

Using Interpreters successfully

Identifying the language

Working out what language your service user speaks can be the first challenge. To prepare for this situation the best thing to do is to ring the Community Relations Commission (1300 651 500) and ask them to send you some Interpreter Cards. These cards will help you and your service user to identify the language being spoken.

Identifying whether an interpreter is needed

- Ask your service user to repeat a message that you have just given *in his/her own words*.
- Ask your service user a question that requires him/her to provide a long response; avoid questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no' or asking familiar questions such as 'Where do you live?'
- If you think an interpreter is required, discuss this with your service user before you arrange for an interpreter.

Most importantly, if you feel that **you** cannot communicate with your service user then **you** will need an interpreter.

Different types of interpreter services

There are basically two types of interpreting services: on-site and telephone interpreting.

- **On-site interpreting** means that an interpreter comes to where the meeting is being held. In general, on-site interpreters are used for complex and long matters.
- **Telephone interpreting** is interpreting provided over the phone and is especially useful for emergencies.

Both types of interpreting services have advantages and disadvantages. If money is a concern, telephone interpreting generally (but not always) works out cheaper.

How to book an interpreter

A range of private and government agencies provide interpreting services. Most importantly you and your service user need to make sure that the interpreter you book (and pay good money for) is an accredited interpreter. Government interpreter services only employ interpreters who have been accredited by the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

If you need an interpreter, you have the following options:

- **TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service):** 13 14 51
- **Language Services,** Community Relations Commission: 1300 651 500
- **Health Care Interpreter Service** [NB for health care related issues only; only a health services provider can organise this; on-site only]
- To find private interpreting agencies look in the Yellow Pages under 'Translations'.
- For **Auslan Interpreters,** call the Deaf Society of NSW: (02) 9893 8555 or 1800 893 855

Working with an interpreter

Below are some 'Handy Hints' we have found useful when working with interpreters:

- Brief the interpreter about relevant words and concepts before the interview whenever possible.
- While interpreters are used for their language expertise, you may also be able to use their cultural expertise, by asking the interpreter before the interview for information on any cultural factors that might affect the interview. Be aware of gender, class, disability and other issues (such as political, religious) that may impact on the interview. Seek the service user's permission if you need to obtain additional cultural information from the interpreter during the interview.
- Stress that you and the interpreter are bound by codes of ethics to maintain the confidentiality of the interview.
- Use plain English where possible.
- When complex issues are involved remember to summarise periodically.
- If your service user does not understand what you are saying, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter's) to explain it more simply.
- Always address the service user, for example: 'How are you feeling?' Do not say (to the interpreter): 'Ask her/ him how s/he is feeling?'
- Do not try to save time by asking the interpreter to summarise.
- Be aware that it may take more or fewer words than you have used to convey the message in another language.
- Do not let the interpreter's presence change your role in the interview. It is not the interpreter's role to conduct the interview.

Be aware

- Speaking louder does not help.
- Do not use children as interpreters.
- Gender issues may be relevant and you may need an interpreter who is the same sex as your service user.
- Especially when working with people from smaller communities, ask your service user whether they know the interpreter. If s/he refuses the interpreter, you will need to book another one.

For more Information contact:

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW (MDAA)

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