

THE COMMITTEE

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PREFACE

The concept of a Comprehensive Community Center for the Deaf has been around for many years. Deaf people have been frustrated in their continued search for a "home of their own" by their inability to articulate the concept strongly, to train their own leadership and galvanize them into activity, and to secure the support of the general "hearing" community.

In the past year, the deaf community has coalesced behind the concept and has developed strong leadership cells to push for political support. They believe that their time and opportunity has come.

The leadership of the Utah State Board of Education, Office of the Superintendent, and that of the Division of Rehabilitation Services, have recognized this movement. The Superintendent directed that this study be made in order to determine whether or not such a Center is feasible.

The Governor of Utah, Honorable Calvin L. Rampton, also has expressed general support for such a Center in a recent talk to the Utah Association for the Deaf.

INTRODUCTION

The Committee felt that its primary objective should be to determine whether the needs of deaf people in the community were of sufficient gravity and complexity to justify the support of the Board of Education for the establishment of a Comprehensive Community Center for the Deaf. The needs were explored through direct contact with leaders of the deaf community, and through collection of data from various meetings of the deaf community at which brainstorming sessions and serious discussions of the concept took place.

The problems of size, location, design, funding, and operation were not considered in any depth because it was felt that these were matters more appropriate for specialists such as architects and legislative analysts. However, a strong feeling exists that the deaf community needs an accessible location, easily reached by the multiply-disabled deaf who cannot drive and need convenient bus service; and design needs to be one of nearly total visual orientation. Several design considerations are included herein, as expressed by deaf members of the committee.

The approach used by the Committee in its discussions followed this general outline:

A Feasibility Study Must:

- a. Describe the population to be served
- b. Define the needs to be provided for
- c. Define existing facilities and services
- d. Describe how the program will be implemented and coordinated

a. The population to be served consists of a potential 78,000 hearing impaired persons in Utah, of which 10,000 are estimated to be deaf for communication purposes. Many of these people are multiply disabled in that they have disabilities in addition to deafness. It should also be pointed out that since there are no Community Centers for the Deaf in the intermountain region, the establishment of such a center in the Salt Lake area probably would attract many more deaf people since it is a characteristic of the deaf population that it tends to gravitate to those cities where services, facilities and other deaf people are to be found.

b. The needs to be provided for may be listed quite briefly in this introduction; amplification follows, item by item, in other sections of this report.

Needs

Communication
Socialization
Social Services
Mental Health Services
Adult and Continuing Education
Specialized Library
Physical and Health Education
Deaf Community Organization meeting facilities
Activities for young deaf people
Crafts and Hobbies, instruction and facilities
Information Center on Deafness
Senior Citizens meeting facilities and programming
Speech and Hearing Conservation Services
Facilities with Specialized Visual Orientation
Expanded Rehabilitation Services

c. Existing community centers in the Salt Lake area were polled one by one to find whether or not they would be able to serve the needs of deaf people on the scale indicated above. Results were negative, although one center indicated that it might serve more people "as long as its functions did not conflict with on-going programs," i.e., deaf people would not be able to use the facilities and plan programs for their own convenience and needs. Hours of all facilities were unsuited to the needs of deaf people.

d. A description of the ways and means in which a Center could be implemented and coordinated received some attention in that the question was posed: "Could not this center for deaf people be included within a general rehabilitation facility?" While there was a somewhat negative reaction on the part of the deaf members of the Committee, it was felt that identification of needs of deaf people were primary concerns and that implementation would necessarily come later when numerous other factors beyond the present knowledge of the Committee would be known and could be considered.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services, Unit of Services to the Deaf, serves approximately 300 people on a continuing year-in-year-out basis. Characteristics of this particular population includes all degrees of hearing loss, and in a high proportion of cases these people have additional disabling conditions such as mental illness, emotional and behavioral problems, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, alcoholism, visual problems, crippling defects, back problems, heart problems, and so on. Virtually all of these people also have educational deficiencies and speech problems. Vocational rehabilitation needs are being met, but expanded services could be provided in a Center for the Deaf.