

WASLI Newsletter 2007 - 12



WASLI is committed to the development of the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide

- IRELAND – THE INTERPRETER ASSOCIATION DISSOLVES
- FINLAND – THE STATE TAKES CONTROL
- NAD (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF) FILES A COMPLAINT (US)

INTRODUCTION

This newsletter includes articles that deal with a number of issues that are all important to sign language interpreters; the profession and the community we serve.

In Ireland, members of IASLI, the professional association, have taken the decision to dissolve the association. I am sure such a decision is not taken lightly. But it just shows that this situation can arise.

In Finland, the responsibility regarding interpreting provision will move from municipal to state control. This move is to improve sign language users right to receive interpreting services. It would seem that the service has varied from municipality to municipality. According to the SVT, the Finnish Interpreter Association, this is likely to have an impact on freelance interpreters and those based at regional centres.

In Florida, US, the NAD has filed a complaint against a hospital and a city authority because of their joint failure to provide a 'qualified' sign language interpreter to ensure 'effective communication' with a Deaf couple. The article describes an all too common situation. The article recounts just how badly this couple were treated when authorities choose to engage and act upon what 'other' (hearing) people had to say (about the Deaf couple), rather than to employ the services of a 'qualified' interpreter so they can engage the Deaf couple directly.

It would be good to see what happens in these 3 cases. Will we see a new professional association emerge in Ireland? Will the Finnish consumer see an improvement in interpreting provision without any detriment to the interpreters? Will the court in Florida rule in favour of the NAD and highlight the discriminatory practice of the authorities?

IRELAND – PRESS RELEASE – IASLI DISSOLVES – 10 Dec 2007

A meeting of IASLI members was held in the Heritage Hotel Portlaoise on Sunday 9th December at 11.00am. The agenda of the meeting was to talk about the future of IASLI, after concerns were aired at our recent AGM.

As a result of this meeting, and after lengthy discussions, IASLI is not constitutionally in a position to hold further meetings and has dissolved. The members present felt it best that the association be wound up, and for interpreters to pursue other avenues in coming together and developing the profession.

All members who have paid their membership categories covering 2008, or who have made advance payments for 2008, will receive a refund of their membership fees. After settlement of all outstanding expenses, IASLI's resources will be distributed to various charities, benevolent funds, etc. Resources will be divided up with each member's "fraction" of resources going where they wish. Other outstanding work will be dealt with before this date.

Those present at the meeting wished to express their sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all members, past and present, for their contributions to IASLI. They also wished to recognise and applaud the huge amount of time, dedication, hard work and vision that previous Committees have given to IASLI, the interpreting profession, interpreters and the wider Deaf community all over Ireland.

Sadness was expressed that the group was closing after such a long journey and after the hard contributions of all present. It was the sincere hope of all those present that the interpreters could again come together in the future to work towards development of the profession, upskilling support and working with the Deaf community.

ENDS – Irish Association of Sign Language Interpreters IASLI

FINLAND – FINLAND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICES TO BE ORGANISED BY THE STATE OF FINLAND – 9 Dec 2007

In Finland, the Sign Language interpreting services will, in the future, be organised by the state: the interpreting services will be provided by the Social Insurance Institution (Kela). Until the present, the interpreting services have been provided by the social services of the Deaf person's home municipality.

According to the Finnish legislation, Sign Language users are provided a minimum of 180 hours (deafblind 360 hours) of interpreting per year, and more hours may be applied for, according to individual needs. Interpreting services related to studies are arranged to the extent needed by the person concerned for coping with his/her studies. In Finland, interpreting services are considered a subjective right, whereby the services are free of charge for the users.

In Finland, there are approximately 5000 deaf Sign Language users, and the Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SVT) lists approximately 450 Sign Language Interpreters.

As the interpreting services will be transferred from the municipal authorities to the state authorities, the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act (380/87) of the Finnish legislation will have to be amended.

The change in the interpreting services is made to improve the Sign Language users' rights to receive interpreting service. As some municipalities are less prosperous than others, the right to use an interpreter has, to a certain extent, depended on the financial status of the Deaf person's home municipality. The price of the interpreting service will not change, and the right to use an interpreter and the actual work of an interpreter will remain unaffected. The change will be carried out during 2009.

For the Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters the change will be a challenge. It will have the greatest impact on those interpreters working on a freelance basis or at regional interpreting centres.

No decisions have been made on the practical arrangements of the future interpreting services. A request of opinion is being drafted, and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) is establishing a working group for the preparatory work.

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AUSTRIA - "EUROPA TO ONE 2"

Yearly big events are organised worldwide at New Year. It is a day when people get together, they want to integrate and celebrate without barriers.

One of these events is our event "EUROPA TO ONE 2" (ETO2) - we want to bring together the deaf, hard-of-hearing, hearing people, as well as CI users and sign language users from all over the world at one spot in Europe and celebrate New Year's Eve together.

You are invited to come and to pass on the news to your friends!

Europe to one 2 offers a 3-day-program:

29.12. White Night -evening event, first gathering - in white!

30.12. Skating on top of the roofs of Vienna - everyone is welcome, ice skate rental is included

31.12. Event EUROPE TO ONE 2 in Vienna

Visit our homepage www.visualbrain.net/eto

NAD Files Complaints Against Palmetto General Hospital and the City of Hialeah

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the Law Offices of Matthew W. Dietz, P.L., filed two complaints in the United States District Court in Miami, Florida, against the City of Hialeah, Florida, and Palmetto General Hospital alleging their failure to provide qualified sign language interpreter services to ensure effective communication with Cynthia Cuevas and Erik Phillips, a deaf couple.

The complaints allege that when Ms. Cuevas was eight-months pregnant, her mother-in-law called the police and reported that the deaf couple was having a verbal dispute and that Ms. Cuevas did not care for herself or her unborn child. Without a sign language interpreter, Hialeah police were unable to communicate effectively with the deaf couple. Instead, the Hialeah police took Ms. Cuevas to Palmetto General Hospital for an involuntary commitment. The psychological evaluation determined that Ms. Cuevas was not a threat to herself or to others.

Two days after her admission to Palmetto General Hospital, Ms. Cuevas gave birth to a healthy baby boy by caesarean section. Five days later, they were discharged from the hospital. The complaint against Palmetto General Hospital alleges that the hospital failed to provide qualified sign language interpreter services to ensure effective communication with the deaf couple during the seven days that Ms. Cuevas was in the hospital.

"Hospitals are required to provide qualified sign language interpreters when necessary to ensure effective communication for appropriate diagnosis, effective treatment, informed consent, quality health care, and discharge information," said Michael Stein, an attorney with the NAD Law and Advocacy Center. According to Matthew Dietz, co-counsel for the deaf couple, "Discrimination against the deaf is systemic in Florida. It is difficult for a person who is deaf to find a doctor or a hospital that is willing to provide a qualified sign language interpreter to ensure effective communication - and it is dangerous for both the medical professional and the

patient who is deaf not to have a clear understanding of the medical procedures.”

The complaint against the City of Hialeah alleges that, when the deaf couple and their baby left the hospital, they visited the mother-in-law who refused to let the deaf couple take their baby home. The mother-in-law later called the police and reported that Ms. Cuevas wanted to harm herself, the baby, and others. Without securing a qualified sign language interpreter to ensure effective communication, the Hialeah police took Ms. Cuevas to another hospital for another involuntarily commitment. This psychological evaluation also determined that Ms. Cuevas was not a threat to herself or to others and she was discharged.

The complaint also alleges that the deaf couple received assistance from the Legal Aid Society of Miami to ask the Hialeah police to help them get their baby back from the mother-in-law. Hialeah police refused to return the baby to the deaf couple without a court order because the Hialeah police had transported Ms. Cuevas to the hospital twice for involuntary commitment. During this encounter between the deaf couple, the Hialeah police, and the mother-in-law, the Hialeah police again did not provide qualified sign language interpreter services to ensure effective communication. About three weeks later, the deaf couple was finally able to obtain a court order and was reunited with their baby.

“As this case shows, not communicating effectively with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing can have disastrous consequences,” said Nancy Bloch, NAD Chief Executive Officer. Bloch also said, “Equal access and effective communication are critical when people need to interact with law enforcement. This case demands remedies to ensure that what happened to this family never happens again.”

The complaints request the United States District Court to declare that the City of Hialeah and Palmetto General Hospital violated the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and award money damages to Ms. Cuevas and Mr. Phillips. In addition, the complaints allege that the Hialeah police department violated the couple’s constitutional rights to due process.

IMPORTANT

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