

## TypeWell Transcriber Shortage Project

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### Introduction

According to the Ministry of Education 2017 report, there were a total of 1,119 deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind students in the public primary and secondary education system in British Columbia. Many of these students will engage with post-secondary education in British Columbia throughout their lifetimes, in addition to those from outside of the province and those who have already left the primary and secondary public school system. In order to provide equitable access for these students, post-secondary institutes need to maintain high-quality services that are well matched to individual deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind students. For many of these students, this will be the provision of the speech-to-text services of a skilled TypeWell<sup>1</sup> transcriber -or transcriber team. Yet, many post-secondary institutes have reported significant trouble finding sufficient transcribers to cover their required transcribing service hours during the Fall (September-December) and Winter (January-April) semesters. No doubt, this shortage has led to ineffective or insufficient institutional accommodations for some deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind students, thus failing to provide equitable access to them.

Historically, the shortage of TypeWell transcribers has been explored from an institutional perspective to the exclusion of transcriber experiences. This qualitative-led mixedmethods project was designed to fill in that missing information, and thus focused on collecting data from current and former post-secondary TypeWell transcribers in British Columbia. By focusing on the motivating elements and challenges TypeWell transcribers face during their daily work, systems can be optimized to provide the most access to motivating elements while minimizing sources of frustration. Considering the high level of skill required to provide TypeWell transcribing services in post-secondary classrooms—such as a high degree of skill in: adapting to unexpected challenges, comprehension of dense material, simultaneously paraphrasing language while intaking additional information—the retention of experienced transcribers should always remain the priority (though recruitment is also needed). Should the recommendations made in this project be applied, our hope is that transcribers will experience higher job satisfaction and in turn, increase the length of their post-secondary TypeWell transcribing career.

This report highlights the results of interviews and a survey of former and current TypeWell transcribers. A total of six 40 to 55 minute in-depth interviews were conducted with current (n=5) and former (n=1) transcribers. These interviews were recorded, and thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes between interviews. Following the interviews, 18 transcribers responded to a survey, which contained open-ended and close-ended questions—resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data. After exploring this data (see appendix 1 for additional information), recommendations are made.

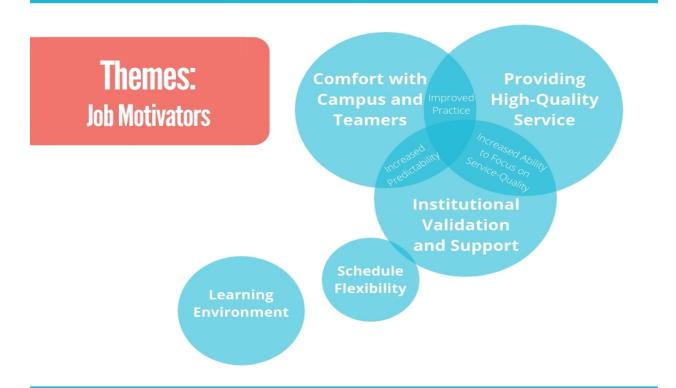
Ultimately, the findings contained in this report point toward the need to identify prospective transcribers and those currently working who are interested in making transcribing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> TypeWell transcribing is a real-time non-verbatim speech-to-text service provided by qualified individuals using a standard keyboard augmented by the TypeWell transcribing program. For more information on this program please visit: <u>http://typewell.com</u>

their full-time career and providing them with avenues to increase their employment stability. At the same time, those who prefer to provide transcribing services at a part-time level should be considered vital and treated as such. Finally, in order to ensure job satisfaction in both of these groups, increased rate of pay, institutional support and validation of their professional practice should be considered of high importance.

#### **Themes that Emerged from Interviews**

The following themes emerged from the thematic analysis of interview data. Guided by the focus of the project, two main categories of themes emerged. First, elements that were reported to increase job satisfaction in the TypeWell transcribers interviewed, termed Job Motivators. The second category related to areas that were reported to be negative elements of working as a Typewell Transcriber, named Challenges and Issues. Additionally, those interviewed were asked to describe their experience with becoming a TypeWell Transcriber, from initial introduction of the idea of working as a transcriber to working regularly as a transcriber. A summary of their experiences can be found in Appendix 2.



**Providing High-Quality Service:** This aspect emerged as the key motivator for the transcribers interviewed. The ability to provide the highest quality access to students, and thus make post-secondary education accessible, was a large part of what transcribers found rewarding about their work. Institutional practices that increased their ability to focus on the provision of high-quality services were seen as increasing their motivation. However, institutional practices that created additional challenges in classroom transcribing practice were seen as particularly frustrating.

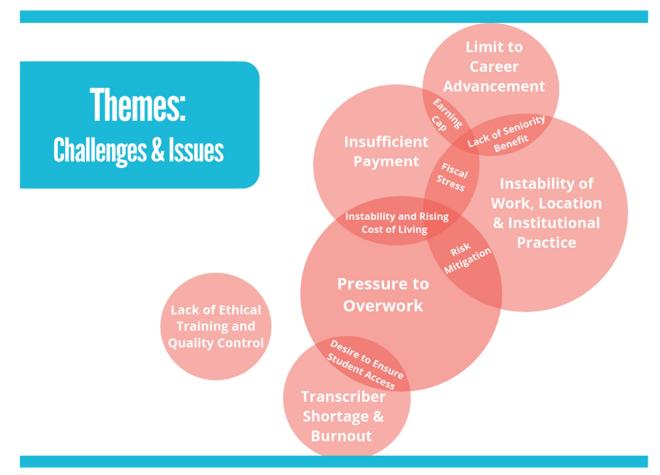
**Comfort with Campus and Teamer:** The ability to work regularly with a well matched teamer (another transcriber who shares the classroom transcribing work) and on a singular campus, was seen to increase motivation. Regular work with a well matched teamer was reported to increase the quality of transcription services provided to students, thereby allowing transcribers to more easily provide high-quality service. Meanwhile, working regularly on a singular campus was reported to increase transcriber comfort, professional connections with faculty and staff, and reduce cognitive-load, which may allow for additional focus on provision of service.

**Learning Environment:** Those interviewed seemed to be passionate life-long learners, and found it particularly rewarding to work in a variety of classrooms. While their main focus was transcribing, they reported that being in an educational environment was particularly rewarding.

**Institutional Validation and Support:** Coordinators of accessibility services were largely seen as representatives of the larger institution by TypeWell transcribers, therefore the actions and practice of these coordinators seemed to have a large impact on how TypeWell transcribers felt about providing services at institutions. Coordinators of accessibility services who were reflective, knowledgeable and actively solicited and acted on feedback (helping transcribers feel heard) were seen to increase the motivation of the transcribers interviewed. Additionally, practice and policy that helped to support an effective transcribing environment in classrooms was seen to be particularly motivating, for example, the practice of notifying and educating instructors on transcribing in advance. These practices and a coordinator who exhibited the qualities listed above were seen to be directly and indirectly providing institutional validation of accessibility via transcribing services. This is key, as all transcribers interviewed ranked it as highly motivating.

Inversely those institutions that had unclear or invalidating practices or policy, were reported to decrease the motivation of transcribers for the service they provide—sometimes in general and sometimes specifically at that institution. Some of the policy and practices mentioned in this regard included: failure to notify instructors of transcribing services in their classrooms in advance, often leading to transcribers needing to mediate increased instructor concern and resistance; disorganized scheduling and logistical processes, with one transcriber mentioning needing to return from a vacation early due to coordinator error around course start date; policy that leads to unpaid transcriber work, such as when last-minute cancellations fail to pay for preparation time that has appropriately been completed in advance; and those that failed to support safe working conditions, such as providing teamers and appropriate ergonomics. These elements led to a reduced sense of institutional value of their work and, as a result, the perception of reduced institutional commitment to accessibility. As many transcribers seem to draw a large amount of their motivation from helping to provide access, when they view institutions as failing to support this, they may be more likely to lose interest in providing transcribing services.

**Schedule Flexibility:** The autonomy provided by the contract nature of the work was an important initial factor for many transcribers. The ability to fit transcribing work into their schedules was seen to be desirable. However, those that work at, or desire to work at, full-time levels of transcribing saw schedule flexibility as less motivating. Those that desired to make this their main career seemed to grow more frustrated overtime with the unstable nature of contract work. This may suggest a need for varied approaches to employment of transcribers, with those who are interested in it as a full-time and long-term career being provided an avenue for more stable non-contract work.



**Instability of Work, Location and Institutional Practice:** This theme emerged as a key challenging element in both interview and survey data for those who are interested in working full-time or near full-time as a transcriber. Conversely, those surveyed who worked at part-time levels mentioned this less frequently, which may speak to the place that TypeWell transcribing work fits into their household income. Those interviewed found that the lack of predictable work, particularly in the summer; the inability to plan long-term due to semester-by-semester schedule changes; unpaid commuting, often between multiple institutes per day; and finally, the perceived and actual lack of fiscal stability, particularly when mid-semester cancellations take place, all created significant challenges and decreased their desire to work as a transcriber.

Adding to this reported lack of job stability was unclear and inconsistent institutional practice and policy. For the vast majority of those interviewed, it was unclear how work was distributed at the majority of institutions. Often there was confusion as to why one transcriber may be offered work over another, with some assuming it was related to seniority or areas of expertise. Most transcribers reported that first-come, first-serve methods of work distribution were stressful and not best practice. This was further compounded by a lack of clear hiring practices. Finally, while there was a preference to remain in the same location and to develop professional relationships with other support-service staff, the lack of clear policy and instability of the work seemed to prevent this from taking place, leading to a decreased sense of wellbeing and agency.

**Insufficient Rates of Payment:** A significant challenge reported by participants who worked in the Lower Mainland was the low hourly pay provided to them. The pay rates reported ranged vastly, from \$22 to \$50 per hour. However, excluding Vancouver Island, the range reported by those working in the Lower Mainland was \$22 to \$35 per hour. These rates seem to have been static for several years, and were cited by all participants as insufficient to ensure adequate yearly income as a contract professional. This seemed to be a significant factor in many individuals working over 45 hour per week during the fall and winter semesters and some reporting working over 65 hours each week. All participants suggested a pay increase was needed to ensure long-term retention of transcribers, with the most commonly suggested range being \$30-\$40 per hour.

Limit to Career Advancement: For those who had several years of experience, there was a perceived lack of benefit in having long-term experience as a transcriber. Many institutions were reported to give increases in pay up to 600 hours of TypeWell experience, but rarely after. Additionally, it was perceived that experience beyond these 600 hours rarely were rewarded in recognizable ways, such as through increased stability. This resulted in many of the more experienced transcribers feeling undervalued in the skill and expertise that they had developed over years of practice, and was a major factor for one transcriber leaving their practice.

**Pressure to Overwork:** In order to cope with the unpredictability of post-secondary TypeWell transcriber work, as well as the reported low pay rates, transcribers report taking on significantly more work than they would otherwise. Several transcribers interviewed reported working over 60 hours during the fall and winter semesters. This pressure to overwork is further compounded by a sense of guilt experienced by transcribers as they see classes being emailed multiple times to institutional transcriber lists (implying a lack of available transcribers), with several transcribers admitting to taking on undesired extra work in order to ensure student access. This pressure to overwork, and actual overwork, likely leads to increased transcriber burnout.

**Transcriber Shortage and Burnout:** All transcribers mentioned the high transcriber turnover rate and transcriber burnout as a de-motivator, with one person mentioning that it affected their sense of wellbeing at work. It also was reported to lead to disturbances in the

patterns of work, with those whom you have become used to working regularly leaving—no doubt adding to the sense of instability.

Similarly, the current shortage of transcribers seems to add additional stressors to current transcribers and leads to less than ideal work pressures due to a lack of available replacement transcribers. Those interviewed felt less able to take time off in order to attend meaningful life events, such as family weddings. Additionally, the lack of replacement transcribers seems to lead to many transcribers being unable to take time off to recover from illness. Instead they often feel pressured to come into work with the flu or a cold, as they want to ensure access for students, no doubt adding to the reported high-burnout and turnover rates.

Lack of Ethical Training and Quality Control: Many of the transcribers interviewed expressed concern about the lack of significant ethical training in the TypeWell course and a clear code of ethics. These individuals felt that this resulted in too much variation in the ethical skill and practice of TypeWell transcribers. Moreover, they felt that there were few avenues to formally encourage improvement in those who displayed weaknesses in this area. Additionally, several of those interviewed expressed a concern over the lack of quality-of-service assurance measures by the institutions they work for. In particular, the perceived reliance on passive quality monitoring systems (such as student or teamer reporting) was seen to be an issue. Furthermore, the lack of (perceived or actual) consequences for transcribers who fail to do their ethical or practical service due diligence was a source of frustration for many who were interviewed. Indeed, this frustration with transcribers who failed to do their due diligence was a major factor in the former transcriber's decision to leave the field.

#### Summary of Survey Data

#### **Reported Amount of Work**

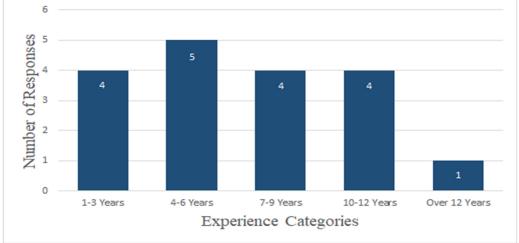
Of the 18 responses, 14 reported working in the last year with 4 reporting not having taken work in the last year (see below). The reported amount of work ranged significantly, further reinforcing the need to understand how the work of transcribing fits differently into the lives of those who provide services. A number of transcribers reported working at full-time hours (anything above 35 hours per week), while a number reported part-time hours. Therefore, any changes to the work-systems transcribers encounter need to be sensitive to the role transcribing work plays in an individual's life; for example, not all transcribers are going to desire a full-time staff position.

Question and Response Data Type:	Results (responses):
Over the past year, what is <b>the average</b>	Fall (13)
<b>number of hours you have worked per</b>	Average: 32 Hours Per Week
<b>week</b> as a post-secondary TypeWell	Range: 8.5-65 Hours Per Week
transcriber during the: Fall, Winter and	Median: 30
Summer Semesters? <i>Ratio- Semester by</i>	Winter (13)
<i>Semester Response</i>	Average: 22 Hours Per Week

	Range: 1-60 Hours Per Week Median: 15 Summer (13) Average: 14 Hours Per Week Range: 1-60 Hours Per Week Median: 10
Are any or all of the hours listed above <b>different than how much you want to work</b> as a Post-Secondary TypeWell transcriber? <i>Nominal-Yes/No</i>	Yes=43% (6) No=57% (8) Of the 6 respondents who wanted to change their hours, 5 wanted to increase their hours while one participant wanted to decrease hours. Those who wanted to increase the amount of TypeWell work they took struggled to do so due to needing to take alternative work resulting from the unstable nature of contract work; limited work in the summer; and being unavailable when most service hours are required.

#### **Reported Years of Experience**





#### Summary of Qualitative Survey Data

The following summarizes the survey responses that asked respondents to answer in their own words. The summarized results are organized by the questions that participants were asked. Additionally, the number of survey participants who reported each experience is noted. The categories and trends that emerged through the survey were strikingly similar to the themes that emerged from the in-depth interview (see next section), even when isolating the responses of those who had not also participated in the interviews (n=11). For the sake of brevity and relevance, any responses that were not shared by or similar to more than 20% of the sample were

omitted.

## In your opinion, what are the best parts of working as a post-secondary TypeWell transcriber? (question was shown to all 18 survey participants).

- 1. Flexibility of TypeWell work and ability to design own schedule (reported by: 14 of 18)
- 2. Working in an educational environment and being exposed to new concepts (reported by 14 of 18)
- 3. Supporting accessibility for students (reported by: 12 of 18)
- 4. The work is interesting and meaningful (reported by: 10 of 18)
- 5. Connections and opportunities to work with other transcribers (reported by: 7 of 18)
- 6. Supportive and friendly coordinators (reported by 4 of 18)

## In your opinion, what are the worst parts of working as a post-secondary TypeWell Transcriber in British Columbia? (question was shown to all 18 survey participants).

- 1. Instability and insecurity of work and lack of benefits (reported by: 12 of 18)
  - a. Insufficient pay (reported by: 4 of 18)
- 2. Issues with institutional policy and practice (reported by: 6 of 18)
- 3. Repetitive Strain Injuries (reported by: 4 of 18)

# What are the main reasons you have not worked as a Post-Secondary TypeWell transcriber for more than a year? (question was shown to all 4 former transcriber participants).

- 1. Lack of stable work and resulting stress (reported by: 3 of 4)
  - a. Obtained stable work in another field (reported by: 3 of 4)
- 2. Decline in skill due to work interruption or lack of available work (reported by: 2 of 4)
- 3. Family/Child care obligations (reported by: 1 of 4)

#### Recommendations

Participants in the interviews and survey were highly passionate practitioners; however, there was enough dissatisfaction expressed to suggest that significant changes are needed to ensure an increase in, and the long-term stability of, the pool of TypeWell transcribers. Based on the data collected and summarized in this report the following recommendations should be considered.

Based on the information gathered in this project, one can see that the work of postsecondary TypeWell transcribing seems to play different roles in the lives of TypeWell transcribers. Some are content with working at part-time levels, while others prefer to work at full-time or beyond full-time levels. In order to ensure long-term stability of the pool of transcribers, it is essential that both TypeWell transcribers who work at part-time and full-time levels are better supported. It does appear that some of the needs of part-time and full-time transcriber groups are unique, but there is a fair amount of overlap, such as: insufficient rates of pay, the need for institutional validation and support, and clarity of institutional practices.

#### 1. Remuneration and Raises

- 1.1. All institutions that employ TypeWell transcribers should conduct a review of pay structures, with significant consideration being given to ensuring that all TypeWell providers are paid a minimum of \$30 per hour (though a higher range may be institutionally advantageous in the long-term stability of available transcribers for their classes).
- 1.2. Clear policy and processes around increases to rates of payment, and how transcribers can request an increase in their hourly rates of payment, should be developed and communicated with all contracted transcribers.

#### 2. Distribution of Work and Hiring Process

- 2.1. Institutions should develop and/or make clear their policies and practices concerning the distribution of work to transcribers. Whenever possible, work distribution through first-come, first-serve email sign-up should be avoided, as it was reported to increase perceived instability of transcribing work and reduces the quality of time off for transcribers (as they feel a pressure to continually check their mobile devices).
- 2.2. Similarly, the hiring or contracting process and policy for TypeWell transcribers should be made clear to all potential transcribers. Specifically, clear criterion and processes for contracting or hiring transcribers should be developed and clearly communicated with potential applicants. This will help to increase effective applications for institutions, while also helping to provide clear avenues for transcribers seeking additional work.

#### 3. Decreased Instability of Transcriber Work and Development of Staff Positions

- 3.1. For those who are interested in long-term full-time employment as a transcriber, methods to reduce instability should be rapidly enacted in order to retain those currently engaged at these levels of service provision. Some of the areas of stability desired were: location, schedule, general hours, summer hours, health and injury benefits—all of which are prime avenues for intervention.
- 3.2. Part-time or full-time staff positions should be considered where possible, with these staff positions being assigned additional duties when not working on transcribing related duties<sup>2</sup> in order to reduce institutional risk.

#### 4. Support of Transcribers Who Obtain a High-Degree of Experience

4.1. At present, transcribers feel little-to-no recognition of their experience after 600 hours of transcribing service, therefore, institutions should consider ways to recognize and validate the skill that comes with long-term experience. Rewards for long-term experience as a TypeWell transcriber should be developed and/or made clear at an institutional level. These rewards should focus on reducing the instability of contract employment and validating the work of transcribers.

#### 5. Active Recruitment Trial of TypeWell Transcribers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In return for increased stability, those interviewed all reported to be enthusiastic to take on the following duties when not preparing for or providing transcribing services as a part of a staff position: mentoring new transcribers, captioning films, data entry, education of faculty on transcribing services and providing feedback to other transcribers

5.1. Active marketing for the work of TypeWell transcribing should be tested, with initial marketing utilizing the elements outlined in Appendix 2. This test should measure recruitment rates and monitor long-term retention of those transcribers who are successfully recruited to the field. It may be worthwhile for both individual institutions, and perhaps PCAS, to promote the work of TypeWell transcribing within academic programs that draw students who are passionate about accessibility, and to consider advertising this work on a more general scale in order to see which has the biggest return on investment.

#### 6. Increasing Institutional Validation and Logistics

- 6.1. As the face of institutions for many transcribers, accessibility coordinators should actively solicit feedback from transcribers and act on the feedback provided. As shown by this study, their work seems to be a significant factor in ensuring job satisfaction in transcribers.
  - 6.1.1. When possible, transcribers should be asked who they work effectively with and coordinators should pair these transcribers together.
  - 6.1.2. Institutional administrative and logistical elements should be refined and streamlined continuously, as this was reported to lead to increased job satisfaction and service provision. Particular focus should be placed on elements that help to reduce the cognitive or administrative load of transcribers, to allow them to focus more on the preparation of content and provision of high-quality service.
- 6.2. Advance notice and description of transcribing services should be provided to instructors, in order to institutionally validate transcriber presence and reduce possible resistance by faculty members. Also, this may help to reinforce the perception of institutional commitment to accessibility, a strongly held value for the majority of transcribers.

#### 7. Training Support

7.1. Avenues to support those training to become transcribers should be investigated, such as using a cohort model to support training transcribers.

#### 8. Remote Transcribing

- 8.1. Institutions who utilize remote transcribing services should make this clear to current and potential transcribers. That way, those who may not be able to physically provide service are aware they can apply to be on a remote-transcriber list.
  - 8.1.1. While remote transcribing will likely be a part of strategies to address geographical and employment-related challenges, based on the collected data, it is unlikely to be a solution to all challenges reported by transcribers who took part of this study. Several transcribers expressed concerns around the use of remote transcribing, and those that were

interested in providing remote services largely preferred to have a blend of in-person and remote work.

#### 9. Ongoing Monitoring and Quality Assurance Mechanisms

- 9.1. Monitoring systems should be developed to measure the average career length of a transcriber. Ideally, this monitoring system would also, on occasion, communicate with those who transitioned, or are in the process of transitioning, out of transcribing work in order to identify the reasons that led them to decide to leave the field. This data could help to provide ongoing feedback on ineffective systems, measure the long-term stability of the TypeWell transcriber pool, and predict potential shortages.
- 9.2. Substantial concern was expressed in the data collected around the lack of qualityassurance mechanisms, with some interviewed having observed a few transcribers to be acting in less ethical ways and providing sub-par service. Those working with individuals who seemed less motivated to provide high-quality and ethical practice reported becoming frustrated, with one person mentioning that as a factor of their eventual transition out of providing transcribing work. The development of monitoring systems should be done in collaboration with transcribers, with a focus on formative evaluation and supporting improvement rather than punitive action.

#### Conclusion

The work of TypeWell transcribers plays a vital role in ensuring equitable access for many deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind post-secondary students in British Columbia. In order to ensure long-term maintenance and growth of a highly-skilled pool of transcribers, the information and recommendations outlined above need to be thoughtfully considered and used by post-secondary institutes across the province. In the short-term, particularly with the current economic climate, increased rates of payment should be considered. In the long-term, policy, processes and employment structures should be optimized to support and grow transcribers' job stability, and provide institutional support for the important and challenging work they provide.

#### **Appendix 1: Research Process Summary**

# RESEARCH DESIGN Summary

## METHODOLOGY

Based on aim and research questions, a qualitative-led mixed-methods approach was selected.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Developed prior to start of research, in order to guide selection of appropriate research methodologies and design.

## RECRUITMENT

Recruitment email sent via PCAS listserv to current and former transcribers.

## QUALITATIVE SAMPLING METHOD

Purposeful sampling was adopted. Six participants were selected to ensure diverse experience as transcribers.

## **INTERVIEWS**

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Semi-structured interview protocol was developed. Six individual recorded interviews were conducted, ranging from 40-55 minutes in length.

## TRANSCRIPTION

Interview recordings were transcribed by project lead, resulting in approx 100 pages of transcription.

## CODING

After reading and re-reading the data, it was coded for positively and negatively reported elements.

## THEME DEVELOPMENT

Coded elements were analyzed for themes, resulting in establishment of two metathemes and 12 themes -with additional contextual data.

## SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

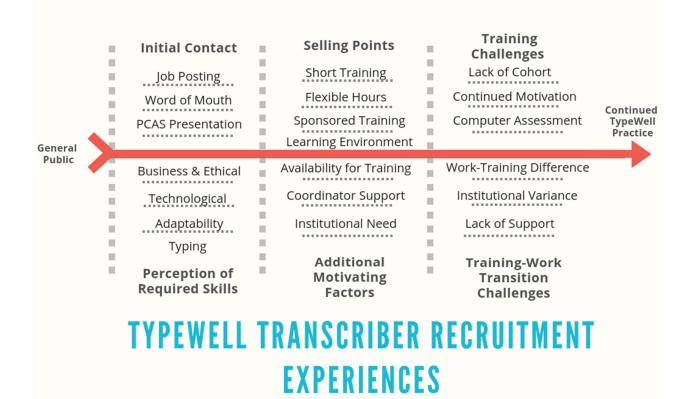
A survey was developed to collect demographic and opinion data, and was distributed to all transcribers on PCAS list-serv.

## Survey Data Analysis

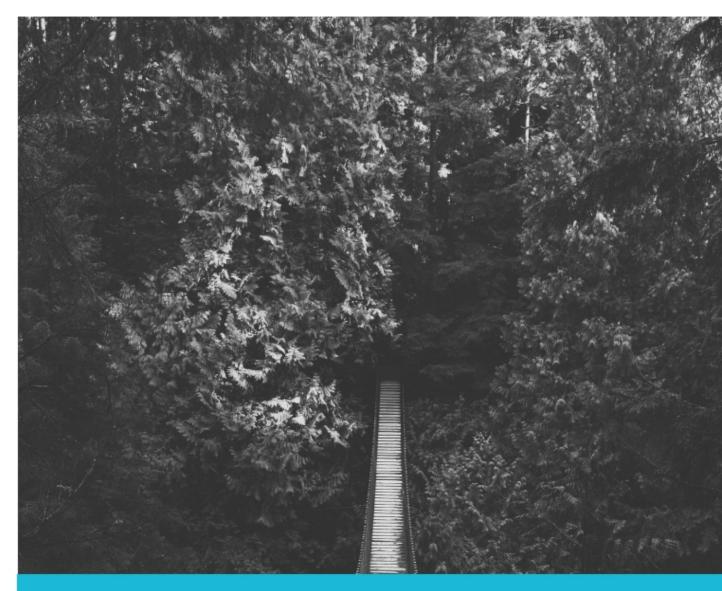
Quantitative analysis was conducted on numerical data, while qualitative data was used to refine previously established themes







The analysis of the interview data revealed the themes highlighted above. It is interesting to note that the majority of individuals became aware of transcribing through word of mouth, either from a friend or coordinator. Without active job advertising having been recently conducted, it is hard to know if word of mouth is the most effective recruitment strategy or just the avenue that is currently most frequently experienced. Moreover, while initial contact was important, there seemed to need to be an additional motivator, or selling point, to encourage individuals to commit to the training process. Finally, the challenges experienced by those interviewed during the training and transition to work are highlighted. One individual highlighted the challenge of computer-based analysis; i.e., that the way the TypeWell software assesses successful transcription may not be conducive to some transcribing strategies. However, these same strategies may be highly effective in real-world transcribing. This, in combination with other training and work challenges, seems to suggest the need for ongoing discussion and support of transcribers in training in order to increase retention through training and the training to work transition.



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