

Feasibility Study for a Community Center for the Deaf

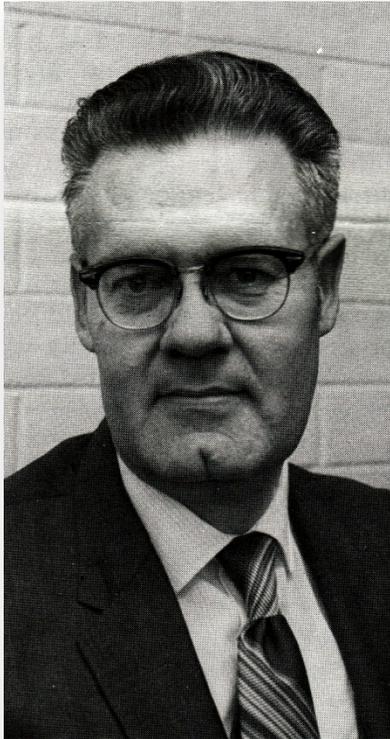
While working for the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Dr. Sanderson still had a vision of a community center for the deaf and spearheaded the drive for it. For several years, he persisted in engaging in-depth discussions with deaf and hearing community leaders on what a community center of the deaf should be and what services it should encompass.

Dr. Sanderson's hard work finally paid off in June 1975 when the first actual spark that set in motion plans for a community center came about. Dr. Walter D. Talbot, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Utah State Office of Education, established a committee to study the feasibility and desirability of providing a community center for the deaf in the State of Utah, similar to the Murray B. Allen Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Dr. Sanderson was appointed as chairman. The committee consisted of Dr. Harvey Hirschi, Administrator, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Dr. Jay J. Campbell, Deputy Superintendent of Utah State Office of Education; and Dr. Charles C. Schmitt, Facilities Coordinator, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, along with deaf members, David Mortensen, Lloyd Perkins, Dora Laramie, and Ned C. Wheeler (UAD Bulletin, December 1975; Sanderson, 2004).



Dr. Walter D. Talbot, Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Utah State Office of Education

A forty-seven-page feasibility report of the study with recommendations was completed on December 1, 1975 and was submitted to Dr. Walter Talbot, State Superintendent of Instruction (UAD Bulletin, December 1975). Governor Calvin L. Rampton along with several organizations such as National Association of the Deaf, Utah



**Dr. Jay J. Campbell, Deputy
Superintendent of the Utah State
Office of Education
UAD Bulletin, June 1973**

Association for the Deaf, Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf, and Parent-Teacher-Student Association of the Utah School for the Deaf, wrote a letter to Dr. Sanderson in support of this concept of a community center of the deaf (Sanderson, 2004).

Through the legislative process, Dr. Talbot, accompanied by Dr. Sanderson and his interpreter, Ms. Campbell, made several visits to the legislative committee dealing with capital funding. Governor Rampton was very supportive of this process, which helped tremendously (Sanderson, 2004).

A bill finally made through the various legislative committees. At the close of the official legislature at twelve midnight in February of 1977, Governor Rampton had the bill on his desk. He was about to sign it, but he noticed that the word, “deaf” was replaced with “blind” by mistake! Since it was past midnight closing of the legislature, he could not fix it (Sanderson, 2004).

In order to find out what caused the mix-up, Dr. Sanderson discovered from the Legislative Research Staff that the bills and resolutions that “failed” or did not pass may not have been filed nor archived. In other words, the bill did not go through the legislative process. No one informed him what happened to such legislation and he did not personally get any explanation of how that mix-up occurred. He believed that it was

a Freudian slip by some bill sponsor or legislator who had blind people in mind since they were more visible than the deaf. At any rate, Dr. Sanderson was unable to find evidence to support the story. The deaf leaders were filled with dismay when they learned that the bill failed because of the mix up. They testified for weeks in support of the community center for the deaf in various legislative committees (Sanderson, 2004).

The deaf leaders were dismayed to find out that the Utah State Board of Education minutes that included the study, resolutions and bills for the legislature in the years of 1975, 1976, 1977, 1980 and 1981 were nowhere to be found! Additionally, there was no mention of a center in State Superintendent Talbot's 1976 budget. Perhaps the deaf leaders missed something, since those yearly minutes books were pretty thick! Nevertheless, UAD Bulletin and Silent Spotlight proved to be rich resources with references to the progress of the center through the years (Sanderson, 2004).



Lloyd Perkins, a member of the Feasibility Study for a Community Center for the Deaf Committee

Utah State Board of Education Adopts a Policy on Deaf

After a lengthy debate, members of the Utah State Board of Education voted on June 15, 1976 to adopt a policy statement that led to the decentralization of counselors for deaf vocational rehabilitation consumers. Under the new policy, the counselors who had been housed in the state school office were located in the vocational rehabilitation offices in Ogden, Salt Lake City and Provo. Consumers served by those offices had a choice in selecting either a “total communication” or “oralist” counselor. The change had been made because Dr. Vaughan Hall, associate state superintendent, said oralists claimed they had not had a clear choice in selecting their counselors. Additionally, some oralists had

testified that they had been reluctant to come to the office of vocational rehabilitation in the state school office [Utah School for the Deaf] for fear they would not receive the



Dora Laramie, a member of the Feasibility Study for a Community Center for the Deaf Committee

services they wished. The totalists, on the other hand, opposed the new policy and expressed concern that it would weaken the services available for vocational rehabilitation consumers. Dr. Vaughan clarified that the new plan would not curtail services and he believed it would provide consumers a choice and that the counselors would be able to better tailor services to meet the need of individual consumer (The Salt Lake Tribune, June 16, 1976).

Dave Mortensen, president of the Utah Association for the Deaf published his article on June 16, 1976 sharing his perspectives of the Board of Education's recent decision. He stated, as follows:

Won't Listen

“The Board of Education is making a serious mistake in listening to the wrong people in its plan to “decentralize” services to deaf people. Never once did they invite the input of the deaf people of the community itself. They listened only to people who do not understand the implications of deafness. People who do not know nor understand what it means to live in deafness everyday. They listened to people into their ivory towers who are far removed from the reality of life.



Ned C. Wheeler, a member of the Feasibility Study for a Community Center for the Deaf Committee

Never once did the Board of Education or personnel connected with it ask the deaf community nor make a survey of the services provided to the deaf to see if the present organization was

satisfactory. The deaf community asked for services years ago and has been happy with the services rendered. Why change without asking the consumer if he likes what he's getting?

The deaf people are tired of paternalism, of being told by hearing people and educators that all we need is more speech and lip reading. We express to them – that such concepts deny deafness – and mislead people who have deaf children who will one day be as we are – deaf adults!

Apparently, the Board of Education is turning its back on deaf people, upon the mass of experience, and is listening only to those who have axes to grind. It was the deaf community that forced the board to take a hard look at its educational programs at the deaf school; to take another look at the conditions in school dormitories and to evaluate them.

If it were not for the alertness of the deaf people then parents of deaf children would continue to receive a less than adequate program for their children. When deaf people speak, we speak with knowledge and experience, and perception that no hearing person can experience.

We believe the Board of Education should retain its Unit of Services to the Deaf as it is presently made up, and if needed, add another counselor to work exclusively with those deaf who are, by personal choice, oral in philosophy. We support the desires of such deaf people when they express themselves but no when others paternalistic step in and try to do for them” (Mortensen, The Ogden Standard-Examiner, June 16, 1976).

There was speculation that Dr. Grant B. Bitter, an ardent oral advocate and former Coordinator of the Oral Training Program at the University of Utah as well as Coordinator of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Deaf Seminary for the State of Utah, played a role behind the new changes.



**W. David Mortensen, a member of the
Feasibility Study for a Community
Center for the Deaf
Committee**

Reorganization of the Services to the Deaf Office

On June 15, 1978, the Utah State Board of Education voted again to reorganize the Services to the Deaf Office. The change was to take immediately. This decision caused quite a stir in the Deaf community. Because they had not seen the latest policy statement or the new organizational chart, they were uncertain how this change would affect various services to deaf people (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

State Superintendent Dr. Walter Talbot assured the Utah Deaf community that the action of the State Board of Education on reorganization of the deaf simply guaranteed all deaf clients to choose a counselor who signed or did not sign. As a result, Dr. Sanderson was given more responsibility; he had all program responsibility for Rehabilitation Services to the Deaf plus training responsibility for all counselors and supervisors who

served deaf clients. The action also allowed for one more counselors for the deaf in the Salt Lake area (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).



Dr. Grant B. Bitter
The Utah Eagle, 1961

Since setting up the Services to the Deaf Office in Salt Lake City in 1965, the Utah State Board of Education took positive steps forward in identifying a need and making services available in an accessible manner with staff capable of communicating with the deaf (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

As of June 1978, the deaf unit had grown in the space of thirteen years to three offices staffed by a director, four counselors and an interpreter for the deaf. The staff members had rapport, specialized knowledge of deafness and ability to communicate by speech, sign language or in rare cases, very basic gestures. Deaf consumers had the opportunity to seek a variety of services available such as financial aid, hearing aid

evaluations, marriage counseling, sign language classes, speech therapy, job training, and much more (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

There was a segment of the population that suffered not only inability to hear, but also inability to communicate their needs effectively. The Services to the Deaf Office was the answer to their needs (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

Counselors in these three offices had also been goodwill ambassadors and opened up opportunities for the deaf. Sign language classes were given at businesses, government agencies and hospitals, so that staff members in turn could work with or serve the deaf; jobs opened up to the deaf, removing barriers that had kept them in low paying jobs. These counselors also gave talks to civic groups, enlightening them of the unique problems of the Utah Deaf community (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

The Utah State Board of Education voted to break up the Services to the Deaf Office. The new arrangement would place counselors who were with the Services to the Deaf Office under district supervisors. The counselors would answer to their district supervisors. These counselors were Norman Roberts of the Ogden area, Gene Stewart of the North Salt Lake area, Jim Hilber of the Central Salt Lake area, and Jack White of the Provo area. Dr. Sanderson continued to coordinate all deaf unit activities to be sure that every deaf and hard of hearing people received equal treatment, regardless of their educational background (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).



**Jim Hilber, counselor of the Central Salt Lake area
UAD Bulletin, November 1973**

The supervisor screened all incoming applicants so that everyone had a choice of counselors. There was a choice of a counselor who did not use sign language but used

speech as the mode of communication and one who could communicate in any way desired by the consumers – sign language, speech, writing notes, and the like (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

Dave Mortensen, UAD president expressed their concerns that the district supervisors did not possess the understanding, training and ability to deal with deaf adults and their problems, and that the deaf adults would no longer be able to find appropriate services through a counselor trained to serve the deaf. Conversely, the skills and knowledge built over the years by these counselors would go down the drain (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).



**Gene Stewart, counselor of
the North Salt Lake area
UAD Bulletin, Winter 1970**

At this time, the Utah Services to the Deaf Office was recognized by other states as an effective model of services to deaf people. While a few complaints had risen to the surface, they were far outnumbered by many individuals who benefited from the easy accessibility of services. UAD understood that it would not be expected that such a model would be put out of existence on the basis of a few complaints. They also understood the reluctance of deaf individuals whose main mode of communication was speech. They stated that there

were several general counselors who could work with these individuals who wished to use speech only (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

UAD felt breaking up the deaf unit would not accomplish positive results. It could only do harm and create justifiable frustration to deaf people and parents who sought help for their deaf children. They had yet to see how such reorganization could improve delivery of services to meet the unique needs of deaf children and adults (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

UAD believed that the Utah State Board of Education should have never taken this backward step. It asked that each member of this board to take the time to talk to deaf people and ask them how they feel about the Services to the Deaf Office. It reminded them that it was the deaf taxpayers who stood to lose from this move – and they, too, vote in elections (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

Dave Mortensen as a Spokesman at the Utah Capitol

In June 1978, the Utah State Board of Education developed a budget for the next legislature to be used for the purpose of a comprehensive community center for the deaf. That way, the services of various types could be provided to deaf people who were not necessarily consumers of the Division of Rehabilitation. It was a goal that the services of the future center could serve all deaf people of the community, including hard of hearing. Speech and hearing conservation services would also be included so oral deaf people as well as hard of hearing people would be able to get services (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978).

During the same month, Mr. Mortensen appeared before the Joint House Senate Committee studying the social services at the State Capitol and presented a request for their help in developing a comprehensive community center for the deaf and a state commission for the deaf. In his presentation, he emphasized that the policy developed by Dr. Vaughn Hall of the Division of Rehabilitation with the Utah State Board of Education restricted services to the deaf to rehabilitation services only. This effectively eliminated many services that had been provided through the Services to the Deaf office for the past thirteen years. Mr. Mortensen gave a powerful message to the committee that that there was now a need for a center for the deaf and a commission to serve all deaf people, not just rehabilitation consumers (The Silent Spotlight, June 1978; Sanderson, 2004).



**John A. (Jack) White, counselor
of the Provo area
UAD Bulletin, Winter 1970**

Back to Square One

In order to get funding for the new community center for the deaf, the deaf leaders had to go back to square one (Sanderson, 2004). One of the leaders, Dave Mortensen, who had become the new president of Utah Association for the Deaf, was the most visible, active leader and spokesperson through the legislative process. At first, he accompanied Dr. Sanderson in meeting legislators and quickly learned the legislative process. From then on, he spent years lobbied the legislative branch and worked hard to see the legislature appropriate money to fund the community center for the deaf.

While Dr. Sanderson was employed at the Services to Deaf Adults, UAD President Mortensen rolled up his sleeves and kept the ball rolling preparing for another bill. Another two years would pass before the bill was ready to be sent to the legislature again. In 1979, a request for their help in developing a community center was granted. The next step was to obtain a facility.