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B Douglas Rice
None

Tim Milligan

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A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO INDEPENDENT LIVING TRAINING FOR YOUNG, MULTIPLY HANDICAPPED, DEAF ADULTS

B. DOUGLAS RICE, Ed.D. and TIM MILLIGAN, B.S.E.

The problems faced by young multiply handicapped deaf rehabilitation clients have been well documented in the literature (Lawrence and Vescovi, 1967; Blake, 1970; Adler, 1970; Hurwitz, 1971; and Vernon, 1971). As a result rehabilitation agencies in recent years have a better awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the needs and unique problems experienced by deaf clients. In turn they have responded by developing and/or expanding facilities and service programs. Despite extensive efforts by rehabilitation to provide more effective vocational evaluation, work and personal adjustment, vocational training, job placement and other programs, services remain deficient and incomplete for young deaf clients.

Inadequate services by both residential and non-residential facilities for the deaf are very evident in the area of community living. Although most non-residential facilities make some type of living arrangements for deaf clients such as foster homes or "half-way" houses, seemingly little effort is made to prepare the individuals for independent living.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The basic skills required for self-care and management of personal affairs are taken for granted by most people. However, approximately one-half of young multiply handicapped deaf (MHD) adults have lived most of their lives at residential schools while most of the other half have lived at home with parents, relatives or guardians. In the latter case the deaf child attended public schools and in general was enrolled in special education

Dr. Rice and Mr. Milligan are supervisor and coordinator respectively of the Project for the Multiply Handicapped Deaf Adults, Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

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classes. These individuals enroll and complete rehabilitation ill-prepared and ill-equipped to meet the demands of independent community living as a result of their previous sheltered and restricted environment. The focus of this paper will be on a well structured personal adjustment and independent living training program that prepares young MHD adults to more adequately cope with the demands of everyday independent living.

A brief description of the project will be presented prior to a discussion of personal adjustment and independent living training.

THE HSRC PROJECT

The Research and Demonstration Project, "A Comprehensive Facility Program for Multiply Handicapped Deaf Adults", was initiated in June, 1968. The specific objectives of the Project are to develop and evaluate a meaningful service program for young deaf adults, and to provide internships, practicums and short-term training conferences for professional rehabilitation workers with the deaf. Clients are referred to the Project by state vocational rehabilitation counselors from throughout the United States. Admission criteria are: 1) Age 16 or older, 2) Non-functional hearing, 3) Reading achievement at fourth grade or below, 4) A history of unemployment or serious under-employment, 5) Borderline or higher intelligence, 6) Freedom from emotional responses, behavior patterns and physical mobility restrictions that would prevent beneficial participation in Center programs.

Settings and Services

Services and activities of the Project are conducted at Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center (HSRC). The daily enrollment at the Center consists of approximately 475 handicapped clients including 40 deaf individuals. A comprehensive range of medical, social, psychological and vocational evaluation, and vocational training services are provided to the clients. In addition to other support services including driver education and recreation activities, specialized services to the deaf are provided by Project staff in vocational tutoring, personal and social adjustment, vocational evaluation, work adjustment, counseling and independent living (Details and description of these services can be found in Blake, 1970; Stewart, 1971; Rice, Milligan and Bolton, 1972).

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Personal Adjustment Training

The young MHD client, with few exceptions, is in need of intensive personal and social adjustment services. Personal adjustment training (PAT) within the HSRC Project is provided to clients through classroom instructions in communication skills, basic academic subjects, personal hygiene, personal grooming, vocational tutoring, interpersonal relationships and basic concepts important to independent living.

The program is flexible and every attempt is made to make it relevant to the client's needs. Services are continuously evaluated by Project staff and modifications made to insure a more effective program. Independent living training is integrated with other aspects of PAT; however, it is considered a preparatory program designed to assist the client toward living independently in the community.

Independent Living Training

The Curriculum for Independent Living Training (ILT) was planned and developed by the Project staff specifically for young MHD adults. The objective of the program is to provide the young deaf client with the necessary skills to make the transition from a sheltered living situation to independent community living with a minimum of difficulty. The coordinator of ILT provides the client with close supervision and support as well as keeping the staff informed on client progress. A typical ILT client would normally follow the pattern given below.

1. A subjective measure of the client's potential to live independently is made by the Project staff and a prescriptive program outlined to alleviate his deficiencies (in a few cases the client has not participated in ILT as a result of involved physical, mental, or emotional limitations).

2. The client is scheduled for PAT formal classroom instruction concurrent with his vocational training, usually about 15 hours a week. During Personal Adjustment Training the deaf individual is also presented with concepts important to independent living, i.e., how to find and rent an apartment, responsibilities of tenant and landlord, how to pay bills, budgeting, marketing, food preparation, laundry services, transportation, opening and using a checking account, personal safety, and use of leisure time. The ILT unit of PAT usually takes 4 to 6 weeks, depending on the client's ability to acquire the information.

3. Financial arrangements are made for the client's move to an apartment. In the case of the deaf client at HSRC, it is a matter of transferring the funds normally paid to the Center for food and housing directly to the client. (This is closely supervised by the ILT coordinator.)

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4. The client and instructor select a suitable apartment. The instructor serves as an interpreter and advisor for the client and landlord. Usually it is necessary for the client to buy a few homemaking essentials such as sheets and pillow cases, cooking utensils and dishes, and the other necessary items for setting up housekeeping. The client, with assistance from the instructor, then goes to the bank cooperating with the Project and opens a checking account.

5. The client begins living independently, and commuting to the Center daily for vocational training. During the client's early stay, he is supervised closely by the Project staff. Various staff visit the client's apartment frequently to evaluate progress. Initially, the instructor assists the client with maintaining an accurate record of expenses. As the client gains confidence and becomes progressively more independent, the supervision is gradually decreased. Staff visits become less frequent, as the client assumes more responsibility for planning his menus, establishing a schedule of daily activities, and using his leisure time. After a period of time, usually three to four months, the client takes over management of his finances completely.

6. Periodically, all clients on independent living status are brought together for a seminar to discuss mutual problems and share ideas. Occasionally, the client expresses a desire to share an apartment to reduce expenses. Approval to share an apartment is given only after several months of living independently. From experience the project staff has found that in many cases the less confident or more dependent of the two clients will become very dependent on his roommate, and the objectives of ILT will not be accomplished.

Termination

The conditions for terminating a client's ILT involves one of four factors: 1) The client successfully completes his Center program including vocational training and independent living; 2) The client or referring counselor discontinue participation in the Center program as a result of insufficient case funds, volitional dropout, location of suitable employment prior to program completion; 3) Referral to other facilities; 4) Maladaptive behavior by the client in the community that is detrimental to his or other's personal well being. If this occurs, the client, if at all possible, returns to HSRC for additional assistance, counseling and training in basic living skills.

Discussion

At present, data collection and analysis are incomplete, therefore, the total efforts of project services to some 200 young deaf adults cannot be

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reported. It is possible, however, to make some speculations and draw some tentative conclusions regarding the impact of ILT. First, ILT has demonstrated that this clientele can successfully make the transition from a protected environment to the community. Second, the process requires a period of preparation and practice prior to the client's actual move to the community without the continued support and reassurance of the Project staff. Finally, and perhaps most important, living successfully in the community reduces the handicapping effects of deafness by increasing the individual's self-concept and feeling of independence.

Summary

The transition from the protected environment of a residential school or rehabilitation facility to the community is a sadly neglected phase of rehabilitation services for the deaf. Although the need for ILT has been reported and documented, progress has been extremely slow. The Hot Springs Project for the multiply handicapped deaf has developed a program for training this group in the area of independent living. Classroom instruction is used in the first phase of the program followed by practical experience in which the client moves to an apartment. After moving to the community, the client must live on a budget, arrange for transportation, buy and prepare food, and perform other activities required for everyday living.

Seemingly, the HSRC project's approach is practical in that it insures young multiply handicapped deaf adults the opportunity to acquire and practice the skill required for independent community living. Results of the ILT program have implications for rehabilitation and other facilities serving the deaf in that this phase of service should become a vital part of the deaf client's total rehabilitation program.

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REHABILITATION COUNSELOR

To provide counseling and casework services to hearing handicapped and deaf children and adults, including interpreting services. Some consultation to agencies and organizations serving the deaf. **QUALIFICATIONS:** Must be hearing-impaired or deaf, competent in the language of signs, and possess a B.A. degree. Experience in counseling or related field desirable. M.S. degree desirable but not required. **SALARY:** \$8,496 to \$11,172, depending on qualifications. **CONTACT:** Mrs. Lorraine Stewart, Assistant Personnel Director, Minnesota Department of Public Welfare, Centennial Office Building, St. Paul, Minnesota 55155.