her job. The insights that she gained from social-vocational training were so useful to her that she made a virtual about-face in her work and received a promotion within three months following her group sessions.

Since several of the trainees were employed students or housewives who had to await the return of their husbands from employment, the sessions were held once a week during the evenings.

These trainees, about twenty-five in number, also gained valuable insights into mental health and illness—something that they previously knew very little about. A course in mental hygiene will be offered in the adult education program if a sufficient number of students can enroll.

Operation Night Owl. The Unit began a night service project in fiscal 1966. This was in response to the needs of deaf individuals who need vocational rehabilitation services after working hours. The District government approved a special request for this one-night-a-week arrangement.

There are persons who seek to upgrade their vocations and who would like to apply for services, but cannot get away from their current jobs. There are spouses who would like to utilize the agency’s program but who cannot afford a baby sitter. They are able to receive these services when the other spouse returns from work. Group social-vocational training is given at night, since the training offers the most advantages to clients who are in training or employed.

Counselors find an occasional evening advantageous to their own service plans. Clients who receive vocational training during night classes, or during adult education classes can be observed and served during this one-night-a-week service. New evening programs can be established.

Operation Night Owl will continue to be a very important service of the Unit. Approximately fifty deaf adults have been able to utilize this special service thus far.
Workshops and Conferences. Workshops on a variety of problems will be held on a local basis to come up with local solutions to local problems. The first, a Workshop on Interpreting for the Deaf in Civil Service Employment, is being edited. Nearly all of the discussions were taped verbatim. A questionnaire was designed to gather all the flaws that the participants noticed to see where improvements could be made. It may be possible that the Unit can come up with an informative brochure on "how to conduct a local workshop."

Conferences have been held between the counselors in the District of Columbia and Maryland who work with the adult deaf to develop ways and means by which the two states could cooperate when developing vocational rehabilitation programs for the deaf. The same efforts are initiating with the counselors in Virginia. An inter-state example would be to have group training projects wherein each state would carry its appropriate share of the training costs. This would be an inestimable boon to group rehabilitation for the deaf.

Workshops and conferences will be held on a variety of topics and with any number of community service agencies during the next fiscal year. Services for the deaf cannot operate in a vacuum but may function successfully as an integral part of the community's agency service program through a series of workshops and conferences which will enable the Unit for the Deaf to operate as a community team member.

Case Finding Program. Case Finding and referral programs for the deaf have been primarily an organization-by-organization operation. Deaf adults who arrive in the community drop into the office almost biweekly. The one year residence law in the District of Columbia prevents the Unit from providing paid services. However, most of these individuals end up with jobs until they become eligible for services.

One day conferences with otologists, audiologists, school counselors and clinicians are being planned for cross-acquaintance purposes. These meetings will also help us establish criteria for reciprocal cooperation which will enable both the referral source and the Unit to work together towards enabling the client to become vocationally rehabilitated.
The United Planning Organization, a local anti-poverty agency, through its “Operations Out-reach” program will train its volunteers (who operate from strategically located neighborhood centers) to go into the community poverty pockets to locate persons who have a hearing loss and have them referred to our Unit for the Deaf for services. This should enhance the case finding program considerably, along with workshops, conferences, interpreters, information and adult education classes.

Project Development Program. There is a heavy emphasis made on the desirability of special projects to supplement the Unit’s case service program. Besides the workshop and the project to Promote Civil Service Employment for the Deaf, the Unit has developed project applications for computer programming, reading comprehension, adult education and several others. The Unit has accumulated approximately twenty-five project ideas for research and demonstration purposes for the deaf alone. There is a high casualty rate for projects so it is very difficult to get one funded. Much work and review of literature is required. It would be to the Unit’s advantage to hire a project development specialist.

Staff Training and Development Program. This program consists of three parts first-hand experience in handling casework and project problems; participating in self-development training, and attending workshops.

The staff has received experience in organizing and planning workshops, conferences and projects. They have written news and information articles about the Unit services. They have participated in meetings for the purpose of developing case service, evaluation, and training films and projects. They have had first-hand experience in trying to write project applications for funds.

Members of the staff have served as assistants in social-vocational group training sessions; they have taken part in workshops as participants, observers, interpreters and are editing the results; training in vocational rehabilitation administration and supervision and in group counseling techniques were also received by members of the staff.

A special Professional Leadership Training Class was set up for staff members, leaders of the deaf from the National Association of the Deaf and from Gallaudet College. The group, headed by a com-
petent psychologist, received a penetrating dose of T-Group training or sensitivity training, and gained many new insights about themselves and the others in the group.

A more planned type of program, including university studies, will be pursued when arrangements can be made.

_Mental Health Program._ Although social-vocational training, interpreting in psychotherapy sessions and mental health hearings along with testing has given the appearance of a program, these services have only demonstrated that there is a dire need for a Mental Health Program for the Deaf. This program, if one can call it such, will get underway when the two psychologists come on board. Until now, outside the usual case services, the Unit has merely succeeded in lowering client resistance and negative feelings towards mental health treatment. This service, as a program, is the Unit’s number one goal for the next fiscal year.

CONCLUSION

This article, hopefully, should help to clarify that a Unit for the Deaf is able to offer more than straight case services in vocational rehabilitation. A counselor can develop programs, and move up to a complex of services that can be integrated with community service programs, generally.

Since undertaking the development of these programs in the past fiscal year, the Unit for the Deaf has almost doubled its anticipated number of cases rehabilitated. This would seem to rebut the argument that the more quality a counselor puts into case services, the fewer will be the number of cases closed as rehabilitated. One can have quality as well as quantity if the Unit programs are developed and integrated with the rehabilitation process. However, both must be realistically based on the needs of the population being served.

Inter-state and inter-agency programs and projects are not only feasible and possible but are recommended. They enable the counselor to bring new and finer quality to his case service outlay. Group rehabilitation enables the counselor to do more with his allotment, to give more for the same price.

The program concept, the high-rise model, is in its initial stages. In the months ahead the staff will be able to discern and define more clearly the high-rise structure that we are building and discovering simultaneously.