



# Relay Interpreters

## **What is an Auslan interpreter?**

The role of the Auslan interpreter is to facilitate effective communication between Deaf and hearing clients.

## **What is a relay interpreter?**

A relay interpreter is a person who is extremely fluent in Auslan, has skills in interpretation and is expected to abide by the same Code of Ethics as Auslan interpreters. Deaf relay interpreters work in tandem with Auslan interpreters interpreting for Deaf individuals who lack fluency in Auslan or English.

## **How do relay interpreters work with Auslan interpreters?**

The Auslan interpreter interprets an English-speaker's message into standard Auslan, then the relay interpreter uses Auslan, International Sign (a gestural system used by Deaf people who do not share a common sign language), gesture, mime, idiosyncratic signs, even drawing, to convey that message to the Deaf client. The system works in reverse when the Deaf client expresses themselves.

## **Who requires a relay interpreter?**

The person who potentially could benefit from a relay interpreter is a person who is deaf and is not fluent in English or Auslan for numerous reasons including:

- They may be a migrant where they have some use of another country's sign language;
- They may have been socially isolated and use "home signs";
- They could have an intellectual disability (mild or more severe) or multiple disabilities such as deaf and blind; or
- They could have attended a school for the Deaf and just did not acquire language skills.

## **How is the need for a relay interpreter identified?**

During the process of interpreting, an Auslan interpreter must identify the equivalent feature of one language and translate it into the other quickly and accurately. During this process they may not also have the facility to break the concepts down into a plain language for the deaf person with inadequate Auslan and English skills.

There may be times when it is identified by either the Auslan interpreter or the Deaf person themselves that additional support in the form of a Relay Interpreter is required.

## **Why are most relay interpreters deaf?**

Anecdotally deaf people have had to rely on visual cues for most communication. They are better equipped to discern idiosyncratic gestures/signs and understand the meaning of different signs out of context that a Deaf person who is not a fluent Auslan user may use.

## **Training and Certification**

Training and accreditation for Deaf Relay Interpreters has been erratic. In NSW a relay interpreter course was held by TAFE in 2002.

In 2007, ASLIA and NABS jointly implemented the Deaf Relay Interpreter Certification Project. Tests were conducted in mid 2007 and a number of Deaf relay interpreters have gained this certification.

## **References:**

[www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)

Napier, McKee & Goswell, 2006, Sign Language Interpreting theory and practice in Australia and New Zealand, The Federation Press.