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THE DEAF JOB SEEKER AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Lucinda C. Casella

The problem of job placement is one of the most difficult vocational challenges deaf people face. It poses an equally difficult obstacle for rehabilitation counselors serving deaf clients. The purpose of this paper is to suggest an approach to the placement problem.

One of the major ways hearing people seek employment is through the use of employment agencies. Yet, to date there is no information available in literature to assess the use of employment agencies by the deaf population. Employment agencies can play a highly significant role in assistance in the urgent needs of the deaf job seeker.

Through the use of employment agencies, the deaf job seeker might be able to increase his probabilities for effective job placement. Lloyd (1973) has pointed out that one persistent problem that faces deaf people, as individuals and groups, is their failure to receive consideration for services to which they are entitled. One such service is the employment agency.

There are two types of employment agencies, one serves individuals who want permanent placement. The other is for finding temporary jobs. No monetary commitments are involved with the temporary agency. Thus, deaf people wanting this type of work have nothing to lose by using them. The majority of permanent agencies have a fee, which the agency charges to the individual after he has been hired. This fee is only applicable after job placement and is based on a specified percent of the employee's yearly salary. Sometimes the fee of the agency is paid by the employer. It is dependent in part upon the salary and type of job involved.

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Design of Study:

To assess the utilization of employment agencies, (permanent and temporary), by the deaf a survey of Baltimore, Maryland was conducted. Two-thirds of the total employment agencies in Baltimore (35 of 48) were contacted.

The approach was to ask to the employment agencies three questions: a) What is the total number of deaf people who have applied for jobs through your agency? b) What type of jobs were found? and c) What was the mode of communication used with the deaf job seeker?

Results :

The total number of deaf persons who used the employment agencies in Baltimore was 84 (which represents .6 percent of the deaf population) compared to 168,000 hearing people (which represents 8.2 percent of the hearing population).

The types of jobs found for the deaf client ranged from skilled secretarial and clerical to the semi-and unskilled, factory work and labor. It is interesting to note that 65 percent sought employment through agencies specializing in blue collar type work. They were employed as unskilled factory workers or manual laborers.

The most widely used mode of communication with employment agency staff was pad and pencil. However, agencies tended to overestimate the value of speechreading.

Conclusions:

The findings of this survey indicate that the number of deaf people who have sought job assistance through employment agencies is small. The blue collar employment agencies were more widely used by the deaf job seeker. Communication with the agency personnel and deaf applicant was dependent upon written messages and speechreading.

Implications:

Very possibly many deaf people are unaware of the functions of employment agencies. Thus, they do not take advantage of the available services.

The trend for the deaf population to be employed in unskilled jobs may be a reflection of inadequate educational backgrounds. Technical and vocational training programs must augment schools for the deaf to upgrade employment opportunities through training.

The overestimation of speechreading can lead to a misinterpretation of the deaf job seeker's wants, needs, and desires and further involve job misplacement. Language, communication and lack of sophistication in job seeking skills present obstacles to the deaf worker in seeking employment (Lauritsen, 1972).

The deaf population must be made aware of all available placement possibilities in order to maximize the chance of being hired. Deaf community referral services should be publicized and listings of employment agencies made available. The referral services should also provide a listing of available interpreters, who could accompany the deaf job seeker to the employment agencies. Prior to approaching an employment agency, the deaf job seeker should be oriented to the practices and procedures of the agency, e. g., the interview, application blanks, and skill tests required. This could help to insure the effective use of employment agencies.

Deaf people often depend on the VR counselor for job placement. They suffer as a result of the counselors' limitations. For example, many VR counselors are inadequately trained for job placement of deaf clients. Most have a heavy case-load of hearing clients and do not have enough time to work extensively with deaf applicants.

Each individual employment agency should be aware of the deaf population. Materials (pamphlets, sign cards) could be distributed to the agencies to aid in providing information to them in case of possible future encounters with deaf job seekers. This could encourage deaf people to take advantage of employment agency services more often.

It is important for deaf job seekers to take maximum advantage of all available placement services, employment agencies being one.

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