

Orem student training in prestigious sign language program

[Barbara Christiansen DAILY HERALD](#)



[Photos: Orem student training in prestigious sign language program](#)

It's like speaking a different language, even if it is unspoken.

Video Relay Service helps provide assistance for hearing impaired individuals who need to communicate with others via telephone. The impaired person uses American Sign Language via video relay, which an interpreter translates to the spoken word. The service takes specialized training and few go through it.

Kristy Mathisen, an Orem resident and UVU graduate, is one of only 12 in the United States to be accepted to the Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute's summer session. It started in June in Salt Lake City. Graduation from the 12-week program will be at the end of August.

"I feel super lucky every day," Mathisen said. "It really is an amazing program."

And she is lucky -- and talented.

"We are very selective," said Carolyn Ball, executive director of VRSII. "We actually have many, many people apply every year from around the country. We went through a rigorous three-phase screening process to select the students. That is a paper application, video interview and skill screening. From those screenings, we select the top 12 candidates."

Mathisen has been interested in language for many years.

"In seventh grade, I started taking Spanish classes," she said. "I discovered I loved languages. I ran out of classes and started to take a different language -- ASL. I fell in love with it."

"At that time in my life, I was having some struggles," she said. "Learning ASL was my escape from my problems. I enjoy it as a mental challenge. It taxes my brain power. You can't think about your problems. You have to focus."

"I had to give it all of my brain power and energy," she said. "I found a happy place in sign language."

And her happy place has expanded to include training to become an interpreter.

Although the training takes place in Utah, it is seldom that students are from the Beehive State.

"In the last five years since we have been doing this program, we have had very few from Utah," Ball said. "She (Mathison) is the third from Utah."

"She has been doing very well," Ball said of Mathison. "She has to give up things, like family and friends, commitments, that those from other states are not as readily faced with. It is more of a sacrifice for her to some degree. She schedules her time well to schedule tasks. She has also been a really good role model, with a positive outlook. She is doing great things now and will in the future."

Her past training may help her in the future.

"There are very few interpreters who are trilingual," Mathison said. "I do Spanish, English and ASL. My ultimate goal would be to work for VRS, helping Spanish speakers make a phone call to their family. That would be fun for me."

Ball agreed it would be good. "There are amazing opportunities for trilingual interpreters," she said.

Other options for future employment may include helping deaf students on the elementary or university level with their studies or working at the VRS center.

"I would like to stay here in Utah and get work with the local deaf community," Mathisen said. "I love the people. I love what I do. I love helping people."

In the meantime, she is getting practice helping others.

"We go to classes every day," she said. "We learn more about the interpreting process. We are always practicing interpreting -- English to ASL and ASL to English. We have mentors we work with on a weekly basis who give advice. We have internship assignments where we go out and deal with others and the local deaf people in the area. They give feedback. It is all set up in a safe learning environment."

"We have a safety net to help us," she said. "By the time the program is over we will be ready for the certificate tests and be prepared to enter the field."