Analysis of Deaf Interpreter Focus Group Discussions
Conducted April-July 2007

NCIEC Deaf Interpreter Work Team

(2009)

Executive Summary

Among its many projects, the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) has established a national team of experts – Deaf Interpreters, educators, and researchers – to investigate effective practices in Deaf interpreting and Deaf Interpreter education. The Consortium's aims in this area are to describe the specialized domains and competencies of effective Deaf interpreting work and to make available resources, learning opportunities, and a network for professional dialogue among Deaf Interpreters. Ultimately, this work seeks to educate the public about Deaf interpreting and, in doing so, enhance access to interpreting services by Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and hard-of-hearing individuals, especially those underserved and at-risk adults and youths who may not benefit from traditional ASL-English interpreting services.

This report presents the findings of six focus groups conducted by the NCIEC Deaf Interpreting Work Team to gather the perspectives of certified and non-certified working Deaf Interpreters from across the United States on current issues and future directions in the field of Deaf Interpreting. Several themes emerged from the analysis of the discussions: Formative Experiences of Deaf Interpreters, Professional Standards and Expectations, Formal Preparation of Deaf Interpreters, and Employment Issues. The report synthesizes the focus group discussions around these themes and recommends areas for further study and future action.

Acknowledgements

Many people contribute to the success of a project of this sort. We would like to specifically acknowledge the following individuals:

Focus Group Participants

These individuals came from far and wide to share memories, thoughts, and insights about their Deaf Interpreting developmental experiences and current practices. Their contributions are invaluable.

NCIEC Effective Practices in Deaf Interpreting Work-Team

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Introduction

As a means of better understanding the current status and practice of Deaf interpreting, the NCIEC Deaf Interpreting Work-team prepared and conducted six focus groups of Deaf Interpreters during the spring and summer of 2007. Participants were recruited from each of the five NCIEC regions to ensure representation of Deaf Interpreters from across the United States; a sixth group comprised Deaf Interpreters from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Each group included four to six practicing Deaf Interpreters, evenly representing Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) and non-certified Deaf Interpreters. The total number of participants was 26. Members of the NCIEC Deaf Interpreting Work-team, Eileen Forestal, Carole Lazorisak, Priscilla Moyers, Cynthia Napier and Debbie Peterson, each facilitated one or more of the focus groups using a common set of stimulus questions and protocol devised by the work-team in consultation with NCIEC's Effective Practices consultants.

The focus groups were conducted in ASL by Deaf facilitators and videotaped by Deaf technicians. Certified ASL-English interpreters transcribed the discussions in English with instruction to note instances of agreement among participants, both verbal and non-verbal (e.g. head nods), to facilitate assessing the weight of particular comments. Transcripts were returned to their respective group facilitator for verification of accuracy and completeness before the analysis.

An independent researcher, Dr. Genie Gertz, was hired to analyze the data working from both the English transcriptions and the videotapes. Her findings, presented to the Deaf Interpreting Work-team, served as the basis for this report.

The report provides a synthesis of the focus group discussions followed by summary and recommendations for further study and future action. The synthesis is structured along the following findings and emerging themes:

1 Formative Experiences of Deaf Interpreters

  1.1 Linguistic Development and Adaptability

  1.2 Informal Experiences of Interpreting

  1.3 Language Consultation to Others

  1.4 Personal Attributes Supporting Professional Ethics

  1.5 Catalysts for Becoming a Deaf Interpreter

2 Professional Standards and Expectations

  2.1 Personal Accountability for Communication Success - Qualifications

  2.2 Interpreting Process

  2.3 Roles and Responsibilities

  2.4 Ethics and Code of Conduct

Synthesis of Discussions

1. Formative Experiences

The Deaf Interpreters participating in the focus groups tended to have grown up in a home with Deaf family members and sign language, and not infrequently with parents who had limited English proficiency. They had experience in many, or most, aspects of the Deaf community, related education systems, and support services. Their foundational knowledge and skills grew from such early experience with diverse languages, communication styles, people, and cultures.

1.1 Linguistic Development and Adaptability

Deaf Interpreter participants commented often on the versatility of their communication skills, including a mastery of various forms of visual communication and ASL as well as English. They described their experience and expertise with:

- Home signs and conventional signs.

- Variations of communication styles used throughout the community, including ethnic, cultural, and regional dialects and variations, and the sign language and systems used in k-12 education programs.

- The full range of types of deaf people who use interpreters, and situations in which they find themselves, such as working with children, people with Usher Syndrome, the elderly, and monolingual ASL users; and in such settings as educational, medical, and business meetings, education.

- Communicating with people who are semi-lingual or a-lingual, who may use mixed sign systems, or rudimentary gestural communication.

- Adapting to or matching the communication modes of people/consumers, even if not personally comfortable with the mode.

- Communicating with people who are mentally challenged and/or mentally ill.

1.2 Informal Experiences of Interpreting

Early experiences of informal interpreting and translating were common among focus group participants.

Interpreting Within Family
Participants described functioning as interpreters from an early age, assisting their own Deaf parents and/or siblings with communication, especially for parents who lacked formal education, communicated with gestures, or whose native language was other than English. These interpreting experiences included many types of interactions of life such as visits to professionals, queries in stores, meetings with teachers, and completion of forms and documents (e.g. related to school, social services, employment).

Interpreting for Peers
Participants described early experiences helping peers understand teachers' and other students' communications. In oral education programs, they conveyed clarifying instructional information to peers when teachers were not looking. In residential schools, especially in dormitory interactions, they helped students with fledgling sign language skills understand what others were saying.

Assisting Immigrants who were Deaf
Participants reported experiences assisting Deaf people from other countries, some of whom were fluent in their own sign language, but needed assistance with complex English, especially with printed materials and forms. They assisted with a variety of documents, forms, issues and situations. As they observed that regular ASL-English interpreting doing was not helpful, they would step in and do whatever worked. Similar experiences also occurred when working with people with idiosyncratic language use.

1.3 Language Consultation to Others

Participants also reported experiences in the work place, such as in higher education, where they assisted hearing colleagues and professionals with ASL comprehension and interpretation, towards better communication with Deaf students. They felt that these experiences laid the foundation for development of their own interest and development as a Deaf Interpreter.

1.4 Personal Attributes Supporting Professional Ethics

There was a strong belief expressed that Deaf Interpreters have certain competencies and attributes specifically as a result of being Deaf and having had the experiences that they have had. These experiences gave Deaf Interpreters a heightened sensitivity to the needs of consumers, and therefore a drive to assure comprehension and participation by Deaf consumers.

Experiences Shared With Consumers
Shared experiences cited by participants included communication challenges of comprehension of situations, interpreters, and communication styles; and challenges of being oppressed and discriminated against. They have had the experience of being in dire need of interpreting

assistance for communication, while hearing interpreters probably never have, except perhaps when traveling in another country. Their experiences in interpreter training program class discussions regarding oppression supported the belief that the non-Deaf students, while sensitive to issues of civil rights and discrimination, have no clue related to Deaf people's actual experience of oppression.

1.5 Catalysts for Becoming an Interpreter

Participants' paths to becoming a Deaf Interpreter were varied, such as:

- Realization of own interpreting competence due to experience

- Spouse, family member or friend suggested it

- Admiration of the work of interpreters in church grew into an aspiration to do the same

- Realization that Deaf people could do Deaf-Blind interpreting

- An enjoyment of playing with English to ASL interpretation became playing "interpreter," working from written English, which became actual interpreting

- During a hiatus from a professional course of study, began interpreting in that field, and when it was possible to return to professional studies chose Deaf interpreting in the field instead.

2. Professional Standards and Expectations

The Deaf Interpreter must be able to explain the need for a Deaf/Hearing interpreting team, and then carry out her or his role. They bring specialized skills and knowledge to the situation, and see themselves carrying the accountability for communication success.

2.1 Personal Accountability for Communication Success - Qualifications

The Deaf Interpreters spoke of a personal professional standard, indeed a mandate, to ensure the Deaf consumer's comprehension and opportunity to participate in communication events. There was a strong belief expressed that Deaf Interpreters have more ability to catch subtle expressions from Deaf consumers regarding comprehension, increasing communication effectiveness.

Participants raised a number of competencies required to achieve successful communication including:

> *"Full competence across ASL-English spectrum and command of both ASL and English"*

> *"Flexibility"*

> *"Awareness, attentiveness to, differences in consumer language"*

> *"Broad experience and tools from which to draw to match consumer's culture and expressive system/language"*

"Willingness to do whatever is necessary to accomplish comprehension, including drawing and mouthing English"

2.2 Interpreting Process

Participants were articulate in analyzing and describing the task of interpreting, and two foundational principles were emphasized:

- Deaf people have a right to understand and participate fully.

- The Deaf Interpreter is ultimately fully responsible for the accuracy of the messages conveyed to and from the Deaf consumer, in part because of their special qualifications, and in part because they are the interpreter in direct connection with the Deaf consumer.

Choice of Consecutive vs. Simultaneous Interpreting
Participants agreed that whenever possible consecutive interpreting is the preferred approach. They observed that it is more conducive to successfully conveying meaning. In the words of one participant:

"With sufficient processing time, the message is more accurate. If there is time to process, confidence in product is increased. Without sufficient processing time, copying the hearing interpreter's signs and structure is more likely."

Source Language Analysis
Participants discussed the importance of message analysis and the responsibility of the Deaf Interpreter to control the flow of information and assure his or her own comprehension. Key among the concerns were:

"...to determine the source language's message, and the goal of the communication."

"If the Deaf Interpreter is not confident of their own comprehension of the source message (for whatever reason, content, language, interpretation) the Deaf Interpreter has an obligation to stop the process to gain clarity, in order to accurately convey the message in the target language."

"[There is a] need to control the flow of information so [one] does not become overwhelmed by the amount trying to process."

Mental Representation of Source Language Message
The Deaf Interpreters described the process of leaving source language form behind to get at meaning. They described:

"'Processing' - Making the transition from language to language, focused on meaning, not lexicon. Strip away lexical form."

"Knowing what of the message to leave out in order to avoid overloading that may bury the more important information. Such decisions are based on experience, and if mistakes are made they must be admitted to the consumers. Yet, there is also the thought that the entire message must be delivered or it is an ethics violation."

Mental Representation of Target Language

Participants described their consideration of the Deaf consumer's comprehension as well as target language discourse structure in formulating the interpretation. They offered several points:

> *"The interpreter needs to have full picture in mind, not just passing along unprocessed communication: Visualization."*

> *"The Deaf consumer's abilities must be taken into consideration, and the message sequenced and arranged spatially for best comprehension."*

> *"Considering the differences in discourse structure between ASL and English is important – such as 'take the medication twice a day' is more effective if interpreted in ASL as 'take the medication in the morning and evening every day.' Interpreters need to consider the 'diamond shape' of ASL discourse and not impose English discourse structure."*

> *"Chunk 'enough' in the conveyed message. If the consumer is understanding well, one can convey bigger chunks."*

> *"Considering what visual information needs to be added to support comprehension by Deaf-Blind consumers."*

Production

The Deaf Interpreters described some of the methods that they use to support consumer comprehension:

> *"Refer to previously mentioned concepts and connecting them to the current information is effective and supports comprehension."*

> *"Use concrete examples as possible to incrementally clarify dense messages and concepts."*

> *"If the speaker repeats information, use reiterations as opportunity to expand on concepts."*

> *"Continue to repeat, deliver, the interpretation until it is successfully understood."*

Self-Monitoring and Modification of Production

Participants acknowledged that time constraints were a factor in the production decisions that they made. As one Deaf Interpreter put it:

> *"[There is a] need to balance expansion in pursuit of comprehension with consideration of time – yet there is discomfort with 'paring down the message,' or having time considerations interfere with gaining complete comprehension. Having a second interpreter to assist with managing balance of, for example, expansion versus time versus delivering the complete message, would be helpful."*

Consumer Feedback – Comprehension and Need for Intervention

In line with the Deaf Interpreter's "mandate" described above, participants spoke of the measures they take to ensure consumer comprehension, for example:

> *"Check in with the Deaf consumer regularly and make adjustments in communication or approach as necessary."*

> *"If the Deaf Interpreter realizes the Deaf person is not understanding, and not saying so,
> there is a need to intervene (perhaps to provide explanation, additional information, some
> communication advocacy) to help ensure understanding takes place."*

2.3 Roles and Responsibilities

It was observed that many hearing and Deaf consumers do not understand the roles and
responsibilities of Deaf Interpreters, and Deaf Interpreters need to educate people about what they
do. There is a perception that they are specifically to be called in when a Deaf consumer has
limited English proficiency or is "low functioning," but it was stated that they can and should also
be used for the larger Deaf population. It was suggested that reminding consumers that
"Gallaudet uses Deaf Interpreters" could help encourage wider engagement of Deaf Interpreters.
Related issues expressed as significant included:

- At first Deaf consumers are awkward with Deaf Interpreters but once they have experienced
  their use they realize the benefits.

- Hearing interpreters have reservations about working with Deaf Interpreters. Deaf
  Interpreters and hearing interpreters should be a team, especially because it is seen that Deaf
  Interpreters catch more of the aside and incidental comments than hearing interpreters.

- The community is small and the Deaf Interpreter probably has many other roles in the
  community, which can be very confusing to some community members regarding what to
  expect in a specific situation. Keeping role boundaries clear is more of an issue than for most
  hearing interpreters. Deaf Interpreters are responsible for providing that education to
  consumers, and for keeping clear that

  > *"Who we are in the Deaf world and who we are at work needs to be kept separate and
  > distinct."*

- NAD could take the lead and sponsor workshops on the subject – so Deaf people can learn
  how to make a request for a Deaf Interpreter, the advantages and benefits, and how it can
  change their lives.

2.4 Ethics and the Code of Conduct

A perception was expressed by participants that Deaf Interpreters who hold certification tend to
value adherence to the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC)[1] more than those who are not
certified. It appeared to participants that the books that discuss interpreting ethics are clear that
interpreters are not to become personally involved in any situation, offering advice or opinions,
and that interpreters are strictly to transmit information between the parties. It was suggested that
hearing interpreters may work from a different set of ethical principles than Deaf Interpreters, and
that keen insight is needed to ascertain other interpreters' ethical processes.

Views on the Code of Professional Conduct
Three principal views related to the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) became clear through
the dialogue.

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[1] Note: Participants referred to the CPC by its earlier name, "RID Code of Ethics," however, the
current name is used here.

1. **For Deaf Interpreters, the RID Code of Professional Conduct is subordinate to a higher ethic.** There was a belief expressed that for some Deaf Interpreters, strictly following the RID Code of Conduct may result in violating a higher level of ethics – the ethic holding that Deaf people have a right to fully understand and participate in communication, and interpreters are to do whatever is necessary to accomplish that. Additionally, they felt that part of the expertise Deaf Interpreters bring to the field is knowing when to rely on their own inner guidance and go beyond the CPC if necessary. A suggestion was that there are two checkpoints along the way towards reaching the goal for Deaf Interpreters: 1) do no harm to Deaf consumers, and 2) every option to provide equal communication access is exhausted.

   It was acknowledged that some situations the same factors that contributed to a Deaf Interpreter's specialized knowledge and skill can create complex challenges to that interpreter as a person. For example, if the Deaf Interpreter is of the same culture as the Deaf person who is from another country, and recognizes the hearing interpreter is struggling with a culturally based issue but not asking for clarification, or sees a culturally based misunderstanding occurring, there is tremendous desire to intervene. The Deaf Interpreter of the same culture knows and feels the need to "step out of role" and explain something to the Deaf person, or advise the Deaf person of her/his rights, in order to accomplish the goal of the communication event, yet doing so is seen as a violation of the CPC.

   It was proposed that perhaps Deaf Interpreters need to develop their own code of professional conduct. For some there was a strong impression that RID's CPC is unsophisticated, thrown together, and supposed to fit all situations. A perception was expressed that traditional, hearing, interpreters work in the system, make the rules, and give each other feedback about ethics, yet the ethical behavior demanded by the situation ("legal ethics") and "RID ethics" are not the same. In the words of one participant, *"legal ethics supersede RID's."*

2. **CPC is situational and appropriate.** Others perceived that the CPC has been revised and refined to the point of being situational and appropriate for both Deaf Interpreters and hearing interpreters. Confidentiality and respect are paramount.

3. **CPC is a framework.** A third view proposed was that the CPC should be considered an ethical framework, helping to establish limits, yet flexible. Deaf Interpreters should stay within the framework while striving for personal excellence, continuing to develop professionally, yet still have flexibility to do what they need to do (assuring comprehension and participation) beyond what hearing interpreters do.

It was also expressed that veteran Deaf Interpreters tend to be the most flexible in their interpretation and application of the CPC, versus newer, formally trained, Deaf Interpreters who tend to follow the CPC more rigidly.

Views on Advocacy
That advocacy is not part of interpreting was a point of agreement, and that if a Deaf consumer needs an advocate the communication needs to be suspended so appropriate steps can be taken to include someone who can provide education and guidance. It was noted that some veteran Deaf Interpreters seem to blur the lines in this area.

Views on Decision-making
There was concern expressed about the level of specific guidance regarding ethical decisions hearing interpreting students appear to need. Deaf ITP instructors among the participants reported repeatedly responding with "it depends" to their questions, yet the hearing interpreting students

seemed to want to be told "The Answer" and they do not understand that "The Right Thing To Do" could be situational.

At the same time, there was concern expressed that the Deaf community is so small that consistency in decision-making is imperative. If an interpreter does something one way one time and a different way another with the same Deaf person, or with different people who talk to each other about interpreters, the reasoning must be made clear to all.

Deaf Interpreters noted there seems to be an inequity in what is permissible for spoken language interpreters versus sign language interpreters. Interpreters working in other languages have been observed requesting permission from the judge to hold up the proceedings in order to expand on concepts they were trying to convey, yet hearing interpreters said such intervention was not permitted. The experience was shared that when a Deaf Interpreter follows his or her own guidance and asks permission, they were perceived as having an attitude problem or wanting to take over.

3. Formal Preparation of Deaf Interpreters

Focus group participants stated their belief that current opportunities for formal preparation of Deaf Interpreters were insufficient. Deaf people wanting to become Deaf Interpreters have been creating their own training processes and "successful training" is measured by customer satisfaction. It takes assertiveness to identify needed training opportunities, workshops, classes, and reading material. Some Deaf Interpreters have gone on to, for example, become certified, earn BA degrees, and participate in other continuing education and in-service training post-certification. Participants observed that volunteer interpreting is one way to hone skills, and consumers are less critical or judgmental of the work of volunteers. Experience of volunteering might lead to a decision to make it a career.

3.1 Desire for a Professional Community for Deaf Interpreters

There appeared to be consensus that there is an urgent need for Deaf Interpreters to have a forum within which they can engage in mutual exploration of their practice and mentoring. Especially in the absence of dependable professional development, it is important to be able to discuss interpreting experiences, and trials and errors, with other Deaf Interpreters, and learn from each other in a confidential setting.

3.2 Absence of Deaf Interpreter Preparation in Traditional Programs

Traditional Interpreter Preparation Programs (IPPs) were seen as not including curriculum and instruction related to the specialized role(s) Deaf Interpreters play in the communication/interpreting process. There is no vision, formal training, or practicum opportunity to support Deaf Interpreters and no program designed for Deaf Interpreter students to dig deeply into the aspect of the field they serve.

- There is no Deaf peer group in the IPPs, so while the programs may be friendly and inviting, there is insufficient peer group mental stimulation for Deaf students.

- Acknowledgment was given to the challenge to IPPs in that without enough Deaf students, it is financially not feasible to offer classes related to Deaf Interpreting. Yet the experience expressed by participants who have been in traditional courses with hearing students, or observed those who were, is that Deaf students become language models for the less ASL

fluent students. They have no access to classes specifically related to their needs and do not have appropriate opportunity to develop their interpreting skills.

- There is a need for Deaf Interpreters to train Deaf Interpreters. Veteran hearing interpreters, in an attempt to have their graduates do well, were seen as being directive in how interpreting is to occur. Deaf Interpreter students are prevented from making developmental errors made by hearing interpreters in the past, yet that deprives them of valuable opportunities to learning through personal experience.

3.3 Alternative Educational Opportunities

Educational opportunities outside of traditional, formal, interpreter education programs were seen as useful, and additional thoughts covered a range of gaps and possibilities. Participants suggested that:

- Workshops meet some of the need, yet at interpreting workshops Deaf Interpreters can feel spotlighted as hearing interpreters so carefully watched them and use them as language models. If more Deaf people were involved, it would feel more collegial.

- Personal motivation makes a difference. One individual reported being so motivated by the desire to be a CDI that she completed the training requirements, found a legal mentor, and has continued to team with that person ever since.

- There is a strong expectation that experienced Deaf Interpreters should train new people, including the introductory conversations about the field, discussion of actual requirements and expectations, and what it really means to be a Deaf Interpreter.

- Videophone technology makes remote mentoring viable. Deaf Interpreters from across the country can still gain access to the specialized Deaf Interpreter knowledge and experience from Deaf mentors, and reliance on hearing interpreters for training and mentoring can be reduced.

There was a need/wish expressed for a centrally located CDI training program . . . yet the reality of knowing how difficult it is for people to give up their lives and move to go to school for a year or two probably precludes it. Establishing Deaf Interpreter programs around the country would be more practical.

3.4 RID Certification Written Exam Issues

While there was a belief expressed that certification is important, it was reported that there is much negative communication in the emerging community of practice that interpreting certification not worth pursuing. A major disincentive is that the costs of preparation for the exams, travel to the exams and to workshops offering CEUS, and various fees are disproportionately high for Deaf Interpreters because of their limited opportunities for work and earnings.

For those who do pursue certification, the need for a study group for Deaf Interpreters preparing for the exam was expressed. They are seen as having issues and questions beyond typical study groups.

4. Employment Issues

4.1 Limited Opportunities

It was noted that few Deaf Interpreters are interpreting full-time. Deaf consumers are seen as becoming more accepting of Deaf Interpreters in many area, but many places that it was thought should have them do not (police stations, lawyer's offices, courts, etc.). It was reported that highly motivated Deaf Interpreters must move to get work. Two primary issues appear to be:

• When hiring interpreters, the default is to hire the familiar, which is hearing interpreters.

• Hiring a Deaf Interpreter seems to be redundant to many hiring entities.

It was suggested that even if people would like to hire Deaf Interpreters the decision to not hire is often strictly financial, as it is seen as an additional cost. The hiring person or entity appears willing to settle for substandard communication from insufficiently skilled interpreters, or even a weak-signing employee acting as an interpreter. Regarding the second point above, participants stressed that often it is more cost effective to use a Deaf Interpreter, as that more likely assures high quality comprehension and participation by the Deaf consumer, allowing the needed communication exchange to be completed in one session. If the hearing interpreter is having a difficult time meeting the needs of the Deaf consumer several sessions might be necessary.

Strategies for Expansion

Several ideas for expanding the employment opportunities of Deaf Interpreters were offered:

• Interpreting agencies can help educate consumers understand the purpose of Deaf Interpreters and what they add to effective communication for Deaf clients, creating job opportunities for Deaf Interpreters.

• Once Deaf consumers are empowered to request Deaf Interpreters to work in tandem with hearing interpreters, market expansion is anticipated and opportunities increased.

• People hiring, or assigning, interpreters need to consider if the job can be filled by Deaf Interpreters. For example, Deaf Interpreters should definitely be used in Deaf-Blind interpreting, yet hearing interpreters are sent. The situation is seen as "... an issue of empowerment." As long as hearing interpreters make the decisions about when Deaf Interpreters are sent, the situation will remain static.

• Deaf Interpreters can work in well-established areas such as Deaf-Blind, legal, and medical interpreting.

• Hearing interpreters need to look at how their decisions contribute to the situation. Deaf Interpreters cannot get enough work to make a living, yet hearing interpreters take regular interpreting work and then take VRS work at night and on weekends to make extra money for things like vacations. RID wants to discuss how hearing and Deaf Interpreters can work together but the immediate concern for Deaf Interpreters is getting work at all.

• With the knowledge and skills they have, Deaf Interpreters can do more than just interpreting, such as providing language consultation and translation.

- Mentorship can help expand the opportunities for Deaf Interpreters. They have in-depth knowledge and ability to discuss Deaf language and communication modes, interpreting, and terminology. Mentoring is being used far more in ITPs because of the gap between skills at graduation and those needed for RID certification. VRS and the Deaf center are also setting up mentorship programs. Deaf Interpreters can nicely fill the need for mentorship.

4.2 Compensation

There appeared to be consensus among participants that compensation for Deaf Interpreters is poor, and many factors are involved. Participants expressed thoughts such as:

- Deaf Interpreters have so little opportunity for work they earn a fraction of what hearing interpreters do (which compounds the challenge to obtaining useful formal credentialing, both related to education and certification in that Deaf Interpreters must pay the same amount for tuition, workshop registrations fees, RID test preparation, and certification fees as hearing interpreters).

- A suggestion for addressing the inequities was to restate the contribution made by Deaf Interpreters by identifying them as "language specialists." Deaf Interpreters often catch communications, nuance, and meaning beyond what hearing interpreters can, especially in asides. They are not just interpreters. Essentially, they help hearing interpreters do their job. Using the "language specialist" terminology would help policy-makers understand the nature of what Deaf Interpreters do, and enable them to elevate the professional status and pay levels.

- Considering the depth provided by their formative experiences with the language and communication processes, the addition of professional interpreting education, and the specialized comprehension and language contribution Deaf Interpreters can make, it would appear that those who do assemble professional credentials should be eligible for an even higher pay scale than hearing interpreters.

4.3 Working Relationships with Hearing Interpreters

Perceptions of Deaf Interpreters' qualification and status relative to hearing interpreters appear to be mixed. Generally, it was observed that hearing interpreters have more experience and credentials, so have more formal status, and interpreters who have years of experience also tend to be more set in how they approach the work and assume more authority. Such interpreters may put an uncertified Deaf Interpreter on the spot by challenging her/his credentials, leaving the Deaf Interpreter having to defend expertise and methods that may have been developed in ways different from credentialed hearing interpreters. Much of the discussion about this relationship appears to deal with thoughts about hearing interpreters' perceptions and attitudes, such as the following:

- The Deaf Interpreter holds the leadership role on the interpreting team because of the specialized knowledge and skills s/he brings to the effort, and because the Deaf Interpreter is the one directly engaged in ensuring the Deaf consumer's comprehension and participation in the communication event.

- If an interpreting agency has assigned a Deaf Interpreter to a job after interpreting skills screening, hearing interpreters should accept that the Deaf Interpreter has appropriate skills and welcome them as team members.

- Hearing interpreters need to become more conscious about their own thinking regarding Deaf Interpreters and what they can do. (An example was given from a mental health interpreting workshop in which everyone agreed that consideration of appropriate use of language to meet the needs of the Deaf client was extremely important, and the hearing interpreter participants shared their experiences in the setting, yet the use of Deaf Interpreters was never mentioned, and when the topic of teaming with a Deaf Interpreter was raised many appeared resistant to discussing it.)

- To help hearing interpreters know how to play a part in supporting the use of Deaf/hearing interpreting teams, they need to be educated to know how to request a Deaf Interpreter team member; and how to how to respond when told by the hiring organization they cannot afford the extra interpreter. Otherwise, the Deaf Interpreter is not hired, disregarding quality of outcome.

- The Deaf Interpreter has a challenging role in that s/he is ultimately responsible and accountable for the message conveyed to the Deaf consumer, so must act with that in mind, making sure accuracy and comprehension is attained at every step.

- To create a supportive interpreting team, and avoid appearing to be taking over, it is suggested that Deaf Interpreters train hearing interpreter team members regarding how both interpreters can fulfill their obligation, and establish protocols for the process, including stopping communication if necessary to gain personal comprehension before continuing, and how they will correct each others' errors.

- With VRS creating such a demand for interpreters, hearing interpreters, who have so many options for work, could support Deaf Interpreters by limiting the amount of interpreting work they take, and be conscious of not taking work Deaf Interpreters should be hired to do.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Six focus groups of Deaf Interpreters from around the country, including one multicultural/diverse group, have provided a glimpse of their personal and professional development, current practices, perceptions, concerns and ideas regarding the emerging practice of Deaf Interpreting. The groups were facilitated by NCIEC Work-team members, videotaped, discussions transcribed and analyzed, and the results synthesized in this initial report. Their experiences provide the most complete picture we have to date on Deaf Interpreting practice.

In closing, a review of the Deaf Interpreter focus group findings leads to several recommendations for future study and action:

1. Analyze the multi-cultural focus group's responses and process as a distinct group. Their information has been presented in the aggregate, and examining it on its own would be valuable.

2. Clarify the role and responsibilities of Deaf Interpreters in the interpreting process in various situations.

3. Clarify the relationship between the process of interpreting the message and the intention(s) of the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) tenet 2.5 related to "providing counsel, advice, or personal opinions."

4. Taking the results of #3 into consideration, explore the relationship of the RID CPC and the work done by Deaf Interpreters, and provide education about it to Deaf Interpreters and Deaf Interpreter students.

5. Develop opportunities for creating a community of practice among current Deaf Interpreters, especially for professional dialogue and mentoring, using video technology.

6. Identify qualifications and standards specific to Deaf Interpreters.

7. Identify specific training needs, beyond or different from foundational interpreting curricula, for Deaf Interpreters.

8. Develop appropriate curriculum for specialized Deaf Interpreter training to be incorporated by interpreting Preparation Programs, or as specialized programs.

9. Explore ways to create study groups for Deaf Interpreters preparing to take the RID exam.

10. Explore possibilities for coordinated efforts among interpreting education programs to offer a highly specialized Deaf Interpreter training program in several locations in the USA maximizing the use of technology and resources.

11. Explore ways to educate all consumers of interpreting, and other stakeholders (e.g. hearing interpreters), regarding interpreting role and responsibilities unique to Deaf Interpreters.

12. Encourage purchasers and providers of interpreting services to seek out Deaf Interpreters and/or Deaf Interpreter/hearing interpreter teams, if the interpreting job can be effectively accomplished by such providers, before defaulting to hiring only hearing interpreters. Encourage hearing interpreters to ask for a Deaf Interpreter team member if appropriate.

13. Encourage Deaf and hearing interpreters to seek each other out to develop working relationships, and offer their services as a team, wherever possible.

Appendix: Questions for Focus Group Discussions

This same set of questions was used to stimulate discussion is all the Deaf Interpreting focus groups. Working from transcripts of the videotaped sessions, issues and themes were identified.

General:

1. How did you get into Deaf Interpreting?

2. Talk to me about the status of Deaf Interpreters relative to that of hearing interpreters.

3. What's going on in the team work when the work is really clicking?

4. What makes you a successful Deaf Interpreter?

5. What support do you need from a professional organization?

6. How do you feel about the job market for Deaf Interpreters?

Consumers:

1. How do you decide signing styles to use in your interpreting?

2. For whom do you usually interpret?

Ethics:

1. What does *ethics* mean to you?

2. Explain Deaf and Hearing interpreters' ethical views.

3. How do you handle conflicts?

Interpreting Process:

1. Describe your process of interpreting.

2. While interpreting, what is happening inside you?

3. What do you do when you get stuck while interpreting?

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. Describe your work as a Deaf Interpreter.

    a. typical settings

    b. alone or as a team

    c. conflicts experienced

    d. hired by whom

Interpreting Education:

1. What did you do to prepare for the interpreting profession?

2. What did or do you do to prepare for state or national interpreting certificate?

Professionalism:

1. What does professionalism mean to you?

    a. Team

    b. Business practices

    c. Pay or other

2. What are your needs for support in your interpreting work?

Continuing Education Needs:

1. How do you assess your interpreting work?

2. What do you feel is good about your interpreting skills?

3. What do you feel you need to learn more about?

4. What do you do to get more knowledge and skills?

5. What is your wish list for learning?