

Guidelines for Service Providers working with Sussex Interpreting Services and SIS Freelance Interpreters

Interpreting is:

‘The accurate oral transmission of meaning from one language to another, which is easily understood by the listener’

Working effectively with interpreters requires some thought and planning. Service providers who work regularly with interpreters may have formulated their own preferred way of working but, more often than not, this is something that people do not think through. They are surprised to discover that some preliminary preparation is useful and that it can be quite a revelation considering the dynamics of the three-way relationship and examining each participant’s perspective.

The following guidelines are not a substitute for proper training, but a useful reference. If you are interested in receiving training, please contact info@sussexinterpreting.org.uk

The Interpreter’s Role

The main aim of the community interpreter is to assist service users from black and minority ethnic communities to get the best possible service from the service agency. The starting point for this is good communication between the service user and the service provider. To ensure this community interpreters working with Sussex Interpreting Services (SIS) receive accredited training. The training addresses interpreting techniques, linguistic accuracy, role responsibilities and boundaries, confidentiality, impartiality, providing factual cultural information and problem-solving techniques. The training enables community interpreters to exercise professional judgement and to transmit information quickly, accurately and in a meaningful manner from the community language to English and vice versa (consecutive liaison interpreting).

Community interpreters are more than just linguists. It is necessary for people who work with interpreters to appreciate the demands made upon the interpreter, as well as making sure that they use the interpreter’s knowledge of background and culture to create a better relationship with their service users. By consciously developing a method of working with interpreters many of the difficulties of communicating through a third party can be overcome.

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Completing the Booking Form

Please give **three working days' notice** whenever possible. This increases the chances of getting a community interpreter, allows preparation for the interview e.g. researching specialised vocabulary and enables SIS to meet emergency interpreting need.

When completing a [SIS Booking Form](#), please consider and indicate:

1. Whether you have allowed sufficient time for the appointment. Normally you need to allow twice as long for an appointment where an interpreter is used.
2. How long the session is likely to run.
3. The language you require. Information concerning dialect and the service user country of origin are helpful in matching service user and community interpreter.
4. Possible political, religious or cultural differences that might affect your request for a community interpreter. Many asylum seekers, for instance, will have just arrived from traumatic situations and may find it very uncomfortable to be talking through someone who represents the opposing faction. In some countries religion can be a strong defining factor of cultural identity and political allegiance. On the other hand, people who share a language do not necessarily share a culture or the same vocabulary for institutions, values and concepts. For example, an asylum seeker from Zaire and an interpreter from France may share a common language but little else.
5. Whether an age gap between interpreter and service user might create discomfort. Particularly where sensitive information is being disclosed, a discrepancy in life experience between interpreter and service user can cause tension and embarrassment, especially in cultures where respect for elders is emphasised. Although you should be sensitive to this as a potential problem area, if interpreters are well trained and professional they should be able to overcome any initial difficulties caused by an age/experience gap.
6. The nature of the interview.
7. Your organisation and the role you play in it.
8. Service user name as clearly and fully as possible. Where the service user has an NHS number, please indicate this on the Booking Form.
9. Please be aware of false assumptions you may make about the service user. Stereotyping is misleading and discriminatory.

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Interpreting Practice

Please note that interpreters should never be alone with the service user and if you are planning a home visit, please meet the interpreter outside the property.

The interpreting assignment ideally has four parts:

1. Pre-session
2. Introductions
3. Interpreting session
4. Ending the interview/Post session

1. Pre-Session

This is particularly important where the service provider has booked the interpreter. The length of the pre-sessions will depend on the time available and the complexity of the case. Pre-sessions are strongly recommended for appointments involving child protection, domestic violence, terminal illness and mental health assessment. Pre-sessions should be used for:

- Presenting factual information about the case. Contextual information improves meaningful interpretation.
- Setting the aim of the present consultation
- Discussion of interpreting methods required
- Discussion of any previous incidents when the professional has not understood cultural implications.
- Discussion of any challenging behaviour that may occur and how the interpreter might respond.

It is important to respect the impartiality of the community interpreter. Be careful not to share your personal perception of the service user as this may affect the impartiality of the community interpreter. Interpreters who are seen by the service user as spokespersons for the service providing agencies are often viewed with mistrust by members of their communities and feel pressure from both sides as a result.

It is impossible to summarise the impact of culture in a few sentences.

Within each language group or country of origin there will be as many variety of beliefs as there is within British culture. Before asking a question about culture, ask yourself if it

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would make sense if asked about British people. It is acceptable to give factual information such as “most people from Bangladesh are Muslims”, “Many refugees from Vietnam are ethnic Chinese” or “Thalassaemia does affect people from Turkey”. However questions such as “Is it common for people to hit their children?”, “Do women shout in labour?” or “Is it a patriarchal society?” cannot be answered without discussing the linguist’s understanding of these issues in relation to British society.

2. Introductions

Allow time for introductions.

If you already know the service user, you should introduce the interpreter. If you are not familiar with the service user, it is easier if the interpreter makes the introduction. S/he can then explain what your role is.

Allow time for the interpreter to establish rapport with the service user and to clarify his/her own role.

If the service user has had a long experience of poor communication with the services, he or she may want to raise many issues now that a channel of communication has been opened up. Try to allow time to explain what your service can do and signpost the service user to other relevant services where appropriate.

The community interpreter will need a few minutes to explain to the service user that they work for SIS, that everything will be interpreted, including exchanges between family members, that information is confidential within SIS and that another interpreter can be made available if the service user would prefer.

3. Interpreting Session

Be aware of seating and acoustic arrangements. The usual arrangement is a triangular formation:



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This allows you to see and clearly communicate with the interpreter and the service user and increases the service user's confidence. Try to avoid interruptions to the session. Hold the interview in an area that allows respect for confidentiality.

Try to speak to the service user, addressing them directly.

This will improve communication between you and the service user. Do not speak to the interpreter, saying "Please tell him/her...", "Please ask him/her ..." as this is time-consuming and reduces directness. At the same time do not discount the interpreter and let him/her decide if s/he feels more comfortable speaking in the first or third person.

Speak in clear sentences with pauses in between for the interpreter to interpret what you are saying to the service user.

Be careful to retain your train of thought and start speaking again as soon as the interpreter has finished interpreting. Continue with this until you finish what you had planned to say. If you speak at length before stopping, the interpreter will be unable to remember exactly what you said.

Avoid jargon, abbreviations or specialist terminology if possible.

Let the interpreter intervene you if s/he needs to.

There could be many reasons for this: s/he may not understand a word or concept, you may be speaking too fast or being culturally insensitive towards the service user. S/he may need to give a long explanation to the service user because the word or term does not exist in their language, or s/he senses the service user does not understand something, or misunderstandings are impeding the interview. Check regularly with the service user that you have been understood.

The service user may not leave pauses for the interpreter when speaking.

In this case the interpreter will summarise what s/he is saying. This may be satisfactory and effective where you are seeking factual information. However, if you are trying to assess an emotional state, you will probably need a more accurate picture of the service user's speech. Explain this to the interpreter and ask him/her to give you a more precise version of what the service user is saying.

Service users will almost certainly relate more closely to interpreters. You will probably find that some of the support-giving aspects of your role will be taken over by the interpreter. This is acceptable but be careful not to resign too much of your responsibility to the interpreter. It is not his/her job to make decisions about services but to assist you to make the right ones.

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Take extra care in explaining procedures, regulations and reasons for asking for certain types of information. People who are unfamiliar with the system may not be clear about the implications of what is being asked or offered. Do not always leave the responsibility for this sort of elaboration to the interpreter.

Feed your perceptions or doubts back to the interpreter and service user.

In this way misunderstandings can be clarified. At this stage you may want to address the interpreter but make sure the service user knows what is being said. It is important to get all the information you need during the interpreting interview.

Be sensitive to the demands and pressures on the interpreter. Interpreting requires enormous concentration, especially liaison interpreting where the interpreter has to switch constantly between two languages. It will be even more demanding if the circumstances are sensitive or stressful. Do not expect interpreters to keep going indefinitely; they may need a break halfway or to continue at another appointment.

4. Ending the interview/Post Session

Check the service user has understood everything. Is there anything else they want to know?

Check decisions taken during the interview. Is everyone clear about follow-up appointments, medication doses etc.? Have you completed a SIS Booking Form for each follow up appointment? **Any discussion with the interpreter should be about communication dynamics rather than about the service user.** Remember to respect the interpreter's impartiality. This is important if s/he is to retain the trust of the service user.

Check with the Community Interpreter any factual cultural information required to make an appropriate assessment.

The interpreter may need support or counselling. It is not necessarily your responsibility as service provider to support an interpreter after a distressing session. However, you may be the only one who is aware of the immediate circumstances and needs. Please feedback to the SIS Co-ordination Team concerning any support needs. SIS will then offer a support session to the community interpreter.

Fill out and sign the interpreter's Assignment Invoice.

Feedback to interpreters and the SIS Co-ordination Team as much as possible. We value our community interpreters and wish to retain and develop their skills. Constructive criticism and feedback assist service evaluation, development and

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improvement. We maintain a comments database and encourage written feedback. If you are dissatisfied with the quality of service please contact the SIS Co-ordination Team in the first instance. SIS has a clear complaints procedure.

N.B.

In some circumstances there may be a pre-session between the service user and interpreter. This often happens in G.P. surgeries where the busy Doctor has no time for a pre-session. The interpreter has a chance to assess the service user's interpreting needs and establish their expectations of the interview, as well as researching contextual background.

The interpreter should introduce himself/herself and the service user to you if you have not already met. Introduce yourself and clarify your role if necessary. Remember institutions and services differ from one country to the next so the service user may not be clear what service is offered by a social worker, health visitor, GP etc.

Information from the service user/Interpreter pre-session is confidential. The interpreter will however encourage the service user to disclose relevant information. You can assist this by checking with the service user whether they would like to add anything.

Thank you for reading these Guidelines.