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A RESIDENTIAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH SPEECH AND HEARING IMPAIRMENT

CARTER M. WILLIAMS

Northern Illinois University provides a special residential program to assist speech and hearing impaired young adults in bridging the tremendous gap between completion or termination of academic education and a realistic vocational objective. The student's vocational, educational, and social independence is greatly enhanced by residence within the university setting. The services provided by this program include diagnostics, speech and hearing therapy, developmental and remedial academic training in reading, language, mathematics, business, and vocational exploration. Counseling and guidance in activities of daily living are also integral parts of the student's enrichment.

Screening and referral of a student is initiated by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the student's home state. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors select a potential applicant using the following criteria: Ages 16 to 24; single; a minimum WAIS performance I.Q. of 80; hearing loss or speech impairment sufficiently severe to affect academic, vocational, and social achievement; and a genuine desire to participate in the program. Referral information includes medical information, audiological information, educational history and transcripts, personal and social history, and psychological information. When these credentials have been received by the staff of the Northern Illinois University program, they con-

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fer with the Illinois state consultant for the deaf and hard of hearing and make recommendations for acceptance or rejection. The accepted student is enrolled in the six week summer program for extensive evaluation and therapy. If an applicant is not accepted into the program, alternate opportunities are suggested.

SUMMER PROGRAM

The students are housed in the university dormitories with all college privileges extended to them. Speech therapy, speech reading, auditory training, language, reading, and vocational testing and counseling are provided on an individual and small group basis. Each student is afforded the opportunity to express his individual feelings and emotions during a special class in creative dramatics. Social and emotional independence are developed during the planned recreational activities throughout the six week program. Organized recreational activities include outdoor sports, picnics, dances, and captioned films. Each student is required to work approximately two hours a day in the kitchen and dining room. This assignment provides an opportunity for the staff to observe and assess the student's work habits and performance. This period of work has proven to be a good indicator of difficulties that may arise in future vocational placement.

Prior to the conclusion of the summer program, all information about each student is discussed by the staff to determine the feasibility of his acceptance into the nine month program. Guidelines and recommendations for those students not returning are included in a comprehensive report supplied to parents and the referring counselor.

NINE MONTH PROGRAM

Emphasis in the nine month program is placed on vocational adjustment and independent living, rather than diagnostics. During this phase of the program, the student is housed with university students and is encouraged to integrate into normal university activities. All university facili-

ties are available to the students, with the exception of intercollegiate activities and fraternities.

The student's weekly schedule is divided into half day units, with one half day being spent in a working situation, and the remainder of the day being spent in remedial and academic training. Friday of each week is utilized for field trips that allow the student to broaden his experience in the area of vocational education.

Each student may be given work assignments in the university, industry, or a local business during his enrollment. The job assignments are matched as nearly as possible to the student's preference and abilities. These assignments are designed to: (1) provide vocational experience in several areas, (2) enhance adjustment to and functioning in the working world, (3) guide the development of individual talents and abilities, and (4) demonstrate to employers that the speech or hearing handicapped do make responsible employees.

Classes are offered in areas that provide the student with vital information needed for independent living; i.e. vocational education, current events, sex education, and manual communication. Vocational education classes study such topics as job applications, interviews, acceptable work habits, the paycheck, insurance, unions, and laws which affect the worker. Classroom instruction is supplemented by field trips to a variety of industries and businesses in Northern Illinois. A sex education class is taught covering such areas as social relationships, dating, anatomy, reproduction, and family planning. The current events class covers areas which are of immediate importance and consequence to each student. A manual communication class is offered as either a remedial course for those lacking in communication skills, or as an elective course.

The student may also be scheduled (or make his own request) for remedial help in certain academic subjects or advanced work in some areas. Classes are offered in the areas of mathematics, language and grammar, public speaking, reading, and business education—filing, typing, bookkeeping, civil

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service, key punch, income tax, and personal banking.

During the first semester, a capable student is encouraged to audit college classes of high interest to him. He is expected to attend all classes and to complete the normal work assignments before being evaluated at the end of the semester by a university professor. During the first semester, for those auditing a class, an effort is made to orient the students to college life, study habits, homework, and specific problems that may arise due to their hearing or speech handicap. Special arrangements are made to accommodate the deaf student in the normal classroom.

Vocational training, in a number of specific occupations, is available in the local area. Examples are key punch operations, office machines, welding, drafting, floral arrangement, plus many other semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. Students expecting training in occupations requiring greater degrees of skill plan on remaining in the DeKalb area for a period if time after completion of the program. Special arrangements are made for these students within the community.

PRESENT PROGRAM

The program, presently in its tenth year, has fifty-five students enrolled. Twenty-nine are profound or severely deaf, seventeen have a moderate loss, six have a mild loss, and three have a speech handicap. Some of the above students have multiple handicaps such as, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and mild mental retardation.

The students range educationally from termination during elementary school to graduation from high school. Only a few of the students have had previous work experience. In the present class, the I.Q. Range is from 78 to 130, as tested on various instruments.

This program is sponsored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, Illinois Division, without whose continued

support this program would be unable to continue. All inquiries and referrals should be directed to:

Director, DVR Program
Speech and Hearing Clinic
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115