

Supporting vulnerable children by choosing **empathetic interpretation services**

Case Study



Introduction

Interpreting with empathy helps Aberlour support vulnerable children

For 150 years, Aberlour has stood by children facing the most challenging circumstances.

Today, that mission continues through Guardianship Scotland. Guardians act as a trusted adult for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, helping them untangle an unfamiliar and intimidating web of social and legal systems.

Many of the children speak little or no English and often have native languages that are rare or hard-to-find. Guardians need to explain complex information in a way young people can understand, while giving them the ability to ask questions and express how they are feeling.

To do this effectively, guardians rely on professional interpreting services that allow conversations to happen at the young person's pace.

Clear Voice's interpreters bring empathy and an understanding of the asylum process, reassuring the child that their voice is truly heard and helping to lay the foundation of a trusted relationship with their guardian.



“Being able to easily and quickly connect to an interpreter makes a huge difference. I don’t have to wait or book far in advance. With Clear Voice, I can get an interpreter when I need one, and I’m completely confident about their professionalism.”

Andy McNeil · Child Trafficking Guardian
Aberlour



The Challenge

Supporting rare and lesser-known languages to overcome language barriers

Aberlour's guardians need to explain a wide range of material to the children and young people in their care. This can cover simple aspects of everyday life in the UK, to complex legal proceedings.

However, since many speak little or no English, or have a rare language as their mother tongue, there aren't many people they can talk to. In these cases, having access to someone who speaks their language provides an opportunity for them to understand, socialise, and to feel seen and heard.

When they meet with their guardians, the young people want and need to talk about what is taking place. It's likely that they will have questions to ask. These conversations often happen spontaneously, with little time to wait for a connection to an interpreter, or to book one.

Without an interpreter on hand conversations have to be delayed or rescheduled. This disrupts the flow of communication and makes it harder for the young people to understand what is happening to them.

Previously, guardians relied on individual interpreters, but their availability and capacity often fell short. It was often a struggle to find interpreters that spoke rare languages and some lacked the empathy and professionalism that Aberlour sought.

Aberlour wanted an interpreting service that offered a wide range of languages and could be accessed quickly and on demand, without compromising on quality or professionalism.



Summary

Aberlour's guardians face significant communication barriers when assisting children and young people who have limited English proficiency or speak rare languages.

Aberlour sought a more robust, on-demand interpreting provider that delivered a wide range of languages while maintaining high standards of empathy and quality.

“The interpreters help the young people get the service they need. They also help us understand how the young person is feeling and if they’ve understood what’s been explained. With Clear Voice, you know you’re going to get a professional standard.”

Andy McNeil · Child Trafficking Guardian
Aberlour





Building a common understanding

By offering Aberlour a range of interpretation options specifically tailored to their needs, guardians had the flexibility to choose the right approach for the young person and their situation.

With an average connection time of 40 seconds, Aberlour now uses Clear Voice to provide an on-demand telephone interpreting service for urgent or unplanned conversations, or quick 'check-ins'. Guardians also have the option to pre-book interpreters.

If continuity is needed, the same interpreter can be requested and reserved for multiple sessions. For longer discussions or when a face-to-face visual connection is helpful, guardians prefer video remote interpreting.

It's also noteworthy that the use of Clear Voice telephone and video interpreting allows Aberlour to reach children who live outside urban areas and across the length and breadth of Scotland, where access to interpreting services is more limited.

“Interpretation is one of the most important parts of my job. You’re dealing with complex information that a child needs to understand in their own language. To do this, you need a really good interpreter.”

Georgios Skourtis
Child Trafficking Guardian
Aberlour

It's not just about language

Our interpreters understand how to work effectively with young people

During calls, interpreters need to understand that their role is not to be an advocate, but to facilitate effective communication.

For Aberlour, this communication is between the guardian and the young person. With previous interpreting providers, Aberlour found that the interpreter was inserting themselves into the conversation, advising or advocating on behalf of the young person rather than letting them be heard.

This is where Clear Voice interpreters have proven themselves particularly adept. When additional information is needed, our interpreters first clarify with the guardian and then explain what they will say to the young person. This provides transparency and clarity about what is being said and the process that's taking place.

Clear Voice can also draw upon interpreters that have lived experience of seeking sanctuary or overcoming displacement, which brings a unique level of empathy and sensitivity to the conversations, and provides a higher level of support for the guardianship work.

Interpreters are very often the key enablers, ensuring that every child gets the service they deserve, with empathy and care.





The Outcome

Building trust so young people can engage with confidence

With reliable interpreting services now in place, guardians are better able to support young people through complex situations and focus on their well-being.

The guardians report that a young person's face visibly relaxes and a smile appears when they connect with an interpreter who speaks their language, turning a potentially overwhelming conversation into a safe, human interaction.

Empowered by interpretation, the young people in Aberlour's care are no longer passive observers. They are able to understand unfamiliar proceedings and actively participate in decisions regarding their future.

At the same time, guardians have confidence that the interpreters are accurately conveying meaning and supporting the high professional standards required in legal or care settings.

While technology has advanced and AI tools are becoming more capable, guardians stress that only human interpreters bring empathy and judgement to conversations. These qualities enable them to understand how a child is perceiving what is being said and what is happening around them.

When a child is silent, hesitating, or emotional, interpreters can adapt their tone and support in a way that feels respectful and safe - something that AI is unable to do.

For Aberlour's guardians, Clear Voice interpreters provide a linguistic foundation for building trust. This partnership ensures that no matter how complex the legal or social hurdle, the young people's voices are truly heard, and they can fully participate in decisions that shape their future.

“You could use AI, but it wouldn’t feel right. You’re working with young people who have experienced a huge amount of change and upheaval in their lives. Interpreters understand how young people communicate and how they see what’s happening around them.”

Andy McNeil · Child Trafficking Guardian
Aberlour





We make services accessible in every language

Everyone should be able to access the services they need, in the language they require. We're here to help you make this a reality.

Talk to us about your language requirements

findoutmore@clearvoice.org.uk · 0800 817 4777