

Evaluating an Assistive Technology Resource Center in Taiwan

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is intended to present the procedure and outcomes of an evaluation of the Assistive Technology Resource Center in a city of Taiwan. The evaluation was initiated by Chiayi City Government through inviting three professionals in the field of assistive technology as evaluators.

For the purpose of evaluation, the Executive Effectiveness Evaluation Form for Assistive Technology Resource Center was prepared and provided to the three evaluators by Chiayi City Government. The evaluation outcomes were delineated by the features of the Assistive Technology Resource Center and the recommendations from the evaluators. Some implications from this evaluation were also indicated in the article.

Introduction

Assistive technology is widely used nowadays for rehabilitating people with disabilities. According to the People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act promulgated by the government of Taiwan in 2007, the municipal and county (city) competent authorities of individual levels shall provide assistive device services to encourage people with disabilities to participate in social activities. In order to provide the assistive device services, the Assistive Technology Resource Center is established in every municipality and county (city). How these centers function seems associated with the service quality of assistive device for people with disabilities. Periodic evaluation of the Assistive Technology Resource Center seems to be a must to upgrade its services provided. The purpose of this article is intended to present the procedure and outcomes of an evaluation of the Assistive Technology Resource Center in a city of Taiwan. Evaluation procedure, evaluation outcomes and implications will be consecutively presented hereafter.

Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation was initiated by Chiayi City Government through inviting three professionals in the field of assistive technology as evaluators. One of the evaluators was an associate professor from Department of Physical Therapy and Assistive Technology, National Yang Ming University. The second evaluator was a professor of special education from Nanhua University. The third one was a division head from Rehabilitation and Technical Aids Center, Taipei Veterans General Hospital.

For the purpose of evaluation, the Executive Effectiveness Evaluation Form for

Assistive Technology Resource Center was prepared and provided to the three evaluators by Chiayi City Government (2008a). The categories and major items with their grading weights of this evaluation form could be listed as follows:

1. Written report (10%)
2. Human resource and administration management (30%)
 - (1) Administration and personnel management (15%)
 - (2) Financial management (15%)
3. Professional services (60%)
 - (1) Service usage (20%)
 - (2) Case management (10%)
 - (3) Publicizing service (10%)
 - (4) Satisfaction survey (10%)
 - (5) Service effectiveness and evaluation (10%)

The evaluation date was set on December 18, 2008. On the evaluation day, the evaluation process was arranged, consecutively, as introducing evaluators, briefing by the center evaluated, written information review by the evaluators and discussion with the center staff, as well as remarks by the evaluators and responses from the center. The evaluation lasted about two hours in the morning.

Evaluation Outcomes

The Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities was commissioned by Chiayi City Government to operate the Assistive Technology Resource Center for the year of 2008. The evaluation outcomes will be delineated, respectively, by the features of the Assistive Technology Resource Center and some recommendations from the evaluators.

The Features of the Assistive Technology Resource Center

The goals of the center are to provide assistive technology services for people with disabilities and general citizens who have a short-term need in technical aids. The contents of services could be listed as follows (The Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities, 2008):

1. Technical aids donation, renting, check and repair.
2. Technical aids exhibition and information-giving.
3. Individualized professional consultation and evaluation for technical aids needs.
4. Home-based evaluation and rehabilitation planning for technical aids needs.
5. Subsidy application review for technical aids maintenance.
6. Publicizing technical aids and educational workshops.

Of those service items, technical aids consultation, renting, check and repair are

mostly in need. Figure 1 presents the general flowchart of this center's services.

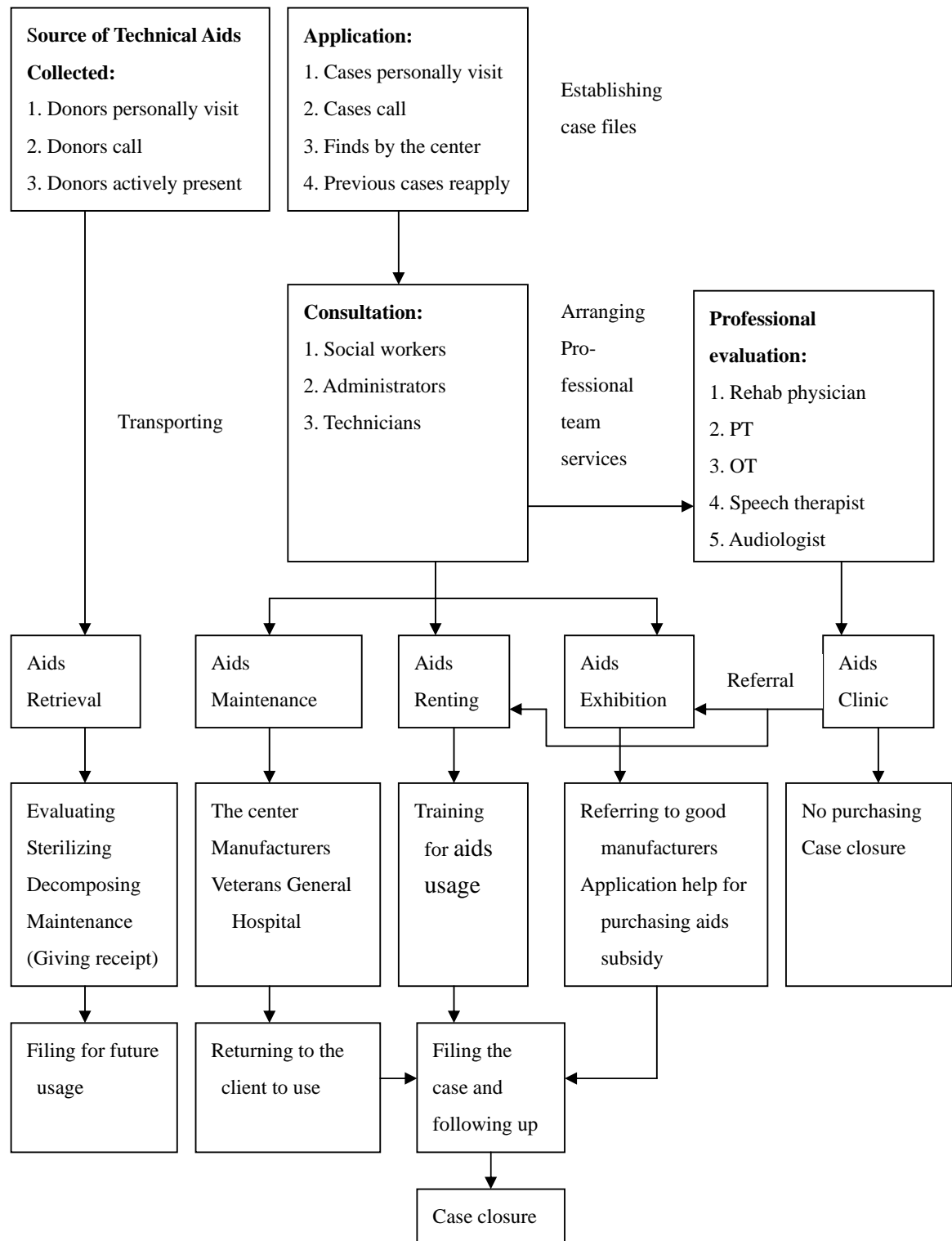


Figure 1 Flowchart of the Center's Services (Adapted from The Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities, 2008).

Based on the information provided by the center, work outcomes achieved in 2008 could be summarized on Table 1. Apparently, Table 1 seems to tell us that repair and consultation services are two paramount areas served by Chiayi City Assistive Technology Resource Center. However, the work outcomes were not satisfied by the staff of the center due to limited funding which also results in shortage of manpower (Chen, 2008).

Table 1 Work Outcomes Achieved by the Center

Service Items	Quantity
Repair Services	305 persons
Renting Services	90 cases
Retrieval Services	21 cases
Itinerary Services	5 times
Maintenance by Veterans General Hospital	112 cases
Home-based Evaluation and Training for Technical Aids	10 cases (190 hours)
Referring to Manufacturers	18 cases
Consultation Services	196 cases

(Adapted from Chen, 2008, p.3)

Some Recommendations from the Evaluators

After the evaluation, three evaluators all came to a consensus that the Assistive Technology Resource Center has made a favorable operation in 2008 under the basis of limited funding. The score for the evaluation given by all three evaluators was 83 based on a total 100 point scale. The evaluation team also recommends that Chiayi City Government continues to commission the Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities to run the Assistive Technology Resource Center.

Although the center has made its most efforts to provide the designated services for Chiayi City residents in need, some recommendations for improving future services were provided by the evaluators as follows (Chiayi City Government, 2008b):

1. It is necessary to expand the service quantity of home-based evaluation and training for technical aids.
2. It is needed to analyze the results of client satisfaction survey for the purpose of future improvement.
3. All professionals (full time and part time) have to receive education and training related to technical aids.
4. Enhancing the technical aids evaluation in the case assessment.
5. All outcome data should be properly categorized in order to understand what

- they really mean.
6. The technical aids needs assessment data in home-based Evaluation should be used in the subsidies and services for the clients.
 7. The satisfaction survey data should be appropriately integrated and used.
 8. The center should make some efforts to provide a stable employment environment for staff.
 9. The city government should increase the subsidy funding in order to expand the services for its citizens in need.
 10. Repair services, home-based evaluation and other technical aids services should be further enhanced.
 11. The spaces for retrieval and renting services seem too small and more spacious sites are needed.
 12. It is necessary to establish a complete complaint channel for clients and manufacturers.

Implications

The Assistive Technology Resource Center was run by the Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities commissioned by Chiayi City Government. This kind of outsourcing services could compensate the shortage of professionals in the local government and better meet the technical aid needs of people with disabilities. However, the Chiayi City Service Association for People with Disabilities is a non-profit organization. Even though the staff of this organization have enthusiasm to provide the commissioned services, proper funding is still a must to do their job better. From this evaluation, it not only reflects the functions of the center and the relationship between Chiayi City Government and the organization but also points out the importance of financial support from the government.

References

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