

## Language Factory

*How difficulties translating information on the web led to a community enterprise*

### Objective

Language Factory, an Infolink Australia enterprise is a community resource that aims to provide affordable and responsive language services to diverse sectors of the community – both government and non- government / community organisations.

### Overview

This program aims to address the current gaps in language services provided by government and non-government services providers. This gap is a product of a combination of factors (i.e. lack of funds as well as availability of accredited interpreters to members of the emerging communities in Australia).

This social enterprise has grown out of a digital divide project that has been piloted at Atherton Gardens Housing Estate in inner city Melbourne. The demographics at Atherton Gardens, although unique, reflects the diversity of culture and languages that are found in other areas of high density public housing. Hence, large inner city public housing estates are culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and as levels of engagement both within and outside rise, there is an increased need for affordable translation services in order to address the current barriers experienced by agencies and individuals in regards to communication.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that there is a significant range of community information that requires translation. However due to the current costs of translation services, combined with the lack of accredited interpreters in the languages of emerging communities, make translation of this level of information unsustainable.

Other gaps in regards to the provision of languages services to the community include the following:

1. Information provided in the first languages of many of the emerging community languages is not accurate. For example the information translated into Dinka on the Centrelink website is not accurate, and contains a lot of grammatical errors. This is a common problem in many other documents that are translated. The Language Factory aims to rectify this issue through the training component to be offered to community translators and interpreters.
2. Some community languages are obsolete. The model aims to provide access to resources and the development of programs that will ensure that materials are relevant and up to date.
3. Access to resources (i.e dictionaries; access to and use of technology etc.) to assist with translating and interpreting are not accessible to many people. For example Unicode runs on XP service pack 2. This software requires a high end PC to run. This means that older computers, or those that are using older operating system (i.e. Windows 1998) won't be able to access languages in the first language, as the character fonts won't work. This means also that information that has been translated is inaccessible to many people as their computers can't open the correct fonts. The Atherton Gardens eACE project provides

a Computer training room on the estate, which a public resource for residents to access between business hours. The machines in the training room have language software installed so that users can communicate in their first language.

4. Language services require interpreters/translators to have competent reading and writing skills in both languages. The Language Factory will develop a competency test to assess an individual's ability to do this.
5. It is often difficult to find interpreters and translators that are able to competently utilise technology. In order for the model to be able to provide languages services, it is essential to find interpreters with high skills in other areas (specifically in the use computers and software applications). Language Factory will therefore develop competencies that are required to inform/instruct recruitment processes.

Language Factory aims to address this current gap, and ensure that there are alternative models of communication with (newly) emerging communities through the proposed model of providing community based translation services. This will ensure that both government and non-government agencies are able to access cost-effective, and more importantly, responsive language services.

### Executive Summary

In order to provide services that are able to communicate and respond to issues as they arise in emerging communities it is essential for materials to be accessible in the first language. A core aspect of democratic society is the ability of all citizens to participate. In order to do this, information needs to be distributed that encourages and enhances people's ability to participate. The increased participation by residents living in public housing in having an active role in the policy and program development targeted to their communities, as well as the necessary advocacy for residents in disadvantaged communities have heightened the need to develop innovative models of language services. The ability to provide this will ensure that community engagement will increase and flourish through accessible information. For example, Atherton Gardens, a Fitzroy public housing estate has moved from a "no go zone" for police, agency workers and others, deeply mired in allegations of high crime and drug dealing/use in 2000. Today, (with the State governments Neighbourhood Renewal funding, able to bring the diverse language groups together to participate in community decisions) residents have set up an Australia Day Award program that has attracted more than 100 nominations. The additional funding from Neighbourhood Renewal initiatives have provided the necessary resources and community building strategies, which reflects the great achievement in 100 nominations being registered for a community of 1500 speaking more then 40 languages.

The Language Factory represents a model that is able to assist governments to achieve a more an effective and at the same time 'empowering' communication strategy, utilising the 'in house' skills of residents living in public housing. This is supported/reflected in the focus of state policies to heighten participation through community action planning (CAP) strategies and processes through Neighbourhood Renewal (<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au>) has increased the need to develop effective models of providing language services to individuals and cultural groups who have English limited proficiency.

Skilled professionals undertake much of the translation that does occur but the reality is that, generally, the level or type of translation undertaken does not require that kind of expertise.

This model will target the translation of materials that are produced by agencies/service providers in order to communicate with their linguistically diverse communities. This will eliminate the risk of confidentiality breaches. (i.e. only public documents etc.)

There is also a commitment to deliver services through the internet. The eACE project @ Fitzroy is an example where information in languages that people are familiar with are provided through the community intranet [www.atherton.org.au](http://www.atherton.org.au). This virtual community is accessible to 800 households with the ability to send and receive email for free. There is a genuine need to continuously generate multicultural content being maintained by a content development officer who is at the same time a public housing resident at the estate.

By providing community language services as proposed above could generate a revenue stream that would have a positive economic and social benefit into these communities. Income generated could/will assist with paid employment opportunities and the development of a language centre where further training and skills development could be a focus.

The project intends to develop a community enterprise business plan and at the same time develop an alternative model of providing language services. It includes a customised Training Programme and processes to establish best practices and allow public housing residents to develop a skills base to provide translation and interpreting services.

Language Factory will generate employment and learning opportunities for public housing tenants through a framework that requires the partnership of agencies and community resources that provide various services to the community. It will utilise a 4-step approach to develop a strategy and meet the needs of the multicultural community in the provision of translation and interpretation services.

4-step replicable pathways:

- Establish a database of bilingual public housing residents – hire part-time, full time and contractors while partnering with established agencies to enhance capabilities and share resources and costs
- Competency training and skills development utilising access hubs and technology centres – including on the job training that will work with accredited staff
- Acceptance, review and approval of translated work through the web – an online facility that aims to utilise the network and digital technologies acquired through eACE
- Promotion of services through grassroots networking – utilising community resources such as university placements, TAFEs and volunteers.

The training components would include the following:

- Computer Skills training (extension of existing training services)
- Content Development training (Develop from CJP modules)
- ESL Training (work closely with current ESL providers like FLN and NMIT)
- Translation Skills Training (working with NMIT, RMIT and VOMA)

Language Factory intends to develop its competencies to gain NAATI accreditation and bid for the VITS funding in 2007