

**Language Access Teleconference/Webinar II****Developing Partnerships to Provide Interpreter Training and Language Referrals****AN OVERVIEW****December 17, 2008*****The Language Interpreter Center: An Alaskan Experience***

*Today's speakers discuss the process of creating the Language Interpreter Center (LIC), located at the Alaska Immigration Justice Project. Prior to its establishment, there were no qualified or certified interpreters in the entire state of Alaska. Since March 2008, the LIC has trained seventy-two interpreter applicants. Brenda Aiken and Robin Bronen will discuss the language and interpreter needs that led to the creation of the LIC, the challenges they faced, and the direction of the center.*

***Forming a Community Legal Interpreter Bank: The Washington DC Experience***

*Today's speakers discuss the development of the Community Legal Interpreter Bank (the Bank) under the direction of the DC Access to Justice Commission and Ayuda. To address the growing language needs of low-income District residents, the DC Access to Justice Commission sought to create the CLIB to assist legal services providers in communicating with LEP residents. The purpose of the Bank is to concentrate the demand for legal interpreters in a centralized location, and to therefore provide legal interpreter services to the community more effectively.*

***Key Questions for Our Speakers***

- *What were the challenges that motivated you to start a language bank?*
- *How much did it cost?*
- *What key partnerships were instrumental to your work?*
- *How do you certify your translators and interpreters?*
- *How do you evaluate the success of your program?*
- *How long did it take?*

**Speakers Part I:**

Robin Bronen  
Executive Director  
Alaska Immigration Justice Project  
907-279-2457

Email: robin.bronen@akimmigrationjustice.org

Brenda Aiken  
Resource Development Officer  
Alaska Court System  
Email: baiken@courts.state.ak.us

### **Challenges to providing language and interpreter services**

- Limited road system and modes of transportation.
- Limited band width poses challenges to implementing a regular telephonic type of interpretive service.
- Inclement weather and/or the costs of air travel.
- High level of dispersed residents outside of Anchorage.
- There are ninety-five different languages in the Anchorage school district alone.

### **Alaska Court System was catalyst**

The Alaska Court System catalyzed the effort to address language issues by convening a summit of decision makers from hospitals, legal services, social services, and local community groups. The summit identified the language and interpreter needs of the state through the following process:

Needs Assessment • The Alaska Court System obtained a technical grant from the State Judicial Institute (SJI) to develop a survey to assess language interpretation needs. The court system identified the stakeholders, entities, and businesses to respond to this survey and those who could work collaboratively to establish it. It was hoped that nonprofits and for-profits would contribute financially to the establishment of the Center.

Survey • The Alaska Court System in collaboration with the University of Alaska Anchorage conducted a survey to identify the top languages requested for interpreter services. A sixty-five percent response rate showed that responding entities were spending up to \$1 million annually for interpretation services. Interpretation services were basically provided by family and friends and bilingual individuals in the community. The majority of respondents also expressed a willingness to support the creation of a statewide language interpreter center.

Business plan • Based on the survey, summit leaders budgeted \$150,000 to open the Language Interpreter Center (LIC) doors at the Alaska Immigration Justice Project. The Alaska Court System also wrote and received a grant that financially supported the Center's first interpreter training program. Since March 2008, the LIC has trained 72 bilingual people, and currently there are 255 applicants of thirty-five different languages. The LIC contracted a language professor, Holly Mikkelson of the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, to conduct English and Spanish training. In addition, other federally certified interpreters in Korean, Russian, Hmong, and Tagalog have conducted interpreter training.

Future Goal • Planning for the spring 2009 interpreter training will focus on the medical profession.

### **Key Questions and Answers**

#### **Who were the monetary stakeholders?**

Our stakeholders included: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services; Alaska Court System; Municipality of Anchorage; Anchorage School District; United Way; Alaska Department of Transportation; ConocoPhillips, the oil company; Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center, the local non-profit health clinic; Alaska Public Defender Agency; the Alaska Office of Public Advocacy, the state office providing legal representation to criminal defendants; the Alaska Department of Transportation, and the Alaska Bar Association. Each of these agencies contributed between \$5,000 and \$60,000 during our first year of operation. These agencies have also agreed to continue their annual contributions for the first several years of the LIC's operations. In addition, the LIC leveraged the financial contributions of these agencies to apply for and receive a \$450,000 award from the Rasmuson Foundation.

#### **How was the survey conducted?**

The survey was conducted through a partnership between the Alaska Court System and the University of Alaska Anchorage. They developed a survey, which asked questions about interpretation needs and whether or not respondents would support a statewide Language Interpreter Center. The Alaska Court System and the University of Alaska Anchorage developed and administered the survey, and summarized it for potential stakeholders.

#### **Are you also training interpreters to work in schools?**

While we are training school district employees to work as interpreters, they have not received specialized training for work with schools. However, training interpreters for school districts is definitely part of the interpreter training program.

#### **Why not create a new organization and why did you decide to use what you had?**

Alaska has a large number of non-profit organizations and we wanted to prevent a diffusion of resources among a large population. We also believed that we would be more efficient building the capacity of the LIC if the LIC was placed within an established organization that already had a lot of credibility within Alaska.

We contracted Holly Mikkelson, a certified Spanish/English interpreter, for the training program. One of our challenges in the past was that training was conducted in English. Holly trained in English only and then worked with Spanish interpreters. We also brought up people to train others in Korean, Hmong, Tagalog, and Russian. We still have ongoing

communication with local universities and are hopeful that our university will eventually offer an interpreter training program as one of its certificate programs.

**Where did you find your interpreters and which participants are interested in training opportunities for bilingual Alaskans? Can they be subsidized and if so, who pays for it?**

The LIC is committed to training interpreters and did not want money to be a barrier to the training program. Interpreters pay no fees for interpreter training because they are subsidized by our stakeholders. Our program manager conducted extensive outreach by visiting restaurants and churches and promoting opportunities for free training.

**What is the pay structure like?**

The pay structure depends on stakeholders, non-profit organizations, and government or private businesses. The interpreters are considered the first tier of three tiers. Survey respondents were paying families and friends \$25-80 per hour, which was problematic. The LIC bases the interpreter rates of pay on their qualifications.

**Was there no other entity offering interpreter training before your program was launched? Were you concerned about stepping on the toes of smaller interpreter training programs, i.e., community colleges?**

There was no training program offered through a community college (because there is no community college in Alaska). There were other training initiatives. The Alaska Court System invited leaders to the table, and each stakeholder chose how they wanted to participate in the creation of the LIC.

**What I noticed between Alaska and DC is that the structure itself is different, and in DC you have the Language Access Act of 2004. Robin, was there anything similar in Alaska you could use as leverage for getting people on board with your program?**

No, there was nothing similar to the DC Language Access Act. Brenda Aiken from the Alaska Court System was instrumental in organizing the multiple Interpreter Summits that facilitated a dialogue between all of the Alaskan organizations that identified interpreters as a critical need. We had been working on this issue for ten years prior to the establishment of the Language Interpreter Center. The Alaska Court System took the lead in organizing the Interpreter Summits because of a recommendation made to the Alaska Supreme Court as part of an Access to Justice Committee. The recommendation identified language interpretation as one of the primary barriers to justice in our state. This recommendation was critical, but it was not a regulation or statute that required people to provide language access, aside from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Although people wanted to comply with Title VI, there was no means financially to do this. In addition, there was no place people could call in order to gain access to an interpreter and know the qualifications of the interpreter. This was the biggest barrier to people meeting the requirements of the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

**Brenda, what is your involvement from the perspective of the Alaska State Courts, and what is your advice for other state court systems?**

We had no difficulty getting people to attend our summits. The time was right and people in various agencies and businesses wanted to address this need. We realized we needed to pool our resources, financial and human, in order for this to happen. We needed to create an entity that would be an expert with language access and interpretation training. If we could be part of developing the infrastructure, standards, and ethics, then we could effectively address interpreter needs in the community. We also joined the Consortium for State Court Interpretation Certification. It was extremely valuable to work with the Consortium and understand the qualifications and testing necessary for interpreters. The collaboration of the LIC and the Consortium was the best investment we ever made in providing access to justice.

**Do you employ in-house trainers for the Language Interpreter Center?**

All of the interpreters are independent contractors. Holly Mikkelson is working with interpreters who we have trained to develop a “train the trainer” model. Until our university assumes the educational task of interpreter training, we hope that once our interpreters earn certifications, they will use their expertise to train other interpreters.

**With regard to Alaska’s language diversity, were there any Mexican or Central American indigenous languages identified in your survey?**

Yes, this has been a huge issue for the immigration legal service component and the work that we do with the Alaska Immigration Justice Project. Alaska has a large Trique community (an indigenous language group in Mexico). We have had great challenges obtaining qualified interpreters for Trique residents in immigration court hearings. Since many were granted asylum, we hope that they will now participate in our language interpreter training program and eventually provide statewide and nationwide service.

**Robin, people may be wondering why there is such language diversity in Alaska, so maybe you could talk about the history of migration to Alaska for a moment.**

I have been working with immigrants and refugees in Alaska since 1994 and there are plenty of job opportunities here. I moved to Alaska twenty years ago in search of job opportunities. It is a beautiful place to live, a little cold and dark in the winter, but a great place to live. Immigrants and refugees from all over the world choose to migrate here for the same reasons. The newest communities to migrate to Alaska are Sudanese and Somalis, who are primarily refugees. Some come directly from the refugee camps in Darfur, but others immigrate to the lower 48 states before coming to Alaska. If they do not like the urban environment they are living in, they immigrate to Alaska.

**Speakers Part II:**

Sunil Mansukhani

Executive Director  
District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission  
[Sunil.Mansukhani@dcaccesstojustice.org](mailto:Sunil.Mansukhani@dcaccesstojustice.org)

Jean Bruggeman  
Director, Community Legal Interpreter Bank  
Ayuda  
[jean@ayuda.com](mailto:jean@ayuda.com)

### **Challenges to providing legal interpreter services**

- Seven percent of population in DC is LEP, according to the 2000 census.
- Lawyers were unaware of where to go for interpreter services. DC has a diverse system of service providers; DC has no major service provider but a group of small service providers. Prior to the establishment of the Bank, legal services providers often relied on friends, family members, or others who were not trained in interpretation.
- Community-based organizations in the health and legal context already had smaller interpreter banks and provided the Bank with advice and assistance.

### **DC Language Access Act and DC Access to Justice Commission**

The District of Columbia was one of the first states in the nation to pass a Language Access Act in 2004. In 2005, the DC Court of Appeals established the DC Access to Justice Commission. The Commission strives to improve the delivery of civil and legal services to low- and moderate-income District residents and to remove other barriers to justice in the system.

### **Community Legal Interpreter Bank**

Needs Assessment • The DC Access to Justice Commission put together an all-day roundtable to address the language needs of LEP residents and the capacity of the legal services network to meet those needs. The Commission invited a variety of stakeholders, including private funders, government officials, and legal services providers who serve the LEP population. They discussed the creation of an interpreter bank to address legal service provider needs. They received \$3.2 million from their local city council, \$295,000 of which was used for the Bank.

Ayuda, a non-profit legal services organization, received the grant in April 2007 to develop the Bank. Ayuda discovered that there was no similar bank around the country. The Bank was launched without a needs assessment survey comparable to Alaska's. However, before planning the creation of the interpreter bank, a strong coalition of community organizations that had been serving the LEP population for years came together as a cohesive force to help planning for the Bank. This group was one of the leading forces behind the passage of the DC Language Access Act.

Structure with Advisory Board • The Bank is led by a Director and Deputy Director at Ayuda, with the support of an active “working advisory board.” The board met monthly and then quarterly to discuss and suggest policies, procedures, and approaches, and to answer questions about implementation.

Goal of the Bank • The Bank aims to increase access to justice for LEP and Deaf community members by making trained legal interpreters available (and affordable) to legal services providers in DC. Interpreters are screened, tested, and provided with specialized training, focused on interpreting within the attorney-client context. In addition, the Bank has established a pay scale based on the professional qualifications of the interpreter, which encourages them to maintain and improve their skill sets over time. Legal service organizations can use the Bank to hire qualified interpreters, rather than relying on families and friends.

Initial development• We began in April 2007, with a \$295,000 annual budget from the DC council. Within the first year, we focused on developing our policies, procedures, and staff; and worked with a consultant to develop an interpreter training curriculum. We also began a Pilot Project with four providers and interpreters in seven languages.

Second Stage• In Phase I of implementation, we had two trainings for interpreters and added one sign language interpreter, as well as a contracted telephonic interpretation service. We currently have ten providers and are adding six more next month. The objective was to start slowly so that we could build a bank of interpreters before becoming overwhelmed by requests from providers.

Train legal service interpreters All interpreters working for the Bank are required to complete a unique 20-hour training that covers the ethics and role of an interpreter working within the attorney-client relationship, an overview of the US legal system and legal terminology, and interpreter skills. The training is co-taught by community and legal interpreters as well as a legal services attorney.

Future Goals • In 2009, the Bank will provide training for legal services providers, to make sure that they understand their legal and ethical duties regarding communication with LEP and Deaf clients, and the best practices in working with professional interpreters. Providers need to understand that interpreters have clear protocol, procedures, and ethics and need to learn how to use interpreters to the best of their abilities. By the end of 2009 the Bank will have provided services to all of the local non-profit civil legal service providers in the District. The Bank is likely to offer a fee-for-service scale, which would open services to private attorneys, government entities, or other entities interested in using interpreters.

**Does the interpreter bank offer services to different sectors of the city, i.e. non-profits, governments, and court?**

Our grant instructed us to provide services to the non-profit legal service providers in the District. In the future we might add a fee-for-service element, which would provide access to other sectors. There are also other interpreter services in the area that have specialized medical and community interpreters.

**Is there training for telephonic interpretation?**

Currently, we are relying on Language Line for our telephonic interpretation. If we have the capacity to provide in-house interpretation in the future, we will use trained interpreters.

**Have either of you, Alaska or DC, pursued state or federal policies regarding standards for interpreters, client rights, etc?**

In DC, the Bank has not focused on any policy initiatives; we focus on getting our services available. We work closely with the DC Language Access Coalition, as being a consultative body for the implementation of the DC Language Access Act. We work with and advise other providers to ensure that the Act is implemented appropriately to provide guidance and support to challenges or problems in implementation.

In Alaska, we have not approached the state legislature to address policy issues. Our stakeholders work internally to change language access policies. Our stakeholders, who are diverse, are in a better position to pressure our state legislatures to address the importance of a statewide language access policy.

**What are the expectations of trained personnel in terms of availability, type of meeting interpretation technique, and skill level for both DC as well as Alaska?**

In DC, all of our interpreters are independent contractors. When we screen and train people, we let them know that most of the assignments are during the day. Assignments average about two hours in length and are mostly attorney-client meetings or preparation for court. We let them know that they have to be generally willing and available to provide these services and that if not, this might not be the right job for them. They also need to attend our training and pass the assessment at the end of training. The expectations are mostly consecutive interpretation with sight translation expected, and generally not simultaneous interpretation. We have some expectations about their language skills and require language skill testing (if they have not done so) in order to join our program.

In Alaska, the Center's interpreters are independent contractors. We have no employed staff members who are language interpreters at LIC. Currently, none of the interpreters in our state has obtained court or federal certification. For the languages we provide, (Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Tagalog, and Russian) the interpreter trainers are providing diagnostic evaluations. The evaluation is an assessment of an interpreter's skill level, and this helps to determine whether a job is appropriate for him/her. We are currently working on having the court certification test administered in Alaska, and hope it will

happen next fall. We will be able to use that test as a more standardized way of assessing an interpreter's skill level.