

ABORIGINAL INTERPRETER SERVICE

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Are your interpreters trained? How many have training – and what sort is it? How do you choose interpreters?

How can we get some training in how best to work with Aboriginal interpreters?

These are common questions for staff of the Northern Territory Government's Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS), located within the Office of Aboriginal Development. In recognition of the critical need for appropriate training, the AIS is given an annual training budget of \$175,000 for the provision of training for Aboriginal interpreters and Northern Territory Public Sector clients of the Service. For the 2000/01 financial year the Commonwealth has offered an additional one-off allocation of \$250,000 to the AIS for training — in recognition of the huge scope of the task of getting a sufficient pool of interpreters to a standard preferred for complex legal and health-related interpreting within a very short time-frame.

The AIS training program is separate from other training services sponsored by the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority. Existing programs offered by Aboriginal training institutions and other bodies are not adversely affected by the AIS program – and in fact are offered assistance.

Relevant factors in determining training need and designing a program:

Decisions about the sort of training that is required, where, order of priority by language and discipline, etc. have been based on a comprehensive mapping exercise that takes into account the pattern of use / need during the last seven months of AIS's operation, indicators from the 1997 Trial Aboriginal Interpreter Service, feedback from clients and language centres and projections of future usage.

The pressing need for designing and delivering effective training programs for interpreters has been weighted against the need to properly prepare clients of the AIS for working effectively with Aboriginal interpreters, with the former being the priority for the coming year.

In designing an overall approach to the delivery of training we have had to work from a pragmatic base:

1. we are not going to be able to provide training for all interpreters in the first year of operation – so we have to target effectively;
2. to reach and hold onto a reasonable number of students, training has to be innovative, intensive, practically oriented and (mostly) delivered in the communities where interpreters live; and
3. include the active involvement of practicing lawyers and health professionals.

What training programs are planned?

Accreditation Workshops

- two weeks each concluding with formal testing under the auspices of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

Stand Alone NAATI testing

- two days for the test alone.

Working With Interpreters

- three hour modules delivered in a diverse range of workplaces around the Territory so that clients of the Service can utilise interpreters to optimum level.

Two Week Specialisation Workshops (Health and Legal)

- offered either in communities or residential college, depending on numbers and mix of languages.

Assessment of Working Interpreters

- one day assessments of language ability and interpreting skill — including a written report for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Professional Development In-Services

- two day workshops, four times a year for those interpreters already working for the Service.

Linking work with those undertaking the Diploma in Interpreting through Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education.

- Specialisation Workshops that link with Batchelor Institute.

Training of interpreters and clients commenced in September 2000. If you are interested in participating in some of this training contact the author; non-government individuals will be charged a nominal fee for participation.

What will be achieved?

Most interpreters registered with the AIS will, by the end of the 2000/01 year, have received some sort of training or assessment of training needs by an appropriately qualified professional. There will be a larger proportion of accredited interpreters and there will be a substantial number who benefit from completing intensive professional development style courses.

All police stations, hospitals and most health clinics will have had three hour practical training modules offered to staff.

Current statistical profile:

At the end of September 2000 the AIS had 104 registered Aboriginal interpreters, with 26 of these accredited. This number is bolstered, in a practical sense, by the sub-contracting of assignments wherever possible, to the regional Aboriginal language centres. A total of 76 languages are currently catered for and 214 jobs have been completed since the Service commenced in April 2000.

So how DO you choose interpreters?

To be revealed in the next article of this series. Plus, a look at the staff and some interpreters at work.

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