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DEAF EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE NETWORK: A MODEL FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE DELIVERY

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Abstract

The successful rehabilitation of deaf clients depends on attention to both individual and environmental factors which hinder vocational attainment and satisfaction. Service providers should be aware of and utilize employment and employability interventions which address these factors. This paper presents a comprehensive model for employment service delivery. An ecological framework is outlined, the model is described, and discussion is offered.

Historically the employment picture for deaf persons in the United States has been problematical. Studies conducted over the past 50 years have noted that prevocationally deaf persons, in comparison with hearing persons, are disproportionately clustered in certain job categories (Best, 1943; Boatner, 1964; Kronenberg & Blake, 1966; Lunde & Bigman, 1959; Martens, 1936; Schein & Delk, 1972, 1978), have less occupational mobility and advancement (Christiansen, 1982; Lunde & Bigman, 1959; Schein, 1968; Crammatte, 1965), usually have lower employment rates (Christiansen, 1952; Schein & Delk, 1978) and, on the average, have lower wages and salaries (Boatner, Stuckless & Moores, 1964; Schein & Delk, 1974; Weinrich, 1972; Winakur, 1973). These conditions are even more unfavorable for deaf women (Barnett, 1982; Rosenstein & Lerman, 1963; Wax & Danek, 1982; Welsh, 1982) and for younger deaf workers and deaf persons who are also minority group members (Christiansen, 1982; Crammatte, 1965).

Many factors have contributed to these relatively consistent observations on the employment status of deaf people over the years. Professionals in education and rehabilitation have implicated both

environmental and individual factors.

Environmental factors include those which impact the development of a "work identity" in deaf youth such as occupational stereotyping by teachers and counselors (Allen, Rawlings, & Schildroth, 1989), lack of career education (Prickett & Hunt, 1977), lack of cooperative work-study and transitioning programs at the secondary level (Allen, Schildroth & Rawlings, 1989), and lack of parental involvement and support in the career decision-making process (Lerman & Guilfoyle, 1970). There are also ongoing impediments to vocational attainment for deaf adults: attitudinal and physical barriers in society (Fritz & Smith, 1985), employment discrimination (both blatant and subtle) and employer stereotyping (Atelsek & Mackin, 1971; Phillips, 1973, 1975), a shortage of vocational training options for non-college bound deaf youth (Allen, Rawlings, & Schildroth, 1989; COED, 1988), overworked and underqualified rehabilitation professionals, and many others (McCrone & Payette, 1989).

Individual factors which hinder vocational attainment include many deaf persons' lack of awareness of employment options due to communication problems, information deficits or restricted social networks (Farrugia, 1982; Galloway, 1978; Kersting, 1975; McHugh, 1975; Ouellette, 1983; Twyman & Ouellette, 1978; White, 1974), lack of self awareness (aptitudes, interests and abilities), lower self-esteem and self-expectations among some deaf people (Dupiez, 1971; Farrugia, 1982; Moccia, 1981; Stinson, 1970), and perceived work disincentives such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Vernon, 1981).

The employment outlook for deaf persons is far from bleak, however. Many recent legislative and

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public policy initiatives such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986, and the Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act of 1987 have addressed issues of employment accessibility, affirmative action and non-discrimination, work disincentives, and supported employment for people with disabilities.

Deaf people have benefitted from these initiatives which have been particularly successful in expanding post-secondary program options and opening up professional career opportunities for higher functioning deaf persons (Ouellette & Leja, 1988). Indeed, deaf people have demonstrated success in every sector of the labor market in which people are gainfully employed.

Another positive factor for the employment of deaf people is projected labor market trends. Nationally, the population and labor force will grow more slowly—the 1.9% annual population growth that was the norm since the 1950's is already slowing and will be .7% by the year 2000. Labor force growth will also be down to 1% per year (GETC, 1989). These trends present a problem for employers: filling an increasing number of jobs with a decreasing number of qualified applicants. In order to fill this gap, employers will need to aggressively recruit workers and develop alternative personnel resources among underrepresented groups.

The challenge now for rehabilitation professionals is to offer employment and employability interventions consistent with the deaf person's and the employer's needs. A particular need exists to meet the employment and vocational training needs of the lower achieving deaf adult (Commission on Education of the Deaf, 1988), although almost all deaf persons can use some intervention at some time in their lives. The purpose of this paper is to describe a comprehensive conceptual model of employment service delivery, the Deaf Employment Assistance Network (DEAN) which has the potential to provide a continuum of services both to deaf persons and to employers.

Rationale

A conceptual design for employment services for deaf people is the first step to ensure comprehensive delivery, fill the job market/labor force gap, and enhance employment accessibility. First, by coordinating delivery, overlap and gaps in service are avoided. Next, employers are able to systematically meet their needs by becoming involved with poten-

tial rehabilitation professionals and employees in the initial stage of the employment process. Finally, accessibility to a broad array of employment services is afforded the deaf person regardless of his or her achievement level.

The DEAN model is based on recent shifts in rehabilitation service delivery paradigms (Szymanski, Rubin & Rubin, 1988). Current paradigms have moved away from deficit-based and individually-centered services to an ecologically oriented approach (Chadsey-Rusch, 1985, 1986; Hanley-Maxwell, 1986; Schmid, 1987; Szymanski, Dunn & Parker, 1989.) The ecological approach considers the environmental dimension of an individual's behavior and provides a framework for designing interventions that optimize the fit between an individual and his or her environment (Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell, & Parker, in press).

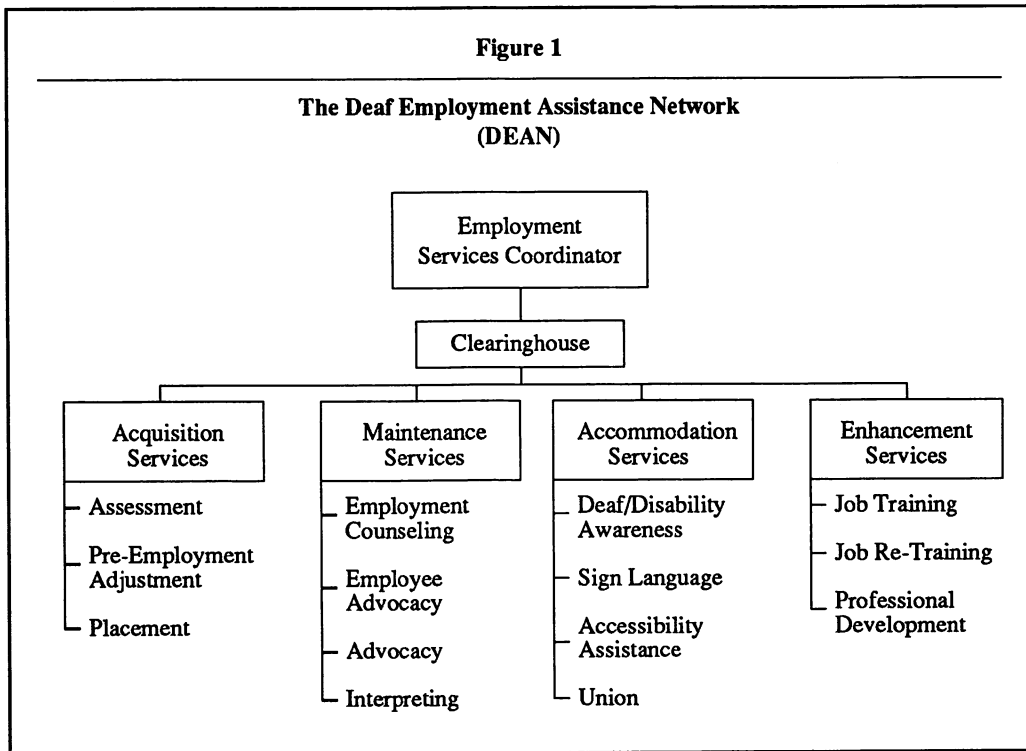
As applied to prevocationally deaf persons, this conceptual model encompasses certain values: (1) that deaf people possess a full range of individual characteristics while sharing a unique language, culture and, environmentally-imposed communication barriers; (2) each deaf person is part of many different, but interrelated ecosystems, e.g. home, work, school; (3) the deaf individual both influences and is influenced by his or her environment; (4) a deaf individual cannot be understood without reference to his or her environment which is dynamic and changing; (5) accessibility to programs and services to the degree afforded hearing people is limited for most deaf people; and (6) any model of comprehensive intervention must address the unique and empirically demonstrated employment problems confronting deaf persons.

Description of the Model

This model presents an ecologically-based framework for rehabilitation interventions with deaf persons which encompasses the following dimensions as illustrated in Figure 1: (1) employment acquisition services which assist the deaf person to obtain employment; (2) employment maintenance services which enable the deaf person to maintain employment; (3) employment accommodation services which enable the deaf person to achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency in relation to his/her job environment; and (4) employment enhancement services which assist the deaf person with job mobility and advancement.

The DEAN model possesses the potential to provide nationwide linkages through a centrally coordinated system of both direct and indirect services.

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Two components are crucial: a coordinating agency or association capable of administering and maintaining the network, a clearinghouse on deafness and employment as part of the coordinating agency or association. The clearinghouse would be an information center that consists of a directory for services, information and referral, and technical assistance in the areas of deafness and employment. The following programs and services would be accessed through the clearinghouse:

Employment Acquisition Services

These services as depicted in Figure 2 assist the deaf person to gain employment. Since the pool of qualified employees is shrinking (GETC, 1989), the job-ready applicant will be in high demand by employers throughout the 1990's. Acquisition services include assessment, pre-employment adjustment training, and placement programs.

Assessment. Assessment helps an individual to determine career objectives based on aptitudes and interests (Traxler, 1989). Although sometimes controversial, these services should be made available to all deaf people so that they may actively participate in the entire decision-making process. Because assessment may yield invalid results when inappro-

priate techniques, tests, or procedures are used, qualified professionals must be involved in the assessment process (Beane & Larson, 1979; Vernon, 1980). Assessment programs might include career exploration, which offers appropriate testing and career-oriented counseling, and vocational evaluation, which measures aptitudes and interests through tests and inventories designed for deaf persons. Both psychological and personality measurements should be used so that a complete analysis of interests and abilities may be formed.

Pre-employment adjustment training. This service enhances an individual's overall employability. Services address acclimatization to the prevailing expectations and demands of the worksite and information regarding work cultures, mores, and norms. These services may be provided to any deaf person regardless of achievement level, from the recent college graduate in his or her first employment situation, to the supported employment candidate. These services exclude vocational skills training. Pre-employment adjustment training services might include Work Adjustment Training (WAT), which addresses the development and maintenance of work behaviors, On-The-Job Training (OJT), and transitioning projects, to move a student from

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the school setting to the work setting. Transitioning projects can be developed for any student leaving a school setting and entering employment, and include not only school-to-work programs for high school students, but also college workstudy and co-op programs, such as Gallaudet University's Experiential Programs Off Campus (EPOC).

Additionally, adjustment counseling can provide support and direction to the person during the pre-employment period.

Placement. These services provide assistance with obtaining appropriate employment. Services include placement counseling, direct and indirect job placement assistance, and employer development. A key element to breaking down attitudinal and physical barriers to employment is through employer development projects. These projects can provide an employment pool whereby employment specialists and employers maintain regular contact and share information regarding potential employees and job openings. They also provide technical assistance with accessibility through awareness activities, information about worksite modifications and the like.

Employment Maintenance Services

This dimension includes those services which enable the deaf employee to maintain employment. Employment counseling, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's), advocacy, and interpreter serv-

ices fall under the category of maintenance services as illustrated in Figure 3.

Employment counseling. This service provides on-going support and intervention to deaf employees working in a predominantly hearing environment. Ideally, these services are utilized by both new and old employees.

Employee assistance programs. These services, commonly referred to as EAP's, help employees whose job performance is impaired due to personal issues.(e.g. alcohol/drug addiction, family or marital relationship problems).

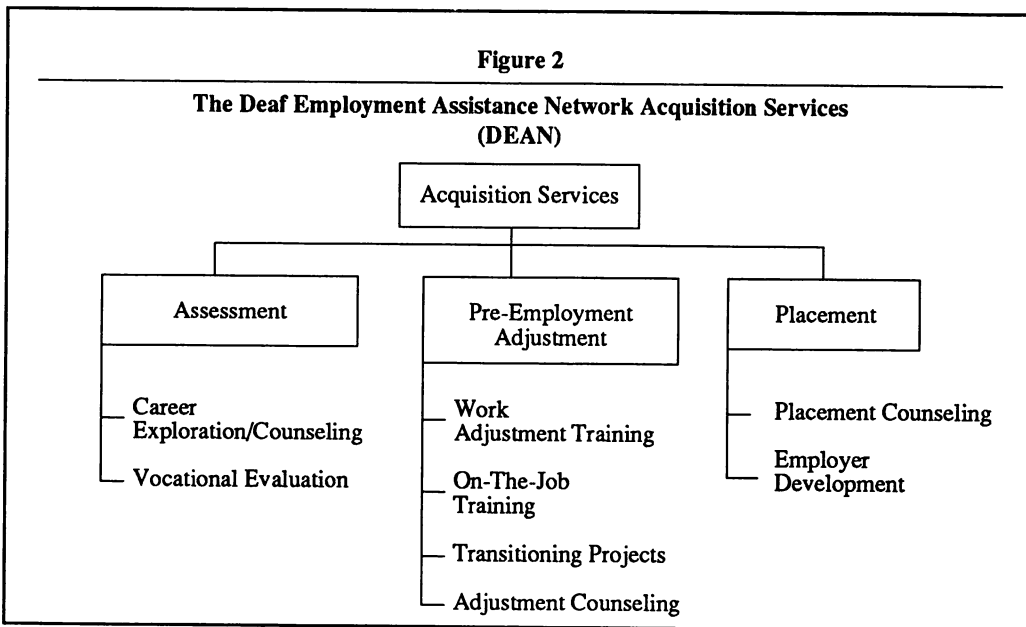
For the employer, it is more cost effective to address the needs of the troubled employee than to replace and retrain him or her (Hellan, 1980). Therefore, access to existing EAP's in both the public and private sectors benefits both employee and employer.

Advocacy programs. These programs offer legal/moral support services to deaf employees who are unfamiliar with their rights in the employment situation or are unsure of how to handle employment-related grievances. These services do not need to be adversarial in nature but may provide information which will ultimately benefit the employer unfamiliar with issues involving the employment of deaf people.

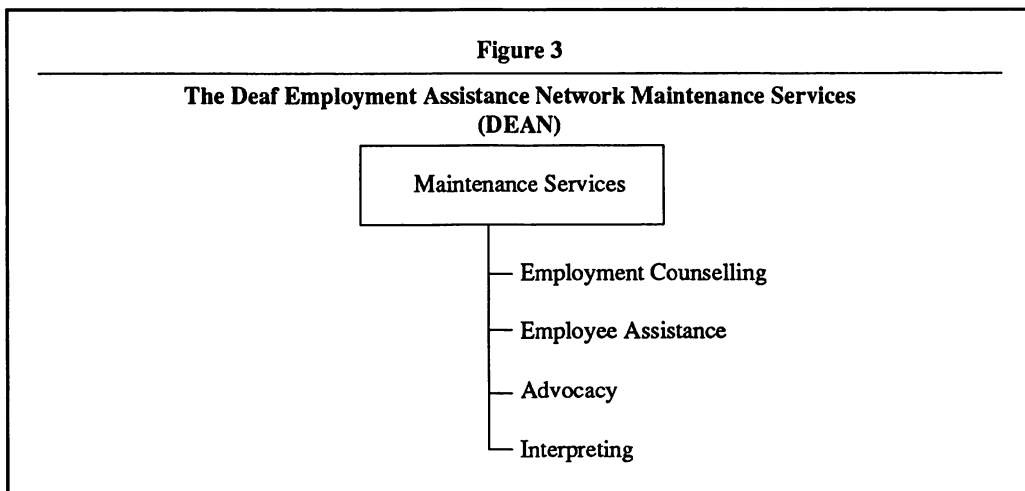
Interpreting services. These services provide interpreter support to help facilitate on-the-job communication. While these services are likely to be tem-

Figure 2

The Deaf Employment Assistance Network Acquisition Services (DEAN)



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porary in nature, they can provide long-term benefits. Employers are often more comfortable knowing that interpreters are available, whether or not they actually utilize them. Further, interpreters often provide the impetus for employer/co-worker sign language classes and deaf culture awareness activities.

Employment Accommodation Services

These enable the employee to maintain maximum effectiveness and efficiency in relation to his/her job environment, employer(s), and co-workers. Accommodation services, as seen in Figure 4, include deafness/disability awareness training, sign language programs, accessibility assistance, and union programs.

Deafness/disability awareness training. These programs involve public relations in the areas of deafness and employment. Workshops and related activities enhance the image of deaf employees by dispelling myths and eliminating attitudinal barriers between deaf and hearing employees.

Sign language programs. These programs include instruction in manual communication to encourage a workplace support system based on common language. Courses may be structured to address job-specific signs, therefore increasing interdependency of co-workers and maximizing productivity.

Accessibility assistance. This service provides for the elimination of physical barriers to employment. This program provides technical assistance in the area of rehabilitation engineering, mobility, communication, and safety barriers.

Union programs. These programs provide access to unions. Through a cooperative agreement, a representative coordinates supportive services, provides information and referral to the employee, and serves as liaison between supervisors, co-workers, and employees.

Employment Enhancement Services

These services assist the deaf employee with job mobility or improvement of his/her current position. They provide direct training to the employee. Included are job training, job re-training, and professional development, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Job training programs. These programs provide additional training to increase advancement opportunities or provide access to other jobs at the same level. These programs might include skills training in a specific skill area, corporate in-house training made accessible with interpreters, and supported employment projects. The supported employment model can be implemented regardless of the achievement level of the employee. Services might include interpreting and/or supportive instruction assistance (tutoring) on a higher level, while job coaches might be used for lower achieving clients.

Job re-training. These programs offer the opportunity to re-enter the labor force. Statistics indicate that re-entering workers will be a valuable resource for employers in the coming years (GETC, 1989). Displaced worker projects help laid-off or phased-out employees obtain new employment. Re-entry projects can target deaf people who may have been out of the labor force for an extended period of time.

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Professional development. These programs offer training in job-related skills to further enhance the job performance and opportunities for promotion. Post-secondary education, continuing education, and occupation related training are considered professional development.

Post-secondary education might be made accessible by encouraging the establishment of support services for deaf students including interpreter services, notetaking, and counseling.

Continuing education programs such as Adult Basic Education, which offer G.E.D. opportunities, might also be made accessible through the establishment of services for deaf students and interpreter services.

Occupation-related training encourages the development of specific job-related skills resulting in financial and personal growth. In-Service training might be offered for technical training, management skills development, or English language development.

This model can be actualized by locating, evaluating, and obtaining the cooperation of existing programs and services and by facilitating the development of such programs and services where none currently exist. As noted earlier, a clearinghouse with an on-line retrieval system has the potential for providing access to the network of services in the DEAN model. The clearinghouse would include the following:

Directory of services. This directory would include an interpreting referral listing, available training resources, and a provider listing in addition to on-line information about employment acquisition, maintenance, accommodation, and enhancement services. Since the vast majority of employers nei-

ther sign nor are familiar with interpreting services, a nationwide interpreting referral listing would be established to include local interpreter referral sources. Emphasis would be placed on locating and listing those interpreters with expertise in employment-related issues, specific terminology, and technical knowledge necessary for effective communication.

Training resources would list training opportunities available for counseling personnel, interpreters, EAP providers, and unions unfamiliar with deafness and employment.

Provider listings include resources available to employees and employers according to region, such as accessible employment service providers, EAP providers, and sign language courses.

Information and Referral. This service would include nationwide referral to local services including interpreting, sign language education, counseling, placement services, training opportunities, and legal defense resources.

Technical Assistance. This service would enable employers to share information nationally about issues in hiring deaf employees, co-worker and supervisor awareness training, statistics about deaf employees (e.g., how they fare in comparison to hearing counterparts), and job accommodations and modifications.

Summary

The DEAN model is a comprehensive conceptual model of employment service delivery. It encompasses a continuum of services to both deaf persons and employers. It is unique in that it presents an ecologically-based framework for rehabili-

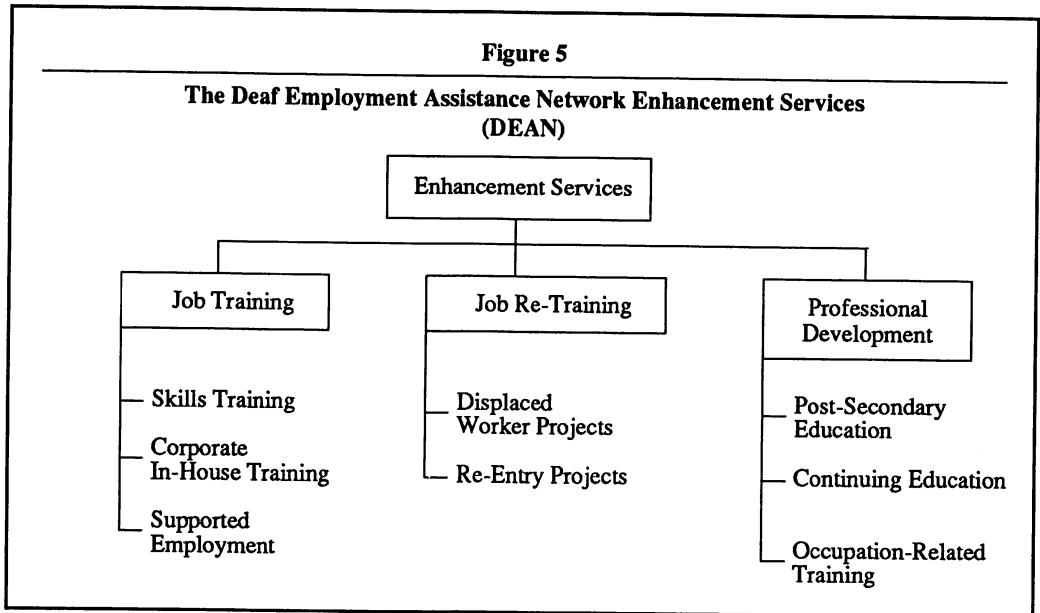
Figure 4

The Deaf Employment Assistance Network Accommodation Services (DEAN)

Accommodation Services

- Deaf/Disability Awareness
- Sign Language
- Accessibility Assistance
- Union

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tation interventions.

If initiated, such a project could address both the environmental and individual factors which often hinder vocational attainment in prevocationally deaf persons. It also has the potential to meet employers'

needs for personnel resources. This model could help to eliminate overlaps and gaps in employment services to deaf persons, while holding promise for consolidating disparate and unconnected employment-related activities.

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