

Interpreter Scholarship Program That Improves Language Services in New South Wales: A Participatory Action Research Approach

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Abstract : In New South Wales (NSW), Australia, we speak more than 275 languages and dialects. Interpreters play an indispensable role in our multicultural society by ensuring the people of NSW all enjoy the same opportunities. The NSW Government offers scholarships to enable people who speak in-demand and high priority languages to become eligible to be practicing interpreters. The NSW Interpreter Scholarship Program was launched in January 2019, targeting priority languages from new and emerging, as well as existing language communities. The program offers fully-funded scholarships to study at Technical and Further Education (TAFE), receive National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) certification, and be mentored and gain employment with the interpreter panel of Multicultural NSW. A Participatory Action Research approach was engaged to challenge the current system for people to become practicing interpreters in NSW. There were over 800 metro Sydney applications and close to 200 regional applications. Three courses were run through TAFE NSW (2 in metro Sydney and 1 in regional NSW). Thirty-nine students graduated from the program in 2019. The first metro Sydney location had 18 graduates complete the course in Assyrian, Burmese, Chaldean, Kurdish-Kurmanji, Nepali, and Tibetan. The second metro Sydney location had 9 graduates complete the course in Tongan, Kirundi, Mongolian and Italian. The regional location had 12 graduates who complete the course from new emerging language communities such as Kurdish-Kurmanji, Burmese, Zomi Chin, Hakha Chin, and Tigrinya. The findings showed that students were very positive about the program as the large majority said they were satisfied with the course content, they felt prepared for the NAATI test at the conclusion of the course, and they would definitely recommend the program to their friends. Also, 18 students from the 2019 cohort signed up to receive further mentoring by experienced interpreters. In 2020 it is anticipated that 3 courses will be run through TAFE NSW (2 in regional NSW and 1 in metro Sydney) to reflect the needs of new emerging language communities settling in regional areas. In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that the NSW Interpreter Scholarship Program improves the supply, quality, and use of language services in NSW, Australia, so that people who speak in-demand and high priority languages are ensured better access to crucial government services

Keywords : interpreting, emerging communities, scholarship program, Sydney

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