

# Giving Voice to Minnesota's



## Community

**Fluent in American Sign Language, Realtor® Anna Broadrick is dedicated to helping Deaf clients overcome barriers in real estate and business**

When Anna Broadrick's mother dropped her off at daycare one morning in the early 1990s, she had no idea that within a few hours her two-year-old daughter would be using American Sign Language (ASL). But sometime between playtime, snack time, and time to go home, little Anna became fast friends with a deaf three-year-old who easily conveyed the rudiments of ASL—the primary mode of communication for more than half a million deaf Americans.

Broadrick's ability to pick up signing so easily was not unusual. In fact, she contends, signing may be the first natural language for children.

"Most children develop control over their arms and hands well before they can control their vocal cords," explained Broadrick, who is fluent in ASL and is now a Realtor® with Edina Realty in Champlin. This innate ability is reflected in the trend to teach children simple sign language, which Broadrick notes is a form of ASL. "Children who learn to sign can communicate their needs as young as seven or eight months old. That's long before most kids master enough spoken language at age three or four to express themselves clearly."

To Broadrick, who has a BA in ASL Interpreting, and an M.Ed. in Special Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the fact that more children are not taught ASL is a lost opportunity. Wide-spread literacy in signing would create a more equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment for more than one million Minnesotans who are deaf or hard of hearing. Broadrick estimates that more than half of her clients are part of this community, so she is keenly aware of the barriers they face.

"People don't listen to the Deaf community. Nor do they give them a platform to share their voice," Broadrick said. "So, their needs are often ignored or overlooked." And sometimes, she observed, businesses refuse to accommodate them.

"One of my clients was doing a new build, and along the way there were several in-person interactions with the developer. Under the terms of the American Disabilities Act (ADA), the building company was legally obligated to pay for a sign-language interpreter. Although my client clearly communicated this fact, the developer pushed back and said that Edina Realty or the client should pay."

When Broadrick approached the developer, she encountered the same stonewalling, so she turned to Edina Realty's legal team.

After receiving an email detailing potential liability under the ADA, the developer backed down.

“A week later they had an ASL interpreter hired and ready to go,” Broadrick said. “Still, it’s very frustrating that deaf people are continually put in a position where they need to forcefully advocate for what they already are entitled to under the law. It’s not the deaf person’s fault that hearing people don’t know ASL.”

Ishaa Vintinner, a property owner who worked with Anna to sell a home in Blaine, agrees that the needs of Deaf people are too often overlooked during real estate transactions.

“Buying and selling a property involves a lot of money and no one wants to make a mistake,” said Vintinner, a retired professor who taught ASL at both the University of Minnesota and Bethel University, and who now lives in Arizona. “Providing a certified fluent ASL interpreter for Deaf clients should be standard practice. And it should be provided for free. It isn’t right to expect Deaf people to pay. But all too often they have no choice and pay out of their own pocket because they can’t risk misunderstanding what’s going on or is being said.”

Beyond the potential for costly mistakes, many Deaf people find that working with Realtors® who are not fluent in ASL simply burns a lot of extra time. When Kristy Ramos, a certified life coach and real estate investor, was purchasing property in California a few years ago, she worked with a Realtor® who did not know ASL. Although the transaction was successful, Ramos said it required more effort for her because of the communication barrier.

**“As a Deaf person, I had to advocate for myself to get the accommodation I needed. So, I did more work than necessary,” Ramos said.**

When she prepared to purchase real estate in Minnesota, Ramos was determined to make the process smoother, faster, and more convenient. Reaching out to ASL Realty, a Colorado-based real estate company that connects Deaf homebuyers and sellers with real estate professionals who cater to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, she was soon in contact with Broadrick.

“Anna is fluent in ASL and understands Deaf culture, so she ensures the needs of each individual are met,” said Ramos. “She helped line up an ASL interpreter for the home inspection, lender meeting, and meetings with the seller and builders.” The process was significantly smoother and easier than her transaction in California, Ramos noted, and a model for the way businesses should accommodate Deaf clients.

Dr. Regina Daniels, a program director and professor of ASL at North Central University, said that while she had a positive experience purchasing her condo through Chan Slettehaug, an ASL-fluent Realtor® with Edina Realty, she observes that the real estate industry could do more to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients.

“It would be great if Realtors® shared more options about funding, FHA grants, donations, and other sources that could help Deaf clients purchase homes.” She added that real estate professionals should cultivate patience when working with Deaf clients, and take time to help them with financing, planning schedules, and effective strategies for purchasing a home.



## FEATURE STORY



For those who are not born deaf, it's tempting to dismiss hearing loss as something experienced by a small minority that will never impact their lives. But in fact, more than one third of people over age 65 have hearing problems, and by age 75 over half are struggling with some form of hearing loss.

"Most people will experience hearing loss at some point in their lives, whether it's a loved one or themselves. Older people—especially men—tend to self-isolate when their hearing declines, which can lead to issues with mental and physical health. That's another reason why more people should know ASL," said Broadrick. "It can help the elderly stay connected to family, friends, and community, greatly improving the quality of their lives."

And it's not just the elderly who would benefit from wider ASL literacy. According to the National Institute on Deafness and

Other Communication Disorders, more than 90 percent of Deaf children are born to hearing parents. In Minnesota alone, over 200 babies are born each year with some form of congenital deafness or hearing loss.

"So, learning to sign is vitally important for children and their parents. It can make all the difference for the emotional and intellectual development of kids, and the cohesion of families," said Broadrick, who believes that all Minnesotans should learn ASL early in life, from grade school through high school, whether they have hearing loss or not. "Deaf children thrive when they have a visual language to communicate. Imagine the possibilities if everyone knew ASL, too."

Broadrick knows that Realtors® who have not worked with Deaf clients before might feel apprehensive about the experience.





**Far Left:** In this still from a video series she created about the home-buying process, Anna signs “describe in great detail,” as she discusses down payments and other aspects of purchasing a home.

**Middle:** Anna celebrates after helping friends Emma Larson and Blane Ablan purchase a charming century-old home. Larson has learned some ASL to better communicate with a Deaf family member.

**Left:** With drill in hand, Anna takes a breather from a bathroom remodeling job. Since completing a DIY course with Karen Graham from Round Tuit Handyman, Anna has tackled three bathroom remodeling jobs. “Knowing how to do a lot of the work myself...I’ve been able to educate first-time home buyers about the realities of redoing things themselves and hiring professionals.”



And though leaving one’s comfort zone might be intimidating at first, she says, the opportunities for professional and personal growth are well worth the effort.

“The more you learn to work with people who are different than yourself, the better you can serve more home buyers and sellers,” Broadrick said. “Just because someone thinks or communicates differently than us doesn’t mean that we should shy away from them. In fact, it means we should lean in and see what we can learn.”

As Minnesota becomes increasingly diverse, it’s vital that we understand each other’s languages and cultures, Broadrick explained. And Deaf people, she noted, are very much a part of that diversity. “When we communicate effectively, we build empathy and respect for each other, and make Minnesota a better place to live.”

## Anna Broadrick’s Best Practices for Hiring an ASL Interpreter

### When scheduling, allow at least two-weeks lead time

Demand for ASL interpreters can be high, so whenever possible, schedule your meeting far in advance.

### Accurately summarize the topic of your meeting

Real estate meetings often cover complex topics packed with legal and Realtor® jargon. Let the agency know you need an ASL interpreter with the relevant industry background. Otherwise, you might be assigned a less experienced interpreter.

### For complex transactions, hire a Certified Deaf Interpreter

Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) are Deaf people with deep knowledge of ASL, and a native understanding of Deaf culture. Their advanced linguistic capabilities ensure that no nuance is lost during complex conversations about finances and other important matters.

### Opt for an in-person interpreter

Face-to-face communication is more personal and leads to easier and more productive sessions. When this isn’t possible, most agencies can set up a Video Relay Service (VRS) through Zoom.

Bear in mind, many agencies have a **two-hour minimum charge**. So, plan your time carefully.

## ASL Interpretation Resources for Realtors®

When working with clients who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, hiring a certified ASL interpreter helps make communication easy, precise, and efficient. Although there are numerous ASL interpreting agencies in Minnesota, these ones number in Broadrick’s top three.

### ASL Interpreting Services (ASLIS)

On-site sign language interpreters for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals throughout Minnesota, North Dakota and western Wisconsin. ASLIS also provides Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) nationally for both ASL and spoken language. Visit [www.aslis.com/](http://www.aslis.com/)

### Keystone Interpreting Solutions (KIS)

Provides ASL and VRI interpretation, and DeafBlind interpretation. Additionally, Certified Deaf Interpreters are available. KIS also offers media and translation services. Visit [www.kisasl.com/](http://www.kisasl.com/)

### Middle English

Offering a full range of language-interpretation services, Middle English provides ASL interpretation, plus translation for many spoken languages. Visit [www.middle-english.com/](http://www.middle-english.com/)