

REHABILITATION IN THE PACIFIC BASIN: EMERGING PROGRAMS

The federal rehabilitation mandate is only beginning to be implemented in Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Because it is early in the process, we are able to observe the social, cultural, and economic concomitants of rehabilitation program developments in areas very

different from the mainland United States. This article will describe the efforts of the Guam and Trust Territory Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation to apply rehabilitation philosophy and practice to meet the unique needs of disabled persons in the Pacific Basin.

Guam Department of Vocational Rehabilitation

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The island of Guam, a territory of the United States of America, is located approximately seven hours flying time from its nearest state, Hawaii, and consists of a population part native Chamorro, "Guamanian;" part "Stateside," the majority of whom are United States military personnel and their dependents; and part Filipino and other foreign nationals, mostly Oriental. In 1975, the total population was approximately 116,358 — of which 36,000 were military and 62,000 were Guamanian. Obviously, Guam contains a representative cross-section of several cultures, and the rehabilitation process finds itself affected by this situation at every turn.

Limitations

Economic conditions prevailing on the United States mainland and, indeed, throughout much of

the world, have left their mark on Guam. Apart from the military presence on the island, Guam has depended in recent years on the tourist industry for its economic well-being. During the past two years, this industry has suffered severe reversals which, in turn, have limited finances available to the Government of Guam. In an area where government employment is one of the primary sources of placement, the budgetary problems of the Government of Guam have hit the employment market hard.

Government financial difficulties have affected the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation directly. The past year's freeze on governmental hiring has left the Department without means to hire or train personnel with the education and experience necessary to do the most effective job possible, especially in the area of specialty

counseling. Our efforts are hampered by the lack of professional expertise necessary to expedite current programs and to create new ones. The same freeze also affects other governmental service agencies. Their staff shortages very definitely affect Vocational Rehabilitation's efforts to provide essential services to clients. Placement of clients with governmental agencies is negligible and will continue to be a major problem until there can be a "thaw."

Vocational Rehabilitation's problems are caused by more than the financial constraints of the government. The lack of any kind of public transportation system greatly complicates the problem of reaching clients for counseling, training, and placement. A rather debatable phone "system" and almost complete absence of street address or house numbers make both client contact and recordkeeping difficult.

An additional difficulty confronting the Guam Department of Vocational Rehabilitation is the combined lack of good client referrals and noticeable reticence of prospective clients to accept vocational rehabilitation services. The referral problem stems primarily from inadequate interdepartmental communication, and is being remedied gradually. Client reticence, on the other hand, stems from cultural attitudes toward disability and accepting extra-familial assistance, and will take many more years to eliminate completely.

Accomplishments

But we are trying! Through use of public meetings, locally recruited and trained counselors, the media, and other means to attain visibility, Vocational Rehabilitation is making an aggressive effort to change culturally-acquired attitudes in favor of more positive feelings about accepting services.

In spite of these problems, we have had several successes in the past year. As of December 1975, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was made independent of the Department of Education and became a fullfledged Department. Operating under a separate Board of Control, the new Department of Vocational Rehabilitation hopes to reorganize, to redefine its relationship with the Guam Rehabilitation & Workshop Center, and to

implement many important changes for the improvement of client services. Several positions within the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation have been reclassified recently. This reclassification, together with more appropriate salary adjustments, has enabled us to compete more effectively with other Government of Guam agencies for retention of professional personnel. Further, affiliation with the University of Hawaii's Pacific Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program is contributing a great deal toward the upgrading and retention of our professional counseling staff.

Development of a Speech and Hearing Clinic, in conjunction with the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Unit at Guam Memorial Hospital, represents a significant accomplishment for rehabilitation. The clinic offers the only such services for adults on the island, where speech and hearing problems constitute one of the most prevalent forms of disability.

To enhance vocational evaluation, training, and placement of severely handicapped clients, special projects have been developed using the facilities of the Guam Rehabilitation and Workshop Center. Evaluation and training in the areas of food services, janitorial services, and repair of small electrical appliances have been developed. Hopefully, the latter project may lead to some small business enterprises in clients' home villages.

Plans

For the future, the Guam Department of Vocational Rehabilitation has several plans to answer some pressing needs. In formulating plans, we have tried to remain cognizant of the reality of the rather bleak economic framework within which we must operate.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation hopes to sponsor or, at least, to promote the development of a degree program for vocational rehabilitation counselors at the University of Guam. Long-term counselor training would open a new career field for local graduates and, at the same time, encourage creation of a pool of locally-trained professional staff, familiar with the island, its culture and language. Similarly, we hope to continue to upgrade the present