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FIELD EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL WORK WITH DEAF STUDENTS

By **MARIE DAVIS**, Student, Gallaudet College

I hope that what I am going to speak about this morning will stress the importance of social work in schools for the deaf. I myself did not realize the extent of this importance until I went through the experience of being the first placement from the preprofessional social work program of Gallaudet College at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf.

When I arrived at the MSSD for the first taste of my "job," I was interviewed by the casework supervisor who explained all the aspects of social work in schools and the aims hoped to be accomplished at this school. The casework supervisor assigned to me some responsibility in the foster home program, which is included in the social work program at the MSSD along with the arrangement of off-campus residential facilities and group homes. This plan was developed for the benefit of the students whose placement in the dormitory is inappropriate or unsuitable, and for students who need parental figures for closer, more intimate relationships or for more adult protection and moral support. In the foster home program, I check the interaction between the natural parents, foster parents and the student and check the development of the student's inner controls and educational progress. Also, this program involves casework treatment, referrals to community agencies for students and their families whenever more specialized help seems necessary, checking the qualifications of foster parents who have applied for the program and interviewing them and, lastly, interviewing the students themselves. For example, I have three regular clients, teenage girl students, who come to see me once a week for interviews.

Here I will illustrate some examples of the kinds of problems which my clients encounter and to protect their identities, I will use initials. One whom I shall call "T" and who has recently been placed in a foster home needs constant reassurance to aid her in adjusting to her new surroundings and to help her in clearing up her feelings toward her natural family from whom she is separated due to a serious family problem with which she is unable to cope. "E", another girl who was formerly in a foster home, but because of

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her difficulty in managing personal needs and her outbursts of anger, she was finally transferred to the dormitory. She still needs help in developing self-control, however, so that she may have better relationships with others. With "M", it is her adolescence problem that brings her to confusion and adds to the already developed crisis of her disordered family. However, "M" is able to communicate with her parents who are also deaf, and it is expected that she will learn how to cope and feel worthy.

At first, I found interviewing to be very difficult because two of my clients were referred to me not knowing why or for what reasons they were to be interviewed. One of them, during the first few interviews, appeared very frightened and told stories of some bad past experiences and sometimes even deliberately tried to find excuses to miss appointments. Now she seems to be more relaxed and a little more confident. This shows how much children need to express themselves and how sensitive they are. During my spare time which I use to review social work materials on foster care at the MSSD library, I sometimes encounter other students who have problems and seem afraid to confide in anyone outside of their peer group. One male student, after learning about my position, confessed that most students prefer to keep their own problems as "secrets". From the interviews and the information I have gathered so far, it has become evident to me that deaf students during their most difficult stage, adolescence, find it hard to confide in their parents or other adults and tend to suppress their feelings within themselves. Since modern education of the deaf insists on a stimulating environment revolving around the deaf student and his needs, there is a distinct need for social workers who can help them in meeting the many difficulties they face. My experience at the MSSD has convinced me that the concept of social service for deaf students is sound and that well-trained and communicative social workers have an important role to play in the education of the deaf.