Services for Deaf People in a Rural Setting: Issues and Recommendations for Interpreters

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* You are in a rural area and the people are poor.
* A Sign Language interpreter is needed.
* You know the Sign Language of the deaf person involved but are not a specialist in Sign Language interpreting

### What do you do?

Helpful Hints

**Remember:**  
Interpreters are not always well trained and educated professional people.  
You could be a Sign Language interpreter  
Many interpreters are unpaid volunteers

# 1. Who is an interpreter?

**Skills**

* Interpreters are people with good language skills who have learned how to interpret from one language to another.
* Many interpreters 'learned' their skills in a practical setting, e.g. from parents, brothers, sisters or friends.
* Children may have learned to interpret for their deaf parents, a mother may have learned to interpret for her deaf child.

**Some Characteristics**

* In villages in poor rural areas, interpreters are often local people who have a good relationship with the client.
* Sometimes the interpreter is the teacher, the social worker or the health worker
* If the deaf client has to visit a hospital, government office, court, etc. it would be better if the interpreter were a teacher or an experienced person because he or she would understand better what was being said.
* Often the language of the deaf client is not an 'official' Sign Language, but a 'home' language which is only known in the community. Only members of the community will be able to understand it well enough to interpret it.
* An interpreter must have self confidence, otherwise clients will not have confidence in him/her either.

# 2. Foundations of interpreting

Interpreting is a matter of faith and trust  
Interpreting is a relationship

* Interpreters need to gain the **trust** of their deaf and hearing clients.
* Trust will give the client(s) **faith** in the work of the interpreter.
* Faith in the interpreting will result in a relationship between interpreter and client.

# 3. Language of Interpreters

Interpreting does not need to be word for word. It is more important to get the meaning of the speaker/signer across.

* The interpreter should pay attention to the level of understanding of his or her clients, both hearing and deaf.
* Interpreters should use the kind of language that is understood by both clients.
* Interpreting word for word from one language into another may often be misunderstood or is not understood at all. It could also change the meaning of what was said

**Example:** Some may say 'I have spent too much time (time-time-much) working on your problem', i.e. he is fed up. To the deaf person receiving the message through an interpreter this may sound enthusiastic: 'I have spent much, much time trying to solve your problem'. Misunderstanding can become a serious problem: Example: A judge may ask, 'Are you innocent?' and the answer is 'Yes'. In Sign Language the question might be 'Did you do it?' and the answer would be 'No'. The judge would note both the no (from the accused) and the yes (from the interpreter). He may decide that the client said he was not innocent.

# 4. Recognition of Interpreter

* Recognition should not depend on the level of education and other qualifications, but on the language skills and the person themselves.
* Professional interpreters and 'local' interpreters should have the same recognition when they do the same type of work.

**Example:** The village chief or tribal sheikh may have an officially recognised function of 'justice of the peace' though he may not have studied law or have other formal qualifications. The government would recognise him in the same way as a professional judge.

# 5. Training

It is always good to get more training Interpreters

* The interpreter should find out whether there are training courses nearby
* Deaf adults may be able to develop their skills further.
* There may be Associations of the Deaf which run Sign Language training courses and/or courses for interpreters.

**Professional Interpreters**

* Good professional interpreters are needed to help train 'local' interpreters and assist them in their work.
* Professional interpreters should try to attend training for specialist interpreting in, e.g. hospitals, schools and courts of law.

**Local Interpreters**

* 'Local' interpreters need to help professional interpreters with local and 'home' languages.
* Training should include ethics of interpreting, i.e. what you should and should not do as an interpreter.

**Beneficiaries**

* Deaf people and those in need of interpreters such as families, or professional people and institutions who need interpreters to do their work properly, should lobby their government for the appointment and training of Sign Language interpreters.
* Deaf people should be taught how to use Sign Language Interpreters.

# 5. Ethics of interpreting

It is important that Sign language be recognised as an official language. Efforts should be made to lobby the government for such recognition. This was done, for example, in Uganda where Sign Language is now officially recognised in the constitution.

**Translation**

* The local 'home' language may be different from the 'official' Sign Language. The client should decide which language is to be used by the interpreter.
* Although the interpreter does not have to use the exact words spoken, he/she should not add to or omit from the message being transmitted.
* The interpreter is not responsible for the content of the message.
* When a deaf client uses an interpreter, everything should be interpreted, including side comments, other people saying things, etc..

**Interpreters**

Interpreters should be recognised by the clients and the community as able, honest, ethical and objective.

* Good interpreters try to identify with their clients and show a measure of respect for the client and his or her culture.
* Interpreters should know their clients and culture.
* Professional interpreters should, if possible, be involved in official interpreting settings, e.g. courts of law. They may not know the 'home' language very well, but they would be able to tell whether the interpreting was done properly and whether clients understood what was being said.
* Interpreters, when interpreting, are not social workers, lawyers, doctors, etc. even though this may also be their profession.
* It is important that the interpreter is prepared and knows the subject of the discussion or exchange that needs to be interpreted. This will reduce the likelihood of mistakes.
* Interpreters should realise that gender issues may be important.

**Example:** A female deaf person may not be comfortable using a male interpreter when visiting a doctor or vice versa.

# 6. Conclusion

This short booklet is not designed to encompass all topics relating to Sign Language interpreting. The aim is to give you some helpful hints and to encourage you in your interpreting.

There is a need for local Sign Language interpreters, maybe you could help?

* You could be a Sign Language interpreter.
* Interpreters are not always well trained and educated professional people.
* Interpreting is a matter of faith and trust.
* Many interpreters are unpaid volunteers.
* It is always good to get more training.
* Interpreters should be recognised by the clients and the community as able, honest, ethical and objective.
* Interpreting does not need to be word for word. It is more important to get the meaning of the speaker/signer across.
* It is important that Sign Language be recognised as an official language. Efforts should be made to lobby the government for such recognition.
* Interpreting is a relationship.

Initiative for Deaf Education in the Third World, Egypt, 1997

Issues and Recommendations for [Parents](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/parents.docx)  
Issues and Recommendations for [Sign Language](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/signlang.docx)  
Issues and Recommendations for [Teachers](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/teachers.docx)

**Reference:**  
**Title:** Services for Deaf People in a Rural Setting: Issues and recommendations for interpreters  
**Publisher:** Initiative for Deaf Education in the Third World  
**Date:** 1997