



In-Language Communication Improves Patient & Family Experience

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center believes all patients and their families have a right to receive medical information in their preferred language. After a ten-year relationship with LanguageLine®, an interpretation and translation service providing 360 degrees of language coverage to linguistically diverse communities, Cincinnati Children's elevated the care experience for patients and families by launching LanguageLine's DirectResponseSM. Andy Schwieter from Cincinnati Children's shared how his partnership with Jason Reczek from LanguageLine® enabled the organization to better support the diverse languages of the community they serve through improved communication.

What was the opportunity you were trying to address?

Andy: Our patients and families deserve the convenience of in-language communication when they call us. But that was not happening at Cincinnati Children's. When a person with limited English proficiency called our hospital, there was a language barrier between the caller and the main operator, who typically only spoke English. The operator would put the caller on hold while connecting to an interpreter through LanguageLine. But when the call was transferred to a specific department for scheduling or other matter, the interpreter was dropped from the call, leaving the caller to wait for another interpreter to be conferenced in. This created a disjointed experience for our patients and families. What we needed was a seamless system that connected an interpreter to the caller on the front end so they could have an uninterrupted experience while their call was routed from department to department within the organization.

The other problem was that we were receiving calls from people who did not speak English during nights and weekends that were being routed to the voicemail of one of our bilingual staff members. Unfortunately, when she was not in the office, it could be days before the messages were translated and addressed.

What practical and replicable steps did you take to address the problem?

Andy: We consulted with our partners at LanguageLine which introduced us to their [DirectResponse](#) system, a model that provides an elevated level of communication. It enables people to call our system with an interpreter on the line at the front end of the call. DirectResponse supports diverse language groups during inbound calls, increasing customer service, professional image, and productivity.

Today, if a Spanish-speaker calls our main phone number, it directs the caller, "Press two for Spanish," and the call gets routed out of our system to LanguageLine's DirectResponse program where they hear a message, "Gracias por llamar a Cincinnati Children's." The message goes on to say in Spanish, "We're going to connect your call to an interpreter. Please wait a moment." This message is more welcoming for the caller than encountering an operator who doesn't speak their language. It provides a better experience for the family and for our operators.

The caller has about two minutes with the interpreter. The interpreters introduce themselves, find out why they're calling and if they want to leave a voicemail. This is important, because with many large organizations, you are routed through a phone tree and ultimately end up in voicemail with a greeting that is not in your language.

After the caller has two minutes with the interpreter, the call comes back to the main operators. This is great from the operators' perspective, because the first thing they hear is, "Hi, my name is John, I'm an interpreter. I have a Spanish-speaking caller on the line." This is much easier for them than the traditional workflow of having to place the person on hold, use another line to call an interpreter, and then bring them back together.

The nice part about this is it's a single call from our switchboard's point of view, so we can just transfer that call with the Spanish speaker along with their interpreter to where the call needs to go. The interpreter stays on the line and provides interpretation as needed.

We've found new uses and modifications for DirectResponse to improve experience for staff or for families. Our telehealth volumes, like most hospitals, went up tremendously in 2020, and we found that our Spanish speakers were struggling with the technical aspect of it. If they called the tech support line, they would have to wait in a queue. The agent would have to put them on hold, connect to an interpreter, and then bring them back together. All of that took time. So we created a special Spanish tech support line that secures an interpreter first and then pushes the call to the front of the line. That's great for the interpreter, because they're not sitting on hold for a long time, and it's even better for the family because they have someone who can speak their language right from the start.

This service doesn't do anyone any good unless they know about it. So, we advertise the numbers on our [website](#), showing the phone numbers along with the language names, both in English as well as in the other language.

These numbers are Direct Interpreter Access Lines (DIAL):

Arabic	العربية	1-513-517-ARAB (1-513-517-2722)
Cambodian	ភាសាខ្មែរ	1-513-517-0651
Cantonese	粵語/粤语	1-513-517-0652
Farsi	فارسی	1-513-517-0654
French	Français	1-513-517-0655
Greek	Ελληνικά	1-513-517-0657
Japanese	日本語	1-513-517-0660
Korean	한국어	1-513-517-0661
Mandarin	普通話/普通话	1-513-517-0662
Nepali	नेपाली	1-513-517-0663
Polish	Polski	1-513-517-0666
Portuguese	Português	1-513-517-0667
Russian	Русский	1-513-517-0668
Somali	Soomaaliga	1-513-517-0669
Spanish	Español	1-513-517-HOLA (1-513-517-4652)
Turkish	Türkçe	1-513-517-0671
Vietnamese	Tiếng Việt	1-513-517-0672

We also offer printed index cards with information about the service and how it works, which are given to families. We include these phone numbers at the top of our appointment

reminder letters for the top five most common languages that we encounter at our organization. Staff can insert the numbers into discharge instructions along with an explanation of how it works in both English and the other language. Our care coordination teams work diligently to provide the number to families so they feel supported.

What were the results?

Jason: The benefit of DirectResponse is that we have the ability to build phone menus and route calls to different areas and partner with our customers to make sure that we set this up the right way from the beginning.

Andy: The biggest improvement is that callers can reach any department at Cincinnati Children's much more easily outside of business hours. We are now able to respond 24/7 to patient needs.

We conducted some dedicated language access surveying of families for a number of years. We would randomly select a handful of families each week who spoke Spanish or Arabic and call them with a few questions about their experience with interpreters, but we didn't learn very much. People were grateful, but that was about it. I know there are things we can do better, but I think this is a challenging area to get feedback from families.

Jason: Healthcare organizations are under great pressure to reduce health disparities. DirectResponse addresses that issue and improves access to care. At one time, a limited English proficient family member may have had to wait to talk to someone about their loved one in the hospital. They would have to leave a voicemail and wait until someone came in the next day and listened to it, determined what the language was, and found an interpreter. Now they can get immediate access and can find out about a loved one, get the care they need, or schedule an appointment. It's really ensuring equity, regardless of the language the patient speaks.

What were the lessons learned?

Andy: When it comes to communicating over the phone, phone interpreting is a pretty established practice in healthcare. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a hospital in the United States that doesn't have phone interpreting services available for their staff. But what about when families call us? What numbers should they be calling? The question is how do you solve both of these problems. I don't think many organizations have thought through the logistics of it. Based on what they are doing now, they should ask themselves, "Is this really the best experience we can provide?" I think it's an easy thing to overlook.

As consumers, we have heard plenty of times, "Press two for Spanish," but have you ever thought about what that really means? Presumably, it means that the menus will be in Spanish. If you're calling a large organization, it may mean you're going to get connected to a Spanish-speaking representative. But what about organizations that are smaller? Even at a big hospital like ours, there are only 100 people in the ophthalmology department, and we're not going to be able to rely on them to speak all the languages we encounter in a year. DirectResponse is a simple-to-use tool that makes it much easier for families to reach us and get interpreters on the line when they need them.

Andy Schwieter leads the language access team at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, helping them systematically turn language barriers into opportunities. Andy has worked as a Spanish interpreter since 2006, was certified by the Supreme Court of Ohio in 2013 and was certified by the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters in 2015. He recently co-authored a paper published in Hospital Pediatrics on improving discharge instructions for hospitalized children with limited English proficiency



About the Organization

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center is nationally recognized as a leader in pediatric healthcare, with a reputation for excellence in patient care, research and medical education. The medical center ranked in the top three in the nation among all Honor Roll hospitals in U.S. News & World Report's 2022-23 Best Children's Hospitals list.

Jason Reczek is the Regional Account Manager at LanguageLine Solutions, partnering with large healthcare systems in the Midwest to provide development and support of their language access program. Jason consults on best practices across the industry and assists in building solutions that will allow staff to maximize workflow and effectively communicate with their patients. He also has a passion for social justice advocacy and health equity.



About the Solutions Provider

LanguageLine founded the on-demand interpretation industry over 40 years ago. Today, it has over 18,000 interpreters offering services in more than 240 languages. Healthcare interpreters are trained, tested and medically qualified. Quality assurance measures are in place to ensure their language proficiency in English and the target language meet LanguageLine's rigorous certification requirements.



About The Beryl Institute

The Beryl Institute is a global community of healthcare professionals and experience champions committed to transforming the human experience in healthcare. As a pioneer and leader of the experience movement and patient experience profession for more than a decade, the Institute offers unparalleled access to unbiased research and proven practices, networking and professional development opportunities and a safe, neutral space to exchange ideas and learn from others.

We define the patient experience as the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization's culture, that influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care. We believe human experience is grounded in the experiences of patients & families, members of the healthcare workforce and the communities they serve.