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AGENTS OF CHANGE: POSITIONING ABORIGINAL INTERPRETERS AS THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Colleen Rosas and Josephine Guy
Aboriginal Interpreter Service, Darwin

The Australian Government's Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory created an urgent demand for interpreters to communicate at short notice both high-level policy and ground level actions. Positioning interpreters as agents of change is a new trend for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service which had up until then provided interpreters for assignments in the justice and health systems. The AIS had to quickly change the way it did business, from recruiting and training interpreters in the major towns to recruiting and training in remote communities in policy initiatives and topical information campaigns.

Developing new training packages has become core business, to build the kind of cultural capital in, and familiarity with, bureaucratic English that helps interpreters to render this complex and dense language into Aboriginal languages. The Service had to take into account the ethical dilemmas interpreters might face as people who were being subjected to the restrictions of the Intervention.

The AIS explored innovative technology in partnership with industry and is pioneering cutting edge communication tools, like push-button talking posters that give messages in several languages. The AIS scripted and produced DVD training packages for future users; and television advertisements for recruiting new interpreters and broadly promoting the use of interpreters. In a highly charged political environment, the service negotiates partnership agreements across jurisdictions and responsibilities and at the same time keeps a cross-agency steering committee informed and supportive.

The success of the AIS in bringing together these strands to build an effective interpreting force has meant increased funding and, importantly, increased interest from more government agencies. The next challenge will be to encourage the private sector to understand that using Aboriginal interpreters is simply good business.



Colleen ROSAS Director, Aboriginal Interpreter Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, Northern Territory.

Josie GUY is the
and Business

Development Manager for the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service, known as the AIS. worked in all the key positions in the AIS and has key player in growing the business of the service specialist services in the health and justice systems interpreting policy and program development by implementing the Working with Language to the Gap Policy. She is a member of the Gurindji the heartland of Indigenous Land Rights and Josie's was taken from her country in 1922 to the Kahlin Institution in Darwin now known as the Stolen Generation. Josie has also had a long history of advocating for Indigenous Rights here in Australia and at United Nation forums in Geneva, Switzerland.



Policy

Josie has
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