Interpreting Services for Deaf People

Albert T. Pimentel

ALBERT T. PIMENTEL is Executive Director, Registry of interpreters for the Deaf.

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The inclusion of the topic of interpreting services in this convention, along with other basic needs of deaf persons, such as psychiatric services and community rehabilitation services, is a hopeful indication that the professional community is beginning to properly value the extent to which the professional interpreter can contribute to the habilitation and rehabilitation of deaf people. There is a critical need to increase interpreter utilization in routine casework service. Interpreters can improve the quality of services that a counselor purchases from psychologists, doctors, therapists, vocational evaluators, training programs and even in the industrial job orientation setting. Too frequently interpreter services are considered only when communication will be completely or substantially impeded to the degree of preventing a counselor from contracting needed case evaluations.

Deafness results in communication problems in almost all situations. The fact that many deaf clients manage to get by on the basis of minimal communication with casework personnel does not eliminate the need for providing these clients with interpreter services. But rather, minimal communication and minimal benefit from expensively purchased casework services should underscore the need to improve the client's communication during this critical period of his rehabilitation program. The question really is—can we afford not to spend additional funds to achieve quality casework services for deaf
people and maximum employment placement? Too often in the past minimal services have been rendered and marginal employment attained because means did not exist to bridge communication problems during the casework process.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965 for the first time provided authorization for interpreter services to be included as part of casework for deaf vocational rehabilitation clients. This provision has not been generally utilized by state vocational rehabilitation agencies to any appreciable degree. In part, sufficient numbers of interpreters do not exist. Further, a means of recruiting, training and evaluating interpreters remained to be developed. In 1967 the Social and Rehabilitation Services funded a demonstration to Professionalize the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. This demonstration grant should substantially alleviate the problem of adequate interpreter personnel. However, utilization of interpreters largely depends on the understanding of the value of this service by agencies and professional people.

To gain a better perspective of our topic we should take a brief look back into this short history of interpreting to see how it evolved as a communicative aid. In the United States the concept of interpreting as a distinctively unique communicative service to deaf people dates almost from the beginning of education of the deaf in 1817. Some form of manual communication always has been permitted for at least the older students in most residential schools for the deaf, where the vast majority of deaf people were educated up through the middle 1940's. Along with this existence of manual communication in the classroom, it was customary to find in these educational institutions a few teachers or school administrators interpreting for students at school assemblies, religious programs and during field visits to community points of interest. From the long tradition of interpreting usage in the educational setting, adult deaf people residing in sufficient numbers in a community developed the concept of utilizing interpreters for very special events of educational, social or cultural importance. Frequently clergymen serving deaf people were utilized as these early interpreters. Down through the years almost all of our special religious programs
for deaf citizens have utilized the language of signs. To this day, members of the clergy and lay religious interpreters for the deaf continue to be active as interpreters in functions outside of their religious spheres. Of significance, interpreting services of the past have been largely limited to emergency situations such as the courtroom, funerals, medical crises and other instances of immediate and critical human need. In the past, specific training and professional recognition of interpreting services were totally nonexistent. From the point of view of the lay person, interpreting was felt to be a peculiar talent that a few individuals chanced to develop, and which the community found convenient to call upon at frequent intervals.

The present day development of interpreting services parallels the Federal-State expansion of vocational rehabilitation services in general. The rapid, albeit still insufficient, growth of personnel and programs serving deaf citizens has created a need for more efficient communication between the deaf client and the many professional people to which he is referred in the process of his rehabilitation case work-up. Interestingly, in spite of the vast educational propaganda of the 1940's and 50's, professional personnel extending services to deaf clients generally find that the young deaf adult clients they serve today have no more intelligible speech abilities than the deaf adult of the 1940 and the early 40's.

In today's busy and time-demanding world of services, efficient means of communication is a basic necessity. In terms of the communicative needs of deaf people this means provision of interpreting services. In the late 1950's, as a result of this emerging recognition of the importance of interpreting services, the few available and competent interpreters for deaf people suddenly found their services in great demand. However, the number of interpreters available and their general background of training was not sufficient to the task.

In 1964 at Muncie, Indiana, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf came into being as an organization with the basic intention of attempting to respond to the nation's sudden
deep interest in and need for interpreters. After three years of organizational operation on a voluntary, quasi-professional basis, we are now into our second year of full-time operation. From the RID's establishment in 1964 to the present time the following materials have been developed specifically in response to the problems and needs of interpreters. They are as follows: The Proceedings of the Muncie, Indiana Conference which lays out the organizational framework; a follow-up structural organization workshop in Washington delineating professional criteria for the Registry. Our Code of Ethics emerged at that time. It is of basic importance and bears elaboration here.

1. The interpreter shall be a person of high moral character, honest, conscientious, trustworthy and of emotional maturity. He shall guard confidential information and not betray confidences which have been entrusted to him.

2. The interpreter shall maintain an impartial attitude during the course of his interpreting avoiding interjecting his own views unless he is asked to do so by a party involved.

3. The interpreter shall interpret faithfully and to the best of his ability, always conveying the thought, intent and spirit of the speaker. He shall remember the limits of his particular function.

4. The interpreter shall recognize his own level of proficiency and use discretion in accepting assignments, seeking for the assistance of other interpreters when necessary.

5. The interpreter shall adopt a conservative manner of dress upholding the dignity of the profession and not drawing undue attention to himself.

6. The interpreter shall use discretion in the matter of accepting compensation for services and be willing to provide services in situations where funds are not available. Arrangements should be made on a professional basis for adequate remuneration in
court cases comparable to that provided for interpreters of foreign languages.

7. The interpreter shall never encourage deaf persons to seek legal or other decisions in their favor merely because the interpreter is sympathetic to the handicap of deafness.

8. In the case of legal interpreting, the interpreter shall inform the court when the level of literacy of the deaf person involved is such that literal interpretation is not possible and the interpreter is having to grossly paraphrase and restate both what is said to the deaf person and what he is saying to the court.

9. The interpreter shall attempt to recognize the various types of assistance needed by the deaf and do his best to meet the particular need. Those who do not understand the language of signs may require assistance through written communication. Those who understand manual communication may be assisted by means of translating (rendering the original presentation verbatim), or interpreting (paraphrasing, defining, explaining, or making known the will of the speaker without regard to the original language used.)

10. Recognizing his need for professional improvement, the interpreters will join with professional colleagues for the purpose of sharing new knowledge and developments, to seek to understand the implications of life, and develop both his expressive and his receptive skills in interpreting and translating.

11. The interpreter shall seek to uphold the dignity and purity of the language of signs. He shall also maintain a readiness to learn and to accept new signs, if these are necessary to understanding.

12. The interpreter shall take the responsibility of educating the public regarding the deaf whenever possible recognizing that many misunderstandings
arise because of the general lack of public knowledge in the area of deafness and communication with the deaf.

An intensive summer workshop in Maine in 1965 producing our basic general training manual entitled *Interpreting For Deaf People*. In the summer of 1966 a Workshop to Activate Interpretering Services was held in San Francisco to reassess the status of Interpreter services and to accelerate the development of interpreter personnel in an attempt to keep up with the personnel needs generated by continuing expansion of new programs and projects incorporating various kinds of rehabilitation services for deaf people. All of the conferences mentioned above, and the valuable manuals resulting, have been possible because of the most generous interest and support of the Federal Rehabilitation Service Administration.

The interpreter for the deaf must function as a professional person. His training must be sufficient to the point of satisfying the agency engaging his services, the agency or persons to which he is referred for actual interpreting, and most important to the deaf individual who is depending on the interpreter for an efficient interpreting performance.

Let us elaborate a bit on what it means to satisfy these three parties. In the case of vocational rehabilitation agency, the counselor would want some assurance that an interpreter's training has included at least some minimal understanding of what the rehabilitation process involves. The counselor would want the interpreter to recognize that he is being engaged as an interpreter and not as a person who assumes counseling responsibilities; that an interpreter's function has some definite service limitations and that he is not being brought in as a general consultant for deaf clients. The doctor, for whom the interpreter intends to interpret on a vocational rehabilitation assignment, will be most reluctant to admit the interpreter into what is traditionally a highly confidential doctor-patient relationship. The doctor needs assurance that he is dealing with a professional individual who has familiarized himself with the professional framework in which medical personnel function. The deaf individual is hopeful that he will have an interpreter who is professionally
able to recognize his level of interpreter needs. The deaf individual also is most concerned that what is confidential and personal information remains so.

The RID is currently working on two fronts in attempting to meet the ever increasing needs for improved national interpreter services. First, we are attempting to upgrade present interpreters through formation of State Chapters of the Registry. Through chapters we are encouraging activities in recruitment, training and evaluation on the State level. By June of 1969 we hope to have twenty State Chapters in operation.

Our second front involves a more formal professional training plan for the future. In cooperation with Center for Research and Advanced Training in Deafness Rehabilitation at New York University, a professional curriculum for the training of interpreters is being developed. In brief this curriculum, as currently envisioned, will include a basic comprehensive course entitled Introduction to Interpreting. Only individuals already having some specifically defined level of fundamental skills in manual communication will be admitted to the course. Following the basic course will be five elective areas of specialization involving: 1) Interpreting in the Legal Setting; 2) Interpreting in Adult Education and Vocational Training; 3) Interpreting for Rehabilitation and Psychology; 4) Interpreting in a Medical and Psychiatric Setting; and 5) Interpreting in Religious Settings. It is likely that there will be some changes in these combinations but these are the present basic considerations.

Once this curriculum is completed it will be available in whole or in parts to various institutions of higher learning. We would hope that some of the professional programs for the preparation of rehabilitation counselors will recognize the value of these courses as electives within their programs. More pertinent perhaps, is the potential benefit that could be derived from the association of students in professional interpreter courses with students in counselor training programs. We also anticipate having some of these courses included as electives in college programs involved in preparing teachers of
tives will be defined. As a result, we will then have a very accurate criterion from which will evolve a professional certification program for interpreters.

By judicious use of interpreters it should be possible to obtain more comprehensive evaluations of deaf clients, to provide a wider range of training programs and even to break through the chronic underemployment problem prevalent in industry. For instance, in Oregon the Taxtronix, Inc. is recognizing its responsibility by providing equal in-service industrial training opportunity for its deaf employees. The company employs interpreters wherever and whenever deaf employees can so benefit from any of their several educational and training programs. This is an excellent example of the type of responsibility that needs to be better understood and widely implemented not only in industry, but also in community adult education programs.

We look forward to the future with confidence that deaf citizens will be able to obtain equality in all private and public opportunities available in the community. We believe that a great deal more attention to the inclusion of interpreter services will be one of the significant means of making this a reality. Professional counselors, we hope, will be in the forefront in promoting the inclusion of interpreters in many varied situations in life that will provide greater human fulfillment for deaf people.

REFERENCES


