Workbook 1.5
Person Centred Practice Across Cultures

Working effectively with interpreters

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About National Disability Services
National Disability Services is the peak body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote quality service provision and life opportunities for people with disability. NDS’s Australia-wide membership includes more than 1000 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to state, territory and federal governments.
# Table of Contents

1. **Preface** ..................................................................................................................... 2  
   1.1 How to use this workbook? ....................................................................................... 2  
   1.2 What is this workbook about? ................................................................................... 3  
   1.3 Outcomes: ............................................................................................................... 3  
   1.4 Who is this workbook for? ....................................................................................... 3  
   1.5 How long will it take to complete? ........................................................................... 3  

2. **The Workbook** ........................................................................................................... 4  
   2.1 What is an interpreter? .............................................................................................. 4  
   2.2 Why use a professional interpreter? ......................................................................... 4  
   2.3 Identify the language ............................................................................................... 5  
   2.4 Identifying whether an interpreter is needed .......................................................... 5  
   2.5 Different types of interpreter services ..................................................................... 5  
   2.6 How to book an interpreter ..................................................................................... 6  
   2.7 Bilingual worker, family member or interpreter? .................................................... 7  
   2.8 When a person refuses to use an interpreter ............................................................ 10  
   2.9 Working effectively with an Interpreter ................................................................... 11  
      2.9.1 Before the Interview .......................................................................................... 11  
      2.9.2 Introduction and Set Up ................................................................................... 11  
      2.9.3 Interview Style ............................................................................................... 12  
      2.9.4 During the Interview ..................................................................................... 12  
      2.9.5 Ending the Interview ..................................................................................... 12  
   2.10 Using over-the-phone interpreters ....................................................................... 13  
      2.10.1 When you and the client are in the SAME PLACE: ........................................ 13  
      2.10.2 When you and the client are in DIFFERENT PLACES: ............................... 13  

3. **Conclusion** .................................................................................................................. 14  

4. **Resources** ................................................................................................................... 15  
   4.1 Useful Websites ....................................................................................................... 15
1. Preface

This workbook is part of a series of resources for the disability services sector designed by futures Upfront for NDS with funding provided by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services; Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

1. Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability
   1.1 Empathy – a practice to connect across cultures
   1.2 Active listening – unconditional positive regard across cultures
   1.3 Choice making – cross-cultural differences and what can we learn from them
   1.4 Reflective Practice – why different points of view matter
   1.5 Working effectively with interpreters

2. Organisational Practices – building a culturally responsive organisation
   2.1 Terminology and data – a guide to understanding cultural diversity and disability
   2.2 Making the business case – why diversity is good for business
   2.3 A culturally responsive person centred organisation – key elements
   2.4 Leading towards cultural responsiveness – a practical guide for managers, team leaders and coaches
   2.5 Building a diverse workforce – practical strategies
   2.6 Valuing bilingual workers – strategies to recruit, train and retain

3. Community Engagement – working alongside diverse communities
   3.1 1 Community @ a time – culturally responsive community engagement principles and elements
   3.2 Making Links – networking with CALD Communities
   3.3 Cross-cultural story-based marketing – 1 story @a time

This workbook is part of “Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability” series.

1.1 How to use this workbook?

This workbook can be used in many different ways, including:
- As self-paced learning program by an individual
- As a self-paced learning program for a group
Workbook 1.5: Working effectively with interpreters

- As part of formal training organised by an organisation
- As part of coaching and mentoring

This workbook includes exercises and opportunities for reflections (when working by yourself) or discussions (when working with others).

There is plenty of room in your workbook to take notes and make comments.

1.2 What is this workbook about?

This workbook is about giving you the knowledge, skills and confidence using professional interpreters to communicate effectively with persons who do not speak English well or not at all.

1.3 Outcomes:

By the end of this workbook you will:

- Understand the benefits of using professional interpreters
- Understand how to use professional interpreters effectively
- Know in which situations to use a bilingual worker instead of a professional interpreter
- Know what to do if a person refuses to use an interpreter
- Book an over-the-phone or face-to-face interpreter
- Know how to access different interpreter services.

1.4 Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for anyone who wants to learn how to communicate effectively using an interpreter.

1.5 How long will it take to complete?

This workbook should take about 40 minutes to complete. If you watch the videos it might take you about 60 minutes.
2. **The Workbook**

2.1 **What is an interpreter?**

An interpreter is someone who can convey an oral message or statement from one language into another.¹

2.2 **Why use a professional interpreter?**

Professional interpreters are accredited by NAATI (The National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters) and are bound by a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct.

Professional Interpreters are:

- **accurate:** they are trained to relay a message and its meaning accurately from one language to another

- **confidential:** they are bound by a code of conduct and code of ethics which requires all professional interpreters to maintain confidentiality and act ethically at all times

- **impartial:** unlike a family member or friend, a professional interpreter does not take sides, and does not allow their personal judgements or feelings affect the interpretation.

As with all people you support, you have a **duty of care** to ensure people have access to information and can make informed choices and decisions. Communicating effectively using an interpreter will facilitate this for people with little or no English language skills.

**Reflection**

How often do you use professional interpreters to communicate with the people you support?

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If you have never used an interpreter, why not? ........................................................................

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1 Please note that this workbook is in relation to spoken, verbal languages and the use of interpreters in that context. If you want to learn how to use Auslan (or Sign) interpreters please check out NABS or [http://www.nabs.org.au/how-to-work-with-an-interpreter.html](http://www.nabs.org.au/how-to-work-with-an-interpreter.html)
Reflect back to the last time you used a professional interpreter:

What worked well? .................................................................
What didn’t work well? ...........................................................
What might you differently next time? ....................................

2.3 Identify the language

Multicultural NSW’s Language Services provides Interpreter Cards that can help you and the people you support to identify the language being spoken. You can contact Multicultural NSW on: 1300 651 500.

2.4 Identifying whether an interpreter is needed

Identifying whether an interpreter is needed is important in ensuring effective communication between people. If you are unsure whether an interpreter is needed, try the following:

- Ask the person with whom you are speaking to repeat a message that you have just given in their own words
- Ask the person a question that requires them to provide a long response; avoid questions that can be answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ or asking familiar questions such as ‘Where do you live?’
- If you think that an interpreter is required, discuss this with person before you make an arrangement for an interpreter.

Most importantly, if you feel that you cannot communicate with the person then you will need an interpreter.

2.5 Different types of interpreter services

There are basically two types of interpreting services: on-site and telephone interpreting.

- On-site interpreting means that an interpreter comes to where the meeting is being held. In general, on-site interpreters are used for complex and long matters
- Telephone interpreting is interpreting that is provided over the phone and is especially useful for emergencies.
Both types of interpreting services have advantages and disadvantages. If money is a concern, telephone interpreting generally (but not always) works out cheaper.

### 2.6 How to book an interpreter

A range of government and private agencies provide interpreting services. Government interpreter services only employ interpreters that have been accredited by the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). If you need an interpreter, you have the following options:

- **TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service):** 13 14 50  

- **Language Services, Multicultural NSW:** 1300 651 500  

- **Health Care Interpreter Service** [NB for health care related issues only and only a health services provider can organise this; on-site only]

- A list of NAATI accredited and recognised interpreters and translators is available on the NAATI website at [https://www.naati.com.au/](https://www.naati.com.au/)

- There are also a number of private interpreting agencies that can be accessed: put ‘interpreter services’ into your web browser to use your favourite search engine

- **Auslan Interpreters:** Sign Language Communications (SLC) is the longest running Auslan/English interpreting service in Australia, with years of experience in interpreting and working with the Deaf Community. Contact the **Deaf Society of NSW:** (02) 8833 3611  

- **NABS is the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service.** NABS is funded by the Australian Government to provide interpreters FREE of charge to people who use sign language to communicate and would like to book an interpreter for private health care appointments. Phone: 1800 24 69 45.  
  Email: bookings@nabs.org.au  
2.7 Bilingual worker, family member or interpreter?

The following decision-making trees are a modification of similar trees developed by the Victorian Department of Human Services in 2005. The aim is to assist organisations in the development of a language policy and in the decision-making processes of front line staff.

The individual has difficulty speaking or understanding English

Is it a simple matter (e.g. organising an appointment)?

Yes

Contact Bilingual Worker for telephone or face-to-face communication

No

The matter is lengthy, complex, technical or legal

Yes

Contact an accredited interpreter for telephone or face-to-face communication

No

If a Bilingual Worker is not available

Does a family member or friend who speaks English well and who speaks the same language accompany the individual?

Yes

Ask family member to assist

No

Contact an accredited interpreter
Workbook Exercise

In this section you will learn why accredited, professional interpreters are critical in a job capacity assessment and how the lack of training and impartiality may negatively affect the assessment.

Case study 1

Rachel has been referred to your service for support planning. You agree to meet her at her house. When you arrive you realise she does not speak English well, but her husband is there and has offered to interpret for her.

What are the benefits for her using her husband as the interpreter? .................................................................
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What are the benefits for you? ................................................................................................................................
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What are the potential dangers/ risks? ..................................................................................................................
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What can you /should you do? ................................................................................................................................
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Case study 2:
Sam, speaks Spanish. He knows your colleague Violetta, who also speaks Spanish. He asks for Violetta to do the assessment or at least be his interpreter.

What are the benefits for Violetta to do the assessment/act as the interpreter? .................
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What are the benefits for you?..........................................................................................
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What are the potential dangers/risks? ..........................................................................
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What can you/should you do? .........................................................................................
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2.8 When a person refuses to use an interpreter

People may sometimes refuse to use an interpreter. This could be because of concerns about confidentiality and privacy, particularly in smaller ethnic communities. It might also reflect a person’s concern about the gender or religion/ethnic background of an interpreter. What you can do in these cases will depend on a range of factors. The decision tree below may help you determine what steps to take.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can the individual speak some English?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to explore with the individual the reason for their refusal to use an interpreter. Explain to the client the advantages of using a professional interpreter, and the disadvantages of not using one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to explore with the individual the reason for their refusal to use a professional interpreter, using a bilingual staff member or a telephone interpreter. If these options are unacceptable to the individual, use a family member or friend of the individual to interpret. Do NOT use a child or any person under 18 years of age to interpret.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can the individual’s concerns be addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact an accredited interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If appropriate, continue the interview without an interpreter. If necessary, use a family member or friend of the client to interpret. Do NOT use a child or any person under 18 years of age to interpret. Record the reason for continuing the interview in the client’s file.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.9 Working effectively with an Interpreter

Following are some ‘Handy Hints’ and practices we have found useful over time when working with interpreters:

2.9.1 Before the Interview

- Establish whether the client knows the interpreter has been arranged and if s/he refuses that interpreter book another one
- Allow for extra time in case someone comes late or the session is longer than expected (it almost always is)
- Arrange the seating to allow easy communication: sit facing the person you are communicating with and the interpreter to the side and slightly behind (seating in a triangular pattern works best)
- Brief the interpreter: provide an overview of the purpose of the interview and check any language, terms or concepts that may be difficult to interpret or may have negative/different connotations.
- Ask the interpreter for any cultural factors that might affect the interview but remember that interpreters are there for their language expertise not their cultural expertise. Be aware of gender, class, disability and other issues such as political, religious, or ethnic that may impact the interview. Seek the person’s permission if you need to obtain additional cultural information from the interpreter during an interview.
- Make sure the interpreter booked has the relevant specialist skills if required (such as court interpreters for legal matters, etc.)
- Establish the process and the objective of the session.
- Establish whether simultaneous (interpreting while speaking) or consecutive (one language is spoken and then interpreted) interpreting should be used
- Always address the client, for example: ”How are you feeling?” Do not say to the interpreter:” Ask him/her how she is feeling?”
- Be aware it may take more or fewer words than you have used to convey the message in another language
- Arrange for water and other conveniences to assist the interpreter and the person.

2.9.2 Introduction and Set Up

- Introduce yourself and the interpreter.
- Explain your role and that of the interpreter.
- Stress that you and the interpreter are bound by codes of ethics to maintain the confidentiality of the interview.
Explain the purpose of the interview and how it will proceed.

2.9.3 Interview Style
- Speak a little more slowly than your normal speaking speed.
- Speaking more loudly doesn’t help.
- Use plain English where possible.
- If consecutive interpreting is used, pause after 2 or 3 sentences to let the interpreter work.
- Stop speaking when the interpreter signals by raising their hand or starting to interpret.
- Summarise periodically when complex issues are involved.
- If the person does not understand, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter’s) to explain more simply.
- Seek the person’s permission if you need to obtain cultural information from the interpreter.
- Avoid long discussions with the interpreter. If you need to speak to the interpreter, the interpreter should interpret the nature of that conversation.

2.9.4 During the Interview
- Sit facing the person.
- Look at the person and maintain awareness of body language. Avoid looking at the interpreter unless you are directly addressing them.
- Speak directly to the person as you would with an English speaker.
- Always use the first person eg. “How are you feeling?” Not (to the interpreter) “Ask her how s/he is feeling?”
- Don’t try to save time by asking the interpreter to summarise.
- Be aware that it may take more or fewer words than you’ve spoken to convey the message.
- Don’t let the interpreter’s presence change your role in the interview. It is not the interpreter’s role to conduct the interview. Remember you are responsible for the success of the interview.

2.9.5 Ending the Interview
- Check that the person has understood the key messages of the session.
- Ask for any questions.
- Thank both the person and the interpreter. Say good-bye formally.
- Debrief the interpreter if needed.
2.10 Using over-the-phone interpreters

Telephone interpreting can be done with both parties at one location or at different locations. When using interpreters over-the-phone refer to the ‘Handy Hints’ outlined above and also consider the following points:

2.10.1 When you and the client are in the SAME PLACE:

- Call the TIS on (131 450) and the operator will connect you to an interpreter in the language you need. You will have to provide your Client Agency ID Number.
- Where possible use a phone with a speaker.
- Be sure that the interpreter can hear clearly.
- Pause after each sentence, so the participants do not talk over each other or cut each other off.

2.10.2 When you and the client are in DIFFERENT PLACES:

- Call TIS and ask the officer to contact an interpreter in the preferred language. They will then call the person with whom you want to speak to in the way outlined above.
- Keep control of the interview, if the person and interpreter start talking to each other, ask the interpreter to interpret what is being said.
- Regularly check for understanding: ask the person to repeat what has been said in their own words.

Videos

There are many videos available on line that can assist you further in using interpreter effectively. Here are two you might find useful:

- How to use Interpreters Effectively
- Interpreter Training (Parts 1 and 2)
3. **Conclusion**

The issues identified above will assist you in working most effectively with an interpreter. But remember, the quality of the communication between you and the people you support who may not speak English well is dependent on your skills in communicating cross-culturally.

To learn more about working cross-culturally, have a look at our workbooks, especially those in the “Individual Practices – working with people from CALD backgrounds with disability” series.

**Reflection**

List five things you will do differently the next time you use an interpreter.

1. ...........................................................................................................................................
2. ...........................................................................................................................................
3. ...........................................................................................................................................
4. ...........................................................................................................................................
5. ...........................................................................................................................................
4. **Resources**

4.1 **Useful Websites**

- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)


