



Access for Deaf People in Victoria

Why Auslan interpreting matters

By ASLIA Victoria on behalf of the
Auslan Interpreting Industry Forum Victoria (AIIFV)







If we are going to develop communities that are inclusive of Deaf people, we need to do things differently.

Good communication is good business. It makes sense to make provisions and adjustments for those who use different languages and modes of communication.

This can be achieved by providing access to quality Auslan (Australian Sign Language) interpreting services.

To get there, a strong Auslan interpreting industry is a must.

Why Auslan interpreting matters

Background	7
About ASLIA Victoria and the AIFV	7
What is Auslan?	8
Introduction	9
Why interpreting matters	11
Activating citizenship and human rights	12
Facilitating Government policy	17
Building community capacity	28
Future planning – what needs to be done?	31




“The fundamental issue is equality. As one of the first countries to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2007, it is abysmal that five years later Deaf Australians still need to fight tooth and nail to receive the services of a professional Sign Language interpreter to go about our daily lives and even access Government services. I cannot wait for the day when I can receive just access, and know confidently that a qualified, professional Auslan interpreter will be provided at my health, education, employment or social event without hassle or worry. That day cannot come soon enough. The truth is — in 2011 Deaf Australian citizens are still not equal to non-Deaf Australian citizens.”

Cathy Clark, Coordinator, Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2011

“There are tasks which each individual confronts but which cannot be tackled and dealt with individually. Whatever separates us and prompts us to keep our distance from each other, to draw boundaries and build barricades, makes the handling of such tasks more difficult. We all need to gain control over the conditions under which we struggle with the challenges of life – but for most of us such control can only be gained collectively. Here, in the performance of such tasks, community is most missed: but here as well, for a change, lies community’s chance to stop being missing. If there is to be a community in the world of the individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right.”

Bauman. Z, Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World, 2001



“Yet a consistent message from their contributions is the desire to have the same opportunities as everyone else for a fulfilling and productive life. Many said they face a constant struggle to obtain what the rest of the community would consider to be an ordinary life... The task that falls to us is to make the political, social and economic changes necessary to enable this to happen. We have been told we need to tackle issues and barriers around disability services, we need to ensure an adequate standard of living for all our citizens, and we need a society in which all people are included and are supported as citizens and leaders in the community.”

Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia, 2009

Background

About ASLIA Victoria and the AIIFV

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association of Victoria (ASLIA Victoria) is a not-for-profit body that represents the needs and interests of Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and Deaf Interpreters in Victoria.

Over the years, the Auslan interpreting industry in Victoria has seen significant gains. The Auslan interpreting industry has been professionalised. Auslan/English interpreting (henceforth Auslan interpreting) is recognised by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) and NAATI accreditation testing has been achieved. Representation through bodies such as ASLIA Victoria has also been realised. A range of business improvements have also been developed through the introduction of new technologies and other innovations such as Video Relay Interpreting and the Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) National Relay Service (NRS) Video Relay Service for telecommunications.

While successes in the industry are many, systemic issues affecting the ongoing

capacity, supply, and development of the Auslan interpreting profession and its services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities persist. These issues include:

- Poor engagement of stakeholders outside the Deaf sector
- Low awareness of the availability of Auslan interpreting services and processes for accessing these services
- Poor planning and coordination across Government in relation to provision of Auslan interpreting
- Limited understanding of the overall demand for Auslan interpreting
- Reactive responses by Government to funding of Auslan interpreting
- Inconsistent remuneration of interpreting across Government, industry and community sectors
- Limited career development opportunities and pathways

- Poor quality and availability of Government support and funding for ongoing education or training
- The need for consistency in access to interpreting services state-wide
- The need for complaints or grievance protocols or ombudsman support for clients and interpreters, and formal professional supervision of interpreters.

Some strategies to address these issues have been developed, but overall there has been a lack of cohesive action among stakeholders.

The Auslan Interpreting Industry Forum Victoria (AIIFV) has been established in response to this issue. The AIIFV has brought key Victorian stakeholders together into a network dedicated solely to addressing the systemic issues affecting the industry and increasing the number of NAATI accredited Auslan interpreters in Victoria. The network had its first meeting on the 4th of March 2011 with approximately 50 key stakeholders from across

What is Auslan?

the state. A range of issues were raised at the meeting, including education and training, workforce quality and development, and structural and systemic reform of the Auslan interpreting industry.

This report has been produced by ASLIA Victoria to position the AIIFV more strategically and to begin to engage key stakeholders in developing a more coordinated response to supporting and strengthening the Auslan interpreting industry. It seeks to demonstrate why Auslan interpreting matters to both the Deaf and wider community.

Auslan is the recognised language of the Australian Deaf Community. It is a visual spatial language represented through hand movements known as “signs”, facial expression and body language. Auslan has its own syntax, grammatical structure and word order which is different to that of English. Auslan is not a universal language. It is unique to Australia though it does share similarities to some other signed languages around the world.

Auslan was recognised by the Australian Government as a “community language other than English” and as the preferred language of the Deaf community over 20 years ago in a number of key policy statements (see for example Dawkins, J. 1991).

Unlike other languages however, access to Auslan interpreting is fundamental to the ongoing participation and inclusion in community life for users of this language. For many Deaf people, Auslan is their preferred and in some instances, only fully accessible language. Many Deaf people experience challenges in acquiring or comprehending

spoken language. Sign language and thus Auslan interpreters – acts as a bridge to the mainstream community. Many users of Auslan also routinely ascribe their experiences as one that aligns with cultural and linguistic identity.

Introduction

This paper has been titled *Why Auslan interpreting matters* to draw attention to the idea that if we as a society are going to develop communities that are inclusive of Deaf people then we need to do things differently.

An interesting concept for readers of this paper to consider is that of being willing to “see other voices.” This thought requires that we recognise that so-called “voices” come in many different forms, including through use of the hands, and signed language, not just speech. It forces us to think differently about the ways we communicate and the potential for silencing those who do not use spoken English as their primary mode of communication. It also requires us to act and organise differently.

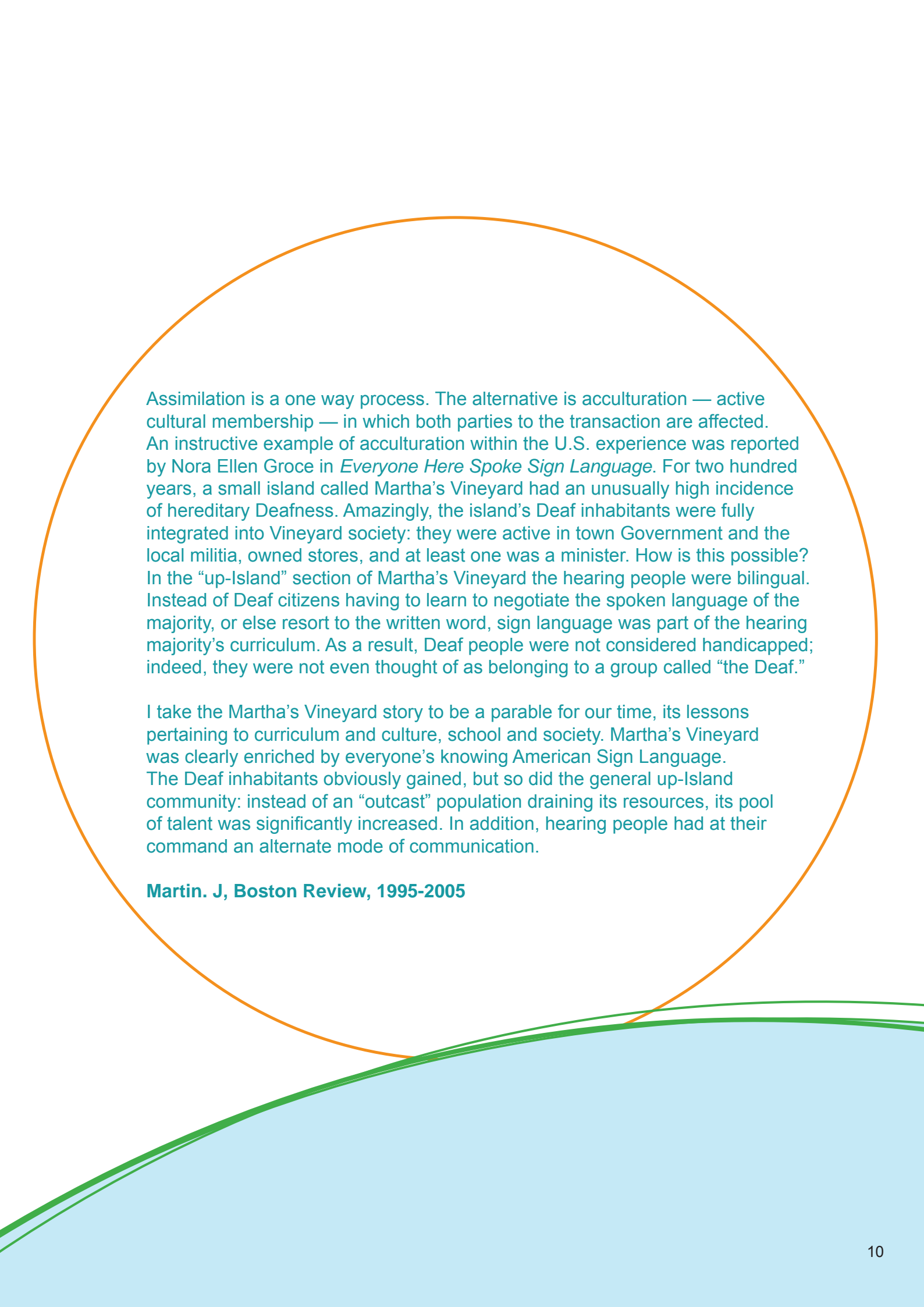
This challenge requires us to accept a visual language over our normative expectations that all members of the community will acquire spoken language skills. To “reclaim” Deaf people from the marginal status of the “other” means that we have to find ways to legitimise their language use, which is the basis for the development of identity, self worth, community connection and participation.

If “good communication is good business” then it makes sense to make provisions and adjustments for those who use different languages and modes of communication. This can be achieved by providing access to qualified and quality interpreting services.

Thinking about *Why Auslan interpreting matters* draws attention to current gaps in the provision of Auslan interpreting services and the debilitating or disabling impact that this has on the life experience of Deaf people.

This idea of a “lack in community” builds on recent trends in disability studies which have drawn attention to the need to promote change in communities so that we are better equipped to respond to, and understand the aspirations of people who are different (see for example Oliver, 1990). The tables have been turned and the gaze is now fixed firmly on the way communities disable, rather than the so-called “deficits” that people with a disability (e.g. with limited mobility) or Deaf people bring to community life. Disablement comes from the way we plan and organise our cities and communities, rather than by the way people with a disability move for example, or the way that Deaf people communicate.

In this context, the impact of a strong Auslan interpreting industry on Deaf people’s citizenship and community membership is profound. Sign language interpreting is a key facilitator of involvement in the community. It is a source of vital connection and communication across a person’s life span and it provides a range of benefits for Deaf people and the communities in which they live. Without access to NAATI accredited, professional interpreting services, Deaf people report experiences of isolation and marginalisation. They are unable to take part or benefit from the opportunities that are routinely afforded to other members of the community such as access to education, health care, employment, volunteering opportunities, attending events, sports and even their children’s events. Without access to interpreters, the experiences of Deaf people are entirely commensurate with the wheelchair user who faces a flight of stairs and no ramp.



Assimilation is a one way process. The alternative is acculturation — active cultural membership — in which both parties to the transaction are affected. An instructive example of acculturation within the U.S. experience was reported by Nora Ellen Groce in *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*. For two hundred years, a small island called Martha's Vineyard had an unusually high incidence of hereditary Deafness. Amazingly, the island's Deaf inhabitants were fully integrated into Vineyard society: they were active in town Government and the local militia, owned stores, and at least one was a minister. How is this possible? In the "up-Island" section of Martha's Vineyard the hearing people were bilingual. Instead of Deaf citizens having to learn to negotiate the spoken language of the majority, or else resort to the written word, sign language was part of the hearing majority's curriculum. As a result, Deaf people were not considered handicapped; indeed, they were not even thought of as belonging to a group called "the Deaf."

I take the Martha's Vineyard story to be a parable for our time, its lessons pertaining to curriculum and culture, school and society. Martha's Vineyard was clearly enriched by everyone's knowing American Sign Language. The Deaf inhabitants obviously gained, but so did the general up-Island community: instead of an "outcast" population draining its resources, its pool of talent was significantly increased. In addition, hearing people had at their command an alternate mode of communication.

Martin. J, Boston Review, 1995-2005



“Deaf people should not be limited to the settings that they can access interpreting services for. They should be able to watch their son’s soccer presentation and have access to the information being spoken, or to see their daughter in a play and understand what the audience is laughing about...”

VCOD Report, Pg. 7, 2008

Why interpreting matters

Some of the specific benefits of a strong and accessible Auslan interpreting industry include:

- Improved access to employment and other vocational activities
- Improved awareness on the part of educational leaders on the important role interpreters play in educational access
- Increased access to a greater range of services
- Opportunities for the development of social bonds and friendship
- A sense of belonging, self worth and identity
- Improved quality of services and less reliance by Deaf people on family, friends and volunteers
- Improved access and exchange of information across services and with the community in particular emergency services information
- The ability for Deaf people who are employed, to contribute to Government revenue through taxes and contributions to workforce innovation, without having to rely on pensions to survive
- Increased community awareness and responsiveness.

The acknowledgement of Auslan interpreting as a basic right enables Deaf people to access these opportunities. It also enables participation and engagement in social life and provides increased opportunities for Deaf people to actively engage with, and build the communities in which they live.

Activating citizenship and human rights

At the time of the Australian Census (2006), 5,500 people nationwide nominated Auslan as the primary language they spoke at home. Of these people, almost 2,000 users were from Victoria (ABS). The Deafness sector reports on numbers in excess of 30,000 Auslan users nationally, citing the limitations of the ABS data, which formulates the relevant question as language spoken at home. Nonetheless, these numbers reveal a community that requires support for specific language access.

The Australian Government has recognised that access to Auslan interpreters is a fundamental need for Deaf people to be able to participate in Australian society and avoid the negative impacts and costs of isolation from community life (Access Economics Report, 2008).

Deaf people's right to use Auslan in their everyday lives is reflected in a range of national and international laws and conventions. This includes the Australian ratified Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008). The UN Convention affirms the right for Deaf people to access Auslan interpreting under the following general principles - non discrimination; full and effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for difference;

equality of opportunity; and accessibility. The Convention also requires that all parties "take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion....on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice...including by... accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages." (United Nations, 2008)

At a national and state level the Federal Disability Discrimination Act, the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act also place a legal obligation on service providers – both private and public – to provide equal access for Deaf people to their goods and services.

These Human Rights Conventions and legislation provide a framework for the development of a set of citizenship entitlements for Deaf people reflected in obligations adopted by the State to promote access to services and resources that enable them to live productive and meaningful lives. This includes access to education, employment, health services, sport and recreation and a range of other areas of life that promote community membership and affiliation.

The ability to activate rights and exercise citizenship is dependent on one's capacity to articulate views and opinions about the future and to have those views understood and acknowledged by the broader community. If planning is a conversation about possibilities, then Auslan interpreting matters to Deaf people because it facilitates the achievement of individual goals and aspirations as well as enabling the planning of both individual lives and the development of a capacity to contribute to communities so that they are more diverse and inclusive. It enables Deaf people to contribute to their communities socially and economically. It enables Deaf people to activate their human rights and responsibilities. It also enables communities to consider and respond to those claims and it enables Government to deliver on its policy objectives.

Theorising Deaf citizenship

The idea of citizenship used in this Report refers to a set of entitlements that Deaf people can reasonably expect to access in order to enable full participation in community life. This includes access to support and resources across their life span to ensure participation in education, training and employment, health, sport and recreation, arts and cultural development opportunities. In all areas of community life, and across all stages of life, Auslan interpreting is critical to ensure that Deaf people can participate with dignity and exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. From kindergarten and early intervention programs to school, employment, leisure and/or seniors programs, access to Auslan interpreting has the potential to enhance the way Deaf people experience community life in a way no other service can. It activates their citizenship.

Many Deaf scholars and researchers have argued that the privileging of spoken communication over signed language has denied Deaf people the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the communities in which they live. This results in Deaf people being marginalised and isolated from community life. It also stigmatises Deaf

people and the language that they use.

Research into the mental health and wellbeing of Deaf people indicates prevalent levels of mental illness four times that of non-Deaf (i.e. hearing) counterparts. Denial of language and culture is a significant contributor but an incapacity to access general mental health services because of inadequate sign language interpreting provision compounds the issue and ensures that the cycles of mental illness and marginalisation are never broken (Deaf Children Australia, 2010; AFDS 2005).

Over the last four decades Deaf people have mobilised around these issues to create a vibrant political and cultural response to their marginalisation.

The celebration of Deaf culture and Deaf pride evokes a vision of citizenship based on the additional needs and aspirations Deaf people bring to community life. It also recognises the contested nature of citizenship, as a status that is both conferred by the state but also actively negotiated and challenged by Deaf people in the context of additional demands that

are made of Government and community in response to their diversity and difference.

Deaf social and cultural organisation is an important part of Australian society yet for the most part it remains invisible and not understood by the broader Australian community. It is a rich and inspiring story at both an international and national level that needs to be told. This restorying and repositioning of a Deaf narrative is an important part of identity building – in a sense it can be seen as “citizenship work.” It also forms the basis of a new social movement which has a global reach with the aim of changing values and lifestyle, and defending Deaf people’s right to participate in civil society on their terms.

Deaf social and cultural organisation is an ongoing story that is central to the Auslan interpreting industry and provides a capacity to inspire those who want to get involved in this rich history and tradition of activism. It also provides some of the key theoretical foundations for the Auslan training curriculum.

“I’m a Deaf person who wears hearing aids. Elsewhere, some of my friends have cochlear implants, while others sign fully. No matter what our backgrounds though, the truth is we’re Deaf. This in itself isn’t bad. It’s just reality. I learnt a long time ago that Auslan is the one language I can fully understand irrespective of context, background noise, or hearing levels. It’s the one language I know that will allow me to go confidently about my business as a manager at my place of employment. It’s also the one language that will allow me to make fully informed decisions when I need to make them, without resorting to writing on paper to correspond with people. I’m entitled to be able to access Auslan interpreting when I need it, and how I need it. It’s also the right thing to do.”

A Deaf woman, aged 29, 2011



“I completed my mainstream secondary school education and applied to study Psychology. I was thrilled to get my year 12 results which meant I got into my preferred course and university. I did not disclose that I was profoundly Deaf and that my first language was Auslan on the application form. In brief, when I contacted the university to introduce myself to them and advise about my interpreting service requirements, I was refused entry to the course and to my necessary interpreting support services.

Much to my surprise, I found out later that the refusal of entry and blatant discrimination that I experienced was standard for all Deaf people in Australia. I was shocked and angry. All I wanted to do was go to uni and study psychology, be a student and enjoy campus life, graduate with a degree and get a job just like everyone else! But what did I do? Well I did not go to university with my peers; rather I met a lawyer and lodged a complaint against the university. I went job hunting and found a temporary, low-paying job. I thought the job would be temporary but in fact the whole experience overtook my life for several years right up until the case was settled just before going to court.”

A Deaf woman seeking to attend university in the 1990s, 2011

“Accessing telephone and other related services is a right for all. When Deaf people in Australia did not have that right, collectively we had to develop a robust national social action plan that would demonstrate and provide evidence of discrimination as well as solutions to force the Government to acknowledge the barriers and correct them. We implemented the plan and it worked. We now have close to world’s best practice in accessible telecommunication services.”

Phil Harper, Community Liaison Manager, Australian Communication Exchange, 2011

“In my work as a manager for an Auslan interpreting agency, I can tell you that sometimes a Deaf person needs an interpreter immediately – such as within the next four to six hours. Occasionally we have the staff available or know of a freelancer interpreter who has a cancellation and can be redeployed. But oftentimes we don’t have an interpreter available in such short timeframes. Frequently I have to go back to the client with bad news.

This is difficult for them to deal with. They tell us ‘My meeting or doctor’s appointment is important. Now I have to wait two weeks - it seems unfair and unreasonable’. They also ask ‘Why does my life have to be on hold for two more weeks before I can sort out an issue?’ This is a problem that Deaf people have to deal with on a daily basis and it isn’t right.”

Manager, Victorian Auslan interpreting agency, 2011

Facilitating Government policy

A strong Auslan interpreting industry has the potential to facilitate Government policy across a range of program areas including in health, education, employment, sport and recreation, and emergency services. Indeed the current state of the Auslan interpreting industry, it could be argued, is in fact letting Government down due to the industry's inability to supply adequate and/or competent interpreting to support Deaf people's participation and access to services. This is not meant to let Government off the hook.

It just means that if Government policy and planning is to be implemented, then Deaf people need to be able to access Auslan interpreting.

The Auslan interpreting industry is therefore obligated to engage, connect with and lobby Government programs to assist them in delivering services that are relevant to the whole community – a community that includes Deaf people.

“...It is also true that Governments cannot work in isolation. Real long-lasting change will only be achieved in partnership with business and the community. Participants and submissions made it clear that people with disabilities and their families, friends and carers expect the Government to bring everyone together to work towards a common vision. And they are hopeful. They want others to share their vision and recognise the benefits for all in building more inclusive communities.”

Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia, pg. 63, 2009



The current policy context

There are a number of key principles that underlie Government reform in Australia. These include an emphasis on:

- Improving access to employment
- Moving people from welfare to work
- Reducing social isolation
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Building diverse and resilient communities
- Increasing access to services
- Bringing Government closer to the people and community
- Building strong community leadership
- Place based planning.

These principles are framed by three key trends across all levels of Government which are:

- The enabling state
- Whole of Government planning
- Community capacity building.

The idea of an *enabling state* refers to a new style of Government policy and program development which emphasises the importance of communities, not bureaucracies, having a central role in defining, delivering and managing appropriate forms of social action. It also promotes a role for Government funding and bureaucracies as “servants” of communities, and not their “masters”.

Whole of Government planning or joined up Government refers to a commitment by Government to a more coordinated approach to planning and policy development across program areas in response to issues and community needs. It is based on the premise that many issues cross territorial boundaries in Government and can only be responded to effectively by an emphasis on common objectives shared across organisational boundaries, as opposed to working solely within discrete program areas and organisations.

Community capacity building derives from enabling state principles and refers to an approach that favours place based planning and empowerment of community members to make decisions about their future.

Central to each of these trends is a commitment to bottom up planning, insiders (i.e. community members) as experts, partnership and collaborative approaches linking key community stakeholders and Government, and the need for Government to listen and connect with local people and organisations.

These trends provide a framework for Deaf people, their representative and service organisations to engage with Government to negotiate more effective provision of Auslan interpreting. The emphasis on “hearing” from all members of community, responding to diversity and reducing isolation will require Government to rethink how it connects and engages with Deaf people. It can hardly claim that its planning and service delivery is empowering and relevant, or that they are obtaining the social and economic benefits of inclusion if the means to hear from, and work with, a key group in the community is not available or under resourced.

How Government currently supports Auslan interpreting in Victoria

Currently Government has a range of provisions for Auslan interpreting. It is debatable whether Government is getting “value for money” from the current way it administers and allocates this resource.

At a national level Auslan interpreting in private medical health settings is provided by the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service (NABS) which is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Based at the corporate office of the Wesley Mission, Brisbane and providing services Australia-wide, NABS provides interpreters to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who use sign language and would like an interpreter for private medical appointments. It is free of charge to both patients and medical and health care practitioners. Unfortunately at this time, community welfare centres, doctor’s clinics and public doctors working in a private setting are not covered by NABS.

Whilst increasing access to private medical appointments through NABS is commendable, the establishment of this service when seen through a lens of systemic industry reform, poses significant challenges. With industry shortages, variable working conditions and limited career

pathways, the emergence of a fully funded service places pressure on the industry as a whole, and contributes to deficiencies in less well remunerated and structured sectors.

The development of such services need to be undertaken within a broader planning framework that is responsive to the contextual issues outlined in this Report, and in relation to encouraging, attracting, better educating and remunerating interpreters to deliver more equitable outcomes across all sectors of community engagement and service delivery.

The Commonwealth Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) also provides funding to purchase a range of work related modifications and services for people who are about to start a job or who are currently working, as well as

those who require assistance to find and prepare for work. While there are many benefits to the program, the current annual funding allocation for interpreting is inadequate for many Deaf people as the (\$6,000) cap per year does not provide ongoing interpreting support in the workplace. This is problematic as the program identifies a need, resources it for a defined period of time, then ceases to fund that ongoing support service. While the financial support does cease, the Deaf person does not cease to experience the need for Auslan interpreting in the workplace.

“The federal Government funds can be exhausted in as little as two months, thereby causing undue stress to Deaf people who require their employer to cover the difference. This is an unenviable position for Deaf people to be in since they must weigh up the impact and perceived financial burden they might create for their employers.”

Manager, Victorian Auslan interpreting agency, 2011

The Victorian Deaf Society (Vicdeaf), established in 1884 is the primary source of reference, referral, advice and support for Deaf adults in Victoria. Sign Language Communication (SLC) Victoria is the largest provider of Auslan interpreting services in the state. Vicdeaf receives approximately 45% of its operating costs for community services from state and federal Governments. The remaining 55% of operational funding is derived from Vicdeaf's fundraising initiatives and service fees where applicable. Vicdeaf offers Auslan interpreting services on a fee for service basis.

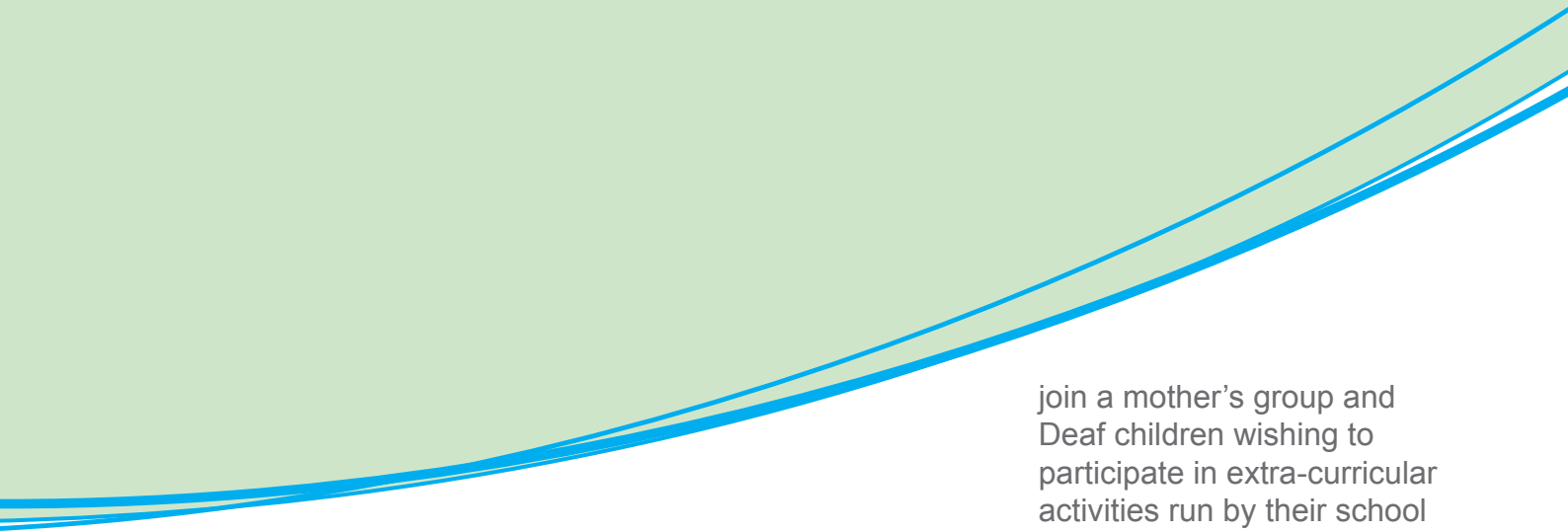
Other employers of Auslan services in Victoria include local TAFE Institutes. The Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing runs the Central Auslan Booking Service (CABS). This service acts as a brokerage for individual TAFE institutes seeking the services of an Auslan interpreter. The service advertises available work directly to a pool of interpreters who then are employed and work directly for the TAFE. This service was established in response to the extreme difficulty TAFE institutes had in locating suitable interpreters,

when their demand for these services would fluctuate continuously. This highlights some of the difficulties when dealing with a highly casualised workforce. Kangan Institute also employs an Auslan interpreter in-house. Other interpreting agencies operating in Victoria include Echo Interpreting, Auslan Services, All Graduates, OnCall Interpreting and the Victorian Interpreting Services (VITS) Language Link among others.

"I work in a job where my interpreting costs can amount to between \$30,000-\$40,000 a year as a result of the multiple meetings I hold to manage major events. The \$6,000 currently available from the Commonwealth to support my needs can be used up in as few as two months. I'm lucky I work for a big organisation which can cover my interpreting costs and are committed to doing so. Others who work in other settings, including big or small businesses, not-for-profits and community organisations aren't so lucky. Either they don't want to spend the money on proper access, or they cannot afford to do so to the fullest extent required."

A Deaf professional, aged 31, 2011

There is also funding provided for kindergarten, primary and secondary school students requiring Auslan interpreting to access their classroom curriculum. This funding falls under the same funding structure available to all children with a disability – the Program for Students with Disabilities. As the funding allocated is not interpreter specific, it does not provide full time access to learning.



In the main, access to interpreting in school settings occurs through the assessment of individual student needs through the disability program – such as the Program for Students with Disabilities. If students are deemed eligible for funding an allocation is made to the school, which may be used to purchase interpreting services. However, the amount of funding that is available to the school via this program rarely provides full-time coverage. In addition, remuneration rates for educational interpreters are the lowest in the industry. In a climate of inadequate supply, schools struggle to meet this requirement or retain their workforce. Limited budgets and supply, compounded with the fact that there is no legal requirement to provide qualified interpreters means that few schools also provide NAATI accredited interpreters for their student – instead employing integration aides who are not adequately trained to support Deaf students.

Overall then, there are a number of issues with the current approach utilised by Government to the funding of Auslan interpreting. It can be

seen as both prescriptive and reactive. It does not encourage a systematic response to the needs of Deaf people nor enable their participation in all components of their social and economic lives. Access to medical appointments is seen as an issue so the Federal Government has set up a system for partial funding of private medical appointments through NABS. Deaf people need Auslan interpreting to obtain and maintain employment and so partial funding for this is allocated under the Commonwealth Employment Assistance Fund.

But the other areas of people's lives remain even more profoundly under resourced. There is no consistency of funding of interpreting in educational settings, there is no ongoing support for Deaf employees who require interpreting services in order to undertake the requirements of their jobs, there is no support for Deaf people who require interpreting services to participate in Local Government elections, sport and recreation opportunities or arts and cultural programs and events. Deaf mothers of newborn babies have no consistent access to interpreting services to

join a mother's group and Deaf children wishing to participate in extra-curricular activities run by their school or sporting groups, must often do so without access to communication with their peers. Similarly, while there are many employers including medium size firms, national and international corporations who provide interpreting services without question, others do not. The law states that the private sector has the same responsibility to provide interpreting just like Government does. Those who do provide required interpreting should be acknowledged. Those who do not, should be held to account as with the rest of the community.

There is no coordinated approach to funding interpreting which engages all key players across Government and promotes partnerships with the community, Deaf sector and interpreting industry to ensure a planned, responsive and more far reaching provision of Auslan interpreting services.

Variation in remuneration across different contexts is also problematic. For example, NABS pays interpreters approximately between \$98 and \$129 per 1.5 hour minimum booking – which includes payment for travel.

For community interpreting fees within standard business hours, one interpreting agency charges \$72-\$79 per hour with a minimum two hour charge. This compares to interpreting in Government schools where interpreters may be employed as educational support officers with a career structure or may be employed on a flexible contractual arrangement. The drain on the school system as NAATI accredited interpreters are drawn towards NABS and other employers is obvious. It leads to more qualified interpreters moving away from providing interpreting in the education system with subsequent impacts on the lives of young Deaf people from the moment they commence school. Consistency in relation to the way Government funds and resources interpreting has the potential to address this issue and ensure more equitable distribution of Auslan interpreting services across a range of contexts, targeting different segments of the community.

In their 2008 report for Vicdeaf, Access Economics has also indicated that the net cost for Government to provide more comprehensive and responsive Auslan interpreting would be approximately \$11.5 million dollars, each year, Australia wide. However optimal use of these funds would require significant reform by the Government, Deaf and interpreting sectors for this level of resourcing to

be effective. To service the current level of need requires work across a number of fronts in the Auslan interpreting industry. This includes:

- Workforce development
- Education and training
- Assurance of adequate remuneration and conditions of employment
- Development of quality frameworks and standards and professional supervision
- Provision and utilisation of new, effective technologies (e.g. Video Relay Interpreting)
- More effective sector coordination and planning in response to identified needs and opportunities.

These factors provide a basis for establishing a more comprehensive framework for investment by Government that would have reach across a range of life areas, community sectors and the broader service industry. It also introduces a greater capacity to mobilise support and commitment from a broader range of providers and stakeholders previously not engaged. This develops a potential to resource Auslan interpreting in new ways that matches Government commitment and investment.



INTERPRET

Resourcing “whole of life” and “whole of community” planning

Auslan interpreting, and the industry surrounding it, can be seen as a “whole of life” or “whole of community” service or intervention that requires work and understanding across a range of contexts to ensure Deaf people have equitable access to the community. An effective Government response to issues identified in this Report will require work across all three levels of Government, the Deaf sector and community. It will require work with a range of Government program areas to reflect the complexity of interactions between Auslan interpreting, Deaf people’s personal and social aspirations and the capacity of the community to respond and engage with these aspirations.

If interpreting services are to be improved and made more accessible “on the ground” then an integrated approach to planning and provision is recommended to enable the

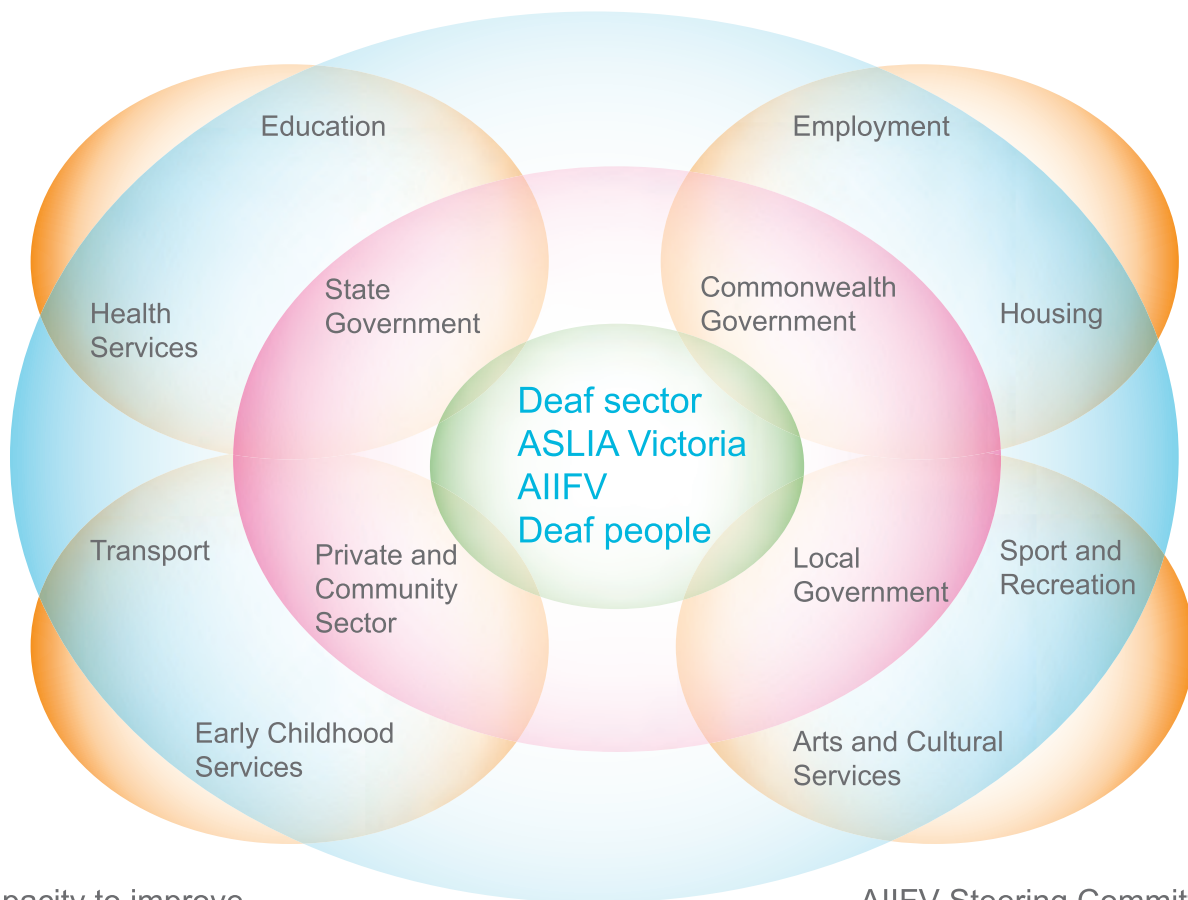
industry to deal with previously intractable problems and to initiate creative problem solving capacities that engage all key players. This will require the industry to move beyond the “usual suspects” and to identify key stakeholders (including those who are perhaps not currently engaged) who can add value to the Auslan interpreting industry.

The diagram on the next page depicts an integrated approach to planning based on “whole of Government”, “whole of community” or “whole of life” planning frameworks. It creates a role for Deaf community members, ASLIA Victoria and key Deaf service providers as “mobilising” agencies, responsible for encouraging Government, business and community sectors to partner them in planning and fostering a better interpreting industry to enable better access for Deaf people.

Five key mobilising or mapping questions can be used to guide planning:

- What are the issues Deaf people face – e.g. in relation to accessing education or sport and recreation, employment?
- Who is currently responding?
- Who else needs to be engaged to strengthen the Auslan interpreting industry or improve access to Auslan interpreting?
- What are the strategies for engaging these key stakeholders?
- What models can address the current systemic issues that allows for a cohesive solution?

An integrated approach to planning



The capacity to improve service delivery at the local level is dependent on a more effective and integrated approach to planning. This has implications for the way that the Deaf sector (including interpreters) positions itself in relation to Government policy and planning. It might also require the sector to draw on more sophisticated social change processes associated with community development practice frameworks.

There are currently comparatively poor links between specialist Deaf services, the three levels of Government, mainstream community services, businesses, interpreters and Deaf people in relation to the planning, coordination and

improvement of the Auslan interpreting industry. The capacity to strengthen and change the interpreter industry is compromised by this poor cohesion and collective understanding of an effective strategy.

The AIFV has been developed in response to this lack of coordination. It has recognised the need for key players to come together to address issues in a more systematic and systemic fashion. The formation of the AIFV signals the development of a new and strategic approach for the Auslan interpreting industry. The inclusion of the Director of the Victorian Office for Disability on the

AIFV Steering Committee is also strategic and provides an opportunity to work with the Office for Disability to extend the reach of the industry across Government in the context of a whole of Government planning response to interpreting issues.

The Office for Disability also supports the development and implementation of Disability Action Plans according to section 38 of the Victorian Disability Services Act 2006. This has application across all state Government programs, Local Government Authorities and Victorian Statutory Authorities. Linking access to Auslan interpreting with local and state Action Planning processes would also help to position the work of the interpreting industry.

Responding to specific policy objectives through Auslan interpreting

The provision of Auslan interpreting is a key resource which enables Government to develop and deliver on specific policy objectives and improve outcomes through more effective service delivery. What follows is a few examples of how the Auslan interpreting industry can respond to key Government “whole of life” program objectives.

Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia

The Commonwealth Government *Shut Out* (2009) Report on the experience of people with disabilities and their families in Australia reveals the level of isolation and disadvantage experienced by people with a disability. The impact that this has on people’s sense of self and their health and wellbeing is profound. To be shut out is to be denied the opportunity to feel, and be a part of, the community in which you live. This results in isolation and exclusion from key services – such as early childhood, kindergarten, school, further education, sport and recreation, employment, arts and cultural development, local businesses, transport and aged services – that enable people to grow, to develop and to be enriched as a valued member of community. The vision of Australia as an inclusive and accepting society is profoundly compromised by the *Shut Out* Report. It provides a strong basis for the

Auslan interpreting industry to commence discussions about how Government plans to address these issues.

A Working Solution

The Commonwealth Government recently announced a number of reforms to the Disability Support Pension to improve support for Australians with a disability and to help them into work. The capacity for people with a disability to access employment is dependent on the development of accessible community infrastructure – such as public transport, accessible public and private buildings and businesses, accessible communication and information – and specialist employment and disability support services that promote inclusive employment practice.

Work readiness for both employers and potential employees with a disability is

“If my partner or daughter gets sick and I need to take either of them to the doctor, I can ask NABS for an interpreter. I can receive full information as a partner, mother and primary carer and make informed decisions based on that.”

“Kathryn”, NABS Noticeboard, 2010

also dependent on reshaping and rethinking work spaces and practices and giving people access to specialist resources on site that facilitate their inclusion. In this context, access to Auslan interpreting services is a key means for improving the work readiness of both Deaf people and public and private employers.

A key point for debate and negotiation will be the amount allocated for employment assistance and support which is limited to \$6,000 for Auslan interpreting. Most would argue that this is extremely limited and would not be enough to sustain a Deaf person in meaningful employment nor is it sufficient to change and develop a responsive workplace culture or environment.

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

All three levels of Government in Australia have adopted the Social Model of Health as the basis for health planning in communities. The Social Model recognises the importance of life circumstances or determinants of health – including social and economic circumstances, indigenous status and ethnicity, stress, gender, early life development and experiences, social exclusion, work and unemployment, and social supports – on people's and community capacity to make healthy lifestyle choices. It also acknowledges the failure of the health system to address issues of access to appropriate services and programs for diverse groups which can lead to inequalities in health status. In response, the Social Model proposes integrated health promotion activities and planning which attempt to close equity gaps by supporting social networks, developing and advocating for healthy public policies, and strengthening community capacity.

In response to this in Victoria we have seen the development of a strong partnership between State

and Local Government in the context of Municipal Public Health Planning and Community Health Planning.

Access to Auslan is important in the context of health policy because it has a capacity to close equity gaps by centring Deaf people in community health planning through the facilitation of advocacy effort, network development and Deaf awareness raising. Health and wellbeing is also impacted by the ability to

participate in community life, to live out your life across a range of community contexts – sport, recreation, arts and culture, education and employment. This provides a basis for discussion about the current narrow health and wellbeing construct of NABS which, while providing important funding for private medical appointments, does not resource interpreting across other life areas that are critical to promoting health and wellbeing outcomes.

“When I was pregnant and at a private hospital, I met a Deaf woman who was also pregnant. We became friends. I took for granted the fact that she had an Auslan interpreter present with her when she needed it. Imagine my surprise when she said that this was often not the case and that two friends of hers – one in a public and another in a private hospital – had to rely on writing on paper or lip-reading to talk to doctors and nurses. This during a time when any new mum is trying to develop the confidence and knowledge they need to handle birth and then a new-born baby! My friend's words have stayed with me all this time. She said to me: ‘One day it is my dream for all Deaf women to have access to interpreters whether in public or private health settings.’ I couldn't agree more.”

A mother of two, 2011

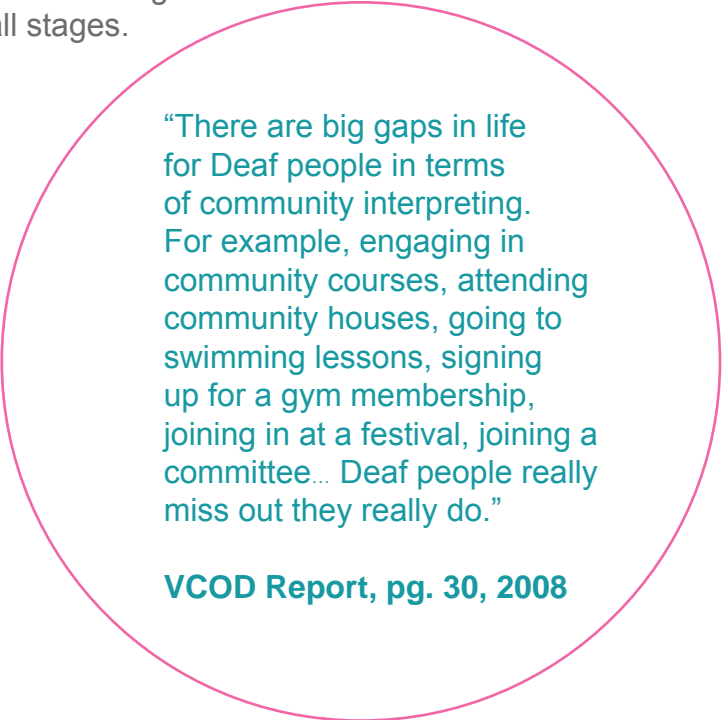


Other potential points of engagement with Government: Funding for pilot programs

Responding effectively to the Auslan interpreting industry may require the development of new approaches and models of service delivery. This includes projects that trial new technology and funding models as well initiatives that engage new partners. Partnerships between Government and the Deaf sector – including the interpreting industry – which foster new approaches should be actively sought. They help to build an evidence base for planning and policy development, optimising use of existing resources and the allocation of additional funding to promote change.

Given links with the Office for Disability, funding could be sought for the development of a project that examines in detail the use and need for interpreting across Government program and both community and business

sectors. This could include the development of standards to be applied in each of these sectors which would deliver adequate, responsive, consistent and quality interpreting services to Deaf people. It would also facilitate a planned and coordinated approach to the development and delivery of interpreting services, and a requirement for interpreting services to be considered in funding and planning at all stages.



“There are big gaps in life for Deaf people in terms of community interpreting. For example, engaging in community courses, attending community houses, going to swimming lessons, signing up for a gym membership, joining in at a festival, joining a committee... Deaf people really miss out they really do.”

VCOD Report, pg. 30, 2008

Building community capacity

For Deaf people to be able to access the full range of community services, interpreting needs to be available across a range of life areas, not just interpreting based on formal funding and policy arrangements linked to medical appointments, hospitals, accredited education courses, courts and workplaces.

Research conducted by the Victorian Council for Deaf People (now Deaf Victoria) on the availability of community interpreting has revealed the difficulties associated with access to interpreting for what might be termed community access and participation activities.

The limited availability of funding for community interpreting is regarded as a major issue for Deaf people. If communities are going to be able to respond in meaningful ways to Deaf people then they too need to be able to

access Auslan interpreting. Community organisations are currently not equipped to respond to the needs of Deaf people because of the limitations on their eligibility to access funded interpreting and their lack of knowledge about processes for engaging interpreters.

The VCOD Report revealed that, generally, community organisations are happy to engage and connect with Deaf people, if they can access funded Auslan interpreting programs. If Deaf people are going to feel a part of their community then a strategy for acquiring funds for community interpreting and a system for targeting and administering those funds needs to be established.

“Access to provision of interpreting services is currently limited to workplace, education, or any formal arrangements. Informal arrangements or meetings often fall into a category where the provision of interpreters is non-existent, usually in a community environment. Non-provision of community interpreting is identified as a barrier, or major hurdle, which does not enable Auslan users access to everyday needs nor allows them to play a significant role in community participation”.

VCOD Report, pg. 6, 2008

The capacity for businesses and community organisations to pay for interpreting also needs to be considered. This needs to be accompanied by a community education campaign which raises awareness of the needs of Deaf people and strategies for accessing Auslan interpreting. Local Government, in addition to other levels of Government, could play a role here as well by budgeting for the provision of interpreting as part of its Disability Action Planning and subsidising community organisations who wish to engage and connect with Deaf people.



Is there a role for Local Government?

Local Government Authorities (LGA) have a mandate to plan and work across the full range of community services. It is well placed to lead discussions and planning about the provision of community Auslan interpreting especially given the deployment of community building services in local councils funded by Department of Human Services, Disability Services in Victoria. This includes the Deaf Access, MetroAccess and RuralAccess initiatives coordinated by Disability Services. In total there are currently 55 workers employed in LGAs and community health

services across Victoria to plan and work across the full range of community services.

These programs provide a strategic link for ASLIA Victoria to local councils and communities that can assist local agencies and workers to develop relationships with key local Government managers and project staff.

Councils are also mandated under the Federal Disability Discrimination Act and the State Disability Services Act to develop Disability Action Plans.

Action Planning provides a basis for commencing discussions about better planning and provision of community interpreting delivered or facilitated by local Government. The links between the Office for Disability and ASLIA Victoria could be used to initiate discussions with local councils about the provision of Deaf access strategies in Local Government Action Plans.

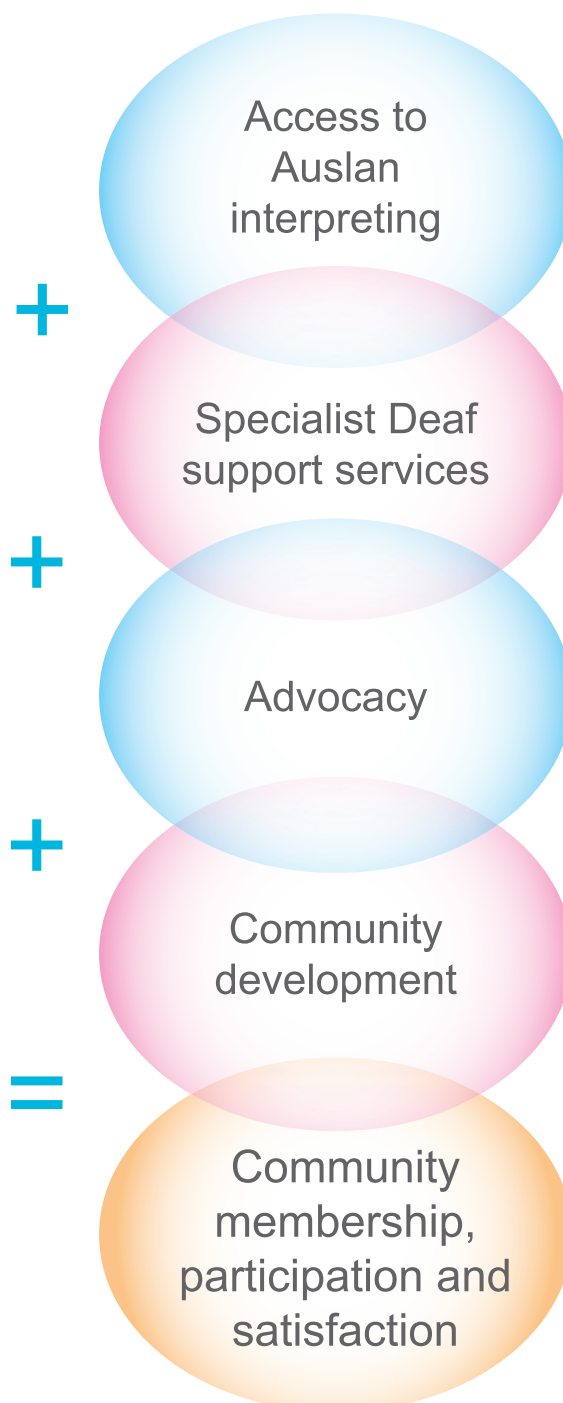
A coordinated approach to local community capacity building

The State Government Disability Services Community Building initiative describes a community membership equation as the combination of the following elements: individualised planning, specialist disability support and community development activities. The logic that follows here is that community capacity building is dependent on integration of effort across each of these areas – no single service or agency has all of the answers or the means to achieve sustained inclusion of people with a disability.

A similar equation for capacity building can be developed that targets Deaf people.

This planning model can bring together a range of key players who are well placed to develop local place based initiatives. It demonstrates the need to combine diverse sets of skills, knowledge and resources in response to the needs of Deaf people.

The elements of the equation could be:



Future planning – What needs to be done?

The Deaf sector – including the Auslan interpreting industry – in Victoria is well placed to work with Government to develop and lead a more coordinated approach to building the capacity of the interpreting industry.

This strategy will involve work across a number of fronts to engage Government, agency and community stakeholders more effectively. The Auslan interpreting industry in partnership with key Deaf stakeholders, will need to build a capacity to draw on a range of strategies to ensure a more coordinated and joined up response to the current needs and issues in the interpreting industry.

These strategies include:

- More effective use of community development practice frameworks
- Stakeholder mapping
- Partnership development
- Community awareness raising
- Training and development
- Promotions, marketing, communications
- Leadership development

- Systemic funding support for interpreting.

In partnership with others, these strategies will form the basis of the AIIFV's next stage for improving the Auslan interpreting industry for the benefit of both Deaf people and the wider community in which they live.





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Note: All quotes were sourced from participants in the Auslan Interpreting Industry Forum Victoria (AIIFV). Except where named, quotes were provided under guarantee of anonymity and were sourced in conversation and correspondence during 2011.

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