



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

Australia

Name of Association: Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) Incorporated

The current situation for sign language interpreters in Australia

ASLIA was established in 1991 and is the peak body representing sign language interpreters in Australia; we currently have 310 members. ASLIA is made up of an Executive Committee, a Representative Council and state Branches. There are six state branches: Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. In the last year or so, we have been very excited to see the re-establishment of the South Australian branch and in 2012 that state will host our annual national conference.

Interpreting Accreditation

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredits interpreters and translators in some 57 community languages, including Australian Sign Language (Auslan); however, NAATI does not recognise nor accredit Auslan/English translation. NAATI began awarding Auslan/English Interpreter accreditation in 1983. Since that time, there have been 883¹ individuals accredited: 154 at the Professional Interpreter level; and 879 at the Paraprofessional Interpreter level. However, these numbers do not reflect the actual number of interpreters – people may no longer be working as interpreters, for a range of reasons. At present it is estimated that there are around 350-400 interpreters working across the country.

Interpreter Training Programmes

Australia has tertiary level interpreter-training programmes – both in vocational education and higher education – offered on an annual or biennial basis in six locations around the country. In 2010, a new national Translator & Interpreter Training Package was endorsed and it will come into effect in some institutions from the second half of 2011, but will be implemented across the country from January 2012. As such, we are entering a new era of interpreter training in Australia and it will be interesting to see what impact this new Training Package will have on our profession. The new Training Package has two qualifications

¹ This number reflects the number of individuals, not the number of accreditations; some individuals may have gained both levels of accreditation.



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which will be available through the vocational education sector, the qualifications will be: Diploma of Interpreting or Advanced Diploma of Interpreting. Similar qualifications are already available, but there is variation in course content and curricula across the country. The new Training Package will result in greater consistency of training. The current qualifications available to Auslan/English interpreters through institutions across Australia in vocational and higher education settings are:

Vocational

- Diploma of Interpreting (Auslan/English)
- Advanced Diploma of Interpreting (Auslan/English)

Higher Education

- Postgraduate Diploma in Auslan/English Interpreting
- Master of Translating and Interpreting
- Master of Translation and Interpreting Pedagogy
- Master of Social Science (Translating & Interpreting Studies)

Employment

Auslan/English interpreters work in a diverse range of settings including arts, conferences, courts, education, employment, government, health, legal system, medical, politics, religious, sport and recreation, television, and theatre, among others.

Deaf Interpreters work with Auslan/English interpreters in a range of settings with Deaf people who have a range of complex communication needs, including individuals with an intellectual disability, deafblindness and Deaf migrants.

The current situation for the Deaf community in Australia

Australia has no official language, although English is the most commonly spoken language. Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the language of the Deaf community and has been recognised by the Australian government at policy level (Dawkins, 1991)².

There is no Australian Federal or State legislation that a Deaf person can rely upon which provides an express legal right to an Auslan/English interpreter. On the other hand, the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) prohibits discrimination, including indirect discrimination, on the basis of disability. In short,

² Dawkins, J (1991). *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*. Australian Government Printing Service: Canberra.



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the DDA provides an implied right by requiring “reasonable accommodation” be made so that a Deaf person can access information and communication like other any other person.

Deaf Australia is the national peak consumer organisation for Deaf people. It receives Federal Government secretariat funding to provide information and advice to the Government on Deafness-related issues. Deaf Australia is currently advocating on a range of issues including the establishment of a funded, national Video Relay Service to be added to the (telephone) National Relay Service, among many others.

Important achievements since 2007

ASLIA National Conference and Interpreter Trainers’ Network Symposium

ASLIA holds an annual conference, which attracts between 200-250 delegates from all across Australia, and many other countries. Every year we select a renowned international guest to be our keynote speaker, in 2011 our keynote presenter was Dr Debra Russell, from the WASLI Board. In 2010 we were excited to be able to support members of the WASLI Board to attend our conference in Brisbane. Anyone is welcome attend our conference. You can find out more information at: www.asliaconference.org.au

The Interpreter Trainers’ Network (ITN) is a sub-committee of ASLIA and provides an opportunity for Auslan/English interpreter trainers to network, share resources, discuss developments in our field and support each other. The ITN has a website and hosts an annual Symposium after the ASLIA National Conference. The ITN is open to interpreter trainers from other countries, for more information, visit the ASLIA website: www.aslia.com.au

Support of our Members and our Region

Run by an ASLIA sub-committee, Across the Board is ASLIA’s magazine which is published for our members. It provides professional development information, including academic articles, information about up-coming events, and advice on ethical and other professional issues.

ASLIA has established a Creating Opportunities Fund (COF), whereby we have been able to support interpreters from developing countries to attend our conference and the Interpreter Trainers’ Workshops. In the past we have sponsored interpreters to attend the conference from countries such as: Papua New Guinea, Serbia, India, Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands. ASLIA also plans to broaden the scope of the COF to include sponsoring interpreter trainers



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from Australia to travel to developing countries in our region to work with interpreters in their communities.

Two major challenges

Provision of Service and Ongoing Training

Australia is a large country, roughly the same size as the United States of America, but with a comparatively small population of 22 million people. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' data from the 2006 Census³, the majority of the population is based in cities around the coastline, with approximately 70% of the population living in metropolitan cities. The other 30% of the population live in regional or remote communities. Similarly, the majority of interpreters are based in metropolitan centres, which impacts on providing services to deaf people in regional and remote communities. As such, we have started to see the emergence of video remote interpreting services as pilot projects and in some specific sectors (e.g. business and healthcare). To assist interpreters living in regional and rural centres, ASLIA has established on-line professional development workshops ("Interpret-ED"), so that interpreters across the country are able to access professional development opportunities.

Chronic Shortage of Accredited and Experienced Auslan/English Interpreters

While not unique to Australia, there is an enormous impact on communication access that results from an under-supply and over-demand for Auslan/English interpreters. The situation is further exacerbated by the large distances between major cities and rural and remote communities, often requiring hours of travel to provide interpreting services. Additionally, the proportion of experienced interpreters (i.e., accredited at NAATI Professional Interpreter level) is substantially lower than the number of less-experienced practitioners (i.e., those with NAATI Para-professional Interpreter accreditation), with roughly a 5% to 95% split, respectively.

What ASLIA can offer WASLI in the next 2-4 years

ASLIA has a very close relationship with the Sign Language Interpreters' Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ) and our WASLI Regional Representative; working together we have provided a lot of support to interpreters from developing countries in our region. Australia and New Zealand are in a unique position in the Asia Pacific region as our countries and interpreter Associations

³ <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter3002008>



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have considerable resources and wealth compared to many of our neighbours. Through ASLIA's Creating Opportunities Fund (COF), we have been able and are well-positioned to continue providing support, resources and training opportunities to interpreters in our region. As well as continuing the current COF programme of sponsoring interpreters from developing countries in our region to attend our annual conference, as noted above, ASLIA plans to broaden the scope of the COF to include sponsoring interpreter trainers from Australia to travel to developing countries in our region to work with interpreters in their communities. ASLIA looks forward to continuing to work closely with SLIANZ and WASLI for the on-going benefit of interpreters in developing countries in our region.