



Policy on Interpreters in courts of law

Sign Language is seen as the main distinguishing feature that defines a Deaf Community. The role of Deaf Australia, with its Statement of Objects, is to enhance the status of Sign Language in Australian society, and to ensure that Deaf people have equality of opportunity and full participation in society.

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the native language of many Deaf people who have Deaf parents and of many hearing children of Deaf parents. In addition, Auslan is the primary language of many Deaf people who do not have Deaf parents but have learnt Auslan later in their lives. Deaf people lead bilingual lives and use mostly Auslan as well as written and spoken English, with varying levels of competence in their everyday lives.

Interpreting between Auslan and English is an essential aspect in the life of the Deaf community and enables equal participation by Deaf persons in the wider community. Often it is the Deaf person's principal means by which they access the wider community in which they live.

In situations where Deaf people appear, for whatever purpose, in Courts of Law, the importance of qualified and competent Sign Language interpreters is of paramount importance.

Deaf Australia believes that:

1. Any Sign Language Interpreter working with a Deaf person in a Court of Law must have NAATI Interpreter accreditation.
2. Any Sign Language Interpreter working in a Court of Law must have experience of working in these situations.
3. To ensure that Interpreters acquire this experience, training programs for Sign Language Interpreters must include 40 hours of practicum in Courts of Law as a partner with a Sign Language Interpreter experienced in these situations.
4. Only after having completed these 40 hours of practicum should a Sign Language Interpreter be assigned to work alone in a Court of Law.
5. Deaf Australia recognises that interpreting in legal situations can be highly stressful for Interpreters. For this reason, unless the assignment is for less than one hour, Sign Language Interpreters should always work in teams of at least two in Courts of Law.
6. Under no circumstances is an Interpreter of lower level qualifications and experience acceptable. If no appropriately qualified and experienced interpreters are locally available then the Court must bear the cost of transporting and accommodating suitable Interpreters.
7. If no appropriately qualified and experienced Interpreters are available the court appointment must be postponed until such a time when Interpreters can be provided. Under no circumstances is a Deaf person who requires an Interpreter to appear in a court of law without an Interpreter.