Helping Your Students Join One of the Fastest Growing Careers: Sign Language Interpreting

By James Frost, President and General Counsel, and Anne Frost, Vice-President

Signing Edge
About Signing Edge

- Signing Edge is a **deaf-owned** and **deaf-led** sign language interpreting agency.

- James Frost
  - Attorney with over 15 years of experience
  - Helped start two other successful sign language interpreting programs
About Signing Edge

- Signing Edge is a **deaf-owned** and **deaf-led** sign language interpreting agency.
- Anne Frost
  - Deaf Advocate with over 5 years of experience
  - Helped start a successful sign language mentorship program for Deaf Way Interpreting Services
About Signing Edge

• Signing Edge is a **deaf-owned** and **deaf-led** sign language interpreting agency.

• Our Initiatives:

  • Vineya Sign Language Interpreting Software

  • Sign Language Interpreting Mentorship Program with Southwestern Illinois College

  • Recruitment Initiative
Information about Sign Language Interpreting as a Career

• Sign Language Interpreting is one of the fastest growing career paths in America

  • The US Government reports that demand for interpreters is expected to rise by 18 percent by 2026. See Handout #1

  • A 2015 news article reported that demand for sign language interpreting is expected to rise by 50 percent by 2022. See Handout #2.

  • There is a severe shortage of interpreters in Missouri as well as across the United States.
Earnings Potential of Sign Language Interpreters

- Median Earnings for Sign Language Interpreters:
  - In the St. Louis metro area, a sign language interpreter can expect to earn between $25 to $50 a hour, depending on his or her experience, qualifications and certification status.
  - In St. Louis, the average hourly wage for an interpreter is about $32.78 a hour. See Handout #3.
  - Nationally, the median annual earnings for sign language interpreters is about $47,190. See Handout #1.
What People Think Happens For Sign Language Interpreters
The Reality
Identifying Students Who Could Be Interested in Sign Language Interpreting

- Many Sign Language Interpreters have the following characteristics:
  - Curiosity about languages
  - A background that involves deaf people (e.g. parents who are deaf or a friend who is deaf)
  - Great people skills
  - Ability to distill information in a way that other people can easily understand
  - Flexibility (emotionally and mentally)
  - Cultural awareness
Now What?

- You can start helping the students you identify as possibly being interested in sign language interpreting by:
  - Encouraging them to take courses in sign language either in school, classes offered by continuing education institutions, or online
    - Make sure these classes are taught by qualified individuals who are either proficient in sign language or certified to teach sign language.
  - Providing them information on sign language interpreting as a career
  - Encouraging them to socialize with deaf or hard of hearing individuals (cultural immersion)
ASL Classes and Deaf Community Immersion Completed! What’s Next?

• They need to go to a well designed, certified sign language interpreter training program
  • Some are 2 year programs, some are 3 year programs and some are 4 year programs
  • Because the trend is to require at least a BA before taking a certification test, we would encourage you to help your students look at 4 year programs.
• In Missouri and Illinois, we have William Woods University, St. Louis Community College, and Southwestern Illinois College.
  • William Woods is a 4 year program, St. Louis Community College is a 3 year program and SWIC is a 2 year program.
Interpreting Training Program Completed!
What’s Next?

• After graduating from the interpreting training program, they need to take their certification (and in some states, licensure) tests.
  • Missouri and Illinois require that sign language interpreters take and pass the Board for Examination of Interpreters (BEI) certification test before they can be licensed to interpret.
  • It would be a good idea for the students to take a interpreter mentoring program before taking the BEI test.
  • Most students do not graduate with the full range of skills needed to pass the BEI test. The majority simply need to polish their signing and receptive skills before taking the BEI test.
Thank You

- Thank you for attending our presentation! We hope that this will help you become allies in helping the deaf and hard of hearing community gain greater communication access in their jobs, in their health care and in their lives.