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## Manpower

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By **FRANCIS J. GATTAS**, Program Specialist, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Ohio Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation

By way of introduction, let me say that participating on a panel of this nature at a conference of such nation-wide scope is a new and exciting experience for me. Let me also express the hope that my contribution here, today, will prove me worthy of the invitation.

When Mr. White, here, asked me to participate on this panel some weeks ago, and told me, I would be expected to discuss in ten minutes, no less, the needs, problems, possible solutions, and the innovative programs in the rehabilitation of the deaf as I see them from my perspective as a specialist working with this disability group on the state level, I must admit my first reaction was to mutter to myself, "You'll never be able to give an adequate answer to that question in the time allotted." My second reaction was, "What a question!"

So now that I've firmly planted those two provisos in the minds of my fellow panel members, and you, the audience, let's begin.

The theme of this conference is "Manpower" and manpower as I see it is people – nothing more, nothing less!

When you ask about the needs, as I see them, relative to rehabilitating the deaf; when you ask me to describe the problems, I see the same answer. And, the answer, is people!!!

What is our greatest need? The answer is simple. What we need is more counselors, skilled and trained to work with the deaf to aid them in facing their often multiple communicative, educational, social, and economic plights.

What is our greatest problem? The answer is again housed in the word people. There simply aren't enough people around with the inclination or the special skills designed to do the job.

So, gentlemen, as I see it, the need and problem are synonymous!!! The need is for more counselors, audiologists, speech and hearing therapist – more manpower – if you will! The problem is not enough of the same.

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Let me illustrate my point by using Ohio as an example of both the problem and an indication of what, I believe, is one of the ways of finding a solution to this national manpower shortage.

When our program in Ohio first got underway, we thought we could simply look beyond our borders and lure competent counselors trained in working with the deaf to our state. We soon learned that skilled personnel working with the deaf are at a premium no matter where you look. This scarcity of counselors combined with our own salary limitations soon indicated to us that this initial avenue of recruitment just wasn't feasible.

As an alternative, we began to recruit counselors already working for the Ohio BVR and designed our own in-service training program. Our agency's administrative staff cooperated with and supported me in the identification and recruitment of counselors from within the agency who we felt could function in this new and specialized role as counselors working strictly with deaf caseloads. These counselors were then carefully screened by the field and myself.

From a practical point of view, our initial in-service training program for these new specialists worked extremely well. Our primary purpose, then, was to provide our fledgling specialists with a general fund of knowledge related to communication disorders with the hope of fostering growth in this specialized area of counseling. Looking back now, as I talk to you, I must say – I think we succeeded in our objective.

First, we arranged for counselors to spend a short period of time at a local speech and hearing center. In this setting, they were able to become familiar with the various types of ear pathology and audiological tests. A one week training period at a school for the deaf and the state school was also included in the program. This gave the counselor the opportunity to witness the actual teacher-pupil relationship in the classroom. As a result, each counselor became more appreciative of the problems faced by deaf students and their instructors.

Second, our new counseling specialists attended meetings with various community agencies and organizations interested in deaf people. This gave them first-hand information about this type of organization and insight into the function and role such groups play in the community.

Third, the agency allocated monies for private tutors to instruct our counselors in the art of manual communication. These tutors were leaders from the deaf community, or hearing people who had close relationship with the deaf. This proved to be an excellent way for counselors to learn not only manual communication, but also, gave them an opportunity to learn about the deaf on a very personal – gut – level. This phase of the training also cemented ties between the state BVR agency and the deaf community. This, then, is what we in Ohio have done.

Today, by way of innovation, we attempt to have periodic statewide meetings of all our counselors for the deaf and the hard of hearing. This gives our counselors an opportunity to exchange ideas and information about

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their programs. We find these meetings innovative and meaningful. Our counselors do learn from each other. Often we have prominent people in the area of deafness, who may be educators, rehabilitation specialists, or psychologists, come in to address the group. At times, we invite members of the deaf community to take part in our meetings so that we can learn from them.

In addition to these periodic statewide meetings, we have established one-week in-service training institutes where deafness and its inherent problems are discussed by counselors. These have proved most helpful. We have local or area in-service training where we contract with a speech and hearing center to provide a one or two day orientation program on communication disorders to counselors in that region carrying a general caseload. This kind of in-service training also has proven effective.

As far as the future is concerned, I would like to see "counselor for the deaf" as a separate, identifiable civil service position. In other words, I would like to see Civil Service hiring practices conform more to the specialized nature of our work. I think this would help immeasurably to alleviate our manpower needs and problems.

## SUMMATION

In closing, let me say, I believe we in Ohio are on the right track. I realize we haven't licked all the problems, fulfilled all the needs, cornered the market on innovation or found all the solutions, but we have more than just begun. In my opinion, Ohio now has the machinery, the program, to do the job. Now, all we have to do is continue tinkering with the engine to make it run more efficiently.