

RID NCIEC Mentoring Grant Update: The Mentorship Program, Massachusetts

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The Mentorship Program is proud to announce that we have launched our new ASL Mentoring Program! This new program will increase the skills of both new interpreters and of deaf mentors. We are also pleased to note that 30 percent of the participants are mentees/mentors of color, which puts us on track toward our overall goal of increasing diversity in all aspects of our program, as well as helping mentees become more comfortable interacting with deaf individuals from a variety of cultures.

Background

The Mentorship Program is now in its 15th year of providing mentorship opportunities in interpreting to novice and aspiring interpreters. While the majority of our mentees have gone on to become professional, credentialed interpreters, others struggle with fluency in ASL and, as a result, are not able to fully benefit from interpreting mentorship. Although we have

recognized the need for language mentorship in ASL for some time, we did not have the resources to develop such a program. This year, we were extremely fortunate to be beneficiaries of an RID NCIEC Mentoring Grant and with that money, plus additional community resources, we have finally realized our dream of establishing a program to provide mentorship in ASL.

Coordinator for ASL Mentoring

Our first task was to hire Terry Malcolm, CDI, as our new Coordinator for ASL Mentoring. A longtime supporter of new interpreters, Terry brings a wealth of experience to this position. She has mentored both ASL interpreters and deaf interpreters for the past six years, mentored educational interpreters in ASL for two years through the Educational Interpreters Mentorship Program, tutored hearing people one-on-one in ASL and taught ASL for families through the Massachusetts State Association of the Deaf's Family Sign Language Pro-

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gram. Terry enjoys working with individuals from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and we are so pleased to have her as part of our team!

Recruiting Deaf Mentors

Our second task was to recruit 10 deaf mentors, keeping in mind the need for diversity both geographically and culturally. We looked for people with native or near-native ASL skills who were friendly, patient and interested in working with new interpreters to improve their ASL skills. We consulted with Passport to Mentorship and the Conference Interpreters Mentorship Program as well as other supporters in the community to generate a list of potential mentors. As it turned out, people were so excited about this new opportunity that we had potential mentors contacting us! Since funding limitations dictated that we only train 10 people, we now have a waiting list of deaf individuals who would like to be trained as mentors!

Mentor Training

Our third task was to set-up a training for the deaf mentors. Luckily, The Mentorship Program of Massachusetts and the NOTYET Program of the University of Southern Maine were able to collaborate and bring mentors from both states together for a two-day ASL Deaf Mentor Training in mid-November. Eleven mentors from Massachusetts (including our Coordinator for ASL Mentoring) and 10 mentors from Maine participated for a total of 21 deaf mentors trained! We were pleased to bring in Gino Gouby, CDI, CLIP-R, National Professional Development Manager for Sorenson Communications, as our presenter. Gino did an excellent job of educating the mentors about linguistic features of ASL and demonstrating how to analyze mentees' ASL samples. The group practiced assessing ASL samples and discussed goal setting as well as approaches for working with mentees. Mentors left the training energized and eager to begin working with their mentees!

Mentees

As a pilot program with limited funding, we were only able to accept 10 mentees into the ASL Mentoring Program. We carefully selected a mix of people who could provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program from a variety of perspectives. The group includes six mentees, who are also participating in our interpreting mentorship program; two mentees, who are past participants in interpreting mentorship; and two mentees, who have no prior relationship with The Mentorship Program. All mentees were required to submit an application, including a self-evaluation of their ASL skills and an ASL sample.

As anticipated, there is great interest in this new program and even though registration for the pilot program was closed, we still have a waiting list of people who would like to apply to the program!

Program Description

Mentor/mentee pairs will meet for a total of eight hours,

including both private mentoring sessions (approximately five hours) and social events (approximately three hours). It is recommended that teams meet approximately every two weeks for an hour each time but the actual length and number of meetings may vary depending upon each mentoring pair's individual needs.

Mentors will conduct an initial assessment of mentees' use of ASL linguistic features, will guide mentees in developing goals for improvement and will engage mentees in activities to enhance ASL fluency. Mentoring sessions will focus on conversational ASL skills, with deaf mentors modeling appropriate use of ASL and mentees focusing on incorporating what they see into their ASL production.

In addition to private meetings, mentors will assist with mentees' entrée into the community by accompanying them to two social events of the mentoring pair's choosing. These may be community events or events coordinated by The Mentorship Program. These social gatherings provide an opportunity for mentees to interact with deaf individuals with a variety of signing styles and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. At these events, mentors will support mentees in meeting new people and will act as linguistic and cultural mediators. Following an event, mentors and mentees will identify any particular linguistic and/or cultural challenges the mentee faced and will identify specific activities/resources/strategies to strengthen this area of development.

Community Support

Community support is essential in establishing any new program, and we are thrilled with the collaboration and support from the community which has made this program possible. Massachusetts RID (MassRID) is a longstanding partner who supported us in our bid for RID NCIEC grant money. In addition, this program could not run without the generous funding provided by the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) and additional funding provided by the Boston University Center for Interpreter Education (BUCIE). We are also thankful to Sorenson Communications for in-kind funding for the mentor training and Northern Essex Community College for donating use of their facilities for the training. Special recognition goes to DEAF, Inc., who continues to act as our fiscal agent and provide meeting space.

In the next few months, mentoring pairs will be completing their work together. We will keep in touch with both mentees and mentors throughout the process in order to actively assess the effectiveness of the program and provide support as needed. We hope that the success of this pilot program will lead to expanded opportunities for ASL mentorship in the coming years! ■

For more information about The Mentorship Program, please visit our web site at www.massmentorship.org or contact Irma Kahle, Director, at irma.kahle@massmentorship.org.