

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND  
REHABILITATIVE SERVICES  
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM  
RSA-IM-96-19

DATE: June 26, 1996

TO: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)  
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)  
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
REGIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM  
ORGANIZATIONS OF AND FOR BLIND PERSONS

SUBJECT: The "Newsline" Network, a National Newspaper Service  
for Individuals who are Blind

CONTENT: This is to provide information on an innovative service which gives blind and visually impaired people access to newspapers and other print information at the time of publication and to provide information on potential programs administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) that could provide financial support for these information services. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) has established an on-line newspaper reading service for blind persons by developing a computerized system that links national newspapers in appropriate electronic text format to a DECTALK voice synthesis system relayed by modem for reading in local communities by persons who are blind using a touch tone phone. On a daily basis, USA Today, the New York Times, Chicago Tribune and other local papers that provide information in appropriately formatted text to the NFB can be accessed through the use of a touch tone phone whose keypad can be used to skip from paper to paper, section to section (within a paper), for reading at a slow or fast speed in keeping with the requirements of the individual reader. Since Newsline is part of a national network, a newsline user will also have access to Newsline in any other city where Newsline is offered. In this way, individuals who travel across the country will eventually have access to local and national publications in cities they are visiting.

The initial start-up cost for a local center wishing to establish such a dial-in reading service is \$18,000 for a 4-line telephone system, \$24,000 for a 12-line system and \$30,000 for a 24-line system with an additional \$5,000 start-up cost for a local paper. There is no start-up cost for the special channel. The ongoing costs to each local service center are \$12,000 a year plus \$2,000 a year for the addition of a local newspaper. There is no extra cost for the special channel. Blind persons participating in a dial-in reading service have access to the same social, cultural information that is available to persons with sight. Additionally, information that advances the employment, career development and independent living needs of the blind person can be placed on this dial-in reading service. For further information on this program you may wish to contact: "Newsline for the Blind", National Federation of the Blind, 1800 Johnson Street, Baltimore, Md 21230, telephone Number: (410) 659-9314.

The following funding sources are potentially available for establishing and maintaining a dial-in center as a local community service when it advances the employment or independent living needs of blind persons within the state:

Special Projects discretionary grant funding, a competition for these projects will be held in FY 1997. Details on how and when to apply will be published in the Federal Register later this year; Title VII, Chapter 2, Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind program; Establishment Authority; Services to Groups; and Innovative and Expansion State agency funding.

**INQUIRIES:**

Please direct any questions concerning the Newsline Network to Mr. Chester Avery, Director, Division for Blind and Visually Impaired, Room 3229, MES Building, 330 "C" Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202-2648, telephone number: (202) 205-9316.

Fredric K. Schroeder, Ph.D.  
Commissioner