

# ASL Interpretation Services - Event Transcript

## Opening

*Lori Litz*

Hi everyone. Welcome to today's Accessibility.com event, ASL Interpretation Services. My name is Lori. I am the Director of Conferences at Accessibility.com, and we're so excited to have you here today. We're utilizing a new format for this series. We're using Zoom Events, so you should have noticed you entered in through a lobby where you saw some announcements. There's an expo floor you can go visit, you can see bios on the speakers... You can get all sorts of information ahead of the event starting. And that lobby remains open for about 30 days after this event occurs. Our event series this year will focus on helping you find the right vendor for your accessibility services needs.

Today, like I mentioned earlier, is on ASL, American Sign Language, and we have a great panel of speakers today led by our President, Mark Shapiro. We have Scott Ready and Kathleen O'Regan. They'll be discussing ASL, what it is, and what you should consider when selecting a vendor to provide those services. Then we're going to take a look into our sponsor today, Deaf Services Unlimited, with Carly Anderson who will give you a little bit more information on their company. You can also visit them on the Expo floor and they will be having a breakout session after this one that you can check out. For today's event,

it is recorded. So that recording will be available for you this evening. You'll receive an email from me with instructions on how to access it. If you have any questions about or for today's panel, you can go ahead and type those into the Q&A down at the bottom. Utilize the chat for networking and discussions amongst yourself, but type any questions for the panel into Q&A.

If we don't get to your questions live today, we will follow up with them. Anyways, here we go. Let's get started. Off to Mark, Scott, and Kathleen.

## Presentation

*Mark Shapiro*

Thanks for joining us today to learn about how to select the right American Sign Language service for your business. I'm Mark Shapiro. I'm the President of Accessibility.com. I'm here today with Scott Ready and Kathleen O'Regan. Scott, can you tell us a little bit about your background?

*Scott Ready*

Sure. Be glad to. And again, thank you for coming and joining us today.

Scott Ready. I'm a CODA. And if you're not familiar with that term, that's a child of deaf adults, which means that my parents both deaf. And they were teachers at the Missouri School for the Deaf, which I had the awesome privilege of actually living on campus from the age of three until I was 13, which means that my community, my language, my best friends, my mentors were all from within that community.

I became a certified sign language interpreter when I was 16. So let me do the math here. That would be 44 years now that I've been a certified interpreter, working in the field, in private practice, as well as a lot of other areas within accessibility. Another role that I had that's relevant to the topic here today is that I was also a department head for an interpreter training program where we were teaching students to become sign language interpreters.

So all of that said, I've had the joy of being in in the field, working in the field, training others to to also be professionals in this field of interpreting.

*Mark Shapiro*

Awesome. And Kathleen, what about your background?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

So I was always fascinated with the visual language and I started taking evening classes when I was a freshman in high school when I was 14. And one thing led to another. I met really awesome deaf people who took me under their wing and taught me their language and their culture, and I enjoyed every minute of it. When it was time to choose university or college,

I ended up at Northeastern University in the Interpreter Education program. And that's where I learned the larger context about social justice and access and ethical decision making and the value system that we as interpreters bring to each setting and how critical it is that we're mindful of the humans. And then it led me to different employment opportunities.

I've coordinated interpreting services for 20 years now. I've been a certified interpreter since the early 2000s, and I love this work. I love this conversation. I love coordinating effective services, and I love to see the magic that happens when you find that right sync and now I work a lot with the federal government and companies that do business with the federal government.

And I have a consulting company where we support companies and organizations in creating effective communication access. So thank you so much for having me.

*Mark Shapiro*

Kathleen, can you share with us what is American Sign Language and how popular is it?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

American Sign Language is a full, robust language. American Sign Language is the language of the American Deaf community. It is exactly like any other language in the world. It's got all the

linguistic features, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics. I would have to triple check my references, but I think it's the third most common language in America.

*Mark Shapiro*

Scott In a business setting, when should ASL be used?

*Scott Ready*

Great question. In a business setting it, there's a couple of different routes that need to be taken into consideration. Let's start, first of all, as an accommodation. When you have a deaf employee or a deaf consumer that is wanting to engage with your business or work effectively at your business, then it's provided as an accommodation in order for the communication to take place.

The other avenue that we also want to take a look at is when a business is providing public access to have it be a conference, have it be a their marketing materials, their social media, all of those public access to that content needs to be accessible. More... The that's that's the important part of all of this is making sure that that effective communication takes place and that's actually what's in the laws too.

*Mark Shapiro*

Speaking of laws.... What are the specific laws, requirements, recommendations for businesses? Scott?

*Scott Ready*

Sure. I'd be glad to take a look at that. Well, first and foremost is the Americans with Disabilities Act that was passed in 1990. There's been additions to that, modifications made to that to bring it up to date. But overall, here in the United States, Americans with Disabilities Act. The presence... the the crux of the Americans with Disabilities Act is equal access.

How can an individual that has a disability have the equivalent experience to individuals that do not have a disability? Have it be a physical, have it be a digital, have it be a communication access. And you know, the topic here today is about sign language and interpreting. So if we look at the communication aspect of this, how can individuals with communication disabilities be able to access what's being communicated?

Then we also have the Rehabilitation Act, which covers government agencies. It covers employment. So any organization that receives government funding, and again, I'm simplifying this very much, but just just to keep it kind of basic and general here, any organization that receives government funding also is required to adhere to the Rehabilitation Act, which you might have heard of, Section 504, Section 508, those are all part of the Rehabilitation Act. And that means that they have to also provide a an effective way of communicating to individuals with disabilities.

*Mark Shapiro*

Okay. Are there any industry standards? Can anybody just pass them off as an ASL interpreter? Or is there some sort of a standard industry certification that's accepted? Kathleen? Why don't you take that?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

The certification is offered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, RID, which is the membership organization of sign language interpreters here in America. And the entity Casli offers a rigorous test. And people who are eligible to take that test, they sit for the test. It's a couple components. There's a written component for knowledge base. You understand the laws, you understand the implications, you understand the academic piece behind the interpreting.

But then also there's a performance portion of that test that includes ethical dilemmas as well. Often in requirements to work in different entities, RID Certification as is required. So yes, there are credentials. RID also for years and is now revamping the SCL, which is a legal specialization certification as well. And there are some states that have a mandate for interpreters who want to work in the courts system or in legal settings to be certified and hold their SCL certification.

*Mark Shapiro*

Is there a listing of these qualified people?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

Yes. Yes. There's a registry where you can go right to RID.org and click on find a member and there's all different checkboxes. You know, people who are members and identify as a legal interpreter or a medical interpreter or an educational interpreter. And you can you can whittle it down a bit to different markets.

*Mark Shapiro*

Scott, If I'm looking for a company, what criteria would I use to evaluate them, to evaluate the different vendors?

*Scott Ready*

Great question. And before we jump into the criteria, my recommendation would first be ask the person that's going to be the consumer of the services, make this consumer centric, but ask them what what are the needs? Because they're going to be the one that knows best as to why is needed in order to have effective communication.

And then as the consumer, they are also going to know the organization or the agency that's going to be in their region that is going to provide them the quality of interpreters that are necessary. Oftentimes the individual that is contracting with a service does not know sign language themselves. They are not proficient in the language. They don't understand the field of interpreting. The understanding how to be that cultural mediator between the two languages and culture.

And oftentimes we have seen very poor matches between a sign language interpreter and the needed recipient of that interpreting. So that's why I always go back to say, ask the employee. Where where have you had good experiences in obtaining a sign language interpreter? Oftentimes they will have interpreters that they prefer that are language models that match their language the best or their situation the best.

So they will even be able to recommend individual interpreters that work in the field or for an agency. So that would be my first recommendation is to always do that. Right now we're very fortunate that the National Association of the Deaf is in the process of setting out the criteria for organizations or agencies that are providing sign language, sign language interpreting.

There is an ethical component to providing sign language interpreting. And fortunately we have the National Association of the Deaf that's going to be able to set that criteria here very soon, and we'll be able to have a listing of those agencies that have been certified by the National Association of the Deaf. Again, the consumers of the interpreting services who best know what needs to be in place.

And then that will give us a very strong list of those agencies and organizations that we can go to.

*Kathleen O'Regan*

I'd like to add to that if I can. I 100% agree with Scott on this. It should be consumer focused and it alleviates a lot of pain points from a company or organization standpoint of accidentally bringing in either providers or using a company that's not reputable. And then it really impacts the experience and that's not what anybody wants to do.

We're humans. This is a very human experience. So you want to find the best fit for your event. You know, if it's a marketing event, you want somebody who's vivacious. You don't want somebody who's like, hmmm.... please buy our product. Deaf people aren't going to buy your product, right? So so you really want to do a little bit of effort if depending on who your audience is to find that best fit.

And you can always ask questions. Nobody's ever offended.

*Mark Shapiro*

Right. What do companies typically charge for for services? What's sort of the range and prices and how are they charged? Is it different for in person, live, recorded? What have you sort of seen out there in terms of ranges of fees? Scott?

*Scott Ready*

Kate, I'll let you... I'll let Kate address that.

*Kathleen O'Regan*

Rates will vary depending on where you are in the country. We've noticed regional rate differences. There are there are ranges depending on specializations. There are you're going to have different rates and terms if it's a... Now let's start with a typical... Let's say you've got a town hall meeting and it's going to be 2 hours and you've got two deaf folks who live in the town.

Typically you're going to hire two interpreters, okay? Because and there's publications and studies on this. Cognitively we fatigue. So when you're listening to spoken English and you're doing all the cognitive things that are turning that into a three dimensional spatial language, it's work. It's work. And then when you're seeing the three dimensional spatial language and you're doing all the cognitive work and then you're putting it out in spoken linear language, it's work.

So about, the studies show about 20 to 25 minutes, the effectiveness of the interpretation starts to go down. So we team things. That's why you'll often see two interpreters at meetings. So that would be typical. Two interpreters. Two hour minimum. We're starting to see some three hour minimums. So two hour, three hour minimums is what I would be aware of.

And that's pretty typical. Let's say it's a four day conference and you've got ten deaf folks in attendance. You're going to need about 15 interpreters. And it's it's a that's a much larger scale event where you have

*Mark Shapiro*

15 different interpreters?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

One five. One five.

*Mark Shapiro*

Okay.

*Kathleen O'Regan*

You're going to have multiple sessions. You know, Bob's going to this session, Sally is going to this session. Chris going to this session. You've got people, right? So again, what's the experience? What's the equal opportunity? So to have the the same experience as anybody attending that type of event, it's a robust team. And if we all know conferences, they start in the morning and they go very late and there's all of these opportunities for networking.

And so you really want to make sure you have enough flexibility. So that's kind of a little bit of a scale. And depending on where you are in the country, it could be \$55 an hour to \$165 an hour. It really depends where you are. Metro areas are going to be more pricey.

*Mark Shapiro*

Are there any large companies that have a lot of employees that work with businesses? Or are most of what you're seeing small, you know, independent, more mom and pop type shops? In terms of vendors.

*Scott Ready*

There are some larger organizations that do provide sign language interpreters. There are some organizations that focus on just remote interpreting. There are some organizations that focus on both remote and in-person interpreting.

And then there are some organizations that that provide just in-person interpreting. Again, it's a variety of of options depending on what's needed. So it covers the whole gamut. There there are some very small organizations that service small locations, and then you get into your big urban areas and you'll have larger nationwide services or provide provision of services.

There's also some companies that are global that look at providing interpreting in multiple countries. So it really does cover the whole gamut there.

*Mark Shapiro*

Okay. Now we're going to do a deep dive into Deaf Services Unlimited. For the next section, I want to thank Carly Anderson from Deaf Services Unlimited to help us out with our deep dive. Carly, can you tell us about Deaf Services Unlimited?

*Carly Anderson*

Sure. Deaf Services Unlimited, we formed in 1996. We started off as a sign language interpreting agency, so primarily providing onsite interpreting services. Through the years, we've added captioning services as well. Video remote interpreting services. We do quite a bit of consulting and training as well. So just kind of a wide array of communication access services that Deaf Services Unlimited provides.

We have a wide array of customers that we service and I think they range from government agencies either on the federal level or the state level. We work with a lot of higher education colleges, universities. We also work with a lot of commercial sectors too, in manufacturing, medical, industrial. We work with a lot of tech companies that are looking for their new advancement of software products to be accessible.

So you name the customer we've probably worked with with a similar one. And I think that's the beauty of our services as they can be tailored to whatever the deaf or hard of hearing person needs.

*Mark Shapiro*

What sets you apart from other competitors or even independent contractors?

*Carly Anderson*

Sure. I think of our tagline. It's go ahead, expect too much. And it's kind of a, you know, a cheeky term, but we really do pride ourselves in an exceptional customer client experience. So our entire team, I think goes above and beyond the call of duty all the time. So you're going to get an answered phone call, you're going to get a live person whenever you need us helping

you through the process, answering questions, walking you through the steps and making it as easy as possible to provide that communication access that you need.

So that would be the first thing. I also think quality of services. We are extremely stringent in our quality and what we expect of all of our interpreters and our captioners and the service providers that we work with. So you're going to get high quality product and service delivery delivery as well as just customer service that we pride ourselves in that top, top level.

*Mark Shapiro*

Carly What should companies budget for this type of service?

*Carly Anderson*

That's a great question. I think I think it really depends on, of course, the volume or the scope of what you're needing. We can provide anywhere from a 30 minute video or remote interpreting appointment for a quick discussion that you need to have with a deaf or hard of hearing individual. Those services are always as needed. You only pay for the minutes that you need the service. On site is the same way. Those services are typically built in more of an hourly rate.

You can expect a two hour minimum for a reservation, so that's important to know, you know how time is reserved. But we also do a lot of contracting. So any time you are looking for maybe a more ongoing need or a regular need, there's discounts for all of those services depending on the volume that you're securing.

*Mark Shapiro*

All right, Carly, I really appreciate you allowing us to do a deep dive on your organization.

*Carly Anderson*

Absolutely. Thank you for your time.

*Mark Shapiro*

Sure. Thank you. All right. We have a bunch of questions from the audience. If we don't get any... if we don't get to your question, just email it in. We actually will have the full listings. We'll be able to contact you and answer the question. All right. First question, what would you recommend for an international company with Spanish, Japanese and English as the primary languages?

So, Scott, do you want to take it?

*Scott Ready*

Well, sure. So we're looking at the need for interpreters in a variety of languages. You might be able to have one organization cover all languages. You might end up having to contract with multiple organizations to be able to meet the need of those languages. When we're looking at both a spoken language and a visual language, one thing to clarify is that the visual language,



the sign language, as in American Sign language, may be completely different than the spoken language.

So take into consideration that if you're having Spanish, for example, there are different Spanish sign languages depending on the country, the region. And so there are a lot of details that that need to be uncovered there in order to accurately provide effective communication.

*Mark Shapiro*

All right. Next question. What is a reasonable budget for an ASL interpreter for a two hour live event? Assuming they need to travel to the event?

*Carly Anderson*

Great question. Our pricing is based regionally, so depending on which Metro or city you're in, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$100 to \$200 per hour for that interpreter. Travel time... and those travel charges are typically billed at the same hourly rate of the interpreting services. So our team will always look for local interpreters that are in the area you need.

In those cases, there wouldn't be any travel. That's the nice thing. They're built into those minimums of the appointment. But if we do have to go outside of a surrounding area, we know that at what's called portal to portal. So the time that it takes the interpreter to leave, head to the appointment and then return back home is all billed at that same hourly rate.

*Mark Shapiro*

Do federal government announcements require ASL?

*Kathleen O'Regan*

Announcements? Is a bit vague for me right now, but I will specify that the White House is mandated for any press conferences to have ASL interpreters. There is a deaf interpreter who is a full time staff at the White House. Elsie Stecker, very cool individual and all of the press conferences out of the White House now is fully accessible, captions and ASL interpreting. And that was a result of COVID and the announcements not being accessible to the greater American public and the deaf American public and the NAD, NAD sued to mandate access.

So the White House. Yes. I, you know, federal agencies who employ deaf people, yes. You have to provide reasonable accommodations for your employees. That doesn't always mean ASL interpreters, right? It depends on who the employee is and what a reasonable accommodation is that lends effective communication.

*Mark Shapiro*

Okay. Is there an international version of sign language? Scott, why don't you take this?

*Scott Ready*

There is. And where we see that mostly is in large international conferences. And the international sign language is not used in a daily conversation, but it is truly for an international

conference platform so that they don't have to have 50 sign language interpreters and have that confusion of, my goodness, where do I look?

*Mark Shapiro*

Does closed caption eliminate the need for ASL? Let's... Carly, why don't you answer this one?

*Carly Anderson*

That's a great question. Closed captioning is provided in the same English word order form. So I would say that closed captioning is not a replacement for American Sign language. They are in two different languages, the English versus American Sign language. So somebody who uses American sign language is not necessarily going to be fully accommodated by that spoken English version.

A lot of times we run into that two people want to write notes back and forth. And while that can be a mode of communication if you need it, it's not always the most appropriate accommodation for somebody who's deaf who uses ASL. If there is a hard of hearing or a deaf individual that prefers English-based, either sign language or written English, then yes, closed captioning is oftentimes the only accommodation they need.

So again, it depends on your deaf or hard of hearing individual and being able to get that information from them so you're providing the most appropriate accommodation for them.

*Mark Shapiro*

Makes sense.

## Closing

*Lori Litz*

And that's all we have time for today. Thank you Mark, Scott, Kathleen and Carly for fielding those questions and for your presentations today. We really appreciate your time and your dedication to such an important topic. Today's event was recorded and will be available this evening. I will send you an email with instructions on how to view. Up next, you can head back to the lobby and go join Deaf Services Unlimited in their breakout session for today.

You can also go to the Expo floor and visit the vendors that are out there. If we didn't get your question live today, we will follow up with it. We hope to see you back at the end of the month, Tuesday, February 27th, when we're going to dive into closed captioning services. Have a great rest of your day.