The Expanded Services for The Deaf Project of The Vocational Rehabilitation Center of Allegheny County

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I wish to thank Dr. Stephen P. Quigley, Conference Chairman, President Gary D. Blake and other members of the board of Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf for the kind invitation to speak before a distinguished group of rehabilitation workers on Expanded Services for the Deaf Project at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center of Allegheny County. We have already learned so much during this convention about the new technical training facilities which are now available to the deaf. Those who have had the opportunities to study the brochures on the above programs will agree that a careful selection of qualified candidates holds a high priority. The vocational rehabilitation counselors will find it most helpful than ever before to have the clients undergo thorough assessment of his aptitudes, abilities, interests, and work habits through psychological testing and/or work sample testing as needed to determine the highest potentials for training and employment. It is most usually finds it most difficult trying to establish a vocational helpful to keep in mind that an average 18 year old individual choice. It is usually frightening when one learns that there are at least 45,000 different occupational titles; that the local labor market is never constant; that certain jobs would become obsolete ten years from now; and that the competitive

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world is extremely keen. We could now better appreciate the changes an average 18 year old deaf individual would experience from a protective environment to a world of work. This is where a community rehabilitation program, such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Center of Allegheny County, fits into the picture ideally. The Vocational Rehabilitation Center, which is better known in the city of Pittsburgh as "VRC", has been in existence for well over 40 years and is a member agency of the United Fund. It is well staffed and the services it has to offer are quite comprehensive. By the beginning of 1970, the agency will be moving from the rented facilities in downtown Pittsburgh to a two million dollar facility of its own. The agency had always provided services to the deaf more or less on a very small scale. However, the need for expansion of vocational rehabilitation services to the deaf was recognized by this agency as well as the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation; the Counseling and Community Center for the Deaf; the University of Pittsburgh; the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf; and the Pittsburgh Association of the Deaf.

The Expanded Services for the Deaf Project at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center was initiated on June 3, 1968 with the appointment of a coordinator and secretary. The basic objective of the project is to reduce the number of unemployed deaf in the community and to alleviate the problem of underemployment among the deaf. This is to be accomplished through casefinding, enhancing the capacity of VPC's current programs in serving the deaf, and selective placement.

As outlined in the request for support of this project, the responsibilities of the coordinator was just not to provide direct services to the deaf, but primarily serve as a consultant and resource person to other professional personnel in the Center was initiated on June 3, 1968 with the appointment of a coordinator and secretary. The basic objective of the project is to reduce the number of unemployed deaf in the community and to alleviate the problem of underemployment among the deaf. This is to be accomplished through casefinding, enhancing the capacity of VRC's current programs in

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As outlined in the request for support of this project, the responsibilities of the coordinator was just not to provide direct services to the deaf, but primarily serve as a consultant and resource person to other professional personnel in the Center working with clients by:

(a) Establishing and maintaining a close relationship with the deaf community and other agencies serving the deaf for the purpose of finding persons needing employment or upgrading in employment. Steps were made toward this direction at the very beginning of the project period. This movement has contributed considerably toward increased caseload and toward vastly expanded and effective placement program.

(b) Acting as a stimulant for the deaf to apply for rehabilitation services and expediting entry into VRC and BVR sponsorship. The deaf have already demonstrated greater interest in the utilization of rehabilitation services. However, efforts are still being made toward the possibility of expanding entry into VRC and BVR sponsorship for clients who are no longer attending school.

(c) Providing direct vocational rehabilitation counseling services to deaf clients. The coordinator has been very much involved with this area and will continue to do so until the vocational counselors are ready to take over this responsibility.

(d) Coordinating services with other professional personnel working with the deaf in the Center. This has proven to be one of the major responsibilities. In addition, weekly in-service training sessions were initiated early in the project for the evaluation staff and subsequently a similar one instituted for the vocational and placement counselors.

(e) Creating additional employment opportunities through contact with current and potential employers of the deaf. Due to extremely limited employ-
ment opportunities for the deaf in the Greater Pittsburgh area, special efforts have been made to open up semi-skilled jobs.

(f) Engaging in the selective placement and long-term follow-up of deaf clients. VRC has expanded its efforts toward selective placement and the long-term follow-up study has already been inaugurated.

Of particular significance to date has been the emphasis on placement activities. As soon as the project became known to the deaf community, the requests for these services increased to the point where the coordinator has spent approximately 40% of his time in placement related activities including the development of new job opportunities and assisting the placement counselors in developing expertise in serving the deaf.

We feel it would be most helpful to outline the services now offered by the Vocational Rehabilitation Center of Allegheny County along with the changes that have been made up to this point. At intake, each hearing impaired individual applying for service is interviewed by the project coordinator. Each individual's previous experience, background, and goals are explored through interviews and psychological tests. The testing serves to supplement the initial interviews to ascertain the client's highest potential for training and employment. The coordinator usually holds a conference with the vocational counselor and psychometrist and determines the best possible selection of tests for a given client. The coordinator would also be available to assist with the administration of tests, depending on the level of communicative skills the client might possess. The more limited the client might be communication-wise, the more likely the coordinator would be involved with the entire testing program. The major objective has been to maintain the highest possible validity and reliability of tests to be administered to the deaf. In addition, an experimental test battery is being developed for administration to students at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. The results of this testing have not yet been tabulated and will be reported in subsequent reports.
On the basis of the initial and subsequent interviews and psychological testing, the applicants are:

1. Counseled to return to school; or
2. Referred to the placement counselor for suitable employment; or
3. Referred to the particular program which best meets their needs and capabilities.

If a client is recommended for, and enters a program, he is assigned to a vocational counselor who is responsible for the initial placement of each client into an appropriate program, and the recommendations for the client’s movement from one phase of the program to another. In addition, the counselors:

1. Provide continuing individual and group counseling during the entire program.
2. Prepare training plans in cooperation with employers, school personnel, foremen, Pennsylvania Bureau of Employment Security, and others concerned with the individual’s vocational development and training.
3. Work closely with placement personnel and training personnel in following clients through the program.
4. Consult with other community agencies who may be providing service to the individual.

**PLACEMENT**

Placement is an integral part of VRC’s total program. Clients are referred to jobs in the community, when, in the opinion of the staff, they are considered to be employable and placeable. The placement counselors with the assistance of the project coordinator are responsible for:

1. Interviewing clients who have been recommended for placement
2. Contacting employers
3. Placement counseling (individual and group)
4. Maintaining contact with the client after placed on a job
5. Follow-up

All clients are interviewed by a social worker on the day they enter a program. When indicated, the client’s parents, parent or relatives are also interviewed. The latter interview is designed to familiarize the parents with the program, and to obtain a social history and understanding of the attitudes of these individuals towards the client. Contact is maintained with the parent on an “as needed” basis, either through direct conferences, or even the phone. In addition, the social worker:

1. Maintains contact with the clients while in a program, through individual and group counseling sessions.
2. Contacts social agencies and individuals for background information.
3. Obtains collateral medical, psychological information.
4. Coordinates medical and psychiatric consultations.
5. Maintains liaison with community agencies.
6. Develops services for clients in community agencies, e.g. recreation, education.
7. Personal counseling:
   a. Home visitation to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the home and the community.
   b. Grooming and personal hygiene.
   c. Development of community resources for recreation and socialization.
   d. Casework services to the family in order to help them accept the individual and recognize his abilities.

**REMEDICATION**

For those clients whose ability to fully benefit from the evaluation and work adjustment programs because of limita-
tions in reading, writing, and arithmetic skills is limited, the remediation program provides individual instruction in work-oriented reading, writing, traveling, and personal grooming.

**MEDICAL AND PSYCHIATRIC CONSULTATIONS**

**Medical**

The medical consultant spends two mornings a week at VRC. The medical records of clients entering programs are reviewed and if indicated the clients are examined to ascertain the physical limitations, if any, which must be considered in programming for the individual. In addition, the physician ascertains the need for and arranges further specialist's examinations.

**Psychiatry**

The psychiatric consultant spends one afternoon per week reviewing records, interviewing clients, and instructing the staff. His services are available to all clients and are not restricted to the emotionally ill.

**PROGRAMS**

**Work Sample Testing**

This phase is devoted to a period of up to 12 weeks of vocational evaluation in a setting which, through the utilization of meaningful job tasks, individuals are offered a wide range of activities to evaluate their potential for training and/or employment in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled trades, various clerical and service occupations. This service provides a basis for vocational plans, either for training or direct placement. Consideration is given to the client's physical and emotional limitations, readiness for work, motivation, work attitudes and work habits, as well as to his skills and aptitudes. Through this 12 week experience, it can be noted whether there is a need for additional services, such as medical counseling, casework, etc. in order to assist the individual in attaining his highest vocational potential.
Work sample testing is most appropriate for those individuals who, at the time of intake, demonstrate attitudes which negate their entry into training programs or direct placement, or those who, in the opinion of the counselors, are so damaged as to require an extended period of preparation prior to their being considered eligible for advanced employment services. On the basis of the evaluation process, the counselor will then assign the individuals to an appropriate program, taking particular care to recommend the most advanced program in accordance with his abilities and needs. During the course of the sample testing, arrangements are made for special services such as remedial reading, medical and psychiatric consultations, personal adjustment counseling, if indicated. At the end of five weeks, a general staffing is held to appraise progress to date and modify the program as needed.

At the end of 10 weeks, the client's progress is again appraised and determination made as to the feasibility or continued evaluation and for the purpose of ascertaining the need for further vocational services. Due to communicative limitations between the evaluators and certain deaf clients, a need for instruction of certain terms as related to a specific work sample area has been demonstrated. Fortunately, Mrs. Don Pulver a totally deaf volunteer from the Junior League with three and a half years of teaching experience to her credit, has been utilized as a tutor half-day per week. This special arrangement has proven to be most helpful in establishing more effective work sample evaluation. Due to a great variety of work tasks that already exist within the program, efforts have been concentrated toward more effective utilization of above facilities. Suggestions have been made for possible expansion in the machine operation area toward more meaningful evaluation in the total crib and stock and shipping areas.

Work Adjustment

Those whose abilities are apparent at the end of the evaluation period, but who demonstrate poor work habits, are referred to our production workshop where they:

1. Work on industrial contracts and are paid in accor-
dance with the established wage rate.

2. Serve in an actual work experience which will reveal factors involving motivation and potentiality for growth.

3. Are exposed to a variety of jobs and intensively tested as to readiness for employment and encouraged to develop proper habits in order to increase their employability.

The work adjustment workshop is designed to simulate an actual work experience through the utilization of sub-contract from industry. These contracts cover a wide range of activities from unskilled work to semi-skilled tasks. Generally this industrial work is in the packaging, binding, and light manufacturing fields. This program has a dual purpose, work adjustment and job training. For those clients who have employable skills but are deficient in work habits and attitudes, the job training workshop in productive work. During this program of approximately 12 weeks, clients are:

1. Observed and counseled to develop readiness for employment.

2. Provided with information and knowledge to overcome their educational limitations in cooperation with the educational and remedial programs.

3. Provided with casework, medical, and other assistance by the staff of VRC or other programs which are to be developed.

When it has been ascertained through staff conferences that the client has made sufficient gains to be considered ready for training or placement, appropriate recommendation will be made.

Job Training

For those clients with the capability and interests for training and placement in an industrial setting, the job training workshop will provide training in these areas to include assembly and general factory operations.

During the work adjustment and training programs, trainees are required to punch in an out and expected to keep regular hours. They are paid wages commensurate with those
paid in regular industry. Those whose productivity has not reached the industrial rate, receive wages in proportion to their productivity. Clients may be referred to the work adjustment or job training programs directly from intake, work sample testing, or from any of the VRC program elements. Prior to or upon completion of these programs, clients may be referred for additional training, job placement, work sample testing, or any of the employment programs. The decision to transfer the client into or out of the work adjustment or job training program is made by the counselor in consultation with the supervisor and other staff who may be serving the client.

Extended Employment

This is a long term sheltered workshop program for those individuals who do not appear to have potentials for placement in competitive industry in the immediate or near future, and who require an indefinite period of employment in a sheltered training setting. Generally their production is at least 25% of standard, but not more than 75%. Clients who have been evaluated in VRC's current rehabilitation programs and are recommended for long term sheltered employment, and who may not qualify or cannot be accepted for service in other workshops are eligible. Long term placement clients are assigned to VRC personnel for professional services, and are re-evaluated regularly to ascertain whether or not they still should remain or have progressed to the degree that they may be ready to move toward regular employment.

Basic Education and Social Training (B.E.S.T.)

Is provided for those individuals whose disabilities and limited life experience preclude their full participation in the Evaluation and/or Work Adjustment programs. Since an adequate assessment of the individual's aptitudes and abilities cannot be made, the B.E.S.T. program has been developed to provide instruction and experience in the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes required for participation in the other available programs, successful performance on a job, and in society.
The following are included in this program:

Basic reading and arithmetic as required for successful vocational adjustment.

Development of the social relationships necessary for effective functioning in a work situation and community living.

Knowledge of the community and its resources: location of streets, buildings, etc.

Field trips to industry to provide exposure to the world of "work".

Grooming and personal hygiene.

Handling of cash.

While in the B.E.S.T. program, clients will participate in work activities geared to their special needs.

Each of the programs outlined above are designed to meet the individual's special needs. These are not to be considered as distinct units with the client moving progressively from one program to another, but rather are utilized at the time the client requires the particular emphasis available in Evaluation and Work Adjustment, or he may enter Evaluation to be transferred to B.E.S.T. or Work Adjustment. The specific program for a client is determined by the needs of each individual.

In addition to its regular programs, VRC in cooperation with various community and state agencies has developed programs which are designed to serve special needs. This includes:

Evaluation of vocation potentials of students enrolled at Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and De Paul Institute on half-day basis.

PUBLICITY

The federal project on expanded services to the deaf has received favorable publicity. The Pittsburgh Press and the
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette have featured excellent write-ups on the project from time to time. The Vocational Rehabilitation Center is most fortunate to have an excellent Public Relations Director. The project was featured or mentioned in practically every publication or brochure prepared by VRC. A special employment bulletin announcing the availability of qualified deaf persons seeking specific working positions was sent to at least 3,000 firms. The responses have been most favorable. Selected number of deaf clients have been included in other employment bulletins.

**PROJECTION FOR THE FUTURE**

The projection for the immediate future is to prepare write-up of successful deaf employees for the news media. As recommended by the project staff and the Advisory Committee on Expanded Services for the Deaf, consideration should be geared to possible ways of educating the potential employers in the community. Continuing efforts will be made to provide in-service training to the regular staff. Time will tell whether it is feasible to expand the project staff or to utilize only the regular staff. However, it is recognized that it requires a genuine interest and time for an individual to become skilled in working with the deaf. Furthermore, the number of clients served during the initial nine month period was well beyond expectations.

With these facts, consideration will be given to the need to expand the qualifications in serving this population. The emphasis to date, as noted earlier, has been on placement activities. This has been in large part due to responding to the stated need of the deaf community. The remainder of the project period closer attention will be given to the assessment process with a concomitant concern directed to developing procedures for the evaluation and upgrading of those who are currently employed.

Forty-five direct and twenty-five indirect placements have been recorded for the first 11 months of the 3-year project. A total of 180 referrals have been made to the agency over the same period. Of this total, 158 clients have been served...
during the first 11 months of the 3-year project period. This is significantly higher than 90 persons projected for the first full year. In brief, this project has been off to an exceptional start. The Community Chest of Allegheny County, which supplied the local matching funds for the first year, has been accepting of the need for providing services to the deaf. They have been gratified by the progress to date. It is expected that they will continue to supply much of the local support for the remaining two years of the project and to participate in the funding required for activity beyond the life of the grant. The State agency has found this to be an interesting experience. It is our intent that the success of the project will find the State agency making greater utilization, this program should be the basis much greater rehabilitation services in future years for the deaf in the community. In closing, thank you for the opportunity to be with you all and to tell about the new and worthwhile program in Pittsburgh.