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Special Problems of Aged Deaf Persons

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SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF AGED DEAF PERSONS

James T. Flood

The thrust of our program today is toward shedding light on just how aging deaf people live and what society is doing for them on the local, state and national levels.

It is a sad commentary to have to say that, in spite of a vast array of social legislation already on the books intended to benefit all the people, the aged deaf are not sharing such benefits to a significant degree.

I do not stand here and say that the aged deaf are discriminated against. The connotation would be that this failure to share is connived—is intentional—and I know of no evidence of such callousness. It is very apparent that other factors are causative.

An analogous situation existed in the area of the education of the deaf. The first public school for the education of the deaf was established at Hartford, Connecticut in 1817, around two hundred years after the settlement at Jamestown and Plymouth. Post secondary educational facilities became available about fifty years later with the chartering of Gallaudet College by Abraham Lincoln in 1864. In this Act he severed the educational bonds of the deaf just as he also did in giving full freedom to black people.

I do not have to tell you that today equality of educational opportunity for the deaf is just about at full parity.

Now the Bill of Rights does not limit its grant of freedom to be enjoyed by all Americans. It states, among other things, that all men are created equal and have the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are reinforced and further

defined in the Bill of Rights and other subsequent Constitutional amendments and legislative enactments.

Social legislation usually contains the expression "For the General Welfare" and therein is the Pandora's Box of problems of access to equality of sharing by the deaf in the benefits of social legislation.

At the recent White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals, the same lack, inability to share the benefits of social legislation, was voiced in print and for the same reason the deaf have long known and have been trying to rectify.

The deaf, other handicapped, other minorities and the aged will not share equitably in the benefits of social legislation unless their needs are recognized, mentioned and specifically provided for in enactments.

In the field—on the local, state and national levels—government and volunteer agencies must be made aware of the problems of the aging deaf. Efforts must be made to structure an economical, rational delivery system of social benefits. Advocates for the deaf, the deaf themselves, families and friends are all needed to accomplish this purpose.

Today we shall find out what is going on for the aging deaf at the local level and I have the pleasure of introducing Elizabeth Carlton Criswell of Dallas. I am sure she is known to all of you for, even though my home is in Ohio, I have come to know and respect her as a friend and advocate for the deaf.

Following Ms. Criswell will be Ms. Donna Johnson, Special Assistant to the Commissioner

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of the Governor's Agency on Aging. I did not have the pleasure of working with her before sharing in this ADARA Conference. However, I hear so much and such good things about her involvement with the deaf that I am sure I could not have shared today's program with anyone more able to tell of the aging deaf at the state level. Ms. Johnson.

Finally, I would like to introduce Mr. Michael Nader, Director of Planning for Columbus Colony. You may or may not have

heard of this model project, a total community of, by and for the deaf, the deaf-blind and the deaf-multihandicapped. If Mr. Nader looks beat, I would like to explain: Columbus Colony is the first such facility in the nation. It was started from scratch and it is not just possible but very probable that the "scratches" certainly have rubbed off on all of us associated with the prototype undertaking. Mr. Nader.