

# Mower County

## Limited English Proficiency Plan

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## **Mower County Human Services**

**1301 18<sup>th</sup> Ave NW, Suite A  
Austin, MN 55912**

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### **Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan**

**Effective Date: 2007**

**(Updated June 2010)**

**LEP Coordinator**

**Financial Services**

**Child Support Services**

**Social Services**

**Julie Stevermer, Director**

**Ruth Schmidt, Supervisor**

**Todd Lysne, Supervisor**

**Brent Gunderson, Supervisor**

The Following document serves as the Mower County Human Service (MCHS) plan:

#### **I. Purpose and Legal Basis**

The purpose of our plan is to ensure that persons with limited English proficiency receive the language assistance necessary to allow them meaningful access to services, free of charge. This plan implements the Title VI language access responsibilities of human services providers receiving federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This plan serves to meet the legal obligation of language access requirements in compliance of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000 et seq.; 45 CFR 80 and in accordance with the Office for Civil Rights policy Guidance, 65 Fed. Reg. 52762 (2000).

**This information is available in other forms to people with disabilities by contacting us at 507-437-9701 (Voice), 507-437-9709 (TTY), or through the Minnesota Relay Service at 1-800-627-3529 or 1-877-627-3848 (speech to speech relay service). You may also send an email to [julies@co.mower.mn.us](mailto:julies@co.mower.mn.us).**

## **II. Written Plan**

### **1. Persons Covered by Policy – Identifying Clients with Limited English Proficiency.**

Mower County Human Services will, on an annual basis, make an assessment of the unique language needs within Mower County. Consultation will be made with the school districts in our County as well as our Legal Aid office located in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Mower County will continue to use data from the Department of Human Services to assist in this form of assessment. Our aim will be to identify clients that are not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with Mower County Human Services staff. The following non-English languages have been identified as being the most likely to be encountered in Mower County: Spanish, Laotian, Vietnamese, Oromo, Arabic, Somali, Russian, and Serbo/Croatian/Bosnian, with some Hmong and Khmer.

### **2. Commitment to Meaningful Access**

Specific language needs of each applicant with LEP will occur at the time of intake or application. This will primarily be done by reviewing the language preference questions on the Health Care Application (HCAPP) and the Combined Application Form (CAF). Language preferences will be entered into the applicant's primary language field in the MAXIS and MMIS systems. No person will be denied access to Mower County Human Services programs or program information because he/she does not speak English or speaks limited English. If the main receptionist or intake worker suspects that the applicant is a person with LEP, the worker will present the LEP person with a card that lists the seven major languages in order to determine which language is involved, if any. "I Speak" cards are available in the following languages: Spanish, Hmong, Lao, Somali, Russian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cambodian/Kmer, Oromo, and Serbo-Croatian.

### **3. Offering Language Assistance Services**

The greatest likelihood of need for interpreter services will be at the point of intake – at the time of an emergency or application for financial assistance. The principal point of contact will most likely be in the Austin office. The most appropriate form of interpreter services will likely be language assistance in completion of an application for financial assistance or health care. It is expected that reasonable efforts will be made by Mower County to provide same-day interpreter services. The other point of contact may involve field-based contact when conducting child protection assessments. These contacts will typically take place in the home of the child's caretaker or parent.

### **4. Resources Needed**

When uncommon languages are encountered, Mower County will be able to utilize our Mower County Cultural Diversity Office. Additionally, MCHS will formally entertain a formal linkage with Language Line Services for other languages needed.

## **5. Timely Access**

The Mower County Cultural Diversity Office is available during customary business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 5:00 pm. Language Line Services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Contact with either entity will be made by commercial phone. When on-site interpreter services are to be used, it will be necessary to schedule appointments at mutually convenient times – for the client and the interpreter.

## **6. Assigning Clients with LEP to Bilingual Staff**

The Mower County Cultural Diversity Office has assigned a part-time Spanish/English interpreter to serve our highest volume LEP population. When our part-time interpreter is unavailable, interpreters will be obtained from one of the sources as outlined in our County Policies and Procedures manual.

# **III. Policies and Procedures**

## **1. Verification of Client's Identity**

Mower County staff will continue the existing practice of verifying the identity of the client before releasing case-specific information. Cultural Diversity, Language Line staff, or other private companies providing interpretation or translation services through contracts with the State, may be used in making verifications.

## **2. Range of Oral Language Assistance**

As much as possible, staff should use these language assistance services in the order set out below.

- a. Part time interpreter for Spanish when available.
- b. Attached list dated 4/4/07 and 2/18/10. These interpreters are approved by the Cultural Diversity Office for specified purposes.
- c. Language Line services.

## **3. Uncommon Languages**

There may be circumstances when customers present for services, will need a less used language other than the most commonly used in our community. If the receptionist is having a problem knowing who to refer the customer to, the case will be referred to the Financial Services Supervisor, Social Service Supervisors, Child Support Supervisor or the Director. This person will be responsible for trying to determine what the customer's language or country of origin. Once determined, contact will be made with an appropriate interpreter in the customary manner.

## **4. Affirmative Action**

The MCHS employee handling the case will inform either the customer or the interpreter once it has been determined that interpreter services are needed, that there is no charge or fee for the service. This will be communicated in verbal form. At no time in the service delivery process will the customer incur any costs associated with LEP-directed interpreter services.

**5. Use of Family and Friends**

Use of family or friends as interpreters will not be suggested, encouraged or required. Instead, the worker will offer free interpreter service. However, if a client still prefers a family member or friend to interpret after the worker offers free interpreter services, the worker may use the family member or friend if doing so will not compromise the effectiveness of the interpretation and/or violate the client's confidentiality. The worker will need to document in the case file the extenuating circumstances for use of family or friends, particularly when the family was offered other interpreter services and that the client insisted a family member or friend be used. In the event that a family member or friend is used, a trained interpreter will sit in on the encounter to ensure accurate interpretation.

**6. Under no circumstances may minor children be used for interpreter services.**

**7. Competency Standards for Interpreters**

Mower County will insure that interpreters have been trained and demonstrate competency. To be competent to provide interpreter services, the interpreter must be proficient in both English and the target language (verbal and written format) and be able to convey information in both languages accurately, have had orientation/training that includes the skills and ethics of interpreting, have basic knowledge in both languages of specialized program terms or concepts, and are sensitive to the client's culture.

**8. Distribution of LEP Plan**

Copies of the LEP Plan will be provided to the following: all Mower County Human Service employees, area Legal Aid office, and Workforce Development. A copy of the main public announcement, DHS- 4739, will be displayed in our central reception area.

**9. Services to Clients That Don't Read Their Language**

Mower County staff must assist a client with LEP who does not read his/her primary language to the same extent as staff would assist an English speaker who does not read English.

**10. Emergency Situations**

When a determination has been made that an emergency exists and LEP considerations are identified as being present, Mower County Human Services will make every effort to insure that necessary emergency services are provided within the timelines of the program involved. In other words, timelines for serving clients with LEP will be the same as those for English speaking clients.

**IV. Notice of Rights to Language Assistance**

LEP clients will be informed of the availability of free interpreter and translation services during regular office hours when it appears that the customer is not able to communicate in English. Staff will also hand out "I Speak" cards at the reception desk or in the interview rooms. Mower County will also use "I Speak" posters in the agency to help staff inform clients that language

interpreters are available in a timely manner at no cost to the client. Notice of service availability will also come from the DHS-4739 document in the central reception area.

## **V. Distribution of Written Materials**

Mower County will continue using the Spanish forms and materials that have been translated by the Department of Human Services. DHS has translated many forms in to multiple languages, which Mower County will access as necessary. Access to the Department's website at [www.dhs.state.mn.us/forms](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/forms) will be made. Additionally, translated income maintenance forms located in Temp Manual 12.01.13 will be accessed as needed. Mower County Human Services will rely on the state-produced documents as the primary source of translated materials. Downloading of documents from the DHS web-page will also be used as necessary. MCHS will follow DHS's translation numerical guidelines as required.

The county cultural diversity office will translate county produced written materials for the LEP clients. Newly identified languages used by LEP clients will be translated on an ongoing basis. The goal will be to provide LEP clients with the same documents that are routinely provided in English.

## **VI. Complaint Resolution Protocol**

Any adverse action taken by Mower County Human Services, with which an applicant or recipient disagrees is subject to complaint. If a resolution cannot be agreed upon, the person making the complaint will be informed in a language understandable to him/her of the process to follow in making a complaint to DHS or the Office of Civil Rights. The procedure will conform to any Civil Rights Compliance requirements. Available interpreter services will be used to help facilitate the dispute resolution process. All complaints can be made to any of the parties listed at the top of this LEP Plan.

## **VII. Posting of the LEP Plan for Public Review**

A copy of the Mower County Human Service LEP Plan will be posted on the main bulletin board in the central lobby. The LEP plan will be available in English, but interpreters will be available to translate the plan for those who do not speak English who wish to read it.

## **VIII. Training of Staff**

Staff will be familiarized with the revised LEP plan at their unit meetings and a copy will be made available to each employee for reference. For any new employee affected by the LEP Plan, this document will be incorporated into the employee orientation process. On an annual basis, a review of the LEP Plan will take place at unit staff meetings.

## **IX. Monitoring of the LEP Plan**

Beginning in January each year, Mower County Human Services will conduct an evaluation of its LEP plan to determine its overall effectiveness. The evaluation will consider what is working and what is not and make adjustments to the plan accordingly. The Mower County Human Services LEP Coordinator will coordinate this evaluation. The evaluation will involve consultation with representatives from the Financial Unit, Child Support Unit, and Social Service Unit to determine compliance with the LEP Plan, identification of any problem areas and development of required corrective action strategies. Elements of the evaluation will include the following:

- ❖ Number of persons with LEP in Mower County
- ❖ Assessment of current language needs of MCHS applicants and clients to determine if the client needs an interpreter and/or translated materials, updating case files which lack information about a client's language preference; determining if clients need to be asked their language preference at the time of certification.
- ❖ Determining whether existing assistance is meeting the needs of applicants and clients with LEP.
- ❖ Assessing whether staff members understand MCHS LEP policies and procedures and how to carry them out, and whether language assistance resources and arrangements for those resources are still current and accessible.
- ❖ Seeking and obtaining feedback from non-English or limited English speaking communities in Mower County, including applicants and clients as well as any known community organization or advocacy group working with non-English or limited-English speaking communities.

## **X. Responsible Authority/Complaint Process - Contact Person**

Mower County has an existing complaint resolution procedure used to resolve civil rights related disputes and complaints and this procedure will be used to resolve LEP-related disputes and/or complaints. The contact person listed below will provide information about this complaint procedure to all clients in a language they will understand. Language assistance will be available for the duration of the complaint process for anyone with LEP who wishes to file a complaint.

Julie Stevermer, Director  
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