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Post-Employment Services

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POST-EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Curtis Groth

I have been asked to talk to you about my responsibilities at St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute (TVI), specifically as they relate to employment and post-employment services. Let me start by saying that the program at St. Paul TVI is, I believe, a very unique one. It is a cooperative effort between the school itself, the TVI Program for Deaf Students, and the State Dept. of Economic Security. I am sure that I will mention this again and again but I believe that this cooperation is what lends uniqueness and strength to the program.

I myself work for the State Dept. of Economic Security (MDES). I have worked for them the past 10½ years. Truly cooperative efforts between governmental agencies can be rare, but in this instance 3½ years ago, after negotiations between the agencies, a branch office of MDES was opened at TVI. As the staff person assigned, I worked with the general student population in a job placement capacity. This was more or less the first step in the cooperative effort and has been so successful that now there are similar efforts in 8 or 9 other vocational schools in Minnesota and these are also becoming very successful programs.

The next step in cooperation came when I first started working with the deaf students at TVI. First let me explain that MDES has staff personnel who specialize in working with the handicapped. But in the past, the training offered these people to acquaint them with specific handicaps and related employment problems was of a very general nature. As far as I know, there had been no one given in-

depth training in the field of deafness or in the use of sign language. After I expressed an interest in working with the deaf, and after some encouragement from staff members from the St. Paul TVI Program for Deaf Students, MDES sponsored me so that I could attend the Interpreters Institute at St. Paul TVI. This involved expenses and release time, full time for 6 weeks. I think this again shows the depth of cooperation and commitment between my agency and TVI. I think it has been a successful effort on both parts. As part of the employment service division I am able to bring all their resources/job listings to help the students at TVI find part-time and full-time jobs. And by having office space within the school and welcomed access to staff meetings/orientations/instructors, I am able to get first hand information regarding students' abilities, potential, etc. I am able to coordinate placement activity between the school and the employer, which I see as my chief function in the setting I am in. Both agencies have given me the opportunity to acquire personal skills, get into direct contact with students, instructors, and employers, so that I can actively coordinate these job placement efforts.

Ever since my attending the Interpreter's Institute, the Program for Deaf Students has made sure that I have no lack of deaf students to work with. It seems that the day after completion of classes 2 years ago I was deluged with deaf students looking for full-time and part-time work. Although things have slowed some, I would say I talk to 5 or 6 deaf students every day. Over the past 2 years I have helped

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place over 120 deaf students on jobs, mostly full-time jobs. So I believe all the cooperation between agencies has paid off for the agencies and for the students involved.

The deaf students have been successful in getting jobs in a wide variety of fields: mechanical trades such as machining jobs, auto body mechanics, welders, printing-related occupations, sheet metal workers, cabinetmakers; many jobs in various office occupations; technical jobs in chemistry, med-lab work, and soon, mechanical drafting. So the jobs that the students are getting run through the entire range of training programs offered at TVI.

I have been very encouraged by the response of employers to interviewing and hiring the deaf students. I firmly believe that most employers, once convinced to at least interview a deaf person, come away favorably impressed with their skills. Of course, most employers who contact TVI regarding job openings already are aware of the good quality of students graduating from the school. The more difficult task is to convince them that the deaf person *can* fit into their company without causing any exceptional problems.

Employers who have had little or no contact with deaf people usually have certain fears, certain questions, they want answered. First of all many employers are unsure as to how to actually interview a deaf person. Thank goodness that interpreter services are available. I am sure this puts both employer and student at ease in the interview setting. In fact, it has been so well received by employers that some have been more than ready and willing to offer jobs to the interpreters, which speaks highly of the quality people filling that important function.

Most employers are unaware of basic language difficulties a deaf person may have and how these difficulties can relate or *not* relate to job skills, abilities, and potential. I find it necessary to take time to explain these things to some employers to help encourage them to interview and hire deaf persons.

Questions are asked on the ability to drive a car to get to the job. Some employers are surprised to realize that the inability to hear doesn't prevent a deaf person from driving a

car.

Of course, for jobs in an office setting, the importance of phone usage is a difficulty, and a valid one. Inability to use a phone eliminates many job possibilities. But then again some employers realize they can slightly rearrange things in their office to eliminate this problem.

The question of making friends on the job is asked a lot. Will the deaf person feel uncomfortable or left out? Actually I find the fact that this question is asked to be an encouraging sign, because it shows that the employer is sensitive to the needs of the employee. I have often wondered if a deaf person would indeed feel uncomfortable. But maybe the problem is larger in a person's mind than it actually is. Things seem to work out most of the time. Other employees start learning some basic signs so that they can more easily communicate with the deaf person. This also is very encouraging to me.

The question of further training is related to this. Many employers wonder how they will teach the specifics of their company's way of doing things to the deaf person. It can't possibly all be written out in notes, etc. Again, the value of the interpreter comes in here, because they can spend 1 or 2 days on the job helping with communications, helping with the training. This is really invaluable, and many times has actually been the deciding factor in the company's actually hiring the deaf person.

Insurance problems/safety problems are also important questions asked by employers. I really haven't come up with a satisfactory answer to these questions. One approach I have used is to check with past employers to see if they have had any safety problems with the deaf people working for them. Sometimes it is a lot more convincing if one employer tells another what the problems were, if any. I don't know if any actual studies have been done to learn more about this important area. I think such a study would be helpful.

I mentioned before that I have been encouraged by the response of employers, not only in their hiring of the deaf, but also by their willingness to become more aware of deafness itself. Many employers are encouraging and even financing their employees to take

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sign language classes. Some classes are being held at the companies themselves. Executive officers are taking these classes, or other classes, at TVI. Some companies have seriously thought of hiring a full-time interpreter on their staff. The more they learn about deafness the better it will be for the deaf students and for those of us in the job placement field.

I would like to give you some idea of what services I provide at TVI. I have already mentioned that I coordinate the job placement services at the school. As an employee of MDES I bring all of their job listings to school on a daily basis and that amounts to a lot of job openings, updated daily. Because of the school's cooperation, most of the phone calls and letters received at the school, if related to employment, are channeled through my office. Thus I am exposed to many job possibilities. I see my primary duty as bringing these job openings to the attention of instructors and students, and then arranging job interviews between students and employers.

I am able to discuss with instructors the different students, how their abilities and personalities may fit in with different jobs. I try to get a feel as to what specifically the student is interested in. Then I can discuss with the employers a selection of qualified applicants for the job, applicants that fit in best with what the employer is looking for. It doesn't always work that smoothly but that's the general idea.

Because I work with many students and not only the deaf, I feel I have a wide exposure to job possibilities. I have a chance to discuss deafness with all the employers, most of whom probably had not thought at all about hiring a handicapped person. So I have a lot of chances to encourage employers to hire deaf persons.

As I mentioned before, I set up job interviews and help arrange for an interpreter to be present at them all. I get feedback from interpreters and employers regarding the interviews, how the deaf person came across, what prob-

lems there may be. I can relay this information back to the students. This gives them a chance to know exactly how they are doing, how the employers view their skills and potential, and how well they came across in the interview setting. I do some counseling regarding interviewing techniques. Most of the deaf students I work with have little or no work experience and are unsure as to how to sell themselves in an interview, what is appropriate behavior there. As an example of this, one girl I was working with had a job interview at a hospital in Minneapolis. The job opening was for a house-keeping assistant, someone to clean rooms, make beds, etc. The student showed up for the interview dressed in a full-length evening gown. The employer later called and explained how shocked he was when he saw her. But maybe it was not so inappropriate because the girl was hired. Anyway, my point is that many times the students are unaware of how to handle themselves in the interview. The movie you saw today will help a great deal to make them be more aware.

I think one important thing I offer the deaf students is *continual* placement services. No matter how long it takes I continue to try to find them a job. I worked with one girl for a little over a year before she finally found employment. That was a year ago, and she is still employed. If the person wants to change jobs my services are always available to them. As you can see I get involved with almost everything covered under the broad title of employment related services.

I will mention for the final time that all of these services are available only because of the cooperation between TVI and MDES. I don't know if a similar program is feasible in your work setting. I do not have in-depth knowledge of the many programs you represent, but I do know that this cooperation has built a successful program, successful for both agencies and for the students involved. I believe that is a good commendation for any program.