

Mid-Atlantic Workshop For Disabled Focuses On Practical Applications

BY SHARON SCHUSTER
Maryland Correspondent

WESTMINSTER, Md. — Farming is one of the most hazardous occupations of all. Dr. William Field of Purdue University has identified farmers as "one of the highest of any segment of the population affected by physical impairments."

Disabilities related to the farming community were addressed in the third Mid-Atlantic Workshop for Disabled Individuals and Their Families in Rural and Agricultural Communities on March 6 and 7 at the Ag Center in Westminster, Md.

The focus of the workshop was on practical applications for those who have difficulty, due to physical impairments, in completing everyday tasks. Vera Stauffer, an Extension agent from Pennsylvania State University specializing in rehabilitation, outlined the steps to problem solving in her presentation of Task Analysis.

"What is your problem, anyway?" asked Stauffer. Whether the task is home management or farm management, Stauffer said individuals must learn to maximize the benefits of their resources. Resources such as "time, physical and psychological energy, money, skills and knowledge, and environmental" must be considered when completing a task, she said.

Taking it a step further, Stauffer said that problem solving can be likened to a philosophy of mechanics to which she subscribes — "they didn't build it all in one piece;" just as a piece of machinery can be taken apart, your problems can be solved by examining the parts more closely.

"Define the problem, look at the alternatives, choose the best alternative, take action and take the responsibility for that action, and evaluate," suggested Stauffer. One method of attack is to break the task down into parts. "Look at the three W's - the Work, the Worker and the Workplace," she added.

Tom Rothrock, 41 years old and blind from birth, made his second appearance at the conference this year, by popular demand. Rothrock offered specific suggestions for ways of "doing things without looking at them." His bag of tricks included handy devices such as a Braille writer, a talking calculator, and a knife with a built in cutting guide for regulated thickness.

"A lot of us are impatient," cautioned Rothrock. He advised the audience to be "slow and systematic and to keep everything in a certain place." Rothrock said dealing with denial of an acquired impairment is one of the most difficult things. Through practice and the aid of friends he has run three marathons, including a 50 mile hike and run in Hagerstown, Md.

Joann Guthrie, associate professor of home economics at West Virginia State University, gave an enthusiastic and informative presentation on Adapting the Farm Home. While assisting West Virginia families to adapt their rural homes to accommodate a handicapped person, Guthrie is often faced with the problem of low financial resources and even homes with no indoor plumbing.

"Housing for the handicapped doesn't look different," said Guthrie. In her slide presentation she showed completed projects such as ramps for accessibility, widened doorways, handrails, removed doors, etc., and all at little or no cost to anyone. Guthrie said she helps families to procure items from second hand stores, and helps them to see low-cost ways of modifying their own homes. "For years, vocational rehabilitation has paid a lot of

attention to the interface areas of workplaces. They pay a lot of attention to placing a person in a job; I contend they have not paid nearly enough attention to the same man's driveway," said Guthrie.

Many brochures were available at the workshop. Some were geared to adapting homes and clothing, and many were resources for farmers and rural families. Tractor lifts, starting at about \$800, can be designed to lift a farmer in his wheelchair right to the tractor seat. "Breaking New Ground" is probably the most innovative and complete resource guide for farmers. The publication is produced by Purdue University.

Attendance to the workshop was down from about 50 last year to just a handful. "We have the information, but the people who need it just aren't here," said program coordinator Gary Smith of the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service. Some of the resources for information and/or equipment to aid persons with disabilities follow.

Presidential Commission on Employment of the Handicapped
1111 20th Street, NW
Room 636
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone (202) 653-5044

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.
1383 Piccard Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Phone (301) 948-9626

National Rehabilitation Hospital
102 Irving Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20010-2949
Phone (202) 877-1000

National Rehabilitation Information Center
The Catholic University of America
4407 Eighth Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20017
Phone (202) 635-5826
TDD (202) 635-5884

ABLEDATA (202) 635-6090
REHABDATA (202) 635-5822

Clearinghouse on the Handicapped
Dept. of Education
Switzer Building, Room 3132
330 C Street
Washington, D.C. 20202
Phone (202) 732-1241

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Jerome Bollinger and Ronnie Ridgely, both of Sykesville, Md., examine photos of tractors equipped with chair lifts. A diving accident left Bollinger, left, without the use of his hands or legs.

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