

# Deaf Learners & Their Education Rights: *Is South Africa Listening?*



International month of Deaf People  
September 2009 - Information Pack



# The Current Situation: Birth



- 1 in 10 babies in South Africa are born with some degree of hearing loss (WHO statistics)
- There is no legislation to ensure compulsory newborn hearing screening.
- Hearing loss is detected late – as late as 6-8 years old. Language acquisition is seriously delayed.
- Early intervention is not widely available and not offered by organs of the State.



# The Current Situation: Toddlers



- Deaf children at home rarely have full access to language input in any form.
- Deaf children entering Grade R have serious language delays due to lack of language input from 0-3 years.
- Most teachers in the Foundation Phase do not have adequate signing skills to help the Deaf child `catch-up` on their language skills.
- Many teachers do also not have specialist skills on educating a Deaf child – they learn this as they go along so there is a further delay.



# The Current Situation: Pre-teens



- By the time they reach the General Education and Training Phase, Deaf children have still not caught up on their language acquisition.
- New teachers entering schools have to be taught SASL by the learners i.e. Learner-becomes-teacher.
- Due to language delays in the learners and basic signing skills of the teachers, large parts of the curriculum are excluded.
- Most parents are not confident in being involved in their child's education – they leave this task to the school.



# The Current Situation: Teens



- High School learners are rarely able to read on grade-level. Further parts of the curriculum are dropped.
- Failure is high and learners are directed towards more vocational learning pathways e.g. Woodwork, metalwork, kitchen cleaning, etc.
- The signing skills of the learners are also not on grade level.
- SASL is not a subject so Deaf learners cannot study the language to which they have the most access.



# The Current Situation: late-teens



- Due to repeated failure or late onset of schooling, the Deaf Grade 9 learner is easily 16-18 years of age.
- 18-Year old Deaf learners are often forced to leave school due to age even though this is not their fault.
- Only 12 schools for the Deaf in SA offer matric and these are in 3 provinces.
- Deaf learners do not study their First Language at school



# The Current Situation: Early adulthood



- Many Deaf people leave school with no matric.
- Functionally illiterate.
- There is no access for Deaf people to FET Colleges.
- Schools are not allowed to offer FET Certificates – only NSC Certificates.
- Very few Universities and Colleges offer access to Deaf students.



# What are the Solutions?: the State



- All babies should have their hearing screened by the Department of Health.
- State departments (social development, health, education) should offer Early Intervention dictated by a Human Rights approach to Deaf people as outlined in the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities
- More schools for the Deaf across SA should be supported to offer Grade 12 certification
- Schools for the Deaf should be equipped with more specialist equipment: computers, white boards, FM systems, etc
- Schools for the Deaf should be equipped with more specialist personnel: speech / language therapists, Deaf teacher assistants, etc



# What are the Solutions?: the State



- The Department of Basic Education needs to set up a strategic plan for Deaf Education in SA and use existing resources to solve current challenges
- The Department of Basic Education needs to fund and support the implementation of SASL as a Grade 12 subject as a matter of urgency
- FET Colleges in each province need to budget for the employment of SASL interpreters – especially in areas where there is a high number of Deaf people
- District-based support teams need to undergo specialist skill training in Deaf Education needs



# What are the Solutions?: Parents



- As soon as a child is diagnosed with hearing loss, there should be support and guidance available to parents
- Parents need to be empowered from day 1 on the specific developmental needs of their deaf / hard of hearing child and this needs to happen throughout their child's life
- Parents are the most important people in a child's development and should receive the support they and their deaf child rightfully deserves



# What are the Solutions?: Teachers & Schools



- Teachers should receive specialist training in SASL and Deaf Education: empowered teachers can empower deaf learners
- Training and support of teachers must be ongoing: DBST, Department of Education, School Management Team
- Schools, Teachers, Parents must work together on each child's individual development
- Schools need to adopt educational approaches that are shown to work in the best interests of each deaf child: expectations must remain high at all times
- All schools for the Deaf and hard of hearing need to work together, share knowledge, share resources, share skills, etc *irrespective of which educational method is offered*



# What are the Solutions?: Tertiary Education



- The Department of Higher Education needs to make provisions for the accessibility needs of Deaf learners into HE institutions (e.g. SASL Interpreters, voice-to-text typists)
- The Department of Higher Education needs to fund ongoing training of SASL Interpreters



# SASL in the SPOTLIGHT: Recent court case



- A deaf school boy, Kyle Springate had been studying SASL at a mainstream school for many years with the Department of Education's blessing.
- When he reached Grade 12, he was told that SASL was not a Grade 12 subject so he fell short of reaching his matric requirements (7 subjects).
- Kyle, supported by DeafSA, took the Department of Education to court.
- The court settlement was divided into two parts:
  - Part A: Focused on specific settlement for Kyle.
  - Part B: Focused on settlement for ALL Deaf learners (DeafSA)



# SASL in the SPOTLIGHT (continued)



- Kyle withdrew his Part A settlement because there were too many LAWS in place to prevent him achieving the settlement he was asking for i.e. That he write a SASL exam at Wits University and this credit be converted to a matric credit.
- The settlement that Kyle got was that the Minister of Education will ENDORSE his Grade 12 certificate.
- Part B of the settlement is still ACTIVE, depending on successful / unsuccessful negotiations between the Deaf sector and the Department of Education.

If the negotiations are unsuccessful (i.e. Implementation of SASL as a subject by January 2011) then we will return to court.



# Who can help?



- DeafSA is the largest organisation in South Africa represented Deaf people.
- National and Provincial Departments need to form mutually beneficial relationships with DeafSA and in that way, Deaf Education in SA will make the progress it needs.
  - National Director: Bruno Druchen, [nationaldirector@deafsa.co.za](mailto:nationaldirector@deafsa.co.za)
  - Deaf Education: Ingrid Parkin, [deafeducation@deafsa.co.za](mailto:deafeducation@deafsa.co.za)
  - National SASL trainer: Abraham Maripane [signlanguage@deafsa.co.za](mailto:signlanguage@deafsa.co.za)

