



## Pro bono Interpreting Policy

### **Introduction:**

*The profession of Auslan-English interpreting will never be recognised and valued as a truly skilled profession if NAATI accredited Auslan-English Interpreters and Paraprofessionals offer their services free of charge.*

When communicating with members of the majority culture, ASLIA recognises that Deaf and hard of hearing people will experience difficulty with access to information, thus impacting upon equity, without the use of interpreters.

Therefore, to this end NAATI accredited Interpreters and Paraprofessionals should be employed as professionals, who are able to bridge this gap in communication and access to information.

ASLIA believes that the only way to ensure the rights of Deaf people are upheld, and the integrity of the interpreting process be safeguarded, is by using NAATI accredited Interpreters and Paraprofessionals.

NAATI accredited Interpreters and Paraprofessionals should receive appropriate reimbursement for services provided. This is in line with other professional bodies and recognises their relevant qualifications.

Thus ASLIA regards the use of volunteer<sup>1</sup> Interpreters and Paraprofessionals with caution. The reasons for this are complex and include the following:

1. Volunteer interpreting has a direct and detrimental effect on the profession. This may create an environment in which organisations and individuals belonging to the majority culture mistakenly believe that Auslan-English interpreting services are, and should be, free-of-charge.
2. Deaf people may feel an emotional debt to their interpreter, therefore may not achieve access and equality, with the very instrument designed to facilitate such equality. There may be conflict of interest resulting from an uninformed choice of Interpreter or Paraprofessional. This conflict could occur because a NAATI accredited Interpreter or Paraprofessional may be a close friend or relative who may feel compelled to 'protect' the person from uncomfortable questions, withhold potentially embarrassing information or self-incriminating information expressed by the Deaf person. By the same token, the Deaf person may not feel comfortable expressing their feelings freely if an interpreter they know intimately is used.

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteer Definition: 'One who renders a service or takes part in a transaction while having no legal concern or interest'. Source: Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

3. The parties involved in the communication process may have their right to privacy and confidentiality compromised, and this situation leaves the parties involved with no recourse.
4. Volunteer Interpreters or Paraprofessionals may not feel obliged to produce a high standard of competence, appropriate level of skill and professionalism, if they are not appropriately contracted to an assignment.
5. Interpreters and Paraprofessionals may find themselves in an unsafe work environment, which could lead to injury, and in such circumstances as a volunteer, may not have any legal recourse for compensation.
6. Volunteer interpreting has the capacity to erode the hard fought conditions of the interpreting profession, thus downgrading the position of colleagues.
7. Repeated volunteering may lead to an unsustainable expectation by consumers of interpreting services that all interpreters will work without remuneration; this has the potential to cause ill feeling between the parties involved.

**In the main no other professional groups in society  
are compelled to provide gratis work.**

ASLIA does recognise that professional interpreters have a moral and ethical commitment to members of – and to Deaf organisations belonging to – the Australian Deaf Community and the causes which benefit the community. As such, ASLIA believes that there is a case for the provision of some interpreting to be done in a *pro bono*<sup>2</sup> capacity or at a substantially reduced cost, bearing in mind the afore-mentioned considerations.

It is not possible to write a prescriptive list due to the numerous variables which exist, but the following suggestions should be used as a guide, with which to negotiate with the local ASLIA branch, local Deaf Societies or NAATI accredited Interpreters or Paraprofessionals, for interpreting services to be provided pro bono or at a substantially reduced rate.

- (i) Deaf Community cultural events such as:
  - The DA sponsored National Week of Deaf People (NWDP)
  - State organised assignments
  - Fund raising activities
- (ii) Emergencies, where the interpreter would act as any citizen would, until an appropriately booked interpreter arrives.
- (iii) Special occasions which are informal gatherings, where the interpreter has the ability to be an individual, with the ability to enjoy any social interactions as an individual, and is not be expected to act as an interpreter.

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<sup>2</sup> Pro bono Definition: 'being, involving, or doing professional and especially legal work donated especially for the public good'. Source: Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

- (iv) Personal events and situations such as:
  - Tupperware parties
  - Personal parties

The value of in-kind assistance to small, unfunded voluntary community organisations is underestimated. In-kind assistance could include, but is not limited to, the following suggestions and examples:

- (i) Free-of-charge access to library facilities, which could include Internet access and research resources
- (ii) The provision of Conference facilities at a reduced rate
- (iii) Donations made of superseded equipment
- (iv) Regular access to rooms for professional development and meetings
- (v) Kindred organisations such as AUSIT and DA jointly-run professional development sessions with ASLIA
- (vi) ASLIA to provide the interpreting and AUSIT to cover the cost of hiring facilities

Unfunded, small, community, voluntary organisations are encouraged to make contact with their local ASLIA branch and/or local state Deaf Society to negotiate for the provision of in-kind payment or assistance with Auslan-English interpreting services. Please note that this does not include large organisations which are funded and have the ability to procure funding.