

Statement on Volunteers' Involvement with Interpreters

As volunteers working with refugees, we may be asked to support them in a conversation with a professional or a service provider. This could be a visit to a medical specialist or a real estate agent or a phone call about an insurance claim or a utility problem. The professional or service provider will generally have an official interpreter. Often you will be simply a support person but if you are asked to participate, it will first be necessary to establish that the Ezidi person (the client) and the professional or service provider authorises you to participate in the conversation.

If you have this authorisation, you have a legitimate right to take part in the interview. Therefore, the interpreter is required to interpret everything you say along with that of the other two participants.

What sort of situations would cause you to become involved in the conversation? It could be that the professional or service provider lists too many bits of information in one grab. Or for example, an urban specialist may be making recommendations for treatment and therapies that are not readily available in rural and regional areas because of waiting times, or insufficient allied health professionals. The Ezidi client may not know of these obstacles or may not feel they can say anything.

It could be that the client's level of English paints the wrong picture of an event or situation and that the interpreter does not or cannot pick this up. For example, in saying an accident happened "while I was driving" creates one image, while another is created by saying the accident happened "when the car was stationary and I put my foot on the accelerator rather than the brake". Or in response to being asked "Do you know the other drivers?" the client replies in the affirmative because the client met them at the time of the accident.

Sometimes the client may not fully understand and answer 'yes' or agree / not pursue an issue, because this is polite in their society or 'saves face' – and you, the volunteer who understands the context and identifies the disjunction may need to intervene to clarify the conversation.

Note: If you feel you need to intervene for the sake of clarity and understanding of the client or the professional or service provider, you should talk directly to them, not to the interpreter.