

POLICY OR PRETENSE?

Investigation reveals that the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) rarely follows its own stated protocol regarding the provision of interpretation to non-English speaking applicants and recipients of public assistance.



a study by:

Make the Road by Walking

The New York Legal Assistance Group

The New York Immigration Coalition

OCTOBER 1999

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The three organizations that put together this report decided to work together in the spring of 1999 to address serious concerns voiced by our non-English-speaking clients and members regarding the lack of translation and interpretation services within the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). For poor, immigrant communities with whom our organizations work, the lack of translation and interpretation services presents a serious obstacle to accessing the public assistance on which many families depend for survival.

HRA Policy Bulletin 99-13 identifies one HRA publication, entitled “Directory of Community Organizations with Bilingual Interpreter Staff” as the cornerstone of their interpretation policy. In response to requests regarding their policy for dealing with non-English-speaking applicants and recipients, HRA produced this policy bulletin, and a flyer targeted towards HRA staff encouraging the use of this Directory.

The following results of our contacts with 89 of the 90 community organizations listed in the Directory indicate that this policy is far from frequently employed. Given the considerable population of non-English-speaking recipients of welfare, these results beg the following questions: What happens to the large majority of non-English-speakers who attempt to apply for welfare or must engage with HRA personnel in order to maintain their benefits? How do they manage to convey vital information to HRA Center staff? How many families fall through the cracks, failing to gain access to the benefits to which they are entitled because they simply cannot make themselves understood?

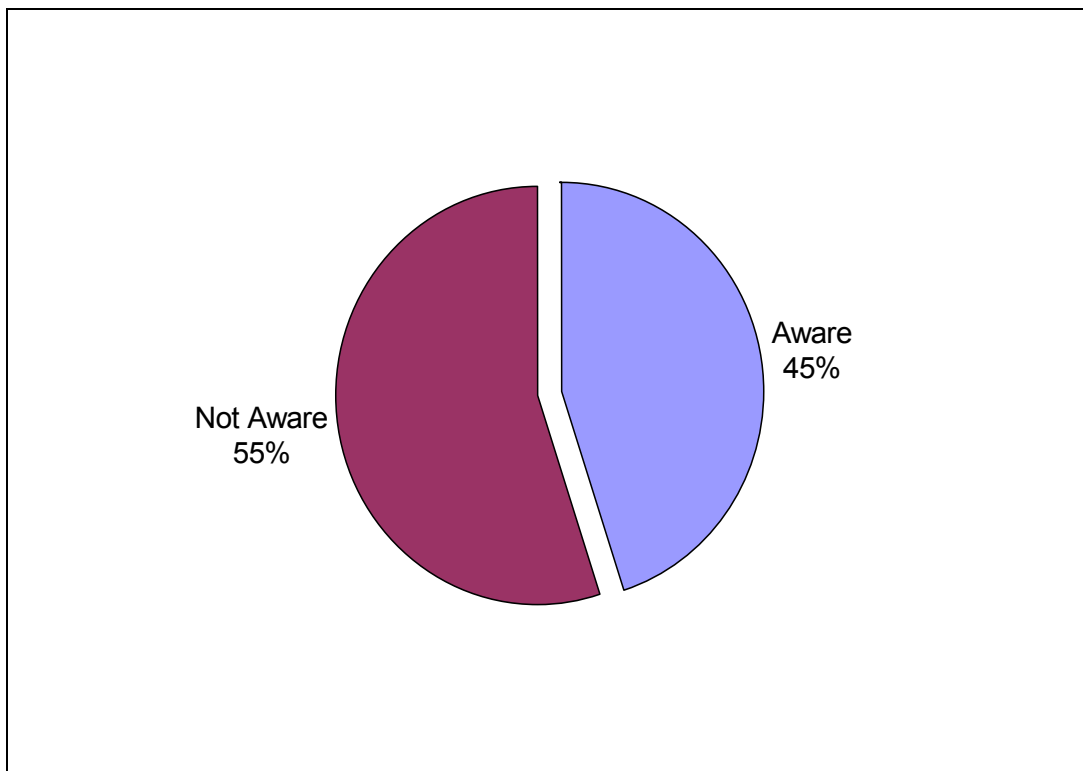
SUMMARY

Our results indicate that it is simply not possible that HRA is providing adequate translation and interpretation services to the tens of thousands of people who need them to access benefits. The “Directory of Community Organizations with Bilingual Interpreter Staff” is dramatically under-utilized by HRA personnel. The fact that it serves as the cornerstone of HRA’s translation and interpretation policy is proof that this policy is simply a sham.

Our results indicate:

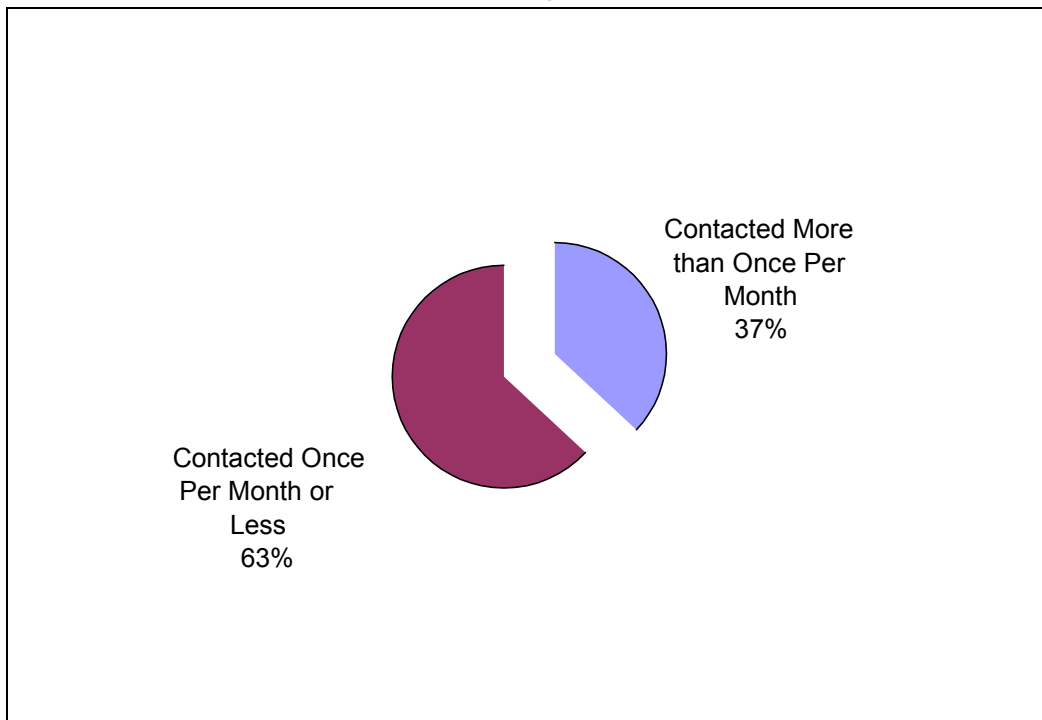
- A majority of the organizations listed in the directory are not even aware that they are listed.
- Of the organizations which said they were aware of being listed, a majority state they are contacted by HRA personnel once per month or less frequently to provide translation or interpretation services.
- Not one of the organizations surveyed stated that HRA had ever done any quality monitoring of their capability to provide these services.

When Asked “Are You Aware That Your Organization Is Listed As Willing To Provide Free Interpreter Assistance To HRA?” Most Organizations Responding Answered That They Were Not Aware.



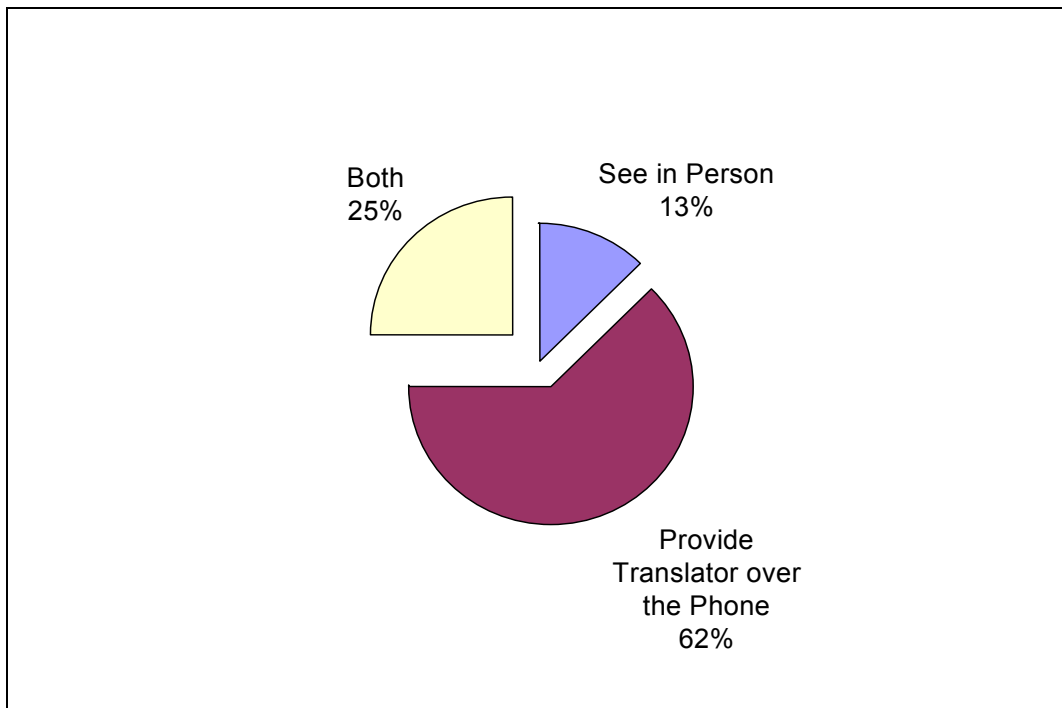
RESULTS

Of The 45% of Organizations That Said They Were Aware Of Being Listed As Providing Translation Services, 63% Said They Were Contacted Once Per Month or Less By HRA Personnel.



RESULTS

Of The Organizations That Said They Were Aware Of Being Listed As Providing Translation Services, A Minority Suggested That They Offer These Services In Person. Most Provide The Services Over The Telephone.



100% Of Respondents Indicated That HRA Had Never Done Any Quality Monitoring Of Their Translation Capabilities.

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To view a copy of an earlier report, documenting the results of interviews with 724 welfare recipients regarding language issues and caseworker treatment, please visit www.maketheroad.org. The report is entitled *System Failure: Mayor Giuliani's Welfare System is Hostile to Poor and Immigrant New Yorkers*, and was released in April 1999.
