

Overcoming the ASL Interpreter Shortage Presented By Deaf Services Unlimited - Event Transcript

Brenna Thompson

Okay. I'm going to go ahead and get started. I think there might be a few more people rolling in.

So today we'll be talking about the ASL interpreter shortage that is currently going on in the United States and in several places abroad. They're also having shortages with interpreter with sign language interpreting as well. But we're going to specifically be talking about in the United States. My name is Brenda Thompson. I'm the director of business development at Deaf Services Unlimited.

You just heard in the first session from my colleague Carly Anderson. She is the Director of Operations here at Deaf Services Unlimited. And she was able to give you an overview of our company and our services and just answer a few questions. We're going to be talking a little bit more specifically, obviously, about the interpreter shortage. We'll be talking about the current status of the shortage, the impacts that it's having and the United States strategies that are used to overcome the interpreting shortage and the benefits of partnership, partnering with Deaf Services Unlimited and some of the strategies we use to ensure that services are available to you regardless of the resources in your area.

So just a little overview of the shortage we're currently experiencing. I know that the Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf was talked about and their certification in the previous session. So currently there are roughly 10,000 interpreters that are certified through RID and who are currently providing American Sign Language interpreting services in the United States. The resources can depend on your area.

So we have found that large metro areas usually have more resources than small rural areas, and there are also some areas of the United States that are a little bit more concentrated. So even some metro areas more might have more resources than others. And like I said, the rural areas are facing the greatest shortage. There might be rural areas where there are no certified interpreters.

We've seen from 60 miles to 100 miles can require quite a bit of travel just to get someone to your area, depending on where you're located at. So comparing that to the amount of deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use sign language in the United States, we know that there are 11 million Americans who consider themselves deaf or experienced serious difficulty hearing, and of those 11 million, 500,000 of them use American Sign Language every single day.

So if you think about the needs of those individuals, they might not just need one interpreter in a day. So if someone goes to work, they might need an interpreter at their job, say they're working as an electrician, they would need an interpreter who has a lot of knowledge in the electrical field. And let's say at the end of the day, they go to a doctor's appointment.

They would need to have a medical interpreter at that employee appointment that has the knowledge to communicate, facilitate communication between them and the doctor. And then that night they might have an event to go to and then they would need an interpreter who has the specific knowledge to interpret for that event. So of these 50 or 500,000 Americans, they have various needs throughout the day and they may require more than one interpreter.

So with these numbers, we can see that there's roughly 50 interpreters there. I'm sorry, there's roughly one interpreter for every 50 Americans who are deaf or hard of hearing and use American sign language, the ratio can vary depending on your area, and many areas find it very difficult to find in-person sign language interpreters in their areas, 50 to 1 is obviously a big disparity.

We have to use all different kinds of strategies to try to meet the needs of these individuals. Considering how great the shortage is. So there are various aspects of this shortage. One that we want to avoid is limited access of effective communication for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. So if you have deaf or hard of hearing clients or colleagues, you definitely want to ensure that they do not have limited access to the things that they need throughout the day and the communication that needs to be taking place.

There are also delays for in-person interpreting services due to the shortage, and many organizations have challenges remaining ADA compliant. I know we talked about the Americans with Disabilities Act in our previous session and how important it is to make sure that we are creating effective communication when we need to. And the shortage definitely can create more barriers and create more difficulties for businesses and organizations that are trying to remain compliant and ensure effective communication.

So what is recommended to avoid these impacts and try to lessen them? The National Deaf Center recommends partnering with an agency to avoid service gaps during the interpreter shortage. So that brings us to why should you choose Deaf Services Unlimited. Deaf Services Unlimited has a national network of interpreters. So we have over 30 years of experience providing American Sign Language services in the United States.

Our owner and founder is Deaf of Deaf Services. Unlimited is Diana Kautzky. She is the she is a child of deaf adults. She is a CODA. So she has been a part of the deaf community her entire life. She has spent her life trying to create a bridge between deaf communities and hearing communities and ensure effective communication for both groups.

Over those 30 years, we have built a very large network of providers and resources, and we are able to leverage all of those resources to ensure that we are meeting the requests of our customers. We have over 1700 certified service providers throughout the United States. We also have established networks in every state. So regardless of where you are, we provide services there and we will do our best to meet your needs.

We are very experienced in metro areas and rural areas. We're very familiar with the challenges that can come with not having interpreters in your area, not having enough interpreters in your area, or maybe just not having access to the kind of interpreter that you are requiring. As we heard in the previous session, we do offer video, remote interpreting services and the service we actually helped pioneer several years ago.

We were one of the first companies to offer video remote interpreting services. Obviously, when the pandemic came around, there was a great need to transfer a lot of onsite interpreting services to video, remote interpreting services. And because we had experience in that sector, we were able to very smoothly transition over to video remote interpreting services. So this is a service that we have really been able to gain a lot of experience in and have been able to really set the standard for how the service should be provided.

We can provide this service as an alternative when on site interpreting is not available. So if the situation allows, we have a professional coordination staff that can really help transfer services from in-person to video, remote interpreting if needed. We're also able to provide on demand video remote interpreting services when needed. This could be because maybe an in-person provider calls in sick has a change in availability, or maybe you weren't planning on needing interpreting services that day and all of a sudden now you do have a needs.

We're able to get you connected in a matter of minutes and make sure that there's no lapse in service and that the person that you are needing to communicate with, you are able to. Our coordination team also is very experienced in all different kinds of platforms that are used for video remote interpreting services, and they're available to troubleshoot or provide technical assistance as needed.

So at DSU, we also like to boast our 98% fill rate. So of all of the requests we receive for interpreting and other services, we are able to fill 98% of those. We employ a comprehensive and proactive approach. So like I said, we have a huge network that we use to provide in-person services and we also have a large network of interpreters that provide video remote interpreting services when in-person services are not available.

We are meticulous with our scheduling and we have very prompt communication. We have a large coordination team that is available that really does an amazing job of ensuring that there are no lapses in coverage and that communication is provided very quickly. If there are any issues there, like I said, available to assist and to overcome any barriers that might be experienced.

We also match the right interpreter for the requirements of the assignment. So we don't just have the next available interpreter assigned to your appointment. We find the interpreter that has the right skill set, that has experience in the industry that you are in and is ready to provide effective communication. A lot of our clients have ongoing needs for interpretation, so they might have a deaf employee or a deaf client that they work with regularly.

They may host events that they like to provide open access to for the deaf and hard of hearing communities. So we really specialize in managing schedules. We are able to manage ongoing schedules. Once you turn the schedule in to us, we do everything from there. We are able to provide consistency. A lot of the times you're wanting to work with the same interpreter.

If you have a weekly meeting that needs to be interpreting, interpreting it, we can provide consistency of services there to ensure that the interpreters you're working with are the same and that they know the jargon in your industry or the agreement acronyms used at your company, things like that to ensure effective communication. And we also are able to handle changes in provider availability or spontaneous needs.

So say you have a weekly meeting and you have the same interpreter every week and they for some reason aren't available. One week we will be able to go in and find someone who can provide services for that session as like a one off and make sure that they have all the prep materials they need to provide the best service possible.

So just a quick overview of the things that we just talked about. Like I said, we have 30 years of experience providing interpreting services. We have a large network that we have been able to put together over those 30 years. And with that we are able to offer in-person interpreting services and also on demand video, remote interpreting services for last minute needs or when in-person interpreting isn't available.

We have a professional coordination team that will handle every detail for you. And we also, like I said, have a 98% fill rate for all requests. So some strategies that can be used on your end. We like to tell our clients to request services as soon as a need arises. So as soon as you know you will need an interpreter, let us know.

The industry standard for onsite interpreting services is about two weeks notice. So if you are not able to give that much notice, there may need to be alternative services that are considered. We will do our best to fill any onsite interpreting request with our resources, but we find that most interpreters book their schedules out at least two weeks in advance.

So if you give us less advance notice than that, we will be trying to find someone who had a last minute cancellation and has the right expert knowledge for your situation. So that's when the pool of interpreters we are selecting from really gets a lot smaller. So whenever you can provide advance notice, we know it's not available, it's not possible all the time.

We really recommend that you do that. Checking with the deaf client to see if alternative services are an option. So the person who will be using the services, it's always great to ask

them if they are requesting in-person services if that service isn't available. Will video remote interpreting services work for them? Just checking in with them and seeing if they feel comfortable and anticipating that there might not.

There might need to be an alternative service used if an in-person services are the only option. It's also great to ask for alternative availability. So if someone needs a in-person interpreter for an appointment that's coming up in a couple of days, maybe asking if they have time in the next week or two weeks that they might be able to reschedule for in case an in-person interpreter is not available.

So I know in the previous session we talked a little bit about our services and we do offer in-person interpreting services like we've said, and video remote interpreting and support services. Along with that, we do offer court captioning services, so that would be real time translation For any event, our captions are certified through the ncra. So if you have someone who is deaf or hard of hearing but doesn't use American sign language, this is a great service for them because they'll be able to have a real time transcript of the communication that's happening provided in English.

We also offer post-production, interpreting and captioning. So if you're looking to make videos on your website accessible or other content that you might have on social media, we do offer post-production, interpreting and captioning so we can add, interpreting or captioning to any of your videos after the fact. So a lot of projects that we do are for events like this one.

If someone wanted to hold a webinar and then they want to post that webinar to their video or to their website, excuse me, we would be able to add interpreting to that video to make it more accessible in the first session. That was a DACA interpreter that was interpreting the session. So you got to see our interpreters in action there.

But there's also the option to add that interpreting after the event as well. And the same goes for our captioning services. We also offer deaf culture training so this training can be done in-person or online. We have a online deaf culture training that is a five modules 11 lessons and it talks about the history of the deaf community.

It also talks about terminology and norms in the deaf community. It talks about effective communication, inclusion, ASL, interpreting captioning, how those services are used. And it also and it includes the perspectives of deaf individuals. So you can hear more about their community directly from them and also hear more about their experiences as a deaf individual in our society and ways that hearing individuals can communicate with them more effectively and make them feel included in the workplace and outside of the workplace.

And we also provide communication access, consulting services for different organizations as well. So that's really an overview of our services and of the current shortage and how we over how we work to overcome that shortage. Can see that there are a few questions in the Q&A, so I'll go ahead and answer some of those with the few minutes that we have left.

Let's see what you need as far as equipment for these video remote interpreting services. Are they hard to set up? So really, all you need for video remote interpreting services is either a laptop or a personal device like a iPad or tablets. So what we will need on our end is an audio stream of the appointment or meeting, and that audio stream is usually provided through whatever platform is being used that can be Zoom teams, etc. So you would be logged in to the laptop or tablet and you would have the zoom call that we would provide unless you have one that you prefer to use on your end, which we can certainly use as well. You would have that platform pulled up, so we would have a audio feed for the interpreter and the interpreter would be interpreting in the Zoom room. So on that tablet you would also have the interpreter pulled up for the deaf individual and they would just be able to see the interpreting on their laptop or on their tablet.

So really setting up interpreting services through video, remote interpreting is as easy as setting up a Zoom room. You just need to get logged in and get in there and make sure that there is a clear audio feed for the interpreter. And we also recommend having a strong Wi-Fi connection as well to ensure that there's no trouble with the audio or the visual for the deaf client.

Okay, Let's go to the next question. What is the best way to get in touch with you about an upcoming interpreting need? Our organization has it's a large event so if you go to our website [WWW Deaf Services Unlimited com](http://WWW.DeafServicesUnlimited.com) you will find on the front page a button to request services and that will take you to our request form.

That form will ask you everything that we need to know about your upcoming event and that form will go to our scheduling team and they will be able to work with you to get everything scheduled you need for your event. We're able to help with small appointments. We have done very large conferences as well. So regardless of the size of your event, just submitting that request form will be all you need to do to get started.

If request forms aren't your thing, you can certainly give us a call. Our phone number is also at the top of our website right next to that request services button. And we have people that are standing by ready to help get the ball rolling with you. Is it next? I'll go to the next question. Is it ever too early to submit a request?

We are doing some planning for the end of 2024, So no, it is not ever too early to submit a request. The more notice you can give us, the better that will really help us ensure that we can find the right people for your event and get any details needed combed out ahead of time, especially if you are planning something like a conference or concerts or just any large live event.

There's a lot of moving pieces to that. So as soon as you can let us know, we will accept requests for services ahead of time. Regardless of when your services. go to the next question. Most of my deaf clients prefer onsite interpreting over VR services. Do you think deaf individuals

are aware of the shortage too? I do believe that deaf individuals are oftentimes aware of this shortage.

I have talked to many of our deaf clients about this. They're aware because they know how difficult it is to ensure that they find interpreters for their events, and they've probably run into barriers with this before, especially if they live in an area where there aren't a lot of ASL interpreters. They're probably very familiar just due to the challenges that they've probably experienced.

So some people aren't as comfortable using remote services because maybe they've had issues with technology in the past. Something that I would recommend would be setting up a test call with them. We're always happy to help with test calls and we can use those to ensure that the deaf individual has a good connection. They can see the connection, they can get out any technical issues ahead of time and just being able to show them how seamlessly the services work.

I think that is something that can be offered that really helps make people more comfortable and okay, I'll do one last question. I know we only have a couple of minutes left, so this question says we have a four day conference with multiple deaf attendees registered. Do you have enough interpreters for a large event like this? The answer is yes.

So obviously this was talked about in the previous session too, but when you have multiple deaf attendees, you will need multiple interpreters. So a four day conference, there's a lot of planning involved in that and I'm sure there will be a lot of needs for interpreting for breakout sessions. You know, there might be meals that are going on and each deaf individual may need an interpreter during those times when they're in different areas of the conference.

So if you have a large need like this, we can certainly help accommodate. The more advanced notice, like I've said that you can give the better. But we are very experienced in providing services for large conferences and large events, so we're more than happy to help with those and we do have the resources needed. So submit your request for services as soon as you can and that will help us to get the ball rolling.

Okay. So I think we are finishing just in time. That is all the questions that I can get to today. Thank you for joining our breakout session. I hope this helped you understand a little bit more about our industry, the shortage that we are experiencing and our strategies, deaf services and limited uses to overcome these challenges that we're experiencing.

And like we said, we have a 98% fill rate, so we are happy to help with any of your requests. Please just submit a request at our website. W WW dot Deaf services unlimited dot com or give us a call and we'll be happy to help you. So I think next we will be moving on to the exhibit hall.

So if you have more questions or you would like to talk more specifically about services you are needing for your company or organization, please come to our exhibit booth and we will be happy to answer any more questions you might have. All right. Thank you.