

ABORIGINAL INTERPRETER SERVICE

Do you ever feel that the person sitting opposite is not really sure what it is you are saying to them? When they say 'yes' are they trying to please you or do they really mean yes? Do you understand them? Have you got the story straight?

On 10 April 2000 the Northern Territory Government established the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) within the Office of Aboriginal Development. The Service is presently staffed with two officers in Darwin, with a third position currently being recruited in Alice Springs. These officers are able to take bookings from anywhere in the Territory and interpreters have been booked for work in the main centres as well as some bush court sittings.

How does the Aboriginal Interpreter Service Work?

The AIS offers a central booking service for government agencies and non-government bodies that require on-site Aboriginal languages interpreters. The AIS utilises and maintains a register of interpreters in the Northern Territory.

At this time there are 93 interpreters registered, covering 56 languages. Twenty six of these interpreters are accredited — and since commencement the AIS has taken 161 bookings from a diverse range of legal and medical settings. Wherever possible, in regional areas, the AIS is providing interpreters by sub-contracting work through local Aboriginal language centres. Overwhelmingly, those who have utilised the Service have commented on its usefulness and the "difference" proper communication with Aboriginal clients makes to the carriage of their duties.

At this time the AIS is staffed from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. An answering machine is presently monitoring the level of after-hours need and it is likely that the Service will become "on-call 24 hours a day" in the near future. Given the hours currently being worked by staff, it may be possible for an after-hours call to be answered and the booking met. And there have been cases of the AIS

being able to satisfy the needs of Police looking for interpreters after-hours and immediately.

Interpreters can be booked to work at a pre-arranged time — including evenings, public holidays and weekends. Advance notice of an assignment is preferred, with a week being the ideal time-frame, however to reflect the needs of clients, AIS staff will make every effort to meet the needs of those who deal with urgent matters.

To make a booking a phone call or fax can be put through to the AIS. At this stage phone bookings are preferred. Every effort is being made to streamline the process to increase the effectiveness of the Service.

The AIS operates on a cost recovery basis. Clients are billed for the interpreter's fees and, where applicable, travel and accommodation costs. There is no administrative charge made for the work undertaken by AIS staff. Clients booking interpreters are required to provide sufficient information to enable us to identify an appropriate interpreter. We can help you with obtaining pertinent information from clients. In this way, cultural conflict issues between

interpreters and non-English speaking Aboriginal clients are obviated.

The Northern Territory Government has funded its "essential services" legal and medical agencies to a level sufficient for them to purchase Aboriginal interpreter services. At this stage the greatest uptake of the Service has been in the legal area.

An important component of the task of designing and administering the Service is identifying training needs and developing an appropriate means of meeting those needs. Further information on the training program will be provided in the next edition of *Balance*. Articles about the staff of the Service and features on interpreters and out-of-the-ordinary assignments will also appear.

All readers are strongly encouraged to contact the AIS on telephone 892 4300 or facsimile 892 44223.

Enquiries related to issues of policy or suggestions for improvement of the Service may be made to Barbara Weis on telephone 892 44224.

Barbara Weis
Manager Coordination and
Research
Office of Aboriginal Development

Call for nominations: good practice indigenous child welfare & juvenile justice programs

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has commissioned social research consultants *urbis keys young* to undertake a national study identifying and documenting good practice models concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child welfare and juvenile justice.

These projects are to conform to one or more of the eight National Standards and the principle of self-determination, set out in the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Children from their Families (The *Bringing Them Home Report*).

If you wish to nominate a project for possible inclusion in the study contact *urbis keys young* for the criteria and documentation required.

Nominations are to be submitted by 6 October 2000.

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