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CROSSROADS REHABILITATION CENTER PROGRAM FOR THE DEAF

Crossroads Rehabilitation Center at Indianapolis has evolved an effective hard money program for the deaf and hard of hearing that demonstrates it is possible to set up and operate a regional program for the severely handicapped deaf without federal grant money, do a good job of habilitating and rehabilitating such people, and even contribute to the center's overhead in the process. The program blends evaluation and habilitation of a large variety of multiply disabled deaf children, high school students and other young deaf people with the evaluation and rehabilitation of a large variety of deaf and hard of hearing adults in an integrated setting which provides realistic preparation for competitive or sheltered employment, on-the-job training or continuing education. Deaf clients come from a five-state area.

The program now accepts 80 to 90 new referrals a year and counting hold-over clients, serves around 125 deaf and hard of hearing clients a year. This does not include hard of hearing clients who do not receive special services within the framework of the program for the deaf or clients who come in only for psychological testing or speech therapy. Deaf clients make up about one-fourth the total served in the center's vocational program and, except while in Vocational Evaluation, are integrated with the normally hearing clients.

Except for a small grant to implement a new communications therapy program for multiply disabled deaf children who can not now be accepted by the school for the deaf, the program has been supported entirely by regular Vocational Rehabilitation Services fees, which bring in a little over \$60,000 per year—enough to pay the salaries of four full-time staff members and make a substantial contribution to the center's overhead. Of course, to handle that many clients, there has to be a vigorous subcontract procurement program, quality work that sustains client motivation and supervisors who enjoy working with deaf people. For the last fiscal quarter 1973-74, Crossroads handled 63 jobs with a total billing of \$196,528, which provided a good variety of work to test job aptitudes and develop skills. Although only four people devote full time to the deaf clients, some of the staff in the vocational program have learned a little sign language and two supervisors who have worked with deaf people for years use it well.

The emphasis is on evaluation, communication, counseling, socialization, paid work and adjustment to independent or semi-independent living rather than on training for specific trades, as it is felt this can be done better on the job or in a trade school after clients have acquired basic work skills and have learned to communicate.

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The program has three parts:

Communications Therapy: As originally conceived, this program was set up to evaluate the potential of multiply handicapped deaf children for communications therapy, using total communication and involving parents and siblings, as a first step in the habilitation of children whose multiple disabilities made attendance at the school for the deaf non-feasible. Initially, 20 deaf children and young adults from a facility for the mentally retarded were evaluated and responded so well to total communication, application was made for a three-year, \$45,000 grant to develop a follow-up program. Simultaneously, a follow-up program was developed at the facility for the mentally retarded and the focus at Crossroads shifted to very young m-h deaf children, young teenagers functioning at too high a level for a facility for the mentally retarded but still unacceptable at the school for the deaf and the low-verbal teenagers and young adults in the center's vocational program. The goal for the young children and teenagers is eventual acceptance by the school for the deaf (and a few have made it) or graduation to Crossroads' vocational program when they become 16. In a break with tradition, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services has been paying a fee for teenagers 13 to 15 years old.

An interesting sidelight of this program is that when it was in the talking stage, it was predicted that if Crossroads ever announced it had a program for multiply handicapped deaf children, there would be a hundred mothers waiting at the door the next day. This never came to pass. Many parents still wanted an oral program, others lived outside the center's transportation area and there probably never were as many such children as imagined. In any event, implementation of Indiana's new special education law in 1973 led to a decline in applications at both the Indiana School for the Deaf and Crossroads. At the same time, more and more deaf vocational clients at Crossroads spend a part of each day in Communications Therapy. Since real two-way communication is necessary for counseling and counseling is vital to rehabilitation, the Vocational Rehabilitation Services is being asked to help continue the program within a hard money fee schedule and prospects look good. As of this date, four young children, three teenagers ages 13 to 15, and 12 clients from the vocational program are in Communications Therapy. Volunteers and parents help the instructor and make one-on-one as well as group teaching possible.

Deaf Students. Now in its 14th year, a special program sponsored by the Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services in cooperation with the Indiana School for the Deaf is helping an increasing number of deaf students get ready for the demands of competitive employment or continuing education by evaluating their vocational potential and giving them a taste of plain hard work for plain hard money in a semi-competitive setting where most of their co-workers and supervisors have normal hearing and do not use or understand sign language—a situation they will face when they enter the labor market.

Most students are at Crossroads for one semester during their sophomore or junior year and are in the program one-half days with the other half being spent in regular classes at school. In exceptional cases, students in lower grades who are regarded as potential dropouts are accepted and others may be in the program a full day or more than one semester. The first few weeks are spent in vocational evaluation; the remainder of the school semester is in work adjustment training where the students are paid for their work at piece rates based on industrial production figures.

The youthful good looks, high spirits and energy of these young people does much to brighten the center's atmosphere and contributes immeasurably to socialization of the severely handicapped deaf clients by providing incentive for communication and a model for "normal" teenage behavior.

Currently, 22 students from the Indiana School for the Deaf are in the program.

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Regular Program for the Deaf. Of prime interest to this conference, focused on the severely handicapped deaf, is Crossroads' program for deaf and hard of hearing teenagers and adults. In a sense, all these clients are severely disabled or they wouldn't be in a rehabilitation program. Some have been or are mentally ill, some are mentally retarded, others have severe emotional problems or problems of adjustment, some have cerebral palsy and most are educationally and culturally retarded. There are no age limits. While young people predominate, we have several clients in their fifties and one spunky young lady is pushing 63. I.Q.s have ranged from as low as 40 to as high as 130. The former was a gross underestimate made by a psychologist totally unfamiliar with the handicap. Because this situation is not uncommon, no minimum I.Q. cut-off point is set for new admissions. The handicapping effect of their disabilities varies widely: some are good workers from the day they enter the program and need only communication and a chance to rehabilitate themselves; others carry a staggering number of physical disabilities without complaint, and still others, with few obvious complicating problems, defy our best efforts.

Crossroads is a comprehensive rehabilitation center offering physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychological testing, vocational evaluation and work adjustment training. Most or all of these services can be obtained at the local level and there is little justification for sending a deaf client long distances unless he is a diagnostic puzzle, his multiple disabilities and communicative limitations add up to such a vocational handicap he cannot adequately be served in nearby facilities or programs, or there is compelling reason to get him away from a bad home situation.

At Crossroads, vocational evaluation, psychological testing and counseling are handled by staff members who can communicate with deaf clients at any level and accurately evaluate their vocational and educational potential. Equally important, interaction with the deaf students facilitates acquisition of communicative skills by the low-verbal deaf clients. Just as oral language is acquired, not taught, so the language of signs and finger spelling is best learned through social interaction. The center's communications therapy program utilizes total communication, which uses the language of signs—along with everything else that works; but no amount of formal instruction can equal the effectiveness of interaction in peer groups.

It should be reiterated that Crossroads does not attempt to teach trades as it is felt this can be done better on the job or in a trade school. The emphasis is on evaluation, communication improvement and work, per se, along with adjustment to independent or semi-independent living in the community. The rationale for this is found in surveys that disclose:

1. Most people can expect to change employment four to five times during their working careers.
2. A large part of the working force today is working at trades that did not exist a generation ago.
3. Forecasts have 50% of all students in school today working at occupations that do not now exist.

This points up the fact that simply learning how to work and live in the community is basic to vocational success. More rehabilitation failures stem from inability to accept the demands of competitive employment and independent living than from inability to learn a job.

As Crossroads is strictly an out-patient facility with no dormitories, housing for out-of-town clients is in independently operated half-way houses. Lack of suitable housing limits the number of out-of-state referrals Crossroads can accept, with no solution in sight.

As of January, 1974, there were 26 deaf adults in vocational evaluation, work adjustment training and the center's vocational workshops. Clients can, and often

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are, discharged to the vocational workshop without further cost to DVR, pending placement in competitive employment, or when sheltered employment seems the better course.

SUMMARY

1. Given a sufficient number of referrals, a program for the severely handicapped deaf can be self-supporting.
2. Such programs are best integrated in existing programs, not only because of the economies involved, but because integration fosters communication and socialization and gives the severely disabled deaf clients models with which to compare their own behavior.
3. Realistic paid work is a must if interest is to be sustained and good work habits developed.
4. With such severely handicapped people, a period of sheltered employment with close supervision is a prerequisite for success of on-the-job training or placement in competitive employment.
5. A crash program to develop communication pays big dividends.
6. There are more than enough severely handicapped deaf people waiting for help to support at least half a dozen regional programs.
7. Good quality housing and off-hours supervision is vital to the success of any such program. Few of these people are ready for independent or even semi-independent living when they arrive. However, as they demonstrate ability to take care of themselves, they should be given an opportunity to move out of the half-way houses (or dormitories, where they are available) into apartments or housekeeping units where guidance is available but less obtrusive. Eighty per cent of Crossroads' failures result from off-center behavior and problems.