

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES  
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM  
RSA-IM – 00 - 21  
DATE: March 28, 2000

ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)  
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)  
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS  
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS  
PROGRAMS  
REGIONAL REHABILITATION CONTINUING EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS  
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION  
PROGRAMS  
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT: INFORMATION ON THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING  
LOSS (DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING)

CONTENT: This memorandum provides information and guidance to designated State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies about the need for attention to the provision of VR services to individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The memorandum is also intended to assist State VR agencies in the determination of how well they are serving this population and to explore what corrective actions can be taken if warranted.

BACKGROUND: A review of the national cumulative case service report (RSA-911) data, on the provision of VR services to individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, raises questions regarding the extent these individuals are obtaining services and achieving successful employment outcomes. The continuing increase in the prevalence of hearing loss, as more and more individuals are becoming hard of hearing or deaf throughout the country, is well documented.

Yet, the data reports indicate that the number of “successful employment outcomes” for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals has declined over the past ten years (1989 to 1998). 20,184 Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals became successfully employed in 1989, which is 9.2 % of the

220,408 individuals who achieved positive employment outcomes through services provided by State VR agencies at that time. Ten years later (1998), RSA-911 data indicated that 17,319 Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals served by VR agencies were successfully employed. This number is a decrease of 2,865 rehabilitated individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing from the 20,184 rehabilitations reported in 1989 and is 7.7 % of the 223,723 successful employment outcomes in 1998.

The following chart shows year by year the number of all individuals served by State VR agencies nationwide with successful employment outcomes from 1989 to 1998. Also shown is the number of individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, as their primary disability, with successful employment outcomes through services provided by VR, with the corresponding percentage indicating an ongoing decline in these numbers.

**COMPARISON OF REHABILITATION DATA FOR  
PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>All Successful Placements</b>	<b>Successful Deaf/ Hard of Hearing</b>	<b>Percentage of Placements</b>
1989	220,408	20,184	9.2%
1990	214,874	19,335	9.0%
1991	202,831	16,832	8.3%
1992	191,821	16,094	8.4%
1993	193,918	15,901	8.2%
1994	202,824	16,029	7.9%
1995	209,600	15,467	7.4%
1996	213,780	15,718	7.4%
1997	211,576	15,535	7.3%
1998	223,723	17,319	7.7%

The trends indicated by the above data are supported with information in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Institute of Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) documents that address specific concerns related to the provision of VR services to individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing within the past decade. These studies give considerable attention to persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and who are unserved and underserved by VR agencies.

One section of the 19<sup>th</sup> IRI document, “Serving the Underserved – Principles, Practices, and Techniques” (published by the University of Wisconsin, Stout in October, 1992), focused on individuals who are Hard of Hearing not receiving appropriate VR services. The document identified the fact that VR counselors are frequently inexperienced and not aware of the multiple services that are often needed by individuals who are

Hard of Hearing. The IRI outlined comprehensive information on various services that can be provided to individuals who are Hard of Hearing to aid those responsible for the provision of VR and related services to this segment of the hearing impaired population.

Subsequent to the publication of this IRI document, RSA funded a one-year short-term “train the trainers” project in FY 1993, through the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP) in Region VI at the University of Arkansas. The “train the trainers” project developed training materials and sent a team of 4 experts on hearing loss and rehabilitation to train other RRCEP personnel and State VR agency trainers in each region using these new materials. The above-mentioned IRI document and these training materials are still available through the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM) at Oklahoma State University. For information about these documents see the “Contacts” section of this memorandum.

The 25<sup>th</sup> IRI document, “Serving Individuals Who Are Low-Functioning Deaf,” published in December 1999, described how to provide rehabilitation services to persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing who also experience other significant disabilities. The study group was comprised of a variety of leaders in the field of “Deafness Rehabilitation,” in collaboration with the RRCEP at George Washington University. This document is intended to raise awareness for those with little or no experience serving this segment of the Deaf population, which has been underserved by the rehabilitation community. The IRI also included recommendations on how to effectively serve this population, along with a comprehensive list of available resources. To get a free copy of this document see the “Contacts” section in this memorandum.

RSA is encouraging State VR agencies to review their case service data on positive employment outcomes for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to see if the trends shown in this memorandum also exist in their own State VR programs. Judgements must be made regarding what actions might be most appropriate if the trends in a State VR program indicate similar or more drastic drops in employment outcomes than those seen in the national trends. RSA has resources that can assist State VR agencies in this evaluation process.

This Information Memorandum is intended to be the first in a series of memorandums on various issues regarding the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Topics to be discussed may include the shortage of qualified interpreters, qualifications of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors necessary to effectively serve this population, and how to effectively serve “low functioning” Deaf or Hard of Hearing consumers. State Vocational

Rehabilitation agencies and their staff are encouraged to suggest and provide input on additional topics for information memorandums by contacting Annette Reichman, Chief, Deafness and Communicative Disorders Branch. (Contact information is given below.)

Within RSA, the Deafness and Communicative Disorders Branch (DCDB) has as its mission the promotion of improved and expanded rehabilitation services for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened or deaf-blind and who are from diverse backgrounds. Please feel free to contact any of the DCDB staff listed below for assistance in this area.

**RSA CONTACT  
INFORMATION:**

Deafness and Communicative Disorders Branch:

Annette Reichman – Branch Chief  
202-205-9152 (V) or 8352 (TTY)  
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George Kosovich – VR Program Specialist  
202-205-9698 (V) or 8919 (TTY)  
George\_Kosovich@ed.gov  
(Specialize in VR for hard of hearing and late deafened individuals and communication access issues.)

Mary Lovley – Program Specialist;  
202-205-9393 (V) or 401-3664 (TTY)  
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(Specialize in interpreter training and services.)

The “train the trainers” materials developed as part of the RSA one year short-term training grant in 1993 can be obtained from the NCRTM, as can the 19th IRI document on “Serving the Underserved...”, at the following address: NCRTM, Oklahoma State University, 5202 North Richmond Hill Drive, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078-4080. A toll-free telephone number is available – 800-223-5219. For more information, visit their Web site at: <http://www.nchrtm.okstate.edu>.

The NCRTM has copies of each IRI document produced but cannot reproduce them until two years after publication. George Washington University does have free copies of the current IRI document published in 1999, “Serving Individuals Who Are Low-Functioning Deaf” available upon request. Copies can be ordered by contacting Dr. Donald Dew at: Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program III, George Washington University, 2011 Eye Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20052. Telephone contact is available by calling: 202-973-1550 (voice);

202-973-1544 (TTY); and 202-775-0053 (fax); or by sending an email request to [dondew@gwu.edu](mailto:dondew@gwu.edu).

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Fredric K. Schroeder, Ph.D.  
Commissioner