

Developing Readiness for Effective Self-Advocacy: Perspectives From Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors Who Work With Deaf Individuals in Postsecondary Settings

RS
Research
Summarized

Summary of Schoffstall et al., "Developing Consumer and System-Level Readiness for Effective Self-Advocacy: Perspectives From Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors Working With Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals in Post-Secondary Settings"¹

Why was this work done?

- Self-advocacy skills are essential for success in school and the workplace and lead to an enhanced quality of life, sense of personal control, and overall well-being.
- Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors are responsible for promoting transition and employment success for deaf individuals. VR counselors are in a unique position to support and instruct their clients on self-advocacy skill building. However, little is known about the perspectives of VR counselors who work solely with deaf clients.
- Researchers wanted to explore the strategies used by VR counselors to promote the self-advocacy knowledge and skills of deaf clients within employment and educational settings.

How was this work done?

- Ten VR counselors with a diverse range of experiences (e.g., working with deaf clients with additional disabilities, transitioning youth, advocacy) participated in hour-long interviews.
- Participants worked in a variety of states across the country and in positions that ranged from direct service provision to state-level coordination. All but one used sign language and several were rehabilitation counselors for the deaf (RCDs).
- The data were analyzed using qualitative research techniques with the aim of identifying and analyzing relationships among patterns (known as themes) in the interview data. Frequently occurring patterns were the main findings.

What did researchers find?

VR counselors commonly used the following strategies:

- Defining which self-advocacy skills are most necessary for deaf individuals
- Promoting and fostering linguistic skill building for clients
- Ensuring that clients have full communication access in both the VR center and on the job
- Monitoring client interactions for comprehension
- Educating employers about deaf self-advocacy related issues
- Using both informal and formal self-advocacy assessments
- Direct modeling of advocacy skills for clients
- Using self-advocacy, skill-building programs

¹Schoffstall, S., Cawthon, S., Leppo, R. H., & Wendel, E. (2015). Developing consumer and system-level readiness for effective self-advocacy: Perspectives from vocational rehabilitation counselors working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in post-secondary settings. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 27(4), 533–555.



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- Gauging client 'readiness' to self-advocate
- Identifying specifically where advocacy opportunities exist at broader systems-levels

What do these results mean?

- Facilitating client self-advocacy and preparing employers is essential because the employment landscape for deaf individuals often contains long-standing barriers and largely disjointed services, agencies, and resources.
- In order for barriers to be removed, VR counselors should conceptualize the self-advocacy skill building process along individual and systemic lines. VR counselors might consider how they can use the strategies mentioned in our findings.
- VR counselors can serve as critical links between deaf clients and their employers.



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