Remote ISL Interpreting Pilot Project

2011

Project Partnership:

Sign Language Interpreting Service
Ireland's National Agency

IDS
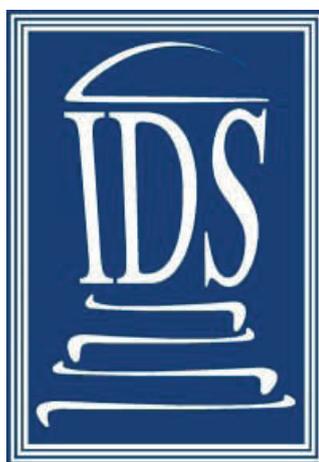
DeafHear.ie
Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing People

Project Objective:

To pilot a model of remote ISL Interpreting using webcam and internet technology to deliver a 'virtual' interpreting service to Deaf people accessing selected public services across several locations, with the agreed participation of the public Bodies concerned.

Project Outcome:

The project will provide evidence of how well this model of interpreting works; knowledge of its scope and its limitations; and develop user and provider operating protocols for quality operation of the service, with the aim of having it rolled out nationally on an ongoing basis.

Background Information:

To fully access public services, most Deaf people require provision of an ISL interpreter to facilitate communication.

At present, the interpreter must be present at the same location as the Deaf person to undertake an interpreting role. Both parties (Deaf person & service provider) rely on the interpreter for accessible communication.

With only a limited pool of interpreters, this model severely restricts the extent to which interpreting is available to make public services accessible to the Deaf Community. Also, many interpreter hours are lost travelling to the location, rather than interpreting. This results in higher costs and lower interpreter availability.

In 2009, Government Departments and public services accounted for 65% of interpreting bookings processed through the National Agency, Sign Language Interpreting Service. The return on this investment was sub optimal in terms of actual interpreting hours delivered.

Proposed Solution:

This project replaces the high cost/low impact model with a cost effective model that has the potential to provide universal access to all public (and other) services for Deaf people, at lower cost and zero wastage.

Using internet video software the interpreter can be 'virtually' present at any service location that has a broadband internet connection available. The only additional hardware required to provide remote ISL interpreting is a webcam. This allows the remote interpreter to 'sign interpret' the conversation between the service provider and the Deaf service user.

From a dedicated centre, the interpreter responds to interpreting requests in real-time via the internet connection. The interpreter is called only when required and is available at short or no notice. The opportunity now exists to provide access to public services to Deaf people for the first time on the same basis as that of the hearing community. There is no wastage of interpreting hours travelling, and the same small pool of interpreters can exponentially increase their availability and the accessibility of public services (a requirement of the Disability Act 2005 & Equal Status Act 2000) without additional cost.

Registration:

Service providers must register with the project prior to making a booking. Initially, service providers will be asked to submit a completed Expression of Interest form to the Steering Committee. The registration process will involve a remote interpreting site test to ensure that the necessary equipment is available and that staff are familiar with the process.

Example: John is Deaf. He visits a Citizens Information Centre to get advice on social welfare entitlements. The Information Officer does not know sign language and needs an ISL interpreter to assist John. S/he connects to the interpreting centre using the existing broadband connection available. The interpreter appears on the computer screen via webcam, and is visible to John. The Information Officer commences her explanation. The interpreter relays the spoken conversation to John and likewise relays John's signed conversation to the Information Officer. When the query has been answered, the call is ended and the interpreter is now free for the next remote interpreting assignment.

Similar scenarios can apply to hospital & health centre appointments, social welfare offices, local authority services and other public services.

The Project:

The 3 partner organisations will either self finance, or seek funding for, the pilot phase of a remote interpreting service for up to a 6 month period, in 2 x 3 month phases. A Steering Committee will develop and oversee the operational aspects of the project. Ongoing evaluation will be actively carried out all through the pilot period.

The Steering Committee will identify a sample range of public services to participate in the project, with a particular focus on the Government Departments and public services that are currently paying for interpreting provision. The Pilot will include:

No. of Citizens Information Centres

No. of Mainstream schools (children of Deaf Parents)

No. of Local Authority Offices

No. of Health Centres

The Steering Committee will develop protocols for call answering, response procedures, answering times etc. during the pilot phase.

The Steering Committee will ensure that the experiences of participants (service providers and Deaf service users) are recorded and evaluated throughout the project, to facilitate modification based on evolving outcomes.

The Steering Committee will report at the interim stage (after 3 months) and at the final stage (after 6 months). The final report of the pilot project will be used to advocate for the establishment of an operational remote interpreting service on a permanent basis.

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IDS

SLIS
Hainault House
The Square
Tallaght
Dublin 24

Tel : 353 1 4139670
Fax: 353 1 4139677
Email: bookings@slis.ie
Web: www.slis.ie

DeafHear.ie
35 North Frederick St
Dublin 1

Tel: 01 8175700
Fax: 01 8723816
Minicom: 01 8175777
Textpad: 01 8783629
E-mail: info@deafhear.ie
Web: www.deafhear.ie

Irish Deaf Society
30 Blessington Street
Dublin 7.

Tel: 353 1 8601878
Fax: 353 1 8601960
Mobile: 087 2345744
Email: Info@irishdeafsociety.ie
Web: www.deaf.ie