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## NEW VISTAS FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OF DEAF PERSONS\*

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Effective job placement for deaf people in competitive employment involves a number of factors. Such things as specific job preparation, general levels of academic achievement, general condition of the job market, personal characteristics of the job applicant—personality, interests, goals—and the skill and dedication of professional workers with deaf people serve as determiners of the success or failure of the placement process. Thus, while focusing on job placement, a great number of these interrelated factors must be placed in perspective. In our society, occupational selection and job performance generally serve at least two major functions—that of providing the material advantages of life and that of providing a base for independent, rewarding interactions with people on the job and in the community.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a discussion of job placement leads to a better definition of the educational background of deaf individuals as well as the rehabilitation, placement, follow-up, and possible retaining of deaf adults. In fact, each of these perspectives, development of school programs and development of improved rehabilitation programs, also requires an examination of the most advantageous articulation of these two aspects of service to benefit deaf persons. Certain job skills and some of the attitudes of work must extend from efforts of the staff within the school setting, and in addition, the training and retraining of deaf

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\*This presentation represents a summary of the discussion group deliberations.

adults requires cooperation among educators, rehabilitation counselors, placement personnel and others. The effective utilization of professional personnel from these diverse areas requires a new organizational scheme and a new concept of service. The immediate objective for these developments may be referred to as establishing "new vistas for competitive employment of deaf persons."

Beginning with the school program, at least three broadly defined areas can be identified as the key to developing these new perspectives. Changes must be seen in the selection and utilization of school personnel, in the efficiency and breadth of program coverage, and in the development of guidance and evaluation programs.

Schools and programs for the deaf generally have personnel who are prepared to teach language skills and the essentials of an academic program. To some extent, certain staff members are responsible for providing school and vocational counseling, and usually a number of staff members are involved with industrial arts, prevocational and vocational training. Quite frequently, however, these staff members work quite independently from each other resulting in something less than a constructive program. If effective vocational preparation is included as an aspect of the total school program, then some rearrangement of personnel would seem warranted. Specifically, a rehabilitation counselor working in the school setting could provide better interaction with agencies in the students' home towns and thereby reduce the time lag between school graduation and initiation of the first job. This counselor could also serve to orient teachers to current employment situations with respect to recent graduates and to advise educators on curriculum modifications. He would also be valuable to the deaf students who are still in school by assisting in student evaluations, offering guidance in the vocational area, and orienting students to the general requirements of work.

As a second item in personnel adjustment, there is some advantage to be gained from employing a staff member who is charged with the responsibility of total program development for older students. Such a person could provide for better interaction between the academic, vocational, and special staff, could coordinate these efforts with the family and the dormitory counselors, and could effect improved utilization of community resources. Of particular relevance here, is the possibility of developing a "cooperative curriculum" where each of these individuals has specific responsibilities in the educational process. Among the benefits to be derived would be

the raising of teacher and parent expectations with regard to the potential of deaf students. This rise in expectation levels should result in improved performance on the part of the student.

Although other personnel adjustments may be particularly urgent in different school settings, the addition of a full-time rehabilitation counselor to the deaf and the addition of a program coordinator should be given prime consideration. These two additions should serve to stimulate improved cooperation among all of the existing school personnel.

The efficiency and breadth of program coverage can now be seen in light of the proposed personnel adjustments. Starting with the person responsible for program development, a number of program modifications could be effected cooperatively. The school's responsibility for job preparation could be better organized. A flexible program is needed that can cut across the traditional departmental lines. Of particular importance is initiating a vocational exploration sequence fairly early through an introduction to job areas, an establishment of work attitudes, and an assessment of the students' potential skills and interests. The vocational rehabilitation counselor in the school would probably provide the coordination necessary for this early start; the effort should involve the parents and all areas of the school.

In addition to an early start, the vocational program needs to be meaningful to the students. Particular attention needs to be paid to motivation and rewards. One way to do this is to keep the program flexible and broadly based. Frequently, this will require developing working relationships with the community in order to reduce the gap between school and work. In this manner, vocational instruction in school will have greater reality for the students as they transfer these skills to the job setting. Work-study plans, work experience provisions, and intelligent use of summer employment should be part of this program. It would be desirable to have vocational instructors who actually worked at their trades during the vacation periods so that these teachers could bring recent experiences into the classroom.

Purposeful interaction between the vocational and academic areas of the school is important in the development of a work-related background. The language of business and industry should be part of the academic program. On the other hand, the development of communication skills in the academic program appears to have direct relevance in the job setting. In a similar sense, the dormitory counselors should be able to increase the total approach to integrating instruc-

tional efforts by providing a continuity of the program goals during the after school hours.

In addition to a total approach in the instructional program, new techniques are needed to provide these experiences, skills, and basic knowledge to the deaf student in an optimal manner. Self explanatory visual aids, programmed instruction, and stimulating environments are essential. It is not only in program organization, but in the actual techniques of instruction that progress must be made. Perhaps the importance of these new instructional innovations can be best demonstrated in working with the multiple handicapped and with those who have not developed adequate language skills. The more adequate a deaf person is in language skills, the more likely it is that he will benefit from current instructional practices. However, at least fifty per cent of the students in programs and classes for the deaf could profit from the utilization of modern instructional techniques currently available but irregularly employed in schools and classes for the deaf. This group also has the greatest need for carefully developed vocational opportunities.

Finally, in discussing program modifications, a concerted effort should be made to aid the deaf student in developing his own unique role in society. Sometimes, adult members of the deaf community can be helpful in this effort, but only if they have made an adequate adjustment themselves. A well organized program for guidance and evaluation probably provides the best alternative. Especially in the vocational area, information from current employment conditions can be used to assist students in making reasonable vocational choices and in organizing their studies to meet these objectives. In addition, the guidance and evaluation program can serve as a means for up-dating existing school offerings on a systematic basis. Thus, guidance and evaluation extend both to serving the individual deaf student and to initiating instructional program modifications. These functions may even be extended to providing information to potential employers, thus creating new vocational opportunities. If possible, most vocational programs should lead to a diploma so that the job applicant can meet this fairly basic work requirement.

At this point, the preparation of deaf persons for competitive employment has been presented as it suggests modifications in the school program. These suggested modifications have included personnel changes, new program developments, and more effective guidance and evaluation.

Turning now to look at the situation of the deaf adult, a slightly different set of factors appear to gain prominence.

These focal points include a better definition of the counselor's skills and responsibilities, a re-examination of the employer's attitudes toward hiring deaf applicants, and a new look at training and retraining of deaf adults. The placement process becomes effective as these three elements are understood and are approached reasonably. Although such a focus will not guarantee successful placement of every deaf person, it should provide a point of origin for effecting better initial placement and better opportunities for job advancement.

Beginning with the first of these factors, definition of the counselor's skills and responsibilities, a number of items warrant attention. Of particular importance is the recognition of the rehabilitation counselor to the deaf as a specialist, a person with a unique background of training, skills, and experiences. This is not to say that services should be provided by this person exclusively, but it is a recognition of a strong tendency for counselors who are not particularly familiar with deaf people to overlook many of the deaf person's assets and to seek a premature placement. In this sense, immediate placement may be misplacement. The rehabilitation specialist to the deaf can help to avoid this problem either through direct services provided to the client or through consultation and assistance to the nonspecialist.

In other words, the specialist to the deaf should act as the coordinator and developer of services for deaf people, and as a consequence, his case load or quota for clients served annually should be reduced. As it is important to gain the maximum effectiveness from rehabilitation counselors to the deaf, this consideration of reduced loads bears particular attention.

Currently, one of the major problems is finding personnel who are knowledgeable in rehabilitation counseling and who also have skills which are necessary to adequately work with deaf people. A person with a background in rehabilitation counseling must acquire considerable understanding of the educational base, general attitudes, and unique orientations of his deaf clients. Although part of this requirement may be met in a classroom setting, only considerable experience with deaf adults both in their work and in social situations can establish more complete understanding. Essential interaction with deaf people, however, is handicapped by a lack of easy communication. Writing is neither an adequate nor a pleasing way to interact with people even though it will serve in a number of situations. As a result, the rehabilitation counselor to the deaf should have a number of communication skills available to use, including sign language. Once these communication skills

are at least partially developed, experience can be gained through interaction with deaf people in clubs, social organizations, on the job, and in their homes. Deaf people are generally quite cooperative in assisting a new counselor-specialist at this point.

As mentioned briefly before, one of the responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor to the deaf is that of coordinating services. More frequently, this means developing services where they have either not existed or have been only partially effective. Though requiring time and effort, quite a number of desirable relationships have been established in a number of cities throughout the country. These supporting services are frequently developed in existing rehabilitation centers, in hearing and speech centers, in employment services, and in community schools and colleges. The variety of services offered and organizations utilized are put together in different combinations in almost every locality, but perhaps the central ingredient is the counselor's persistence and the agencies' recognition of his unique problem.

As a word of caution, it is important for the counselor to understand deaf people and to work with them effectively. This does not mean that all deaf people have the same problems or require identical services, but rather that each person be treated as an individual. A balance must be reached between the services offered and the deaf clients' independence. In some cases, over-identification with deaf clients and their problems actually interferes with the rehabilitation process.

In job placement, this balance could be translated to affirm the right of the deaf person to react to job opportunities rather than to the over-direction of an eager or maybe apprehensive counselor. One area that is particularly ripe for probing research is an assessment of the need for services within communities as a forerunner to the development of these services. In a similar sense, it would be interesting to assess the necessary skills for serving as a specialist to the deaf and to formulate standards from this assessment. Standards for interpreters for the deaf, for example, have been proposed.

This discussion has not examined all the characteristics related to the skills and responsibilities of the counselor, but it has presented a number of the more apparent items. We might turn now from the counselor to look at the employer's attitudes about hiring deaf applicants.

Most employers are interested in acquiring the best workers possible so that they can produce at high quality and low cost. The deaf applicant is at an immediate disadvantage

when he applies for a job because the employer is concerned about the communication problem, and consequently about the workers independence on the job. In some instances, this caution is justified, but too frequently the applicant is not given an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to handle a job. The problem here is one of getting information to the employer that will serve to alter his concern. One of the ways this has been done is to involve employers in conferences where the assets of deaf workers are discussed. Although national meetings are desirable, many more conferences should be held regionally so that the counselors and the employers in a particular area can get acquainted. Unions can be of invaluable assistance in developing jobs, and representatives from these unions should be an integral part of these conferences.

In this area of selling deaf people to prospective employers, considerable research is urgently needed. At the moment, this process is haphazard at best. One of the best salesman is, of course, the deaf person who is successful on the job. Frequently, illustrations of successful deaf employees in other related industries have helped to give a deaf applicant an opportunity in an industry that has not previously hired deaf employees. Another desirable approach is to prepare and update a list of placements on both a regional and national basis. This registry of placements can serve to identify companies which hire deaf workers and to indicate the types of jobs being performed. It is quite possible that this collection and distribution of information should be coordinated by some central organization.

Additional research information is needed in the area of instrumentation to assess the existing and potential skills of deaf workers. If employers are impressed with success, then the job-applicant and the job to be performed must evidence some correspondence. In addition to job skills, it is important to examine what might be termed the "work personality" of deaf job-applicants. Too frequently, a person with the necessary job skills does not hold a job very long because of other problems. If these problems could be identified early, the counselor or placement officer could recommend a worker with greater confidence. In terms of job stability and advancement, this ability to predict success should have considerable meaning. Job follow-up after placement can provide some of this information. Evidence of under-employment, a common problem among deaf workers, could be detected through systematic follow-up of placements, but also, ways of dealing with this problem might be formulated. Again, as part of a research package, predicting job success for deaf people must



also attend to career development. "Just any job" is not adequate as a long range objective, and job advancement must be made part of the over-all plan. Thus, the employer needs to be approached first in terms of hiring a deaf applicant to meet his particular need at the time, and secondly, in terms of considering deaf employees for normally anticipated advances. This concept must be carried directly to the immediate supervisor of the deaf worker.

To summarize employer attitudes, it would appear that there is some initial resistance to hiring deaf job-applicants. However, where the past experience with deaf workers have been desirable, deaf people have been given employment, although not necessarily gaining the advancements they might anticipate. The problem of under-employment is, therefore, particularly distressing. If the errors of counselors and placement officers could be reduced, probably more industries would hire deaf people and more opportunities for advancement would be produced. A research effort is particularly important in this area since it may produce a better means of matching deaf individuals with job situations. If problems could be discovered before they become crises, corrective efforts could be initiated and employers should gain a better impression of deaf job-applicants.

Having explored the counselor's skills and responsibilities, as well as the employer's attitudes toward hiring deaf workers, the final factor of training and retraining of deaf adults can be placed into this picture. Training and retraining become particularly important as the trends in modern industrial society are observed. Automation is causing many jobs requiring manual skills to be replaced by fewer jobs which often require more academic skills. Since quite a number of deaf workers are employed in manufacturing type jobs where their manual skills are utilized, they have become particularly susceptible to the dislocations associated with automation. They must either learn new skills which may lead to job advancement, or settle for lesser jobs where underemployment is even more pronounced. In some instances, they may even lose their jobs altogether.

A second trend can be observed in the mobility of many modern industries. An industry may close its factory in one location and move to another more desirable, at least from the employer's point of view, location in another community. If the deaf worker hopes to maintain his job, he may have to move with the industry. Many deaf workers are quite hesitant to do this, since it usually entails severing many social ties and may also require learning new skills which are needed in

the newer, and more efficient, plant.

The results of these trends are that employees must frequently have higher levels of education and training when they apply for jobs and that older employees must gain new information in order to assure their continued employment. The deaf worker must also make these adjustments, but his ability to gain this additional training is impaired. His hearing loss makes it difficult to profit from company sponsored training sessions, just as it hinders his ability to gain from trade or industrial courses in school settings. In addition, he may not have the academic background, in such areas as mathematics or English for example, to handle required course content for employment in these new jobs. In some instances, up to 75 per cent of the deaf working force may find themselves without this essential academic background.

Therefore new training and educational facilities, specifically designed to meet the problems of the adult deaf, are needed. Some possibilities for development include: (1) adult education programs which provide instructors or interpreters for deaf participants, (2) industry sponsored instruction with special tutoring for deaf people, and (3) regional technical-vocational schools specifically designed to serve deaf students. Gallaudet College and the new National Technical Institute for the Deaf are currently available, as are these Regional Technical-Vocational colleges and several rehabilitation centers for deaf clients. In the three new approaches, the emphasis should focus on job orientation and the development of new skills so that training and the job are highly compatible.

Particular attention should be given to instruction offered, with particular emphasis on new instructional techniques. These techniques should be part of a research effort. In particular, the use of visual aids in teaching the adult deaf should be developed as fully as possible. These techniques should be adaptable for teaching new skills as well as aiding in the development of attitudes which are appropriate in the work setting. Programmed instruction, demonstration models, and other instructional materials should be utilized. Close cooperation between the counselor and the instructional personnel should help to organize effective programs for deaf adults who find themselves in the position of having to up-date their capabilities.

The problem of finding suitable employment for multiple-handicapped and language-deficient deaf adults is particularly distressing. Although distressing, it is nevertheless challenging to the rehabilitation counselor to the deaf and may

require statewide planning. The use of on-the-job training, sheltered workshops, and possibly subsidies to factories to hire these deaf people may provide part of the answer. In each of these arrangements, special, individual attention is central to the effort. This type of training may be expensive and time consuming, but it does show promise of meeting the problem.

The training and retraining of the adult deaf, therefore, is currently being approached from a number of directions. Better utilization of existing facilities, as well as the development of new capabilities, shows promise of meeting this problem area, but much remains to be accomplished. Company sponsored instruction, adult education, and regional technical-vocational centers designed to aid deaf students should develop rapidly in the future. The more difficult problem of placement for the multiple-handicapped and language-deficient deaf person may take longer. Some interesting ideas, on-the-job instruction and others, hold an expression of hope that the needs of this group can be met.

In summary, this examination of "new vistas for competitive employment of deaf persons" has reviewed key factors in the school program prior to the student's graduation and in the world of work where the adult is making new adjustments. In a sense, job placement of deaf people has been presented as a process of individual development and industrial change. Job preparation and job placement are challenges for the professional workers with the deaf today, but changes in our industrial society strongly suggest that even greater challenges will occur in the future. Effective job placement for deaf people must, therefore, be seen as a constantly developing process requiring imagination, insights, and hard work. This presentation has aimed at an exploration of the parameters of this effort.