

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Service (OSERS),  
U.S. Department of Education: Funded Programs and Projects,  
Past, Present and Future<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract

The panelists will provide background information regarding funding of significant programs and projects in research, demonstration, and service areas that have made an impact on the lives of children, youth and adults. In addition, the panelists will discuss ongoing activities; talk about future programs and projects that are needed; and discuss how consumers with hearing loss and their supporters can help shape the direction that ED/OSERS takes in developing priorities to address the needs of consumers with hearing loss.

*Ramon Rodriguez:*

It is not very often that the Department of Education allows four staff members to leave town. It might be possible if they were going to various parts of the country to address different organizations, but to come to PEPNet and meet in one room is unheard of. So, it required a great deal of leadership on the part of the PEPNet directors to get this panel here. I am sure you will be interested in what the panel has to say. They represent the three major offices that comprise the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Dick Johnson is senior member of the firm, the longest serving person in the department. He is with the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) office. He will tell you a little bit more about himself in a few minutes.

We are fortunate to have Annette Reichman join us. She is chief of the Deafness and Communicative Disorders Branch (DCDB) at the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) office.

We also have Ernest Hairston, who is with the Office of Special Education Programs. He is Deputy Associate Director of National Initiatives Program. Let us begin with Annette.

*Annette Reichman:*

Hello, everyone. I'm very honored to be here with you this evening. I'm the new kid on the block and have been with RSA for only a few months.

Let's begin with what I'm going to share with you this evening. The mission of our branch is to promote improved and expanded rehabilitation services for individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind. I want to make clear that our

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited transcript of the panel presentation.

branch, the DCDB, is under the Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA). My position is to oversee all the states and ensure that they are providing effective vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to clients with disabilities. Our office specifically focuses on individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Those of you who are working in postsecondary institutions may have many students who are also VR clients or consumers. So VR and PEPNet have developed a collaborative relationship. We are working together to ensure that appropriate training, services, and education are available and that the ultimate goal of employment can be achieved.

Perhaps some of you here this evening are state coordinators of the deaf or rehabilitation counselors for the deaf. Perhaps you're curious as to what's taking place in postsecondary institutions that are serving your clients. Perhaps that is your reason for attending the conference. What is required to achieve employment for consumers? That means that your students and your clients need to get gainful employment. In my opinion, there are two things that need to occur for that to take place. First, they need to have qualified and adequate VR personnel. Second, they need to have access to training.

Let's briefly touch on statistics for a moment. It was mentioned earlier that there are over 20,000 students in postsecondary institutions who are Deaf or hard of hearing. This evening, I'd like to share with you some statistics and some information I discovered since I've been working in this office for the last five months. Last week, I went to a workshop at Gallaudet University regarding VR. About four weeks ago I went to Philadelphia to the Region III conference held for VR counselors who work specifically with Deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Since most of you haven't heard this information, I'd like to share it with you.

In 1988, VR noted that 9.1 percent of all deaf and hard-of-hearing clients were either successfully employed or had their cases closed during that year. According to the data I have, in 1998, that number has decreased to 7.6 percent. So the number of individuals who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing who have gained successful employment seems to be declining. If you consider VR as a whole and all the clients that they serve, the number of general VR clients who are getting employment or achieving successful outcomes has increased, whereas the number of successful

outcomes among the Deaf and hard-of-hearing population has decreased.

So, last week when I was at Gallaudet, I asked the 40 people who were in attendance about their theories as to why this has occurred. I did the same thing during my trip to Philadelphia four weeks ago, and I'd like to share with you some of the theories that I received at these two different locations. One of the theories is that the economy is good; we're booming, and deaf students or deaf individuals don't need VR services any longer. The second theory was that more severely disabled individuals are more difficult to place than those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Another theory was that there are fewer manufacturing jobs out in the workplace. The world has changed; therefore, there are fewer opportunities in that job market. Another theory was that more jobs are requiring individuals to have literacy skills as well as math skills.

In the last five years, there have been several research studies that have addressed the issue of how individuals gain employment. The researchers discovered that individuals who want gainful employment must have an 8th grade reading ability as well as 8th grade level mathematical abilities. This is required for successful placement in a competitive work force.

So the question becomes: What does that mean for an individual who is Deaf or hard-of-hearing? For those of you who are VR counselors and are working with students, this becomes a critical point. What about the Rubella bubble and the increased numbers ten years ago? There seem to be fewer deaf people now than compared to ten years ago. I'd like you to ponder this issue: Why has there been a decrease in the number of clients served by VR counselors? And what is the impact upon postsecondary institutions? If you are depending on VR and its system to support your students in the institutions, what is the impact nationally?

Before I conclude my presentation, Ramon asked me to share some more information regarding some of my other job duties. One of my major responsibilities is with regard to the RSA interpreter training programs. There are ten different regional interpreter training programs and two national programs that we are focusing on now. We are also trying to promote employment. That is another one of the tasks that I am charged with.

Regarding services to clients, there is a publication out of our office that reports the re-

sults of the recent Institute on Rehabilitation Issues. This was recently disseminated, and what it discusses is that we are not serving our clientele very well. It is available on the web at <<http://www.uark.edu/depts/rehabres/publications.html>>. In preparing this presentation, I asked Ramon if any SCDs or RCDs would attend this conference. If there are SCDs or RCDs in the audience, I would love to get together to have a forum on these issues. I would like to meet all of you personally and discuss these issues with you. I'd like to find out what it is you're facing on your jobs and how we can better serve consumers. I will bring that information back to my office.

I'm going to turn the floor over now to Ernest Hairston.

*Ernest Hairston:*

I used to work with the captioning media branch, so I worked with a lot of closed circuit television, closed captioning, video description, and those sorts of things. Even though I work with technology, I don't really have a lot of fancy modern technology that Annette used. So I can't entertain you with any video or slides. I use the old-fashioned methods: paper and literature. (*laughter*)

However, this particular document that I have with me is IDEA. It is from 1998, and includes various activities under IDEA. Some of this information came out in 1999. There is a lot of information in this document, and it's also on the Department of Education website. They have a very comprehensive website at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/osers/bosp>>. This website has many, many links, including one to our captioning center. The captioning center has a lot of information and materials that I'm sure all of you will be interested in.

There have been some changes over the years related to the use of technology and providing materials in accessible formats. Many years ago, I was a strong advocate of captioning films, and now we are working on captioning videos. It used to be that deaf people applied for funding for special projects by sending in written applications. Now that is something that can be done on-line through links at that website. From our site, you can link to the OSEP website or the PEPNet website.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funds several discretionary programs or projects. In 1998, we funded about 1,800 differ-

ent projects, so I couldn't possibly mention all of them. However, I will give you some of the topics or highlights. There are state grant programs for children with disabilities. We have a preschool grant program. We also have projects related to infants and toddlers with disabilities. We fund programs for all ages, from birth to 21. There are special study projects and evaluations. One very interesting study is a national research study that focuses on the disproportionate representation of minority children within special education. You find that there are a large number of minority children in comparison to others. In the general population, that's not true.

We also have several other research projects as well. One of the largest programs that we have is the personal preparation program, formerly known as the teacher training program, in leadership at the Ph.D. or advanced studies level. Those grants were given to historically black colleges and universities but are not limited to them. We also have personal preparation in low incidence. Low incidence population programs include educational interpreter training programs. The support for that program proved to be necessary because there are many mainstream programs that use interpreting services. We now have a nationwide study that will provide research to verify the need for educational interpreting. We just simply cannot give money because we believe the need is there; we have to have research basis to substantiate that need.

I'd like to focus on technology and media, which is indeed my "baby." I have been involved with closed captioning for television. You often see "Captioning Sponsored By the U.S. Department of Education" at the end of a program. But only 40 percent of the closed captioned television programs are paid for by the Department of Education. We caption a wide variety of programs, including sports, educational programming, daytime programming like *Oprah*, for example, and the soaps. We also have descriptive video for blind individuals. People who are blind are able to hear, so they should be able to understand the television. But that's not necessarily true. They get the sound, but not the activity or actions on the screen. Descriptive video gives a description of what's taking place, and they are able to enjoy while they listen. During the silence or the pauses, they can get information like "there is a woman wearing a red dress, walking through a meadow," or that kind of thing.

We also have selective captioning. It used to be 35-millimeter films or certain types of videos, but we don't do that any longer. Now the focus is captioning educational videos and placing them in our school depositories, like video libraries, within many of our schools for the deaf.

We have educational videos and materials. After the reauthorization of IDEA, it stipulated that after the year 2001 the Department of Education could only pay for closed captioning for programs that were informational, educational, or related to the news. That means that the Department would not caption daytime programming, sports, and other programs. Since they didn't tell us what is considered educational, it was left up to us to define that.

We put out a public notice last December, asking people in the field to define what is considered educational and what is not. We received over 4,000 responses. From all of the comments that I've seen, they said that everything is educational. Many of them commented that deaf parents have a right to see what their children are listening to on television or watching what their hearing children are partaking of. There are a lot of innocent children out there and there may be a lot of undesirable language that you don't want your children to be exposed to, but the general response was "everything is educational."

We don't know what will take place when the year 2001 comes around. The FCC regulations state that 100 percent of television should be captioned. But the regulations say over a period of time – 5 percent, 10 percent, 25 percent, 50 percent, and so on. It will be done in phases.

I think my time is up, but I'll be happy to entertain any questions. I will leave information about where you can get all of the educational materials, including application forms and other publications. Thank you very much. *(applause)*

Let me introduce to you now Richard Johnson, who is from NIDRR, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

*Richard Johnson:*

Thank you. I'm not sure if you can hear me okay. If you can, fine. If not, try to understand the sign language. I have a problem. I can think and I can talk. I can think and I can sign. But I have a problem trying to think and talk and sign at the same time. *(laughter)*

Ernie gave you his e-mail address: slash, slash, slash, slash, slash, slash. I brought some of these

brochures. They are over there on the table. Here on the back is our e-mail address with slashes. *(laughter)*

I want to tell you the story of my life—in a professional sense. We have NIDRR, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. That was founded through legislation in 1978; it really began operation in 1980. I've been with them since the day they opened the door. It's really an unusual agency in that we do almost applied research and not much experimental research.

In experimental research, you try to figure out what the number on the next ping-pong ball will be or the next number on the lottery. We don't do that. Rather, we fund over 50 centers nationally. The centers work with a variety of disabilities. Literally, we cover everything from brains to feet and everything in between. We have a big, big traumatic brain injury research program. We have a really neat prosthetics development program up in Chicago. In fact, maybe you followed the Disabled Olympics a couple years ago. A young man came close to the world record for people without disability in running the dash, and he was wearing a leg designed at one of our centers. It has special spring toes to give him a boost; it's really neat. These people are dedicated to their work and they are always coming up with new ways to use new material and improve designs. They are very innovative.

We also have a number of other programs. For example, everybody uses computers, but computers don't always come in one size. They come in little sizes and big sizes and so forth. We work with a variation of that, trying to find new applications for people with different kinds of disability.

We have, for example, a program at Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Center in San Francisco. Among other things, they are looking at how to use little inserts in the eye for blind people to help them see. I know you are interested primarily in hearing loss, because that's your field. I'll try to get into that a little bit. But before I do, I want to mention some of the other aspects of the program that may be of interest to you.

First of all, we are not only national, but we are also international. We have a lot of affiliated programs overseas because disability, as you know, is not limited to any one country. People get a funny expression on their faces when they talk about it, but I have landmine program. Yes, a landmine program. We are working right now in what used to be Yugoslavia. There are a tremen-

dous number of children and adults who step on landmines almost every day. So we work with a lot of that kind of physical damage.

We have developed technology for early identification of hearing loss in newborn infants through our program at the Lexington Center in New York. We worked the bugs out, and then we went to the National Institute of Health. They picked it up and administrate it. Now it's used widely in delivery rooms. If the profile is not in the normal range or if there seem to be some abnormal spikes, then they have the child examined more closely. They also have digital hearing aids that were originally developed at our center in Lexington.

We have a lot of assistive technology, with different kinds of devices to get people who have hearing difficulties or visual difficulties more into the mainstream. And on that note, if you are a computer nerd, you may be into Windows '98. If you are, you may be aware that the special section on built-in assistive devices in that software came from our center in Wisconsin, the Trace Center. The Trace Center also works closely with Gallaudet in the area of telecommunication, which is another area that is booming.

We also fund rehabilitation research and training centers, including two in the area of deafness. Doug Watson, who hopefully is here, runs the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. You may also be familiar with the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Hard of Hearing or Late Deafened that is at the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego.

In addition to the centers that I mentioned around the country, NIDRR also funds other kinds

of research. "Initiated research" is something that we decided we need. You send in an application and a group of experts reviews it. We make decisions about awarding funding. A typical three-year grant will provide about \$160,000 to \$170,000 per year to a successful applicant.

We have other kinds of programs that involve other kinds of grants. For example, you may be familiar with the ADA Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs). There are ten of those centers located around the country, and we support them.

We also have fellowships, which is the only program that provides funding to individuals. If you are interested in pursuing a research topic that is of special interest to you and important to the field, you can apply for a fellowship to fund the research. It's very popular to take a sabbatical or otherwise leave your work for one year, but there's a lot of competition for those fellowships. *(laughter)*

I brought some brochures that explain some of this information in more detail. I will also be around for the next couple of days and would be more than happy to sit down with you and explain any part of our program that you may be interested in.

Thank you very much. *(applause)*

*Ramon Rodriguez:*

Annette, Ernie and D.J., thank you very much for your sharing information from your offices. All three of the panelists will be available here throughout the conference. Please feel free to visit with each of them if you are interested in finding out more about what their offices do. Thank you very much for your attention. Thank you. Good night. *(applause)*