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Technology
and Disability

Introduction

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Rural America consists of a range of persons totaling between 23 and 27% of the Nation's population. Of these, 11-15 million are people with disabilities. Meeting the assistive technology needs of these Americans presents numerous challenges to the rural rehabilitation professional. While the challenges are great, many rehabilitation professionals have paved a route towards understanding of rural processes. This issue presents the experiences and research of several professionals in the field of rural rehabilitation.

The lead article by Smith and Alexander details specific issues facing rural consumers with disabilities. Important definitional considerations are outlined, including definitions of the terms 'rural' and 'disability.' The article further reports on the issues of economic development, rural employment, geographic isolation, the elderly, children with disabilities, legislation, personnel resources, and future perspectives. The article provides a conceptual framework for the rest of the issue.

Consumer change cannot proceed without community change, and this concept is highlighted by articles providing an overview of how the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Tech Act of 1988, and subsequent revisions, have affected rural consumers with disabilities. Nancy Proctor's article depicts the findings of a study analyzing rural businesses' attitudes towards the ADA. The findings reflect that rural business owners are leery of the law and think the government should take responsibility for financing provisions of the law. Torres-Davis

and Crowl discuss a series of legislative actions leading to the present-day implementation of the Tech Act and additional program initiatives.

Rural Canadians with disabilities face numerous challenges also encountered by their American counterparts. It is interesting to note that many of the services delivery processes to address the needs of this special population also correspond. An overview of service delivery issues and processes are presented in articles by Sullivan and Greene. Sullivan's article outlines the geographic, cultural, and other aspects of providing rehabilitation services to rural Canadians. In another article, Greene depicts a novel outreach process used by our northern neighbors. Greene demonstrates how a mobile outreach van, operated by the Terry Fox Clinic, has been used to provide assistive technology assessments and fabrication of assistive devices for rural consumers residing in remote areas of Canada. These two articles will broaden the reader's overall understanding of issues facing rural consumers with disabilities.

Rural occupations such as logging, mining and farming are very dangerous. In the past, the focus of rehabilitation has been on preparing injured workers in these jobs for alternative positions. Through modifications and assistive technology, we are now seeing rehabilitation result in successful placement back into those logging, mining and farming jobs. Paiva describes one such initiative with loggers.

It is important to understand that rural resources are not readily available without personal

creativity. An article by Yearns discusses how the creativity of a consumer, the consumer's family, and various rehabilitation professionals were combined to modify a home for a farmer with a spinal cord injury. Through creative processes, accessibility was obtained for minimal costs.

This issue was organized to expose the reader to challenges facing the rural consumer, and highlight the efforts and experiences of rehabilitation professionals to minimize those challenges through creative and successful provision of assistive technologies. My intent is to present a representative, not exhaustive, collection of ideas relating to rural technology. Many ideas surrounding provision of assistive technologies to rural consumers remain. (See the resource listing at the end of this issue.) Perhaps, this issue may provide an impetus to additional research and inquiries into the issues facing rural consumer with disabilities.

This issue is dedicated to Rachel Crowell. Also, I thank my parents for the opportunity to live in Blanchard, Louisiana, a rural community in Northwest Louisiana, and Home of the Poke Salad Festival.

About the Editor

T. Scott Smith is currently a Rehabilitation Consultant for Glenn-Marr, Ltd. Glenn-Mar, Ltd. provides Vocational rehabilitation consulting services for private insurance carriers across Louisiana. Mr. Smith currently serves approximately 24 parishes, and 22 of those parishes are considered rural. His educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Louisiana State University in Shreveport, and a Master of Arts degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Alabama. His professional Work experiences have included positions with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Probation Office/Northern District of Alabama. He has given presentations on rural rehabilitation topics to such diverse groups as Rehabilitation International, Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North America, National Rehabilitation Association, National Association of Wheat Growers, Louisiana Academy of Arts and Sciences, Louisiana Rural Health Association, and Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association.