

# Community Rehabilitation Programs

A community rehabilitation program (CRP) that focuses on employment services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing can best provide a full range of customized services by working collaboratively with other local agencies. Pooling resources, whether financial or staffing, is an efficient way for collaborative agencies to assist both employers and employees in eliminating or reducing barriers to successful employment. Changes in the employment / labor market are inevitable, but what remains the same is that there are still many people in need of employment services, not only to secure employment opportunities, but to maintain job security and receive career advancements.

People who are deaf/hard of hearing and who are considered to be “low-functioning” often are diagnosed with a secondary disability due to problems in behavior, educational development, mobility, employment, independent living skills, inadequate communication skills, or some other major life function. They also experience communication barriers in preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining employment. For these reasons it is essential that CRPs hire specialized professional staff who are educated and knowledgeable in three areas: hearing loss, communication skills, and their professional discipline. Hearing loss refers to the medical and socio/cultural aspects of deafness. Communication skills refer to the ability to use ASL and knowledge of the communication systems used by people who are deaf/hard of hearing. Finally, the staff must know assistive technology, evaluation, community resources, placement accommodations, and other professional skills, as well as current issues in vocational rehabilitation.

A holistic perspective of the consumer who is deaf/hard of hearing allows for the best chance of achieving financial and personal self-sufficiency. Basically, this group of people need the same array of services as their hearing counterparts. The primary issue is accessibility.

Accessibility to services goes beyond the availability of an interpreter; clients who are deaf or hard of hearing and “low functioning” often need to work directly with

professionals who can communicate through a variety of modalities other than American Sign Language (ASL), including communication methods that are not considered to be a formal language. The use of gestures, drawings, physical objects, or demonstrations to convey meaning are frequently used to facilitate communication.

Specialized services essential to successful long-term placement of persons who are deaf/hard of hearing should include the following:

- Vocational evaluation
- Job coaching
- Long-term follow-up. This does not suggest that placement, career planning, counseling, and job-seeking skills training are less important; it's just that vocational evaluation, job coaching, and long-term follow-up are services not commonly found in CRPs but are critical to the success of this population.

## Vocational Evaluation

Vocational evaluation is a critical component to the rehabilitation process when serving persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Counselors, teachers, and other professionals who work with this group need to be informed of the large number of tests and assessment tools available on the market today and how they can be utilized when working with a deaf person. Rehabilitation professionals traditionally have relied on standardized tests and compared the deaf person to a norm group when predicting vocational potential and designing an appropriate vocational rehabilitation plan. Some communication and language preferences of the deaf client must be considered before selecting psychometric instruments or work samples that will be used to measure their aptitude and determine appropriate rehabilitation services. Since communication deficits are the most common characteristic of the underserved deaf population, it is critical that the person's communication skills be assessed prior to evaluating aptitudes, educational levels, or vocational interests.

The Communication Assessment Model assumes that in order to accurately assess the individual's communication strengths and weaknesses, one must

also assess their background, experiences, and preferences. This communication model focuses on the individual's communication skills relative to specific work environments and ties the results to placement, job development, job coaching, and retention.

### **Job Coaching**

Job coaching has been proven to be an essential service in determining the long-term employment of underserved persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Job coaches work closely with the employer and employee to ensure a satisfactory work environment. Successful job coaches are careful to consider both the employer's and the employee's needs when assessing the workplace environment to determine intervention strategies.

#### **Job coaching services may include:**

- Communication training for managers, supervisors, and co-workers
- New employee paperwork (i.e., benefits, in-house policies, orientation)
- Disability awareness training and educational materials
- Expertise in troubleshooting workplace barriers and suggesting workplace accommodations
- Support for establishing positive workplace relationships

#### **Long-term Follow-up Services**

Follow-up services need to be provided on a case-by-case basis with the scope and duration of services determined by the individual's needs. Follow-up services may vary according to the disability and continue for the duration of employment.

#### **Follow-up services may include:**

- On-going assistance regarding communication needs
- Additional service needs supporting employee advancement within the company
- Assessment and problem solving to eliminate potential barriers so the employee can participate fully in the workplace

### **Closing**

Providing services to persons who are deaf/hard of hearing and considered to be "low functioning" in community-based rehabilitation programs can be a complex process for the inexperienced service provider. Service providers need to be aware of the unique needs of this underserved population and the specialized services needed to be successful with this group of people. Programs need to work toward developing a process that would work in their community based on employment demands and the deaf/hard of hearing population seeking services. For more information on setting up and providing comprehensive services to people who are deaf/hard of hearing, call or write:

The Minnesota Employment Center for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing  
c/o Lifetrack Resources Inc.  
709 University Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55104  
651.227.8471 Voice  
651.298.0181 TTY  
651.227.0621 Fax  
Web Site: [www.mecdeaf.org](http://www.mecdeaf.org)

### **References**

1. *Serving Individuals who are Low-Functioning, 25<sup>th</sup> Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 1999*, Dew, Donald, Ed.D, CRC, editor.
2. *Assessing Workplace Communication Skills with Traditionally Underserved Persons who are Deaf*, Greg Long. Available from the PEPNet Resource Center.

For more information, contact:

#### **Northeast Technical Assistance Center**

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National Technical Institute for the Deaf  
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Rochester, NY 14623-5604

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