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MANPOWER NEEDS IN COUNSELING THE DEAF

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INTRODUCTION

For all practical purposes the professional preparation of vocational rehabilitation counselors with the deaf is a product of the last decade. Prior to this time those counselors who provided services to deaf people generally had little or no specialized training.

At present, there are six university programs preparing counselors with the deaf. Four of these are degree programs and two offer short-term orientation to deafness. The contributions which these programs have made in extending rehabilitation services to deaf people is difficult to assess. However, I think it would be safe to say that much of what we have been able to accomplish would not have been possible were it not for these programs.

PROBLEM

Despite the efforts of the past ten years there remains a critical manpower shortage in the area of deafness rehabilitation. To those of us in the field this problem is so evident it hardly warrants discussion. Many existing and emerging programs are being seriously hampered in their efforts to serve deaf people due to a lack of adequately trained personnel.

Although professional training programs have made important contributions towards easing the manpower shortage they have been unable to keep up with increasing demands. Between 1962 and 1970 the six professional training programs had a total of 576 graduates (1). This is barely enough to meet the one year demand for new personnel which the Rehabilitation Services Administration has projected for next year (2).

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There can be little doubt that the educational level and professional competence of counselors with the deaf is much greater today than it was a few short years ago. Much, however, remains to be done. A recent study of 132 rehabilitation counselors with the deaf indicated that only one third considered themselves good in the use of manual communication. This study also showed that only 13 percent held graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling (3). These figures would seem to indicate a definite need to upgrade the skills of counselors now in the field.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Now, I would like to offer some suggestions for meeting our manpower problems which may warrant further discussion during our meeting. Many of these suggestions were taken from the report of the Tarrytown Conference on Current Priorities in the Rehabilitation of Deaf People (4).

(1) Greatly increased funding for university training programs that prepare counselors to work with deaf people. We desperately need at least one long-term program in each of the SRS regions and possibly two or three more short-term programs. Advanced funding should be provided so that these programs can adequately plan for staff and student needs. Each program should work closely with the state agencies in their region in up-grading the skills of counselors presently in the field. All training grants should include the provision of interpreting funds for deaf students.

(2) Initiation of a comprehensive manpower study to determine the need and demand for special counselors and related personnel. At present, we have only estimates to go by in planning future programs. Hard data is needed on present manpower shortages and projected needs.

(3) Development of an accreditation mechanism for counselor training programs. Currently, a committee made up of representatives from five professional organizations is working on this problem. The Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf should have some input into these deliberations. Our goal should be not only the accreditation of our own programs, but also the inclusion of some course work in deafness in general rehabilitation counseling programs.

(4) Establishment of a national employment clearing-house, possibly under the direction of PRWAD. This office should serve as a link between counselors wishing to enter the field or change positions and employers who are in need of counselors. The office might also coordinate a national recruitment program aimed at reaching young people and informing them of the career opportunities in the field of deafness.

(5) Development of closer ties between counselor training programs and post secondary schools and special facilities serving the deaf. These schools and facilities are in a position to provide excellent practicum

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experiences for students and will, in time, become the employer of many of the graduates of these programs. The Rehabilitation Services Administration should develop a mechanism whereby the directors of these programs could meet annually to discuss problems of common interest.

(6) Development of special curriculum materials for counselor training programs. At present, there are very few text books, training manuals, and other media developed specifically for this purpose.

(7) Greater utilization of para-professionals in rehabilitation programs. A few states, such as North Carolina and Michigan, have successfully used counselor aides in meeting the manpower problem. More states should follow this lead. Many deaf adults who lack the academic credentials might serve very well in this capacity.

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