

'Only best practice will do'

– an interview with Zora Jackman MCIL DPSI RPSI

'Movers and Shakers' is a series of interviews with the interpreting profession's leading lights.

Zora Jackman is a registered interpreter with more than 2,500 hours of professional experience working for a variety of public services. Based in Wales, she is also a trainer for the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS), tutors those studying for their DPSI qualification in Law and Health at Cardiff University and is co-founder of Fuzzylaw.com – an online resource for legal interpreters.

What was your route into the profession?

I started as a business interpreter in 1991 in Prague where I worked for an architecture firm and world famous architect Frank Gehry.

I moved to Britain more than ten years ago and began looking for translation work. I came across and started working for Language Line, which provided me with training and encouraged me to become DPSI qualified and to register with the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI).

I wanted to go into face-to-face interpreting and to work for the Health service, but didn't know the sector well and naively thought an interpreting qualification would be a necessity. I was surprised



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to discover this wasn't the case. Things have changed, though. They've improved dramatically over the past four years in my region with the establishment of the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS). WITS requires all of its interpreters to undergo training, encourages them to become qualified and offers financial support to those who want to study interpreting courses at Cardiff University.

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Today, in addition to interpreting for a range of public services, I'm a trainer for WITS and tutor those studying for their DPSI qualification in Law and Health at Cardiff University.

How important is it for interpreters to undertake training?

It's very important to have training and to get qualified so that we understand our responsibilities as professional interpreters and how we should conduct ourselves.

"The NRPSI Code of Professional Conduct provides us with a guide to best practice."

It is often up to us to explain to our clients our role and best practice based on our Code of Conduct: that it is our job to be impartial and to interpret everything, and only what is said, accurately. It is not our job to censor what is said, even if requested to do so. It is also not our job to give advice or to offer an opinion on the case at hand.

As interpreters we have a responsibility to our clients because we are often the only ones in a position to evaluate our accuracy. Proper training regarding ethical issues and professional conduct is therefore vital if we're to effectively manage these situations and avoid serious consequences.

The NRPSI Code of Professional Conduct provides us with a guide to best practice, and forms the basis of WITS own training. I encourage all of my students to join the National Register and always to follow their Code of Conduct. In so doing they protect themselves as well as the public.



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Can you give an example of how you feel your work has made a difference?

A good example would be when I worked with a family who had a child with learning difficulties. As a result of my involvement they were able to obtain the support they needed from a range of services that they would not otherwise have been able to access. 

Should clients receive training on the role of the interpreter?

Yes; I believe it helps to train the professionals who work with interpreters as well. I'm currently working with medical students and health workers to aid their understanding. I've also worked with and trained police officers regarding the role of interpreters, although the Police does have a far stricter policy with regards to its use of interpreters with The Police and Criminal Evidence Act stating when a professional interpreter should be used.

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What do you enjoy most about being an interpreter?

I like helping to put people on a level playing field by providing those who wouldn't otherwise be heard with a voice and enabling service providers to do their job effectively. As interpreters we play an important