Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)

Focus Group Summary Report

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**Introduction**

As discussed in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division’s 2019 report “Assessment of Statewide Supply and Demand for CART Translation Services,” one of the three major solutions recommended for consideration was to increase the size of the CART captioning workforce. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division conducted a focus group discussion with representatives from provider agencies, training programs, and professional organizations on December 20, 2019 to learn more about what has been done to:

1) Promote career opportunities in the CART captioning field to recruit prospective students,
2) Provide support to CART captioning students and new graduates through means such as scholarships, internships, and mentoring opportunities, and
3) Recruit experienced court reporters to make the transition to the CART captioning field through means such as mentoring and technical support opportunities.

Focus group participants included:

- Mary Johnson, Official Court Reporter & Vice-President of Minnesota Association of Verbatim Reporters & Captioners (MAVRC)
- Debbie Peterson, Official Court Reporter & President of MAVRC
- Jennifer Sati, Judicial Reporting Faculty Member at Anoka Technical College
- Karen Skow, Owner of Access Resource captioning agency

Representing Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD) were Kristina Anderson, DHHSD Management Analyst and meeting note taker; Dan Millikin, DHHSD Director; and Teika Pakalns, DHHSD Program Planner and meeting facilitator.

**Promoting CART career opportunities**

**Marketing needs**

The need for more marketing and communications emerged as a common theme, as there is a real lack of awareness among the public about court reporting and CART captioning as possible career paths. The court reporting industry itself has not developed a strong campaign to market these professions in Minnesota. As a result, high school students or those looking for a career change do not know about court reporting and CART captioning careers. Promoting awareness is important.

Anoka Technical College promotes all their educational programs through one general brochure, rather than focusing on individual programs. Anoka Technical College does host a court reporter and captioning exhibition every year for the public so they can see what CART captioning actually looks like.
They have a flyer to promote this event. However, CART needs more focused marketing, which costs money.

Ideas for focused marketing include videos and other visual materials that stakeholders could share with high schools and career counselors. Promotional materials should be developed with high school students in mind, and be readily accessible to them. For example, a video that explains what court reporting/captioning is, demonstrates what court reporters and CART captioners actually do, and promotes careers in the field. This promotional video could go out to public and private high schools with a statement indicating that people are needed in this field and a request to share the video in classes and through student/career services. Video-based materials could be easily disseminated statewide.

Minnesota Association of Verbatim Reporters & Captioners (MAVRC) is having a hard time finding volunteers to promote court reporting/captioning. There are not sufficient appropriate materials available to distribute. They would also like to figure out how best to send such information to the masses.

Some agencies, such as Paradigm, list the various organizations they provide captioning for on their websites. It may be worthwhile to explore whether some of those organizations could promote awareness about CART services, as some of them are high profile.

Both Anoka Technical College’s Court Reporting program and MAVRC use social media (Facebook, Instagram) to promote court reporting and the A-Z program (a free introductory course to learn about court reporting and captioning developed by the National Court Reporters Association [NCRA]). Word-of-mouth is also an important component, as both working reporters that understand the work, and those who know others who they think would be good at court reporting/captioning, can pass along this information.

**Target audience**

It is helpful to know the target audience to shape promotion efforts. One-third of students who enroll are right out of high school. About one-third of students who go into CART captioning already had a four-year degree in areas such as English or journalism, and then they looked at where to apply those skills, and found CART. Individuals who are planning to get a four-year degree in English or journalism would thus be good demographics to send specific information. Music graduates are also drawn to court reporting.

Anoka Technical College enrolls an average of 17-22 students a year. One cohort starts in August and the other in January, with about 10-15 students per cohort. If that number could be at least doubled, that would be great. About 25% of enrolled students choose to go directly into CART captioning.
Students first work to develop the basic skill to transcribe 225 words per minutes, and then take additional classes in captioning. Most graduates (95%) stay in Minnesota, either in the Twin Cities or their hometowns.

Technology is also a huge part of the job, and having the ability to know and use that technology is almost as important as the actual writing ability.

**Outreach avenues**

Outreach to high schools and high school career counselors is an important component. Anoka Technical College contacts all the career counselors in all the schools, and MAVRC helps with this. This outreach must be done every year, which requires a lot of time. MAVRC continues to seek members to volunteer to promote court reporting and CART captioning.

In the last 3-5 years, there have been an increase in programs designed to build career awareness for high school students. These programs have focused on areas such as medical-type careers, where the students learned about hospitals, chiropractors and dentists, and business careers, where they learned about banks and other organizations. A similar module about court reporting and CART could be developed for high schools. It could be a 4-week module about court reporting and CART captioning as a career, or it could be a keyboarding class. Such a module would increase awareness of CART as a career opportunity.

Another suggestion is to provide information about court reporting and CART captioning to the Department of Employment and Economic Development’s (DEED) CareerForce Centers. This would connect those looking for a transition or a new career with court reporting and CART captioning as potential career paths.

When reaching out to these specific targets it may be helpful to provide statistics on salaries, the types of job opportunities, and possible areas where graduates eventually work. The hourly wage for an entry level, 9-to-5 court reporter is about $25 an hour. The top of the range is about $37 per hour. Court reporter jobs include benefits. Court reporters have set hours typically between 8 a.m. and 4:30 or 5 p.m. However, court reporters may have times they are working late as well.

Independent contractors will charge more than $25 per hour; they can charge closer to $100 per hour because they may only take one job per day and this includes travel and research time. People who choose to freelance like the flexibility and variety of their work.

Those considering the field may also wonder about career span. For many people, it is a lifetime career and they stay until retirement. Currently, with an aging workforce, there are more people nearing retirement than new professionals entering.
A to Z introductory program

One resource for promoting CART careers to potential students is the A to Z program: “The NCRA A to Z® online program is a hybrid course combining both live online instructor sessions with videos and dictation materials for self-paced practice. During this free six-week program, experienced court reporters will teach you the alphabet in steno and how to write on a machine” (NCRA, http://www.atozdiscoverstenography.org/). The participants typically include high school students, college students and those who are starting a second career. NCRA started this at the national level, and MAVRC runs it locally through Anoka Technical College. It is offered twice per year – in the spring and fall – in the evenings.

In the Minnesota program, participants receive a free loaner machine and 8 weeks of lessons. The program also features guest presenters, such as a judge and a court reporter. After the 8 weeks are up, participants can decide if they want to continue on this potential career path.

The A-Z program is exciting. It gives prospective CART captioning students a chance to see if they might be successful, and it is free. There is a need to create a video specific to the A-Z Program to build awareness and promote that it is a free program. It may also be helpful to add a summer session when high school students do not have class.

Anoka Technical College offers other trainings online as well, but students would have to have the basic skill to type 225 words per minute on the steno machine before taking those trainings.

Scholarship support

Support for scholarships would help increase awareness, and provide opportunities for people who would not otherwise be able to attend college. Scholarships could be set up for new students, for reporters who are transitioning, or both.

One suggestion was to consider providing scholarships to students specifically for CART provider training. Students who have achieved the 225 words per minute skill level are ready to go into the general court reporting field. They need two additional classes to become a CART provider. Offering a scholarship for those classes may encourage them to continue.

If full scholarships were offered, it was suggested to prioritize them for people who are low income and would otherwise not be able to attend college. Criteria may include individuals who are able to type 70 words per minute and can play a musical instrument, and who have taken the free A-Z program. This would ensure that whoever receives the scholarship would be a good candidate. To retrain a working reporter, $2,000 for a year’s worth of classes would suffice.
Providing support to CART captioning students and new graduates

Mentoring is needed at different levels. New CART captioning graduates need support and encouragement. This also applies to more-experienced court reporters, as they may need to know what to do to prepare themselves for the transition to CART. It would be good to build a better network for everybody in this field.

Currently, many people who are in CART captioning are not in contact with others in the field. It would be good to invite working reporters and students to connect, as they tend to work in disparate locations; it is such a small group. One suggestion is to set up a forum where court reporters or captioners can let others know they have issues and need help, and other reporters can respond. MAVRC has discussed having such support on their website, as it would be nice to have more places besides Facebook where they can share information. Another possibility is to explore the use of Zoom or other video technology to bridge geographical challenges and support networking. Anoka Technical College has an email list of all its’ program graduates and could email them about networking opportunities to offer support beyond the training program.

Many court districts assign a mentor reporter to new reporters coming in. The First Judicial District is good with mentoring new reporters; however, having someone willing to set up and/or provide mentoring is difficult because everyone is so busy. Every time a new reporter comes in, they should immediately be set up with a mentor. Mentoring is a good way to find those court reporters with the interest and skills to become CART captioners. Not all people are able to write at that real-time level, but giving people the confidence they need so that they can do it is important. Having a mentor to talk to when going through a training would help to build confidence.

When students are in school, they are set up with a mentor in the field in which they want to work. Sometimes this takes off and becomes a lifelong relationship. It may be beneficial to give court reporting students both a judicial mentor and a CART captioning mentor. In addition, students in the higher-level classes could mentor new students so they realize immediately how important mentoring is. School becomes more difficult for students as they progress, and they can work as court reporters sooner than as captioners. However, when they decide they want to do CART, they are proud of the service they provide. More interactions with CART consumers can also be important, as this can provide more motivation for students.

Having an email connection with mentors is also important to have. Sending an email saying, “Hey, I need help with this because I never have done it before” is possible when you have a mentor available to provide the answers.

One possible challenge is to get an adequate number of mentors ready to mentor incoming professionals in the CART field. Even if there will likely be enough mentors, another possible challenge
is having the time to match people up. It would help the mentors commit if they were paid for their time. Mentorships can be provided at the entry level, mid-level and so on. Entry level mentorships are great for supporting motivation. The mid-level mentorships could be for those going into the real world to work. Everyone needs encouragement when they get out of school.

Another mentoring challenge is that, for many captioners, the majority of the work is done remotely and independently. Occasionally providers will work together, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Despite this, agencies are supportive of mentoring students, and do offer opportunities for interning on certain jobs.

Confidentiality issues also pose a challenge for mentoring. Some assignments are not eligible for interning or shadowing due to the confidential nature of the work. When possible, agencies will ask the client for permission to bring an intern.

As the number of captioners increases, there will be a greater need to provide ways to connect and mentor. Although there are state and national conventions available, more will need to be done.

**Recruiting experienced court reporters to the CART captioning field**

According to DHHSD’s reported survey results, there are experienced court reporters who would like more information on what CART is all about and would like to know who would be a resource to talk to about that.

Anoka Technical College has started a new program specifically for the person who has done court reporting for several years and now wants to caption. The cost is $2,000 for their one-year online program. Since these students have experience with reporting, they already know the general concepts and so have a high likelihood of success.

It is important to have this kind of program available, as CART captioning is different from court reporting. It can be difficult for court reporters to understand the differences. It is important to help them understand those differences and get support and encouragement from those who do CART.

It is also important that court reporters see the benefits of doing CART work and have more interaction with the CART consumers. There is a lot of negativity in the court system. Former court reporters have transitioned to CART because they wanted to do something more positive. Providing direct service to a CART consumer and seeing the difference you can make in someone’s life is encouraging.

Although some people prefer the security and benefits of a court reporter’s salaried job, there is freedom to set your own schedule if you are a freelance CART captioner. Someone could choose to be a CART provider during the day and/or on evenings and weekends. Some may actually make more money than a full-time court reporter, depending on their skills and experiences, rates, and the
number of jobs they accept. For some people, this could lead to greater work-life balance for their particular needs.

One specific strategy suggested for recruiting court reporters to the CART field is to send out information about the opportunities and benefits of a CART career to MAVRC’s members.

**Conclusion**

One key theme that the focus group participants identified was the need for more marketing, communication and networking to build awareness of CART captioning and its benefits. People need to know more about CART overall, both as a career path for new and transitioning students and as an accessibility service option for consumers. Another key theme identified was the need for the CART community to coordinate further among its professionals to encourage people to join and stay in this field. People can become interested in CART as a career opportunity through scholarships, public service announcement (PSA) videos, mentoring, and networking. Giving them interactive ways to ask questions and get mentoring opportunities can help them feel more supported as they progress in their careers.

**Acknowledgments**

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division thanks the focus group participants for their contributions to this report.
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