



Final grant report: Training for sign language interpreters working in Courts

Project title	Training for Sign Language Interpreters Working in Courts
Grant recipient	The Deaf Society of NSW
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Position	Coordinator, Sign Language Communications/Manager, Customer Service
Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount	\$5,000.00
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1. Description of the project

Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?

This project provided training and mentoring for sign language interpreters who use Auslan and English to work in legal settings such as courts and tribunals. The aims of the training were to:

1. Enable Auslan interpreters to better work with vulnerable and disadvantaged deaf people, including those with additional needs, who require access to justice.
2. Enable Auslan interpreters to be confident and effective servants of the court.
3. Provide specialised training in legal processes and interpreting techniques.

2. The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?

Our organisation supplies Auslan/English interpreters for a range of settings including courts and tribunals. As a major provider of interpreters for deaf people to courts and tribunals we found that additional vulnerabilities such as educational disadvantage, lack of language fluency, or the presence of a second disability or mental illness, resulted in some deaf people having a greater difficulty than others in accessing legal processes. We have also found that to be effective in this setting, Auslan/English interpreters need an extremely specialised skillset. The demand for skilled interpreters to work in the court system with deaf people is rising yet our pool of interpreters who are skilled and competent to work in the court system is very small. Feedback from many of our professional interpreters who have the necessary qualifications to work in legal settings, indicated that they were not confident to take on this work as they felt unfamiliar with court processes, legal language and their role in court. In order to provide a specialised service to the courts and tribunals we needed to

train other interpreters so they are competent to work in the court system with disadvantaged deaf clients.

Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.

Stage 1: Identify Auslan and deaf interpreters with the potential to work in courts. Expressions of interest were sought and sent to targeted interpreters.

Stage 2: Conduct a detailed needs analysis to ascertain the skills, knowledge and experience these interpreters required in order to feel confident to accept court work. An informal survey of our experienced court interpreters was conducted to help target the workshop, and identify the priority areas.

Stage 3: Design and run an intensive weekend workshop. The workshop was held on 6 November 2015 with 16 attendees. The morning session was run by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) and the afternoon session run by Della Goswell who conducts the post graduate interpreter course at Macquarie University.

Stage 4: Evaluate the workshop.

Stage 5:

- Provide a mentoring program specifically targeting professional level interpreters who previously refused to work in courts to work with the skilled court interpreters, so that they are mentored and trained on working in the court system.
- Of the 16 that attended the workshop, ten were already experienced in working in legal settings and six were inexperienced. However, mentoring opportunities were restricted to four of those people as two people were not able to participate beyond the workshop stage.
- Between December 2015 and June 2016 there have been 15 interpreting court assignments in Sydney booked through our organisation. Six of the workshop participants (two of whom were inexperienced) worked on these assignments as the interpreters.
- Mentoring was appropriate for five of the 15 court assignments as these assignments were in open courts. Mentoring was set up for these five assignments, however the assignments were cancelled by the Courts and when rebooked, the previously booked mentors with mentees were no longer available.

Stage 6: Evaluate the mentoring program. Unfortunately the mentor program was not able to proceed due to the factors listed above. If we were to proceed, further time is needed to ensure there are appropriate assignments for mentors/mentees to attend and to factor in for cancellations of bookings. Court bookings are often cancelled and then postponed. We have underestimated the time needed to make the mentor program happen.

Stage 7: Evaluate patterns in provision of interpreters for legal bookings to see whether we have successfully broadened the pool of interpreters and improved the timeliness of filling bookings.

Now that the project has concluded, how did the implementation and/or the outcome differ from what was originally intended? Did anything surprise you? Were there any unintended outcomes?

Mentoring opportunities were not frequent because courts generally book through their own government agencies so we don't have control over the interpreters who are booked. We are also unable to find out if a deaf person is attending Court (unless contacted directly by the client). Also we found that mentees required to be paid to attend mentoring as part of their professional development with our organisation, since their mentoring improves our allocation of booking interpreters and benefits our service provision. All potential mentees currently work, and to take up a mentee opportunity means they have to decline work to attend. This extra cost needs to be factored into future mentoring programs.

3. Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?

- Since the workshop have you accepted more or less court/tribunal interpreting jobs?
- Are you more confident to take on court/tribunal interpreting since the workshop?
- If you are more confident, can you recall what has given you more confidence?
- If you are less confident, can you explain why?
- If you are not confident about taking on court/tribunal work, what would help improve your confidence?
- Is there anything different about the way you work or would work in a court/tribunal because of the workshop?
- Do you have any other comments to make on the impact or not of the Legally Minded Workshop on your interpreting and work in courts/tribunals?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?

The survey was sent to all 16 workshop participants. Five people responded (31% response rate). Two reported there was no change in the type of interpreting jobs they accepted. One person responded that they were accepting more interpreting jobs, while another responded that they were not accepting jobs due to their skill level. Another responded that they were not accepting jobs due to other factors such as location and time.

Two said they were more confident in accepting legal assignments, while another two said their confidence levels were unchanged. One expressed less confidence since doing the workshop. The person who was less confident commented that their attendance at the workshop was their first step into the legal arena and did not expect that the workshop alone would give her the confidence to start working in court.

One respondent noted that she would change the way she worked by taking the time to meet with deaf clients before a Court matter to ensure that the client understands court jargon before going in.

All who responded to the survey said they would benefit from further mentoring in legal settings.

Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?

Through the workshop, we achieved the aim of assisting interpreters to better work with vulnerable and disadvantaged deaf people who require access to justice. We also provided specialised training in both legal processes and interpreting techniques.

We also enabled interpreters to be confident and effective servants of the court, however this would have been further cemented by the mentoring program. Practical application of learning appears to be key in assisting interpreters to be confident and effective.

The workshop participants included deaf interpreters. These people have less experience and training than hearing interpreters as there is less demand for their services. The workshop and evaluation indicated that these interpreters would especially benefit from mentoring that specifically looks at their translation issues.

In terms of patterns in our legal bookings, since the workshop there have been two of the less experienced interpreters who have taken on more work as interpreters. There has been no effect on the timeliness of filling bookings.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?

Practical application of knowledge in professional workshops is required via a mentoring program or more intensive and practical training. Deaf interpreters more particularly require mentoring. Funds are needed to pay mentees to participate in the mentoring.

What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?

- Continue to create mentoring opportunities with deaf interpreters and those who are less experienced.
- Set up a mentor program specifically for deaf interpreters.
- Expand the legally minded workshop to include more practical components in a mock court environment.
- Ensure there are funds to pay for the mentee time involved.