

November 2019

Indianapolis Program Blends Habilitation – Rehabilitation

Eugene W. Petersen

None

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara>

Recommended Citation

Petersen, E. W. (2019). Indianapolis Program Blends Habilitation – Rehabilitation. *JADARA*, 4(1). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol4/iss1/6>

INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION – REHABILITATION

EUGENE W. PETERSEN

In an era when the handicapping effects of many disabilities are yielding to improved medical and rehabilitative techniques, the handicapping effects of deafness are increasing. This is due partly to the changing etiology of the disability itself, and partly to the changing social and economic conditions with which its victims must cope. It is not the purpose of this paper to dwell on these conditions, but to outline one approach to the problem being taken in Indiana in the form of a program which blends habilitation and rehabilitation in an established rehabilitation center.

Rationale for this concept lies both in the economics of the situation and the nature of the handicap. It is axiomatic that habilitation is cheaper and better than rehabilitation; it also is known that the deaf need specialized services, while at the same time, one of the handicapping effects of the disability is the isolation it imposes—an isolation often abetted by the need for specialized services. Integration in an ongoing program affords not only economies, but psychological benefits; and the blending of habilitation and rehabilitation benefits both programs.

Crossroads Rehabilitation Center, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, is a 33-year-old rehabilitation center, one of the largest out-patient facilities in the United States. It offers a com-

Mr. Petersen is Supervisor, Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, Crossroads Rehabilitation Center, Indianapolis, Indiana.

12 INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION

prehensive range of social, psychological, medical and vocational services, and is well known and highly regarded in the community and state. Funds come from the United Fund, Easter Seals, miscellaneous contributions, fees from clients, profits from contracts and fees from the State Vocational Rehabilitation Division. Where the program for the deaf and hard of hearing is concerned, VR funds are the most important; but the vital phase of work adjustment hinges on the availability of contract work. Emphasis is placed on development of good work habits and tolerance in a realistic setting where profits are a consideration, just as in private industry. While Crossroads does not attempt to teach specific trades, the usual run of subcontract work offers considerable variety to facilitate testing of vocational interests and skills and prepare clients for on-the-job training. This situation is aided by Indianapolis' fortunate location in an industrial area where over 200 companies utilize the center's facilities for subcontract work.

Since the program for deaf adults, while comprehensive, is similar to that offered in other rehabilitation facilities, this paper will concern itself with the inclusion of selected students from the Indiana School for the Deaf and other deaf teen-agers, who for one reason or another had been excluded from regular educational programs for the deaf, in the program as part of their preparation for adult life.

The program for students from the Indiana School for the Deaf, the most distinctive of the center's services for the deaf, had its beginnings in 1960 when officials at the school, noting the student's need for work experience and the fact that the school and Crossroads were only 10 minutes apart, asked Dr. Roy E. Patton, Crossroads' executive director, for help. As a result, in February of that year, 12 seniors began a program of work adjustment at the center. Soon after, the Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Division, recognizing the value of the program, assumed financial support. Since that time, approximately 150 students have participated in the program, attending Crossroads one-half a day, either in the morning or afternoon, and returning to school for classes the

other half of the day. Normally, the students are at Crossroads only one semester, with from eight to 16 students in the program each semester. Transportation is by school bus and students are regarded as being in school while at Crossroads, with school standards for dress and behavior in effect.

Originally, these students were all certificate seniors, none of whom qualified for high school diplomas, and, in general, were in the bottom third of their class. The thinking behind the program was that without such help, most of these students would eventually wind up in the Rehabilitation Division's waiting room, and that habilitation was better than rehabilitation.

In 1967, the addition of a specialist to the center's vocational staff opened the way for acceptance of an increased number of severely disabled deaf clients, many from hospitals and institutions. In 1969, the program was extended to juniors from the school for the deaf. It had been observed that when the program was limited to seniors, it was obvious that some of them needed more help; but after graduation, they scattered to the four corners of the state, complicating the rehabilitation counselor's task.

Among the students, there are some with superior intelligence (even though they do not qualify for high school diplomas) and many with superior motor skills; there are others with very limited assets. Among the regular deaf clients, there are people who have been to college and retardates who had spent most of their lives in institutions; and a number of deaf adults with no complicating handicaps, who merely need temporary employment. Some of the deaf teenagers who had never attended school came to Crossroads with no formal language, in any medium, to call their own. All these clients are integrated with one another and with the hearing clients, who outnumber the deaf by about four to one, in the center's vocational department. This heterogeneity constitutes one of the center's greatest strengths.

In the 30-month period from May 1, 1967, to Dec. 1, 1969, 84 deaf and hard of hearing clients were served at Crossroads

14 INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation Center, all in the vocational program (some also utilized the center's speech and physical therapy resources).

TABLE I

Indiana School for the Deaf Students	55
(Includes seven students terminated from school because of behavior, discipline or learning problems and transferred to Crossroads as full-time clients. Some of these students continued to board at school and take part in extracurricular activities.)	
Adults	29
(Includes seven teen-agers who were not in school.)	
Multiple handicaps (using accepted criteria for inclusion in this category):	
Significant educational retardation	80
Severe mental retardation	23
(Includes nine clients who were in hospitals or institutions.)	
Serious behavior problems, history of mental illness, psychopaths	11
(Includes five who were hospitalized.)	
Cerebral palsy	3
Orthopedic and other physical impairments	3
(Note—Adds up to more than 84 as some clients have more than one additional disability.)	

While the supervisor and assistant supervisor of the program for the deaf are deaf themselves and able to communicate with deaf clients on any level, and some of the staff in vocational evaluation use and understand some signs and fingerspelling, none of the staff in work adjustment or the

INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION 15

vocational workshops use or understand manual language. This is in line with the center's policy of providing realistic working conditions, encouraging independence and weaning the deaf clients from reliance on intermediaries for help with minor problems. Of course, the deaf supervisors are available when needed, and counseling, which is an integral, continuing part of the program, always is in the clients' preferred means of communication.

Vocational evaluation, which takes 10 weeks, provides a profile of each student's educational level, general knowledge, aptitudes, motor skills, learning ability, work tolerance, dependability, reaction to industrial-type shop rules and supervision, and potential for training for a skilled or semi-skilled occupation or immediate job placement. This is incorporated in a comprehensive report which goes to the Vocational Rehabilitation Division and the School for the Deaf.

Some students, who exhibit little interest in academic pursuits, claim they will do better once they go to work: The experience at Crossroads gives them a chance to put up or shut up. Faced with this challenge and a chance to compete on more even terms, it is not uncommon to observe a student who has had little but frustration in the classroom set the pace at bench assembly. However, as a rule, those students who do best in the classroom also do best at assembly work; they have less trouble disciplining themselves.

Deaf students often have special problems which distinguishes them from the average rehabilitation client with normal hearing:

1. Their communicative skills are apt to be very limited—even more so than most mentally retarded hearing clients.
2. Few have had any prior paid-work experience.
3. They have grown up in a highly sheltered and protective environment and tend to be unrealistic about employment and society.

16 INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION

4. Many of these students are indifferent to work, never having actively participated in competitive employment. They have not learned to discipline themselves to long hours of repetitious labor. They have become accustomed to having their wants supplied by others and receiving special consideration; when they are forced to compete with hearing workers under the supervision of people who know little about the handicap and seem to have no sympathy for their special problems, they sometimes imagine they are not being treated fairly.
5. Most have only fuzzy vocational goals or have unrealistic goals in mind. Others tend to sell themselves short.
6. Many exhibit marked immaturity, functioning on an approximately 10 to 12 year-old level. Coupled with natural youthful exuberance and strong, young bodies, the combination lends a welcome leavening to the center's atmosphere, but also annoys a few older sheltered employes. And while most of the students are friendly and helpful with the other deaf teen-agers in the program, their lack of tact sometimes leads to misunderstandings and resentment.
7. Most are grossly unfamiliar with the non-deaf world and thus unable to communicate or interact except on an adolescent level.

Crossroads' vocational plan consists of recognizing the problems and potentials exhibited by each student, and then attempted to guide or correct the situation to vocationally satisfying and socially accepted levels. The media: a situation where social interaction with the non-deaf world can take place, and employment in a semi-competitive situation where they can learn what work is all about. Of course, to achieve optimum results, considerable time is spent in behavior shaping and vocational counseling. Continued training outside the center, for skilled or semi-skilled trades, can

be and often is recommended. There is constant encouragement for the acquisition of new skills and better work habits. Counseling, as mentioned, is a continuing process and an attempt is made to keep it on a hard-nosed, adult level, with criticism, when needed, short and to the point. Experience has shown that informal, on-the-spot counseling before work starts, at breaks and at other opportune times is more effective than formal group counseling as the students do not take well to being called together for what they may assume to be just another lecture. An exception is the showing of captioned films developed at the Oregon College of Education to illustrate facets of employment for the deaf. These films and other material distributed by Captioned Films for the Deaf are shown at the students' break time, and they are not required to attend the sessions, but very few students pass up the opportunity.

The students generally enjoy the program. Working alongside more severely disabled clients helps put their own handicap into better perspective, and the money, which constitutes a rather handsome "allowance," is always welcome. They also learn about such things as employment applications, withholding statements, taxes, Social Security, time clocks, shop etiquette and supervisors and co-workers who do not understand sign language or finger spelling. There is the usual amount of grumbling about low wages and hard work, the kind of work, bi-weekly paydays, deductions, favoritism and supervisors who don't understand deaf people. This griping is normal, but in a competitive situation, where there is seldom anyone around for a deaf worker to go to for advice, discontent sometimes feeds upon itself.

The Crossroads' program also provides a cushion to soften the impact on students whose attendance at school must be terminated. Of the seven cases mentioned, three have found competitive employment; two have been discharged to Crossroads' vocational workshops, with the expectation they eventually will be able to move into competitive situations; one is now in work adjustment, and one left the program when the family moved out of state.

18 INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION

The presence of the deaf students contributes immeasurably to the habilitation of the seven non-student teen-agers mentioned in Table I. All came to Crossroads with the diagnosis of moderate to severe mental retardation and/or brain damage. In some cases, experience casts considerable doubt on the original diagnosis: One young girl, who had been institutionalized with an indicated I.Q. of 40, was recently re-tested by a psychologist familiar with the deaf, who found she had a minimal I.Q. of 87; and another youngster who had been rejected by the school for the deaf as uneducable, was found to have an I.Q. of 67 at the time of entrance in the Crossroads' program and a recent retest disclosed he had gained 10 points with evidence pointing to continued gains. At least three of these youngsters came to Crossroads with no formal language, in any medium, to call their own: communication was limited to crude pantomime, gestures and facial expressions. While the effect of meaningful social interaction with peers who share their handicap cannot be measured, there is no doubt that these youngsters learn as much or more from their association with the students as from formal classroom instruction. In some cases, this represents the first opportunity these people ever have had for social interaction with others who share their handicap and are willing to come down to their communicative level and help them up. In any event, no adult counselor or teacher, no matter how skilled he is in communication with the deaf, can hope to equal the rapport that takes place when young people get together and talk without supervision or inhibitions.

Of the seven teen-agers mentioned, five continue in the program at Crossroads with every expectation that they will be capable of holding competitive positions after they have gained a little more maturity; one dropped out because of a deeply ingrained "welfare philosophy" and lack of cooperation at home; and only one, a 17-year-old boy with brain damage, looks non-feasible at this time. It also has been noted that some of the young deaf adults, in their twenties, identify with the deaf students more readily than with other groups in the center.

As mentioned, the heterogeneity of clients represents one of the program's greatest strengths; but it would be wrong to say that such a heterogeneity creates no problems. There has been some resistance to the Crossroads program on the part of students and parents who misinterpret the scope of rehabilitation and look down on manual work. Others have been dazzled by publicity about Gallaudet College, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and the new regional junior college programs and imagine there is a stigma attached to participation in a work adjustment program in a rehabilitation center. Actually, it has been observed time and again that the top students in each group get the most out of the program even though most of the attention goes to the more limited students. The superior students quickly grasp the purpose of the program and make the most of it. Partly as a result of this observation plus the fact that a taste of plain hard work for plain hard money is excellent preparation for the grind of higher education and competitive employment, plans are being made to make the experience available to more high school students when attendance will not interfere with graduation requirements. It is expected that this will do much to reduce resistance to the program.

Also, beginning in the fall of 1970, the program will reach down to the elementary level of the school to take in some potential dropouts.

The fact that the students are at Crossroads only half a day and the adult clients return to private homes after work eliminates most of the possibilities for trouble stemming from social interaction of naive, inexperienced young people with older rehabilitation clients. There is some resistance and intolerance on the part of older hearing rehabilitation clients to the youthful hi-jinks, immaturity and communicative problems common to the students; but, in balance, their presence brightens the center, and their superior strength, energy and dexterity make a valuable addition to the center's labor force.

At a time when a large part of our working force is engaged at trades that did not exist a generation ago and fore-

20 INDIANAPOLIS PROGRAM BLENDS HABILITATION — REHABILITATION

casts have half of all students in school today working at occupations that do not now exist, simply learning how to work may be one of the most important subjects a student can study. The work experience program at Crossroads Rehabilitation Center is a simple, practical means of preparing students for the demands of competitive employment.