

Case study

Languages and culture at work

Zahara*: Freelance interpreter (Swahili and Bravan)



During a spell living and working in Kenya before moving to London in 1995, 39 year-old Zahara, a native Somalian, had learned Swahili in addition to her native Bravan (a dialect of Somali). Having devoted herself to her three young children for a number of years, she decided to learn how to interpret professionally – something she'd got a taster of in helping her family to access local services like hospitals and schools.

Zahara joined a London Development Agency funded course delivered by Making Training Work, which enabled her to develop her customer service and communication skills as well as professional interpreting techniques. The training gave her a huge boost in confidence. Since 2008, she has progressed to work through interpreting agencies in Romford, Dagenham and Newham.

No two days are ever the same, and Zahara has found she often needs to react quickly to interpreting assignments in both Swahili and her native Bravan. Clients frequently need help the same day, and there may be little or no briefing before she gets there. Working across different parts of London, there's also a lot of travelling involved. But she has no regrets.

"I really love the independence this work gives me. I've learned new things about schools, housing and healthcare that have proved really useful, and it's nice to have such frequent contact with people from different backgrounds. It's been a huge change in my life."

*Name changed to protect the interviewee's identity.

Useful links

RLN London – careers and learning advice
www.rln-london.com/careers

Making Training Work
www.makingtrainingwork.co.uk

rln. london
regional language network

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