

The invisible Disability

Unless the Deaf wears hearing aids, deafness is not immediately apparent. Deaf people use their hands to talk with sign language, and they use their eyes to listen.

It often comes as a surprise to hearing people that many deaf people refer to themselves as being members of the Deaf culture belonging to a unique linguistic minority that uses South African Sign language (SASL) as its primary mode of communication. This language was acknowledged in 1995 as the official language of the Deaf. They are presently lobbying to become the 12th language group in South Africa.

In the previous era in some schools the Deaf children were forced to sit on their hands to prevent them from using their hands to communicate!

Facts about the Deaf Culture

The Deaf (note the capital letter **D**) share common values, norms, traditions, language and behaviours. The Deaf do not perceive themselves as having lost something (i.e. hearing), and do not think themselves as handicapped, impaired or disabled. And they detest it to be called deaf and dumb!

They celebrate and cherish their culture because it gives them the unique privilege of sharing a common history and language. They have their own culture and at the same time live and work within the dominant South African culture which is unique in various ways.

Within the Deaf culture the words **deaf, hard of hearing, and deafened** refer to a person's audio logical status. The latter two do not see themselves as members of the Deaf culture. Some may know sign language, but their primary language is English/Zulu/Xhosa/Afrikaans.

The term **Hearing Impaired**, which often is used by the media and society in general to refer to people with a hearing loss, is often seen as offensive. It suggests that Deaf people are "broken" or "inferior" because they do not hear. A more generic phrase is "deaf and hard of hearing" which refers to all people with a hearing loss.

Within the Deaf culture the term "hearing" is used to identify people who are members of the dominant South African Culture. One might think that the SASL sign for "hearing" is related to the group's ability to hear (e.g. pointing to the ear). However, the sign for "hearing" is related to the ability to "talk". The act of talking is clearly visible to Deaf people, whereas listening or hearing is not!

**From the Deaf culture perspective,
it is the act of “talking” that clearly separates the two groups.**

Deafness in South Africa

According to the 1996 statistical figures, there are 383 408 Deaf persons in South Africa, of whom 65% are unemployed. Due to the unique culture and language of Deaf people, a special approach needs to be taken to help them become proud and productive members of the civil community.

Facts and figures

- **10% of the SA population are disabled**
- **3.5% or 1.5 million of the population have some hearing loss**
- **90% of Deaf people have hearing parents**
- **There are currently 7 000 Deaf pupils in schools or institutions or classes for Deaf people**
- **7 000 - 10 000 Deaf and hard of hearing children are not in school (from disadvantaged backgrounds)**
- **33% of all Deaf adults cannot read or write, because of insufficient education**
- **65% of all Deaf are unemployed**
- **Most Deaf persons never attend a school or start attending very late (age 9+)**
- **Average income of Deaf persons is lower than that of hearing persons**
- **HIV/Aids awareness education, presented through the mass media, is not accessible to Deaf people**
- **Deaf school leavers have the average language ability of an 8-year old hearing child**
- **In 2004 only 40 Deaf people graduated in /South Africa**
- **Only one university in the country is open to Deaf scholars**
- **There are 41 schools for Deaf and 3 schools for hard of hearing learners in South Africa**

In the Foreword to the White paper on and **INTEGRATED NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGY** (November 1993), the then Deputy President T.M. Mbeki stated:

”Among the yardsticks by which to measure a society’s respect for human rights, to evaluate the level of maturity and its generosity of spirit, is by looking at the status that it accords to those members of society who are the most vulnerable, disabled people, the senior citizens and its children.

The concept of a caring society is strengthened and deepened when we recognise that disabled people enjoy the same rights as we do and that we have responsibility towards the promotion of their quality of life. We must stop seeing disabled people

as objects of pity but as capable individuals who are contributing immensely to the development of society.

We must play an active role in working with them to find joy and happiness and the fulfilment of their aspirations.”

eDeaf

A leading company run by the Deaf for the Deaf

President Mbeki’s worthy goals to provide joy, happiness and fulfilment of the aspirations of disabled people have led to clearly defined legislation prompting the business sector to employ and empower the disabled sector of our community. (See White paper of 1996)

However, in practise these citizens are still marginalised in many respects.

The relatively new (and young) company **eDeaf** was founded early in 2007 to pro-actively counteract this marginalisation. Their goal is to empower the Deaf through education in order to provide employment opportunities to those who are seen but not heard in the world of work.

Their success rate over the past years is remarkable, if not astounding!

The two Directors, Nazereen Bhana, a Deaf lady with gusto and vision, and her partner Jesse Kotze, a hearing child of Deaf parents, are entrenched in the world of the Deaf.

Nazereen who has been the presenter and producer of Deaf TV, is also well versed in education and training of the Deaf. Jesse has previously worked fulltime for DeafSA and Beexchange, a company assisting the business sector to comply with the government’s BEE requirements.

eDeaf’s objectives are to up-skill potential Deaf candidates with scarce and critical life and job skills and to prepare them for suitable employment opportunities.

eDeaf also bridges the gap between the hearing and the deaf by sensitizing the workplace to the needs of the Deaf candidates by way of workshops for employers and employees.

eDeaf does not do job placement and then leave the rest to the employer and the Deaf employees. Nazareen explains that they follow through with regular visits to the company and they supply interpreters’ services when needed.

“eDeaf has placed 240 Deaf people with 25 different businesses, since we started our business in June 2007, Nazareen proudly mentions. “We have trained 772 unemployed Deaf people in work ethics, labour law and personal skills development (budgeting, etc.) in one day workshops facilitated by myself. This training, and the relevant certificate, enables Deaf people to go out and to look for employment on their own.”

Jesse states: “eDeaf has acquired offices in the MODE building in Braamfontein, providing easy access for Deaf – one taxi, train or bus from centre town. Our offices are equipped with a training room where we host our workshops, presently training 45 people at a time twice a month. We also conduct workshops at the Tshwane Deaf association’s offices.

eDeaf has registered as a Microsoft training provider, which allows us to train and equip Deaf people with computer literacy skills. The training is free and they receive an internationally accepted certificate on completion.”

DELL has donated 20 desk top computers for training purposes.

Jesse points out that the desk tops will also be loaded with Media Works ABET & Numeracy programmes that are accessible to the Deaf. “Two trained Deaf trainers (Nazareen & Kabelo) provide the ongoing training. eDeaf strongly believes in Deaf people training Deaf people. This is empowering, and a Deaf trainer knows best how to adapt training material to Deaf learners’ needs.”

Kabelo Moloi, a Deaf lady with valuable experience as project manager, was appointed as trainer and mentor. She adds a lot of value to our business. She will manage the proposed eDeaf branch in Tshwane,” says Jesse.

Some of the companies who are coming back for more Deaf employees are Life Diamond who has appointed 30 Deaf diamond employers, and they want 20 more. Icepick is very happy with their 18 Deaf workers in manufacturing of fridges for big retailers.

Biddulphs have employed 14 Deaf people and Rene Turck employed 14 Deaf people working in their glass manufacturing business.

Supercare (Isikhonyane), have 44 Deaf cleaners on a learnership at OR Tambo, ACSA. The Services SETA provides a bursary for 50 Deaf cleaners.

eDeaf is proud to announce that a pilot project for the training for 40 Deaf workers will commence soon in the Wholesale and Retail SETA, in collaboration with one of the biggest retail chain groups, Shoprite Checkers. Shoprite will assist with the training, and guaranteeing simultaneous job placement and career path development in a segment ideally suited to the skills of a Deaf person. Four Deaf trainers and assessors were appointment to conduct the training.

Jesse proclaims, "This is a massive breakthrough for the Deaf community, and a giant step for the Wholesale and Retail SETA. We foresee that this pilot project in the Gauteng region will eventually be executed nationally in all the regions of our country."

Addendum: Companies who have appointed Deaf employees. They can be contacted at the relevant numbers.

- Biddulphs, MD. Mr. Peter Farmerey, 012 386 1321. 14 Deaf staff members
- Boogertman & Partners, FD, Marlene, speak to Retha and ask her who the best person is.. 011 790 1600. 4 Deaf cleaners
- Nativa, Mike Hamilton-Hall, 012 664 6105. 4 Deaf workers
- Supercare (Isikhonyane), have 44 Deaf cleaners on a Learnership at OR Tambo, ACSA. Dave Reynolds, 011 709 8102
- Life Diamond, Rachel, 011 334 9131, 30 Deaf diamond polishers
- AFCHO, Sumaya, 011 224 2400, 12 Deaf cleaners
- Icepick- Werner, 011 394 5082, 18 Deaf workers
- SABC, Gerhard Fouché, 011 330 9592, 3 Deaf data capturers
- Rene Turck, Walter Cradock, FD, 011 571 7400, 10 Deaf workers
- Services SETA, Sydney, 011 715 1800, they provided a bursary for 50 Deaf cleaners.
- Wholesale & Retail, Ankie Kemp, or 012 676 9000- will launch a pilot project to place 40 Deaf people on skills programmes.