

## Facts About Sign Language Interpreters

The following information is provided to help clear up some uncertainties related to sign language interpreters and individuals who are deaf and use sign language.

*Misconception:* Writing messages back and forth with a deaf or hard of hearing person is acceptable to all parties.

**Fact:** The first language of many individuals who are deaf is not English. Their visual language may be American Sign Language. It has no written components; therefore, they may not understand written languages.

*Misconception:* Sign language interpreters are “helpers,” who come to businesses to “help” the person who is deaf.

**Fact:** The role of sign language interpreters is solely to facilitate communication between both parties.

*Misconception:* Interpreters just happen to know sign language and are happy to sign for deaf people.

**Fact:** Sign language interpreters are professionals with years of education and training who are paid for their services. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is their national governing body, which regulates qualifications and certificates.

*Misconception:* The presence of a third party, the interpreter, may jeopardize the confidentiality of the situation.

**Fact:** Interpreters operate under a National Code of Ethics, which mandates that interpreters share no information outside the professional setting in which their services are provided. This includes the name of any individual involved and the location and nature of the assignment.

*Misconception:* Deaf people should bring and pay for their own interpreters.

**Fact:** Under the ADA, covered employers, service providers and public entities are obligated to make interpreter services available as a regular cost of doing business. Mandated accessibility ranges from wheelchair access to communication accessibility.

*Misconception:* All sign language interpreters can interpret in legal settings and other potentially life-altering situations.

**Fact:** Sign language interpreters, like other professionals, acquire skills and certification according to their experience and training. Only those interpreters with extensive training and certification are qualified to interpret in legal settings.

*Misconception:* Sign language interpreters and deaf people know each other because they know the same language.

**Fact:** Similar to other professionals, sign language interpreters do not necessarily know their clients. For reasons of privacy and confidentiality, both interpreters and deaf clients may prefer to work with interpreters they do not know.

*Misconception:* During an interview or meeting in an office environment, sign language interpreters should sit in a visitor's chair next to the person who is deaf.

***Fact:* The best position for a sign language interpreter is side by side with the hearing person so that the deaf individual may see their interpreter and the person with whom they are conversing simultaneously.**

Please note that it is important to schedule the services of an interpreter at least two weeks in advance. If you have not yet identified sign language interpreters serving your area, please contact NBDC Information Services so that you will have this information on hand when it is needed.