

LEARNING IN A SILENT WORLD

Cindi du Preez: National Training Manager

Imagine a world without sound. Not waking up to the sound of birds chirping, hearing soothing waves crashing on the beach or standing in front of someone and not being able to communicate with them clearly. This is the daily reality of eight deaf employees at one of our contracts.



What has made matters more challenging is that, as per the COVID-19 health and safety protocols, everyone is now required to wear masks. Our deaf employees are now unable to read their colleagues' lips.

To overcome this challenge, we trained all employees working on this contract in partnership with the National Institute for the Deaf. The team was evaluated to determine their mother tongue, level of hearing impairment, their understanding of sign language, and their ability to read lips. The National Institute for the Deaf freely shared advice and assisted us with remote interpretation during the training.

These were some of the basic insights we discovered:

- There are various levels of deafness.
- Sign language is not a universal language; it differs from region to region and between countries.
- Some people learn sign language through formal schooling, while others learn it from the community.
- Not all deaf employees are able to read lips.
- For some, sign language is their first language, for others their second.
- Finding the right training solution is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Solutions must always vary.

What is working for us currently?

- Having small groups and short classes.
- Having a web camera so that the remote interpreter can clearly see everyone.
- Having a screen that allows everyone a good view of the interpreter.
- The training room should be set up in a U-shape.
- Making use of our own employees to further determine where language barriers exist.
- Our trainer, Mapula Molemi, made use of visual aids and practical demonstrations, and even learnt some sign language.



Staff sentiments

"I would like to express my gratitude to everyone that administered this training. We are happy that Tsebo went the extra mile for us to ensure that we also get equipped with knowledge like other employees in the company. We feel a sense of belonging without being judged or excluded. We are not just a number but part of a great company that looks after its employees. We can now proudly call ourselves professional cleaners! We wish other companies could learn from Tsebo's earnest efforts."

- Goodness Dlamini