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GREATEST PERSON: Found in Translation's Maria Vertkin

The 25-year-old social entrepreneur just graduated her first class from the program, which trains low-income and/or homeless women in medical translation.

By [Chris Caesar](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 13, 2012

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An Israeli citizen born in Russia, Maria Vertkin speaks five languages – though not all of them well, she jokes – and has been translating professionally since she was a teenager.

Now the Medford resident is helping low-income women who couldn't otherwise afford it become certified medical translators themselves, with a new Malden-based program called "[Found in Translation](#)."

The social entrepreneur started the program with a \$40,000 grant from the Kip Tiernan Foundation. Last week, 21 women graduated from the program's first class.

"If you look at the homeless or low income population, a huge number of minorities...are actually fully bilingual," Vertkin observes.

Those working as full-time medical interpreters – who work with patients and doctors to navigate language barriers – can earn as [much as \\$20 an hour](#).

"You can work in an ER, a clinic, a private practice, community health centers and some of these women...get jobs as interpreters or other jobs that are related," Vertkin said. "That's going to give them a real edge, because a lot of places...can't afford to have a medical interpreter, but will still want a secretary or medical assistant that is a medical interpreter."

The twelve-week program meets three times a week at the Cambridge Health Alliance – so far, the program is "very bare bones," Vertkin said.

Still, students cover a lot of content, including specific job training, in-person mentoring, personal finance principles and even a trip to Malden's Tailored Impressions, where students can receive free professional wear.

"For a lot of these women, this will be a very big professional jump," she said.

The non-profit selects its students on an individual basis, looking at factors like income, hardships and past successes, including any kind of previous relevant job experience or education.

Students must also answer four essay questions about why they want to be interpreters. They must also possess a fluency or near-fluency in English.

For more information, visit the [group's website](#).

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Diana

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Brilliant! Kudos to Ms. Vertkin for her hard work and resourcefulness in creating this program.

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