

MEMORANDUM

TO: Refugee Service Providers
FROM: Steve Walker, State Refugee Coordinator
SUBJECT: INTERPRETATION RESOURCES
DATE: March 15, 2008

As you know, agencies and organizations receiving federal funds are required to provide services in a language the client/patient can understand. County departments of job and family services, health screening providers, and social service agencies have various arrangements for in-person interpretation, but some of these are not always reliable. Because refugees are under pressure to rapidly attain self-sufficiency and their benefits are time-limited, it is important to avoid delays in health screenings and eligibility interviews due to interpreter no-shows. It is also important that refugees receive information in a language they can understand. Lack of adequate interpretation can lead to misunderstandings, medical problems, and even civil rights actions, in addition to creating barriers for the refugees in adapting to life here. With this in mind, we recommend that everyone review their approach to interpretation, making sure that it meets your needs for reliability and quality. A back-up plan should also be in place in case your primary arrangement falls through when the refugee is present for an appointment.

With the recent arrival of refugees who speak relatively obscure (from our viewpoint) languages, difficulties arise not only with finding an interpreter of the needed language but even with discerning what that needed language is. For example, well-meaning staff connected a Somali language interpreter with a Somali refugee, only to find at that appointment that the client spoke Maay (sometimes called Maay Maay), a regional language of Somalia which is significantly different from standard Somali. The business at hand was postponed and the benefits or services delayed. This example illustrates the need to for continual updates to our cultural knowledge, the exercise of care, and the need for sound judgment about a refugee's language. It also shows the need for an interpretation back-up plan.

A number of telephone interpretation services exist which can provide short- or long-term solutions to the interpretation needs of organizations serving people who are not proficient in English. Most offer varying arrangements, depending on how much service you need. Usually it's a pay-as-you-go flat rate, with a discount for high volume and a higher rate for occasional use. Some services require that you contact their sales representative for a quote and set up an account. Often services are accessed by completing an on-line form with credit card information and receiving a PIN. With that PIN, service can be set up over the phone or via the Internet. Most companies claim they can provide access to an interpreter in 30 seconds with virtually no advance notice.

On their websites, these organizations make similar (sometimes identical) claims as to how their services will be helpful and how well-trained and skillful their interpreters are. Some offer the capability of incorporating a glossary of terms that you may provide into their service. It is not always readily evident if all these services can provide interpretation for some of the languages used by recent refugees from Africa and Asia. Attached is a table in 8 ½" x 14" landscape format of some of the organizations providing over-the-phone interpretation services in the U.S. Please note that ODJFS does not endorse any of these services, but rather provides the list for informational purposes only.

Here are some additional web resources dealing with languages and interpretation:

- http://www.ethnologue.com/language_index.asp. - a list of over 7,000 languages with a description of each one and where it is spoken
- <http://www.spanish-translation-help.com/telephone-interpretations.html>. - helpful tips in choosing a telephone interpretation service
- http://www.migrationinformation.org/integration/language_portal/ - The Language Portal is a digital library of close to 600 resources relating to the use of language access services in social services and public safety agencies. The Portal includes legal guidelines, service models, master contracts for service providers, hourly translation and interpretation rates for different languages in key areas of the U.S., pay differentials for multilingual staff, and sample translated documents.
- American Standards Testing and Materials (ASTM International), an organization which establishes worldwide standards for goods and services, has developed the Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services. The guide is available for purchase at <http://www.astm.org/cgi-bin/SoftCart.exe/DATABASE.CART/HISTORICAL/F2089-01.htm?L+mystore+auev0128>

We hope to provide training in the future which will help you to make better use of interpreters. We are also working toward production of health education DVDs in most languages used by refugees coming to Ohio. By continuing to work together and use interpretation resources thoughtfully, we can help refugees resettle successfully in Ohio no matter what language they speak.

Thank you for your continued and valued service to refugees. I hope this information can be of some use to your agency.

SW/JK
Attachment