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## Medford resident unveils new workforce development program to assist bilingual women

### **Medford Transcript**

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Medford — A fresh idea is coming to our community, offering economically disadvantaged multilingual women a way out of homelessness and poverty through the use of their language skills. The Medford-based nonprofit, Found in Translation, offers Medical Interpreter Certificate training to low-income and homeless women at no cost and helps them to overcome barriers to employment.

Medford resident Maria Vertkin, a multilingual woman herself, created Found in Translation seeing an opportunity at the intersection of two persistent social justice problems: the economic disadvantages faced by minority women and disparities in health care.

“Minorities, and especially minority women, are disproportionately affected by poverty and homelessness,” says Vertkin, “but many are bilingual, and language is a very marketable skill — a skill that can be used to start a lucrative career.”

One example of this is medical interpreting, a profession with a median wage of \$43,000+ per year. In addition, it is a career that would enable the women to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to their communities.

Medical interpreters save lives, reduce disparities in healthcare, improve health outcomes, increase efficiency and cut costs for the entire health care system, saving money for us all.

Vertkin submitted a proposal to the Kip Tiernan Social Justice Fellowship, sponsored by Rosie’s Place in honor of its founder in order to fund projects that serve poor and homeless women and won.

The selection committee recognized Found in Translation’s potential to break the cycle of poverty by giving women a well-paying profession, and awarded her \$40,000 of start-up capital to create and carry out the project.

“When we heard Maria’s proposal, our reaction was, ‘Of course! This is so obvious. Why isn’t this happening already?’” said Steve Breen, residence manager at Rosie’s Place and a member of the fellowship selection committee. “Maria herself is an impressive woman who we have total confidence would MAKE this project happen.”

Rosie’s Place is not the first to place its bets on Vertkin. In 2009 she received the Veronica Award from the Superstars Foundation, which recognizes social service workers with much higher than average performance.

In 2010, she was selected from over 10,000 candidates nationwide for the Pearson Prize from the Pearson Foundation, recognizing college students with demonstrated community leadership and contribution to social justice.

In 2011, after starting Found in Translation, Vertkin received the Women of Peace Award from the Women’s Peacepower Foundation, an award given annually to “extraordinary women all over the world who work for peace, fairness and true justice within the lives of women and their families.” Vertkin is the first Massachusetts resident to receive this award.

To make Found in Translation happen, Vertkin partnered with the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) of Central Massachusetts, a leading provider of medical interpreting education, to teach Found in Translation’s Medical Interpreter Certificate course.

Upon successful completion of the course, women are qualified to be employed as medical interpreters, and the course can also be applied toward college credit.

The 12-week program is offered at no cost to income-eligible women and is based in Malden, the second most diverse community in Massachusetts.

For more information on Found in Translation, visit [www.found-in-translation.org](http://www.found-in-translation.org).

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