



NOW YOU'RE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

A Good Practice Guide Delivering A Community Interpretation Project Incorporating Simultaneous Interpretation Equipment



“How many languages are there in the world?

How about 5 billion!

Each of us talks, listens, and thinks in his/her own special language that has been shaped by our culture, experiences, profession, personality, morals and attitudes.

The chance of us meeting someone else who talks the exact same language is pretty remote.”

Anonymous

Introduction

This guide has been designed to highlight the challenges faced by service users and service providers of acknowledging the use of language and recognise that the ever growing number of ethnic origin languages results in creating a significant barrier when accessing or providing services effectively.

Tung Sing Housing Association (TSHA) is a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) led Registered Social Landlord, which provides social housing accommodation and community development support to tenants from a diverse wide range of ethnic backgrounds. With funding from the National Lottery in 2005, TSHA established an Equality & Diversity Unit (EDU) to engage, encourage and increase BME tenant and community engagement and participation with other local service providers. The EDU also provides support, on a consultancy basis, to other social housing providers on a full range of equality and diversity issues.

In April 2005, the EDU successfully received Innovation Into Action funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) via the Charter Institute of Housing to deliver a creative and highly innovative project to recruit, train, develop and ultimately contract bilingual speakers from the local community to become accredited Community Interpreters with the additional opportunity to continue to progress by receiving specialist personal development training covering key themes such as confidence building, presentation skills, effective communication, assertiveness and valuing diversity and equality.

Empowerment of the local community through combining an accredited training course with ongoing personal development paves the way for effective and successful economic opportunities for participants.

Our thanks go to members of Manchester Adult Education Services and all of the participants who have contributed to the projects success and production of this guide.

Equality And Diversity Statement

Equality of opportunity is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of who they are, are treated in the same way. It also recognises and acknowledges the differences in each individual, which make us unique.

It is recognised that we all have the power to reduce the disadvantages that people experience. We can do this by making our organisation and services more responsive to communities and individual needs.

'I found the course enjoyable and felt more confident in providing interpreting services to various agencies'

We must recognise and value the diversity of all our communities and want all our services, facilities and resources to be fully accessible to everyone.

Everybody must be committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

Genuinely wanting to engage with people comes from a sense of respect for people and a willingness to regard their perspectives as valid and of equal worth

Language

Language is the most common form of discrimination and disadvantage.

In many cases language is the starting point for equality.

How we talk to and communicate with other people matters. It's the first impression, it signals how we think about others. In service provision, of any nature, it sends a powerful message of how inclusive people, organisations and agencies are.

Background To The Project Idea

TSHA as always valued and recognised that investment in people is of great importance and it is crucial to reach community members who are not our tenants and would not normally have the opportunity to access activities provided by the Association.

After witnessing how little interpretation took place and the impact of how the stop and start interpretation seriously affected the flow of meetings and generally added valuable time to the meeting or event the project idea was to tackle this major barrier in an innovative way.

We also felt it imperative that we implement a project that would address the issues of exclusion and intimidation created by language barriers.

The Project aims were to:

- Support the development of 'UN' style simultaneous interpretation services which can allow for up to 3 different interpretations to be provided in 'real time' without disturbing the flow of an event.
- Introduce an innovative participation method to encourage community participation.

- Provide community members with the opportunity to be trained and accredited in providing community interpretation services.
- Provide funding for the use of Community Interpreters at project facilitated events.

The purchase and usage of the simultaneous interpretation equipment was relatively straight forward. Therefore, this guide focuses on the Community Interpreters element. The key aims for this were:

- To provide bilingual community members with the opportunity to become accredited Community Interpreters
- To be part of a supported social enterprise development
- To draw the interpreters from all sections of the community
- Accredited Community Interpreters will be combined with the simultaneous interpretation equipment and promoted as a complete interpretation resource solution
- To provide funding to use Community Interpreters in a freelance paid capacity during the project through ongoing events.

Project Delivery

Methods of recruitment

As well as advertising in the local ethnic press, leaflets and disseminating information through established networks and partner agencies, TSHA in partnership with the 17 other RSLs across Manchester held 7 BME Residents Roadshows across the City of Manchester with great success.

The Roadshows welcomed all residents from areas where there was high BME communities, to come and enjoy presentations delivered by a number of key agencies including the Tenant Participation Unit at Manchester City Council, the Environment team, Crime and Disorder Reduction representatives, MCCR (Manchester Council for Community Relations) and also by TSHA on 'How to become a Community Interpreter' which gave a comprehensive overview of the initiative, background, levels of commitment required, and information on how to apply.

'I would not have been able to attend the course if childcare expenses were not reimbursed as I am not in a financial position to pay the fees myself and this has been significant in preventing me developing my skills in the past'

The aim of the Roadshows was to be as inclusive as possible and a key aspect was that we organised interpreters in key ethnic languages, access to Language Line to support participants in languages we could not cover and provided the projects simultaneous interpretation equipment at each event so everyone could enjoy and participate fully at each Roadshow. The simultaneous interpretation equipment creates a more inclusive forum for communication but also welcomes participants in a positive way and builds confidence and respect in the community.

The Roadshows provided a positive opportunity to deliver presentations and distribute information about the community interpretation training being organised. Opportunities to ask questions, request for application forms and access advice on an individual basis was offered and an extremely positive response was generated.

This approach proved to work significantly better than leaflet drops and adverts. By being able to discuss elements of the project and get questions answered on a one to one basis personalised the initiative on an individual basis.

Using the simultaneous interpretation equipment proved very positive and still receives glowing reviews from interpreters and service users at the innovative aspects of the equipment. Due to the success of the equipment, used to interpret information and presentations delivered in English into a variety of ethnic languages, we decided that to be even more inclusive and innovative to deliver one Roadshow in Urdu. Utilising the equipment to interpret to speakers of English instead. This was welcomed with immense delight by all, it also provided an understanding of how language barriers can be created, understanding how this can feel and essentially how this can be overcome in positive ways. This gave a whole new slant on the usage of this equipment.

The Roadshows and publicity generated over 260 expressions of interest to access the actual Community Interpretation course and we were overwhelmed by the great success of our recruitment drive.

Training Provision

Sourcing a suitable service provider for the course was an essential element of the project as we wanted the training to be inclusive, culturally sensitive and personalised to the needs of the participants.

A number of training providers were approached and asked to submit course details, practice and methods. Three agencies were considered, a local BME training agency, Stockport City Council and Manchester Adult Education Services(MAES).

MAES were chosen to deliver the course as they had the capacity to deliver the course to and to be able to cater for increased numbers of participants at an affordable cost to the project and were able to provide staffing and support to the participants on a wider level.

Choosing this training provider cost less, Therefore, the course was intended to target 15 participants but this was increased to 60 participants completing the MAES 'Interpreting in the Community' course accredited at Level One.

Outline of course

- The courses started with an in depth assessment of participants language skills in both their mother tongue as well as English (written and spoken)
- The interpretation course was modular and consisted of 3 hours per week for seven weeks. There were key elements to the course including glossary, research and role play. Students were required to research words relating to specialist services such as housing, benefits, education, asylum and immigration issues as well as health and social services
- There was a high level of commitment required for the course and all students were given detailed information on the assignments expected from them from the start of the course. They were advised on organising study time and how much time they spent on their individual portfolios.
- All students were able to reclaim childcare and travel costs which eliminated the financial implications that may create barriers to accessing training provision.
- Refreshments were provided throughout the duration of the sessions
- All students were given stationery and folders as well as a dictionary in their chosen language to equip them with the tools they required to complete the course and progress forward.

Course Numbers

Each course started with a maximum number of 20 attendees and a total of 46 finished. The drop out from each course was due to a range of factors including experience, levels of ability and personal circumstances.

Attendance on the course was excellent with less than a 3% absence rate and this was attributed to unavoidable work commitments.

'I liked the tutor. The class was friendly and though the work was demanding and required commitment I relished the challenge'

Languages

Participants brought an interesting and diverse range of ethnic languages to the course. These were:

- Pashto
- Somali
- Shona
- Farsi
- Cantonese
- Arabic
- French
- Urdu
- Kurdish
- Bengali

Post course 'Personal Development' Training

Early on in the sessions it was identified that the course contributed to just one element of successful interpreting in the community opportunities. It was deemed necessary to combine this accredited training with additional ongoing support and advice, therefore a personal development training plan was created to incorporate key topics highlighted by the participants as areas of development. These were:

- Valuing Equality and Diversity
- Effective Communication skills
- Presentation skills
- Confidence building
- Assertiveness training

Combined with the accredited course this training was planned to empower and equip individuals to successfully implement their skills in the community with confidence and a positive attitude.

Additional business support was also offered to those who expressed an interest in becoming freelance interpreters as TSHA is also involved in a project which provides free business start up support, advice and guidance to members of BME and disadvantaged communities.

This range of support addresses the needs of the participants in a holistic manner identifying economic, social as well as personal development factors to enable the optimum chances of success in their chosen role.

Opportunities to work

An integral element of the project is to ensure that once the participants successfully completed the course they would be supported in sourcing working opportunities. With this in mind TSHA engaged with a new community language agency to maximise the skills of the participants.

Enquiries, meetings and marketing has already begun to ensure that the interpreting services in the diverse range of languages are available as a result of the project and to ensure the participants are able to use their skills to gather experience as well to generate income.

We also had enquiries from agencies such as Sure Start who enquired about help from our newly accredited Community Interpreters to set up a support group for local families that speak little or no English. As well as the group work they requested help in translating leaflets and information for these families.

We were able to link appropriate individuals to Sure Start by liaising with the course tutor and discussing requirements with the agency. This request offered part payment and part voluntary contribution and overall provided a valuable opportunity for the participants to practice their skills and gain essential experience.

Use Of Participants In The Future

The project recognised the importance of opportunity and enterprise. One of our aims was to ensure that the accredited Community Interpreters were supported with sourcing successfully opportunities for ongoing work experience as well as paid work to build up a solid base to progress forward.

Establishing the Social Enterprise

TSHA will ensure that participants records and details are kept of the languages and skills the interpreters offer and this information will be used to ensure we utilise there services when required. The EDU have sourced appropriate guidance for setting up the Enterprise.

As in all career-orientated programmes it is essential to manage the expectations of the participants that ensures that whilst they are supported they are also empowered and encouraged to be independent.

'I have not encountered this type of scheme before and just wish there were more like it'

It was stressed from the outset that work is not guaranteed and that completion of the course is essential for ongoing success and progression. Otherwise expectations can be unfairly raised.

Maintaining positive attitudes was the most appropriate approach as once fully trained and accredited the Community Interpreters are in a strong position to begin their career in community interpretation.

In Summary

What went well?

- The simultaneous interpretation equipment continues to receive rave reviews on each occasion it is used
- Other agencies now hire the simultaneous interpretation equipment
- The course was demanding but the participant's feedback stated that this provided them with confidence in facing challenges, meeting deadlines, and adhering to tight time scales.
- The venue was accessible, central and welcoming.
- The rapport of the participants with the tutor had a positive effect overall as the trust and respect contributed to positive performance and group work.
- The participants were relaxed and eager to do well as they felt valued and respected. As their travel and childcare costs were being met they also wanted to return the gesture by doing well.
- By providing materials and equipment, this suitably equipped participants to progress without additional financial concerns
- MAES and Job Centre Plus expressed an interest for further partnership working in funding similar initiatives in the community at a local level due the innovative approach, the overall success and the high caliber of participants.
- Other agencies expressed an interest in delivering or being involved in similar initiatives as it has been widely recognised that the project was tailor made to address community need and support economic development at a local level.
- The ongoing personal training element was welcomed by participants as they had initially expressed concern at implementing their newly qualified skills.

What didn't go well?

- Sourcing the appropriate service provider proved time consuming
- Once a service provider had been identified signing contracts and agreements was a lengthy process

Lessons Learnt

- Delivering the course within the timescales stipulated proved difficult as service provider capacity, staffing and availability had to be considered
- Budgeting for childcare and travel expenses should be accurate as limited funds can represent cause for concern
- Choosing a central venue with clear public transport routes prevents time being wasted and makes it more equal and accessible for participants to attend
- It was a concern for some that payment for expenses would be at the end of the full seven weeks and in future it would be wise to pay them weekly to avoid any financial hardship
- Participants required dictionaries and these were sourced during the project, which slowed some of the participants down, in hindsight these should have been purchased after the participants had been selected and before the start of the course

Concluding Observations

Until recently, the practice of working with interpreters was rare, this rarity is vastly becoming the norm and the demand for accredited interpreters is evident.

We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of people wanting to take part and as a result changed our original plans to ensure we trained more people. This proved to us that this project was wanted and needed.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact proportion of participants who following the community interpretation courses will actively pursue careers as interpreters or venture into completely different fields. What is clear, however, and has recently been highlighted by many agencies, service providers and organisations that require the use of interpreters, is that they all anticipate a drastic shortage of interpreters in years to come so the opportunity will be there.

The use of Community Interpreters coupled with the simultaneous interpretation equipment not only empowers BME community members to take advantage of their bilingual skills but also empowers the service user and the service provider.

This combination has a visible positive effect with everyone, but in particular, service users feel that they have been involved in something special and in the words of one participant ... 'Now You're Speaking My Language'.

'Wearing the headset has allowed me for first time to be part of the meeting brilliant idea. Thank you.'