A Study of the financial assistance and services rendered to blind negroes in the Chatham county department of public welfare--Savannah, Georgia 1937 - 1944

Mildred Christine Handy

Atlanta University

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A STUDY OF THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES RENDERED TO
BLIND NEGROES IN THE CHATHAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
WELFARE--SAVANNAH, GEORGIA 1937-1944

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE ATLANTA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
MILDRED CHRISTINE HANDY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
AUGUST 1945
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Financial assistance provided for the blind under the Social Security Act is not new. Prior to the Social Security Act, states gave pensions to their needy blind. The main difference is that in the past, each state had to provide for its own needy blind. Now, through the Social Security Act, the Federal government shares the cost of rendering aid to the blind with every state that accepts this plan.

The philosophy underlying early state laws was that blindness of itself prevented blind people from engaging in the normal activities of life, and because of this, the government should assume the responsibility for their maintenance and care. The need of the blind person was not taken into account. The pension was given because of his blindness. As the effects of blindness were better understood, it became clear that blindness alone does not prevent an individual from leading a satisfying and productive life. The focus of work with the blind therefore is now directed toward helping the blind person through training or retraining to utilize whatever capabilities he possesses. Financial assistance is given on the basis of need, rather than because of blindness.

To provide the basic needs of life; food, clothing and shelter, is a much greater economic problem for a blind person than a seeing person. Blindness not only limits the type of work a man may engage in, but it deprives him of the freedom of action. Some of this freedom of action may be purchased but the blind person with limited means can do this only by giving up other things essential to his well-being. Blind people have certain expenses which seeing people seldom incur. Traffic conditions make it necessary for many blind people to have guides. Blind people who do travel alone often find themselves in situations where they must have special help. If a blind person owns his home there are many minor repairs which a seeing person can
do himself, but which a blind person must hire done. A blind person more
frequently soils his clothing by spilling food, sitting in grease and dirt,
or tearing on projections that seeing persons can avoid; thereby increasing
the cost of keeping himself presentable. The blind person is not able to
shop from store to store to find the best prices. He cannot relate quality
of foodstuffs to prices charged and must depend upon the integrity of store-
keepers or others who shop for him. He must buy many foodstuffs that are
wholly or partially prepared, which increases the cost of food. Most people
in limited circumstances do their own housecleaning, but a blind person finds
it necessary to hire a certain amount of house cleaning done in order to keep
his home looking presentable. Therefore, in any program of financial assistance
for blind persons, these extra expenses should be taken into account, if the
blind person is to be cared for adequately.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the number of blind Negroes
in Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, who have been aided by The Chatham
County Department of Public Welfare, through the provisions of the Social
Security Act; the adequacy of grants given to clients; and the diseases which
appeared to be the most frequent causes of blindness. Attention is given to
the services other than financial assistance that have been given to blind
relief clients.

Scope and Limitations

Thirty-two cases were used in making the study. Because there is no
registration of the blind, it was not possible to determine how many blind
Negroes there are in Chatham County. It would be of importance to know what
proportion of the Negro blind are receiving financial assistance through the
Chatham County Department of Public Welfare.
Method of Procedure

Information for the study was secured from the case records of the Chatham County Department of Public Welfare. Schedules were used in collecting data.
CHAPTER II

FEDERAL PROVISIONS FOR THE BLIND

The special consideration given the blind by the Federal government falls into three categories: special provisions for the blind by federal agencies; the provisions of library service for the blind in communities where this service by local government is impractical; and legislation designed to aid other groups and including the blind.

In the Post Office Department unsealed letters of the blind are classified as third class mail and library books for the blind are circulated through the mails free of charge. Magazines and periodicals for the blind in raised characters when no subscription charges are made and no advertising matter is included are permitted to be carried through the mails free of charge. Books in Braille published by the Library of Congress are distributed to the blind free of charge through the mails.

In 1927, the Interstate Commerce Act was amended so that blind travelers could be accompanied by a guide without paying an additional fare. The Act was later amended in 1937 to allow a blind person to take his guide dog with him without paying additional charge.¹

The American Foundation for the Blind made its recording studios available to the Library of Congress in 1929 for the recording of Talking Books (books recorded on sound-reproduction records), so that the cost could be kept at a minimum. These books require for their reproduction a special type of phonograph not available on the market. As most blind people are not financially able to meet the cost of such reproducers even when manufactured and sold without a profit, the Work Projects Administration was prevailed upon to set up a project for the manufacture of such machines under the supervision of the

American Foundation for the Blind. This project was sponsored by the Library of Congress and the machines are the property of that organization. The machines are allotted to the various states in the proportion that their general population bears to the total population of the United States. The local agency for the blind in each state takes the responsibility for maintaining and lending these machines to blind people free of charge. Today the library circulation of Talking Books exceeds that of the number of books in Braille, though the number of titles available is less than one-tenth of those in embossed type.¹

Some blind people who are forced to ask for public relief are capable of performing productive labor if opportunity for employment were available. There are many sheltered shops throughout the country for the blind, made possible by voluntary contributions and government contracts. Many articles bought regularly by the Federal government are manufactured in these workshops. The capacity for providing employment for the blind in these workshops, however, is seriously restricted because of the limited market for these products.

One of the most remunerative lines of activity for the blind has been the operation of small business places. Hundreds of blind people throughout the country are earning a comfortable living as proprietors of vending stands handling such articles as newspapers, magazines, cigars and candy. As such places of business are small a blind person can learn the location of every article and without any difficulty serve his customers expeditiously. The Randolph-Sheppard Act passed by Congress in 1936 stimulated the blind to greater efforts in striving to make themselves self-supporting by authorizing them to operate vending stands in any federal building where, in the discretion of the head of the department or agency in charge of the maintenance of the building, such vending stands may be operated properly and satisfactorily by the blind person.²

² Ibid., p. 29.
In 1920, Congress enacted a law authorizing the appropriation of $1,000,000 to be used in the matching of funds expended for the vocational training of "persons who, by reason of a physical defect or infirmity are totally or partially incapacitated for remunerative occupation". Since then the authorized appropriation has been increased to $5,500,000. While this law was not designed primarily to provide vocational training to the blind, in most states services have been extended to blind people as well as to other physically handicapped persons. In a few states, the blind are specifically exempt from the benefits of the State Vocational Rehabilitation Act and as a result of this, there is no federal matching of the state funds for this purpose. In many states the State Vocational Rehabilitation Department cooperates with the state agency for the blind in meeting a substantial part of the cost of vocational education of many adult blind persons. One-half of such expense is met by the Federal government.

The original draft of the Social Security Act providing categorical relief to the aged and other groups did not include the blind. Upon the recommendation of the American Foundation for the Blind, Title I extending assistance to the blind was incorporated into the Act. Today the Federal government matches one-half the amount expended by the states for monetary assistance to the blind to an amount not exceeding $20 per month to any individual. The Federal government further meets one-half the cost of the administration of such aid. The Act prescribed certain standards for state administration to which the states must conform. A State plan for aid must: (1) provide that it shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, and, if administered by them, be mandatory upon them; (2) provide for financial participation by the State; (3) either provide for the establishment or designation

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1 Ibid., p. 30.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 32.
of a single State agency to administer the plan or provide for the establishment or designation of a single State agency to supervise the administration of the plan; (4) provide for granting to any individual, whose claim for aid is denied, an opportunity for a fair hearing before such State agency; (5) provide such methods of administration as are found by the Board to be necessary for the proper and efficient operation of the plan; (6) provide that the State agency will make such reports, in such form and containing such information, as the Board may from time to time require, and comply with such provisions as the Board may from time to time find necessary to assure the correctness and verification of such reports; (7) provide that no aid will be furnished any individual under the plan with respect to any period with respect to which he is receiving old-age assistance under the State plan; (8) provide that the State agency shall, in determining need, take into consideration any other income and resources of an individual claiming aid to the blind; and (9) provide safeguards which restrict the use or disclosure of information concerning applicants and recipients to purposes directly connected with the administration of aid to the blind.\(^1\)

Many states have accepted this program but others have elected to continue their own state pension plans for financial relief to the blind.

There are many other blind persons who need assistance but because of the restrictions of Title X of the Social Security Act, they cannot qualify. In most states those who do not qualify for aid to the blind are placed on the general relief roll. The Federal law sets no age limit for aid to the blind and a few states also have no age requirements. Most states give aid under this program only to adults and take care of blind children and young people through other provisions. Many states do not require a definite number of years of residence, provided the person applying for aid became blind while living in the state. Some require one year of residence and a few a

longer period. A state cannot require more than five years—-one year just before asking for aid and four other years which may have come any time within the last nine years. Federal assistance is granted to states only for persons who are in need, but each state decides how much property or other resources those it aids may have. In Georgia, resources or incomes of every source are considered, including contributions from relatives if they are actually helping with the applicant's support.¹

In spite of the fact that the Social Security Act represents the most advanced thinking in the field of financial assistance to the blind in that assistance is given on the basis of need and not because of blindness only, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction in regard to the administration of the Act. In many states the administration of blind assistance operates to discourage a blind person of low earning power from endeavoring to become at least partially self-supporting, because for every dollar he earns, a corresponding amount is deducted from his security aid. No consideration is given to the extra expenses caused by blindness. The Social Security Board, with some measure of success, has taken steps to correct this administratively. There is need, however, for an amendment to this Act which would give those administering aid to the blind a freer hand in dealing with this problem. In arriving at the budget of a blind person two elements should be taken into consideration: (1) the amount required to cover the usual necessities of life; and (2) an allowance to meet the inevitable expenses growing out of blindness. If the law were properly amended, when a sightless person begins to earn more than enough to meet this minimum budget plus expenses growing out of blindness, deductions from his aid to cover the usual necessities of life could be made on a percentage basis so that for each dollar earned over a certain amount, less than a dollar could be deducted from his relief allowance.² This would

¹ Department of Public Welfare, Georgia Manual of Public Welfare, p. 35.
² National Resources Planning Board, Economic Parity For the Blind Through Federal Legislation, p. 16.
CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA REGARDING THE CASES STUDIED

Eligibility Requirements for Blind Assistance

In the Chatham County Department of Public Welfare, applications for aid to the blind are taken in chronological order. After the application is made a case worker is sent to the residence of the client to make the preliminary investigation for eligibility. Eligibility requirements are as follows: (1) the applicant must be 21 years of age or over; (2) he shall not have sufficient income or other resources to provide a reasonable subsistence compatible with health and decency; (3) he shall not be an inmate of a public institution; (4) he shall have made no transfer of property within the past two years before making application to render himself eligible for aid to the blind; (5) he shall have resided in Georgia continuously for one year before making application; (6) he shall not be receiving old age assistance; (7) he shall not be publicly soliciting alms in any part of the state and (8) he shall be blind.¹

Resources means any insurance, or personal property that the applicant may own which can be turned into an income. If it is found that an applicant has real or personal property that will afford him an income if directed into the right channels, the agency will give aid to him in doing this. Likewise, if the applicant has insurance from which income can be derived help is given in securing this. Enough insurance is left to afford the applicant a decent burial.

The Georgia State Department of Public Welfare considers a person blind whose vision with correcting glasses is so defective as to prevent

the performance of activities for which eye-sight is essential. Blindness
is established by examination by an ophthalmologist who is paid a fee
of five dollars for each examination by the department. The report of the
eye examination is sent to the State Department of Public Welfare to be ap-
proved by the ophthalmologist appointed by that department.

Eligibility in regard to need must be established annually, at which
time a budget is made out by the visiting case worker with the cooperation
of the client to get a realistic knowledge of the client's resources and
needs.

Applicants Right of Appeal

If the applicant is dissatisfied with the action taken in his be-
half and the explanation of such action by the county department he can
make an appeal in writing to the State Department of Public Welfare with
the assistance of the county director.

Causes of Blindness

In a program designed to give financial assistance and service to
blind persons, information regarding the causes of blindness is important.
There should not be concern only for meeting the financial needs of clients,
but effort should be directed also toward helping the client to become
financially independent if it is at all possible. By determining the
causes of blindness through careful and thorough examinations, there may
be opportunity for remedial help by which sight may be restored. Other
systemic diseases affecting sight may be discovered and the need for treat-
ment thus indicated. Information in regard to causes of blindness also
serves as a basis for establishing programs for the prevention of blindness.

1 Ibid., p. 38.
The causes of blindness in the thirty-two cases were found to be optic atrophy in 8 or 21.3 per cent of the cases; glaucoma, in 6 or 15.2 per cent; syphilis, in 6 or 15.2 per cent; accidents in 3 or 12.2 per cent; cataracts, in 3 or 12.2 per cent; sore eyes, in 1 or 3 per cent; diabetes, in 1 or 3 per cent; congenital disorders, in 1 or 3 per cent; and in 3 or 9 per cent of the cases the cause could not be determined. Optic atrophy, glaucoma, and syphilis are the leading causes of blindness.

Syphilis can be prevented through effective programs of prevention. When syphilis affects the eyes it takes the form of a hard chancre on the eyelid and inflammation on the eyeball. Blindness is usually found in the third stage of syphilis if it is not congenital.

Glaucoma is an increased fluid pressure resulting in the hardening of the eyeball. The outlet or tiny hole in the corner of the eye is blocked. Glaucoma is an unusually progressive and painful disease of middle life. There is no hope of restoration if vision is already lost due to glaucoma. The only hope is in maintaining what vision remains with proper treatment.

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages of Recipients by Years</th>
<th>Number of Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-41</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42-51</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52-61</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62-71</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-81</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest number of recipients in this study fell between the age groups of fifty-two and sixty-one. Table 1, shows the ages of the recipients at the time the study was made. It can therefore be seen that the majority of these clients were already or nearly approaching the age of financial unproductivity. Table 1 shows the ages of the recipients at the time the
study was made.

Ages of Recipients in Regard to Onset of Blindness and Application for Assistance

In any program for assistance and service to blind persons the age of the recipient at the time blindness occurs, and his age at the time of receiving assistance is important. An assistance program whether for blind individuals or seeing persons should have a two-fold purpose; meeting the financial needs adequately; and giving service that will lead to satisfying and useful living whether or not the person can be made capable of engaging in gainful employment.

The blind person, who lost his sight late in life must make a total readjustment, as habits, training, and methods of earning a livelihood have already been established. The problem is quite a different one with the individual, who lost his sight early in life, as his adjustment, and training, if any, have already been established in relation to his blindness. The direction of help and service to these two individuals is therefore quite different.

The age of the individual at the time of application for assistance will determine what the agency may be able to do for the client other than meeting financial needs. Statistics have shown that the large majority of blind people are over 60 years old and would be unemployable even if they could see. It has also been shown that physical debility, illness, and household responsibilities prevent blind people from engaging in gainful employment, as with the seeing.

The ages of the recipients at the time when blindness developed ranged from fourteen months to seventy-five years. Seven or twenty-two per cent of the clients lost their sight after sixty years of age at which time they were probably incapable of gainful employment even had they not become blind. Table 2 shows the ages of the recipients at the onset of blindness.
TABLE 2
AGES OF THE RECIPIENTS AT THE ONSET OF BLINDNESS
BY YEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages at The Onset of Blindness By Years</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-70</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-75</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76 and Over</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial Assistance Given to Blind Recipients By The Chatham County Department of Public Welfare

Temporary assistance is given by the agency to the blind applicant if the demand is urgent enough to warrant it during the lapse of time between the date of application and the time of the first grant. The length of time between the filing of the application for assistance and giving the first grant gives some evidence of the efficiency of administrative procedures. In making this study it was found that the shortest lapse of time between the date of application and the time assistance was rendered was one month and the longest lapse of time was fifty months or four years. Fourteen out of 32 cases had applications pending for a year or over. Giving temporary assistance only when the need proved urgent may have been discouraging to applicants who had to wait for a period of over six or seven months. The reason for the long lapse of time between the date of application and the date the first aid to the blind grant was received was due to the fact that all eligibility requirements had to be established before the grant could be made. Table 3 shows the lapse of time between the date of application and the date assistance was granted.
The monthly grant in the Chatham County Department of Public Welfare under the aid to the blind plan does not exceed thirty dollars. The Federal government will, however, match any grant up to an amount not exceeding forty dollars per month to any individual who is eligible to receive aid to the blind.

The State of Georgia has not taken advantage of this additional financial assistance because of the added cost to the state. The grant is determined each year in accordance with the individual’s needs. The items that are included in making the budget are: rent, food, fuel, clothing, and medical care. The extra expenses of blind people are not taken into account when the budgets are made.

Between January 1, 1937, and December 31, 1944, The Chatham County Department of Public Welfare paid aid to the blind recipients grants amounting to the sum of $22,962.50. Although the present average grant per year is not sufficient to meet the basic needs in the community, the average grants as shown in the study have tended to increase each year with the exception of the last one. The cause of the increase was due to the increase
in appropriations for blind assistance to the county. Table 4 shows the average grants by years.

TABLE 4
THE AVERAGE GRANTS OF BLIND RECIPIENTS BY YEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Grant</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$8.75</td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.62</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.37</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.90</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.72</td>
<td>1941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.60</td>
<td>1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.87</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.84</td>
<td>1944</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education of Recipients

The educational background of the recipients whose cases were studied present an interesting picture. Since 63.3 per cent of the recipients became blind after they had reached the age of thirty-five, education should have been completed before the onset of blindness. Educational opportunities for Negroes, especially those living in the rural areas are few and standards are low; however, many do not take advantage of those educational opportunities that are offered in their communities.

In making a study of the educational background of the recipients, it was found that 14 or 47.2 per cent of them had received no education. Grades completed by the others were: 2 or 6.2 per cent, the second grade; 1 or 3.1 per cent, the third grade; 2 or 6.2 per cent, the fourth grade; 4 or 12.5 per cent, the fifth grade; 3 or 9.3 per cent, the sixth grade; 3 or 9.3 per cent, the seventh grade; and 2 or 6.2 per cent, the eighth grade. One of the recipients who finished the eighth grade became blind at the age of fourteen months and was the only one who attended the Georgia Academy for the Blind. Under the Vocational Rehabilitation plan a person
can be more rapidly prepared for an occupation if he has received a high school education.

Marital Status of Recipients

The study of the marital status of the clients showed that 28 or 87 per cent of them had married previous to blindness. Of this number 4 or 12.1 per cent had become separated from their spouse; 9 or 18.7 per cent were still living with their families, and 15 or 56.2 per cent of the recipients' spouses were deceased. Four or 12.1 per cent of the recipients had never married. One recipient married another blind person and from this union there were four daughters born all of whom had perfect sight. From the above, it appears that the largest group of the clients are alone, spouse dead or never married. A blind person living alone has more expense since he has to pay for practically everything done for him, but this is not taken into consideration when the budget is made.

With a knowledge of the educational background of the recipients studied, it can easily be determined that the majority of them had to perform some type of unskilled work as a means of making a living. Only one of the recipients was able to do work after the onset of blindness which would afford him some means of support. The recipient was the one who attended the Georgia Academy for the Blind where he received a knowledge of Braille. He was employed as a teacher of Braille to other blind persons by the Work Projects Administration. He received a salary of $49.50 per month.

Services Rendered Other Than Financial Assistance

The provisions of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation program apply to persons of employable age who by reason of physical defect or infirmity, are incapacitated for employment but who are capable of being
fitted for and of engaging in employment after receiving vocational rehabilita-
tion. To be eligible for vocational rehabilitation service the person
must be a citizen of Georgia and have a permanent physical disability which
constitutes a vocational handicap. Eligibility for vocational rehabilita-
tion service does not necessarily imply acceptability for the service. Factors
such as age, degree of physical handicap, attitude of mind or social status,
sometimes make it inadvisable or impossible to render vocational rehabili-
tation service. The Chatham County Department of Public Welfare explains
to its eligible clients the provisions of this service and encourages those
who are interested to take advantage of the training.

The aim of the vocational rehabilitation program is to train or re-
train the person so that he may be able to enter employment at a living wage.
When the person is sufficiently prepared to engage in work at the occupa-
tion agreed upon by the person and the supervisor of the program he is ex-
pected to go to work and begin to make his own living. In making this study it was found that none of the applicants were
referred to Vocational Rehabilitation Services. It was not determined why
no referrals for vocational training had been made.

Provisions were made by the agency to assist applicants who were
unable to get to the office of the ophthalmologist for their eye examina-
tion, by providing transportation for them.

Recipients who were found living in localities in which they did
not desire to live, were assisted in finding other places to live that were
more suitable to them.

1 Georgia State Department of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation for
2 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maid</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houseman</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakele Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The assumption of the government for financial assistance to the blind as provided for under the Social Security Act is not new. Prior to this act, states assumed this responsibility by providing state pension plans with the underlying philosophy that blindness of itself prevented blind people from engaging in the normal activities of life and because of this it was the duty of the government to assume responsibility for their maintenance and care.

The Federal government gives the blind special consideration; first, by granting them free mailing services; secondly, by allowing them to travel accompanied by a guide or guide dog without paying an extra fare; and thirdly, by authorizing them to operate vending stands in federal buildings.

The first draft of the Social Security Act, which provided categorical relief to the aged and other groups did not include the blind. At the recommendation of the American Foundation for the Blind, Title X extending assistance to the blind was incorporated into the act. The Federal government contributes one-half of whatever the state pays to each person up to a combined total of forty dollars a month.

Many people interested in work with the blind feel that Title X of the Social Security Act may react unfavorably in regard to rehabilitation of the blind because too much emphasis is placed on financial aid alone as the primary need of blind people. This group feels that the primary objective should be the restoration of the blind to social and economic independence by the improvement of medical care, the vocational training services and by helping blind people to find avenues of recreation.

From the year 1937 to 1944 the Chatham County Department of Public Welfare assisted thirty-two blind Negroes under the aid to the blind provisions of the Social Security Act.
The cause of blindness in the majority of cases was Optic Atrophy, accounting for 21.3 per cent. Glaucoma and syphilis caused blindness in 15.2 per cent of the cases.

The ages at which blindness developed ranged from fourteen months to seventy-five years. The largest number of clients fell between the age group 31 to 46.

In regard to the financial responsibility assumed by the agency, the total sum spent in grants for the seven year period was $22,962.50. There has been a gradual increase in the average grant per year since 1937. This increase is from $8.25 in 1937 to $22.84 in 1944. The increase is due to larger appropriations to the counties by the legislature for blind assistance.

The educational background of the recipients studied was very low. Although 63.6 per cent of the recipients did not become blind until they had reached the age of thirty-five, only two of them had completed the eighth grade. Only one of them had a knowledge of Braille. Fourteen or 47.2 per cent of the clients received no education at all.

In regard to the marital status of the recipients the study showed that 37 per cent of them had married previous to the onset of blindness. Of this number 66.2 per cent of the recipients' spouses were deceased and 18.2 per cent of them were separated from their spouses. The percentage of the recipients who had never married was 12.1.

The employment status of the recipients prior to application for assistance showed that the majority of the clients had performed unskilled work as a means of livelihood. This can easily be understood, because 47.2 per cent of them had received no education at all. Only one of the recipients was able to make a fairly decent living after the onset of blindness. This recipient was a teacher of Braille to other blind persons for the Work Projects Administration with a salary of $49.50 per month. He applied for assistance after Work Projects Administration was discontinued, because he could find no further work.
On the basis of this study regarding services rendered to blind recipients by the Chatham County Department of Public Welfare the financial assistance seems inadequate to provide the applicants with a reasonable subsistence. Since the year 1937, the cost of living has gradually increased and although most of the grants in the study show an increase from year to year for each recipient the maximum grant of thirty dollars appears to be insufficient especially at this time. However, there are two reasons for this condition. First, the federal government, through the Social Security Act will only meet one-half of the amount expended by the state up to forty dollars and secondly the appropriations made by the state are not very large.

The time interval between the date of application and the date an aid to the blind grant was given in some cases ran as high as four years which is an unusually long time for a person to wait for assistance. Although it may have been hard for the agency to clarify eligibility requirements it seems that enough effort could have been made on their part to act more quickly so that the applicants would not become too discouraged. Of course, temporary assistance was given when the need proved urgent, but it was just enough to cover the emergency.

Blindness in the majority of the cases developed after the clients had reached the age of thirty-one. At this age, some of them may have been able to be gainfully employed through the Vocational Rehabilitation Services. There was no evidence that any of the applicants had been referred to or to the services which Vocational Rehabilitation offers to handicapped persons. Much could and should be done in this connection because it has been demonstrated that blind people can perform tasks in industry, and are able to compete successfully with seeing persons.

Many blind people are not eligible for training or retraining for gainful employment due to age, other physical handicaps, systemic disease, limited education or other causes. Many need help however, in adjustment
to the handicap of blindness and in learning to do things for themselves. To be able to perform the normal activities of living, such as, dressing oneself, going about unaided, arranging one's belongings so that articles can be easily located, gives meaning to life and counters the feeling of hopelessness and despair that frequently accompanies blindness. There was no evidence that this service was available to the blind persons studied.