

Radio Announcer (RA)

Julie Judd (JJ)

RA: And it's so commonplace now when you see emergency broadcasts or important information from officials being broadcast on television that you will find someone who is communicating through sign language, through Auslan. And certainly, over the last couple of months during the emergency briefings on your tv with bushfires that has been staple. So last week when the Northern Territory had its own emergency briefing. There was a chance that a cyclone was going to hit the Territory so emergency services got together and started communicating vital information to audiences. You may have noticed something missing. There was no sign language interpreter relaying important information for people who are deaf. It is a question that a lot of people have come to the ABC in saying "Hey, where is the Auslan interpreter?". The answer is pretty simple. To tell us more, Julie Judd is Chair of the Australian Sign Language Interpreter's Association. Good morning Julie. Why didn't the Northern Territory have an Auslan interpreter?

JJ: Well hi. Basically there isn't a qualified – qualified Certified Interpreter – in the Northern Territory. We just don't have one there. That's our problem.

RA: Has that always been the case? I'm sure I've seen emergency briefings with Auslan interpreters in the past.

JJ: Yes we did have one full-time interpreter who was employed by the National Auslan Booking Service which is a federally funded service that used to provide medical interpreters throughout the country. But they also provided a full-time interpreter to work across the Northern Territory in different domains. She resigned recently and they decided not to replace her with another interpreter.

RA: Who is they?

JJ: NABS – the National Auslan Booking Service - which is a federally funded service. Since the NDIS has come in people are getting their own packages to be able to receive interpreting support but if there is no interpreter then they cannot receive any support at all even if they have the funds to pay for one.

RA: Has NABS given a reason why they haven't chosen to fill that vacant spot?

JJ: I'm not aware of the reasoning behind it but basically even if there was the funds there, there isn't anyone living in the Northern Territory that has the Certified qualification to be able to work there. There isn't really an incentive for someone to come up there and move if the payment is not there.

RA: You can't get somebody who is quite good at Auslan, can you just ask somebody else who knows what they're doing to do it? What's the difference between a lay interpreter and someone who is Certified?

JJ: Well, an interpreter needs to go through training. Just because you can communicate effectively in Auslan, at a communicative level, doesn't necessarily mean you have the skills to be an interpreter. So, there is a National Accreditation Authority (NAATI) that accredits interpreters throughout the country, for all languages, including Auslan. And um, having that training enables you to have the skill then, to be able to interpret. Interpreting and communicating in a language is two very different things.

RA: Julie Judd is the Chair of Australian Sign Language Interpreter's Association. We're talking here about there being no Auslan communicator, well interpreter, for the Northern Territory during emergency, well any kind of communication that's going out on a large scale. How much of a problem is that do you think?

JJ: I think it's a real problem especially with the community in the Northern Territory being unable to access, the deaf community that is, unable to access information – especially emergency information. Although there is technological advancements now. As I'm sure your listeners would know we have live crosses from different places in the country with reporters in different locations. It would be interesting to know whether any investigations have been made where an interpreter could be Zoomed into a live media conference from another location throughout the country.

RA: I see, so you could just bring them together. So, if someone down south connects with a broadcast up here?

JJ: Mm-hmm. And they could be listening to the live stream events and a split screen could be organised on the media channel and the interpreter could be interpreting simultaneously.

RA: Well you might have just solved the problem. Is anyone listening to you Julie?

JJ: Uh, well, It's really difficult to know who the right organisation that manages all of these things is. Because of the recent terrible events in VIC, NSW, SA and WA by the way, have seen interpreters on the screen and there has been a big advocacy push for interpreters to be shown on any media broadcast and that seems to be gaining traction. So, therefore more people are now realising the importance of being visible so hopefully somebody in the powers that be in the Northern Territory will look into this and try and solve this problem in consultation with the experts throughout the country who have been doing this for some time.

RA: Yeah well I think as people find out that the Northern Territory doesn't have an interpreter at this level like other states and territories do, it's a bit embarrassing really.

JJ: It certainly is, and um, I feel for people in the Northern Territory, not only Auslan users, but those who are indigenous that use different sign language systems where there isn't the opportunity to have access to medical and legal services readily available to them.

RA: Good to speak with you, thank you for your time Julie.

JJ: You're welcome.

RA: That's Julie Judd, Chair of the Australian Sign Language Interpreter's Association. I would love to hear from you if this affects you or affects someone you know. You can text 0487 991 057 and my telephone number is 1300 057 222.