

7-1974

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Recommended Citation

Gattas, F. (1974). Birth of The First State Chapter. Ohio Chapter. Professional Rehabilitation Workers with The Adult Deaf. *JADARA*, 8(1). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol8/iss1/30>

BIRTH OF THE FIRST STATE CHAPTER, OHIO CHAPTER, PROFESSIONAL REHABILITATION WORKERS WITH THE ADULT DEAF

FRANCIS J. GATTAS

First, I want to thank members of the Planning Committee, Officers, and the Executive Board for recognizing the PRWAD membership in Ohio for its efforts toward establishing the first state chapter by inviting one of its members to tell its story. Second, I want to thank the Ohio membership for selecting me as the person to tell that story. Third, those of us in Ohio are proud, not particularly that we are the first state chapter, but more importantly that we organized, and that as a group we can fulfill the purposes of the national organization at the state and local levels. In addition, we feel that as an awareness, action-goal oriented, professional advocacy group, we can and are committed to bringing about effective change that will enhance the betterment of deaf and other hearing impaired children and adults in our state.

Following the birth of our chapter in April, 1973, we received correspondence from members in other states requesting the guidelines we used in getting our chapter organized. Unfortunately, we had no guidelines. We felt an active state chapter, advocacy oriented, could help meet some of the needs of deaf people in our state. It would also bolster the national organization. As a result, we decided to establish a chapter.

Being on the National Membership Committee and also state membership chairman, a print-out of the Ohio PRWAD members was made available to me by Mr. Norris; also, there were membership rosters from previous years. Although our membership was decreasing, there was a group of people who maintained membership year after year. These people were unknown to each other, they were unaware of other people in the state who belonged to the national organization. As individuals, they received a newsletter, the journal, and a statement to renew membership each year. Membership from Ohio was in a vacuum. It was also felt that these people who maintained membership might be interested in something more. If they were interested in a national organization, which at that time was far removed, they might be interested in a state chapter, something closer to home.

With that in mind, we planned a membership drive, but not before corresponding with our delinquent members asking them to renew. It was important to bring them back into the fold before attempting to recruit new members.

A packet was designed consisting of brochures, membership application, a PRWAD Newsletter, and a letter composed by the State Membership Chairman. The letter described PRWAD and encouraged people to join. Those interested were instructed to send the application and fees to the state chairman who included their names in a state membership file with pertinent information, then forwarded the check with their application to our national office. It was important that they respond to the state membership chairman because they were more apt to identify and relate

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to someone from their own state than someone hundreds of miles away. This is not to say that recruiting membership from our national office is ineffective. What I'm saying is that recruitment is more effective if we have state membership chairmen working cooperatively with the national chairman and national office. The membership drive began in September, 1972, at which time we had a membership of 19 people. In March of 1973, we grew to 75 and in June, 1973, we closed out the year with 104 members in PRWAD, the largest state representation in the national organization.

The initial response from the September drive was so favorable that a small group of us began talking more vigorously about a state chapter. Contact was made with our national office informing them of our intention which was looked upon favorably. The support we received from Art Norris, the Executive Secretary, and the Executive Board in helping was wonderful. In December of 1973, eleven national members from Ohio, representing a cross-section of the Ohio membership, met in Columbus to discuss the possibility of organizing a state chapter. Mr. Norris flew in from Maryland to lend his expertise. The atmosphere of the meeting was positive. The outcome was to move aggressively toward the establishment of a state chapter. Some members of the group volunteered themselves to draft by-laws compatible with the national organization. Others were to study the feasibility of a state membership meeting or conference whereby the membership could pass on the by-laws and elect their officers.

The conference committee, aware that the Ohio Speech and Hearing Association was to have its spring conference, thought it might be mutually beneficial to have a joint conference for the following reasons:

1. The committee felt that tying in with an organization as large as OSHA (960 members) would give our chapter maximum visibility, which we felt was important.

2. OSHA conference mechanics, registrations, reservations, publicity, mailing, etc. were already organized, all we would have to do was tie in. This would enable our group to concentrate on helping to promote the conference and on putting our own organization together.

3. A joint conference would open lines of communication and better understanding between both organizations.

4. We felt if we could come up with a good program, we could help OSHA attract members of their organization that normally would not attend their conference.

5. Many professionals trained in the area of services to people with communication disorders have never had real contact with people who are deaf, nor are they aware of ramifications of deafness as viewed by deaf people or many of us deeply involved in working with the deaf. A joint conference would sensitize many people.

Contact was made with some members of the OSHA board in regard to a joint conference. A meeting was held with their board and members of our conference committee. It was agreed that a joint conference would be in the best interest of both organizations and the people we serve.

Following that meeting, a newsletter was written to our membership informing them of organizational activity and pending conference.

Our organizational committee worked closely with the OSHA in all aspects of implementing the joint conference. The national office helped us financially, and in securing prominent speakers such as Dr. Jerome Schein, Director of the Deafness, Research, and Training Center, Dr. Williams, Director of the Office of Deafness, and of course, Mr. Norris. The national talent, coupled with local talent, resulted in an impressive program. A general business meeting was held, by-laws were acted upon, officers elected, and on April 13-14, the national organization, before 900 people, gave birth to its *first state chapter*, and named it OCPRWAD, Ohio Chapter, Professional Rehabilitation Workers with the Adult Deaf.