

Strategic Pathways to Overcoming Barriers for the Deaf Community

*Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers:
Empowering Deaf Individuals with Your Support*

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INTRODUCTION

I, Bianca Naicker (Deaf), am a business partner and co-founder of Agape Financial Administrators (Pty) Ltd, trading as AFA since 2019. Alongside my partner, Mrs Nothando Ngcobo (Hearing), I have learned from her and built another successful business, Agape PA (Pty) Ltd. Nothando and I met as university students in 2009 and have been inseparable for 16 years. As a Deaf individual, I have faced numerous challenges, but with Nothando's unwavering support and assistance, I have overcome them to become a successful Deaf businesswoman. For more information, please visit our website at www.agapepa.co.za.

I can now communicate effectively with our hearing clients without needing an interpreter, whether it's in meetings, on the phone, or through emails. Thanks to Nothando's guidance and support, I've been able to seize opportunities I never thought possible. Without her, I wouldn't have known about the numerous opportunities, employments, and training available for people with disabilities in South Africa. There are many barriers that Deaf people face right now, not just from one situation but from three key areas: Education, Training and Internships, and Employment. These are the three main challenges Deaf people are currently dealing with. We have identified significant barriers that prevent Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals from accessing equal opportunities. However, with your support, dear readers, we can collaborate to break down these barriers and create a more inclusive environment for all Deaf individuals. Your involvement and assistance are crucial to achieving this goal.

We are proud to share our personal journey, struggles, and triumphs in this book, with the goal of raising awareness about the unique needs of Deaf individuals in various settings. Through our story, we aim to inspire empathy, spark meaningful conversations, and provide a valuable resource for institutions, organizations, and companies seeking to better understand and support Deaf individuals.

To further enrich our work, we conducted a survey of over 100 Deaf individuals, gathering valuable insights into their experiences and challenges related to employment and training. Their contributions have been essential in shaping our understanding and guiding our recommendations.



Mrs. Nothando Ngcobo, Specialist Accountant and Tax Consultant, and Ms. Bianca Naicker, Professional Accountant (SA)

PART I: UNDERSTANDING DEAFNESS AND COMMUNICATION

Chapter 1: Deaf Culture and Community

The South African Deaf community values South African Sign Language (SASL) as the core of a culturally Deaf identity. Through SASL, members are given a unique medium for personal expression, a spatial and visual language that does not require the use of sound and emphasizes hands, faces, bodies, and eyes.

Key aspects of Deaf culture:

1. **Visual communication:** Deaf culture places a strong emphasis on visual communication, including SASL, lip-reading and written communication.
2. **Community:** The Deaf community is a tight-knit community that values social connections and mutual support.
3. **Cultural identity:** Deafness is not just a medical condition, but a cultural identity that shapes one's experiences, values and beliefs.
4. **Diversity:** The Deaf community is diverse, with individuals from various backgrounds, experiences and communication preferences.
5. **Advocacy:** The Deaf community has a strong advocacy movement that promotes accessibility, inclusivity and social justice.

Importance of understanding Deaf culture:

1. **Breaking Down Barriers:** Understanding Deaf culture is essential for breaking down barriers and promoting inclusivity in key areas such as education, employment, and social interactions. It helps challenge stereotypes and foster a more equitable environment for Deaf individuals.
2. **Building Connections:** Learning about Deaf culture fosters meaningful connections with Deaf individuals, allowing for better communication, mutual respect, and empathy. It creates a foundation for stronger relationships in both personal and professional settings.
3. **Promoting Accessibility:** Recognizing the value of Deaf culture plays a crucial role in promoting accessibility. By understanding the needs and communication preferences of Deaf individuals, accommodations in education, training, and employment can be implemented, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

Chapter 2: Barriers and Solutions

Employment Barriers:

Deaf individuals face numerous challenges in the workforce, primarily due to communication difficulties, inadequate workplace accommodations, and a general lack of awareness about their unique needs. These barriers not only make it difficult for Deaf individuals to secure employment but also impact their ability to thrive and maintain long-term career success.

1. Communication Barriers

- **Lack of Sign Language Proficiency:** Employers and colleagues may not be familiar with sign language, hindering effective communication.
- **Lip-Reading Challenges:** Lip-reading can be difficult, especially in noisy environments or with individuals who speak quickly or have accents.
- **Difficulty in Meetings:** Deaf individuals may struggle to participate fully in meetings due to communication challenges.

2. Workplace Accommodations

- **Lack of Accessibility:** Workplaces may not provide necessary accommodations, such as video relay systems, interpreters, or closed captions.
- **Employer Resistance:** Some employers may be reluctant to provide accommodations, citing cost or inconvenience.

3. Attitudes and Discrimination

- **Negative Perceptions:** Employers or colleagues may hold negative stereotypes about deaf individuals, believing they are less capable or unable to perform certain jobs.
- **Isolation:** Deaf employees may feel isolated in the workplace due to communication barriers and lack of representation.

4. Other Factors

- **Education and Training:** Deaf individuals have limited access to quality education and training opportunities, impacting their job prospects.

By understanding these communication barriers, we can collaborate to develop effective solutions that remove these obstacles and foster a more inclusive and accessible work environment for Deaf individuals.

Solutions

After overcoming numerous challenges, I successfully broke down the barriers mentioned earlier with the assistance of Mrs. Nothando Ngcobo, a hearing individual.

1. Communication Barriers

- **Solution to "Lack of Sign Language Proficiency":** In many workplaces, spoken conversations are often limited during office hours as employees focus on tasks, projects, and emails. This reduces the immediate need for sign language proficiency. At my previous company, colleagues were enthusiastic about learning sign language, and we held weekly lessons every Friday at 3 pm, with our former employer's approval. I spent a year refining my communication skills through email and WhatsApp, which allowed me to effectively connect with clients. Repeated practice and dedication helped me overcome communication barriers and improve my ability to interact in diverse settings.
- **Solution to "Difficulty in Meetings":** To address challenges in meetings, I requested interpreting services and also made use of Microsoft Word's Speech-to-Text feature during in-person meetings. My former employer would hold my cell phone while speaking, allowing me to read the captions in real-time. For online meetings, I utilized Microsoft Teams, where someone would speak on my behalf while I typed and sent messages. Additionally, meeting with university members helped me better understand their intentions and provided an opportunity for them to gain a deeper understanding of Deaf culture. After meetings, colleagues would send me the agenda via WhatsApp, giving me a chance to review and prepare for future discussions.

2. Workplace Accommodations

- **Solution to "Lack of Accessibility":** To overcome accessibility barriers, I focused on work-related communication with colleagues and clients via email and WhatsApp. When clients called with questions about my work, a colleague would take notes or send me messages through WhatsApp. At my previous company, colleagues would write key information on the whiteboard, and I would take pictures of it instead of writing it in a diary. This approach not only improved my communication skills and work experiences but also ensured effective and timely communication with clients.

- **Solution to "Employer Resistance":** It's important to recognize that employers may hesitate to provide accommodations due to perceived costs or inconvenience. However, this doesn't always signal discrimination or a lack of resources. To address this, I believe in the power of repeated training for Deaf individuals, helping them to become independent in the workplace. Over time, this approach reduces reliance on accommodations and empowers Deaf employees to work seamlessly in various environments.
- **Job Opportunities That Don't Require Daily Interpreters:**
Deaf individuals can thrive in many careers that do not rely on verbal communication or daily interpreter support. These roles often emphasize technical skills, creativity, and independent work, making them accessible and inclusive. Some examples include:
 - ✓ **Laboratory Work:** Many scientific and research-based jobs, such as laboratory work, do not require verbal communication and can be done independently.
 - ✓ **Data Entry and Virtual Assistance:** Roles that require strong organizational skills, attention to detail, and independent work are perfect for Deaf individuals.
 - ✓ **Web Development and Design:** This field is well-suited to those with a technical background, as it primarily involves computer work, which doesn't require face-to-face interaction.
 - ✓ **Photography and Videography:** Artistic careers such as photography and videography focus on visual skills and offer excellent opportunities for Deaf individuals.
 - ✓ **Accounting and Bookkeeping:** Accounting roles require attention to detail and financial expertise, which can be done through written communication and online collaboration.
 - ✓ **Software Testing and Quality Assurance:** Testing software and ensuring its functionality do not require verbal communication, making this an ideal fit for Deaf individuals.
 - ✓ **Art and Design:** Creative fields such as graphic design, digital art, and interior design align well with Deaf individuals' visual and creative strengths.

And many more careers exist where Deaf individuals can excel. However, to break down the barriers and fully tap into these opportunities, all that is needed is your support with training. By providing the right resources and training, we can help unlock these potential career paths and create a more inclusive workforce.

3. Attitudes and Discrimination

- **Solution to "Negative Perceptions":** Rather than labeling it as "Negative Perception" or "Discrimination," I believe the core issue is a "Lack of Awareness." Employers and colleagues may not fully understand that Deaf individuals often require extensive training to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential. By increasing awareness and providing proper training, we can shift perceptions and create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for Deaf individuals.

4. Other Factors

- **Solution to "Education and Training":** Acquiring new communication skills through education and training can significantly enhance our ability to connect with others. Initially, interpreters may be necessary during training, but as Deaf individuals gain skills and experience, the need for interpreters in the workplace can decrease. Training programs and internships, particularly those that provide interpreters, help us develop the ability to work independently. Over time, this enables us to perform our roles without the ongoing need for interpreters, as the training helps us overcome communication barriers and succeed in permanent job positions. By showcasing our skills to employers and clients, we can increase awareness and understanding of Deaf culture, promoting a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Removing Communication Barriers, Creating Opportunities: Together with Your Support

What can be done to improve employment outcomes for deaf people?

There are a number of things that can be done to improve employment outcomes for deaf people, including:

- Providing more access to quality education and training
- Removing communication barriers in the workplace
- Increasing awareness of deaf people's capabilities and potential
- Creating more inclusive workplaces

What can deaf people do to improve their chances of finding employment?

There are a number of things that deaf people can do to improve their chances of finding employment, including:

- Networking with other deaf people in the workforce
- Seeking out employers who are committed to representation and accessibility
- Taking advantage of job training and placement programs
- Promoting their skills and experience to potential employers

What can be done to improve career readiness for deaf youth?

There are a number of things that can be done to improve career readiness for deaf youth, including:

- Fostering autonomy among deaf youth
- Starting career exploration earlier
- Facilitating school & employer partnerships
- Supporting ongoing career development

<https://nationaldeafcenter.org/news-items/supporting-deaf-people-closing-the-employment-gap/>

Chapter 3: Why Training at the Workplace is Necessary for Deaf Individuals

1. Limited Access to Education

- Many Deaf individuals face challenges in completing high school or lack access to advanced language training, which can limit their career opportunities. Traditional educational pathways may not always be accessible or fully inclusive, leading to barriers in skill development.
- Workplace training and internships provide an alternative path for Deaf individuals to develop essential skills in a practical setting. By offering training opportunities directly at the workplace, companies can equip Deaf employees with the experience and knowledge they need to excel in their roles, reducing the skills gap and promoting greater inclusion.

2. Reliance on Video Calls

- Deaf individuals often rely on video calls for communication, as it allows them to use sign language, but this can sometimes hinder the development of written communication skills, which are essential in many workplace settings.
- Workplace training can focus on improving skills in writing, email exchanges, and professional documentation. By incorporating these aspects into training, Deaf individuals can enhance their written communication abilities, making them more effective in diverse work environments and better prepared for long-term career success.

3. Sign Language Limitations

- Sign languages, including South African Sign Language (SASL), do not follow the same grammatical structure as English, which can create challenges when it comes to written communication. This difference can make it harder for Deaf individuals to express themselves accurately in written form, especially in professional settings.
- Workplace training can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between sign language and written English. By focusing on improving written communication skills, such as grammar, sentence structure, and professional documentation, Deaf individuals can enhance their ability to communicate effectively in the workplace.

4. Increased Reliance on AI Technology

- Deaf individuals may often rely on AI tools, such as grammar correction software, to assist with written communication. While these tools are helpful, over-reliance on technology can limit the development of independent language skills and critical thinking.
- Workplace training can help reduce this reliance on AI by fostering independent language skills. By focusing on improving grammar, writing techniques, and communication strategies, Deaf individuals can enhance their ability to write confidently without needing constant technological assistance, ultimately increasing their professionalism and self-sufficiency.



The Solution: Workplace Training and Internships

1. Learning from Hearing Leaders and Mentors

Daily interactions with hearing leaders and mentors, facilitated through tools like WhatsApp and email, can greatly improve communication skills. These interactions not only help bridge the communication gap but also offer Deaf individuals the opportunity to gain valuable skills and experiences. By learning from experienced mentors, Deaf individuals can develop a deeper understanding of workplace dynamics, enhance their professional growth, and build stronger communication skills, all of which are critical to success in their careers.

2. Repeated Practice through Email and WhatsApp Communication

Continuous practice in written communication, particularly through tools like email and WhatsApp, enhances proficiency and self-sufficiency in professional conversations. This repeated practice allows Deaf individuals to learn how to communicate effectively with clients, customers, and colleagues without facing language or communication barriers. Over time, this builds confidence and skill, enabling more seamless and independent communication in a variety of professional settings.

Bianca's Experience:

"When I was a trainee at work during my first year, I struggled with English. But as I started texting and emailing with colleagues and clients, I focused on improving my grammar. Since sign language doesn't have its own grammar, I repeatedly worked on refining my written English. I would practice by responding to the same types of tasks with similar responses, only changing the words to fit the new task. It took time, but I gradually started feeling more confident in my ability to communicate. I now realize that this repetition helped me improve my English, and more importantly, it made me confident enough to communicate with hearing clients without needing an interpreter."

3. Access to Information and Industry Trends

Workplace training provides Deaf individuals with the opportunity to access important company discussions, industry trends, and internal information that they might otherwise miss. Through inclusive training programs or accessible platforms, Deaf individuals can actively participate in meetings, stay informed about new technologies,

and understand market shifts. This ensures they remain up-to-date with industry developments and are able to contribute effectively to the organization's goals, fostering inclusion and ensuring that all employees have equal opportunities to succeed.

4. Developing Career Advancement Skills

Workplace training enables Deaf individuals to develop the essential skills needed for career progression, such as leadership, technical expertise, and collaboration. Through specialized training programs, Deaf individuals can enhance their technical skills in areas like project management software, data analysis, or other industry-specific tools. At the same time, they can gain experience in leading teams and working effectively with colleagues. These skills are crucial for advancing within an organization and securing higher positions, ensuring Deaf individuals are well-equipped to progress in their careers.

5. Enabling Entrepreneurship and Professional Development

Workplace training helps Deaf individuals transition into independent careers, including entrepreneurship or freelance work, with the assistance of hearing colleagues and mentors. By acquiring specialized skills and gaining business knowledge through training programs, Deaf individuals are empowered to explore professional development opportunities across various industries. The support of hearing people, through mentorship or collaboration, can further enhance their entrepreneurial journey, providing valuable insights and guidance to help them succeed in establishing their own businesses or pursuing freelance work.

In her article *"Deaf People Often Need to Work Harder"*, Asphyxia shares personal experiences of the additional effort Deaf individuals often put into their work and education. She discusses how, due to the lack of accommodations, she had to work twice as hard to succeed in university and later, in her freelance circus career. The article raises awareness about the invisible barriers Deaf people face and highlights the importance of supporting and providing equal opportunities to them.

For more, read the full post here:

<https://helloasphyxia.wordpress.com/2020/10/08/deaf-people-often-need-to-work-harder/>

Chapter 4: Recruitment Strategies for Empowering Deaf Job Seekers

1. Daily Job Availability Updates

- Update job listings regularly on an accessible platform or website, specifically designed for Deaf individuals. This ensures they have easy access to the latest job opportunities.
- Clearly outline job requirements, qualifications, and responsibilities in each posting, helping Deaf job seekers understand what is expected.
- If you have job openings available for Deaf individuals, please contact us so we can update our website with the latest opportunities.

2. Provide Job Requirements and Qualifications

- Deaf individuals may not have access to information from traditional sources like TV, radio, or verbal communication. Therefore, it's essential to provide job qualifications and requirements through daily updates on accessible platforms.
- This ensures Deaf job seekers have equal access to important details about job opportunities and can understand the specific skills, qualifications, and experience required for each position.

3. Direct Contact with Employers and Directors

- Allow employers and directors to contact us directly for further information or clarification regarding job opportunities for Deaf individuals.
- Establish a centralized communication channel between employers and Deaf candidates, ensuring a smooth and efficient exchange of information.

4. Provide and Arrange Interpreters

- Ensure businesses provide interpreters for interviews and onboarding.

5. Offer Internship and Apprenticeship Programs

- Encourage businesses to offer internship and apprenticeship opportunities for Deaf individuals, providing valuable work experience and career exposure.
- Develop specialized programs that help Deaf individuals gain hands-on experience in their chosen fields, enhancing their skills and improving their employability.

6. Host Job Fairs and Recruitment Events

- Organize job fairs specifically designed for Deaf individuals, providing them with opportunities to meet employers who are open to hiring diverse talent.
- These events can offer a platform for Deaf candidates to showcase their skills and connect with organizations committed to inclusion.

7. Create Specialized Job Training and Development Programs

- Offer job-specific training tailored to various industries, ensuring that Deaf job seekers acquire the necessary skills for success.
- Provide skill-building programs that make Deaf individuals more competitive in the workforce, enhancing their chances of securing and excelling in meaningful employment.

8. Promote Equal Opportunity Employment

- Encourage businesses to commit to equal opportunity employment practices, ensuring Deaf individuals have access to the same job opportunities as their hearing peers.
- Implement diversity and inclusion initiatives to actively recruit and support Deaf talent in the workforce, fostering an inclusive work environment.

9. Provide Accessible Career Resources

- Offer career counseling, resume writing, and interview preparation services tailored for Deaf job seekers to help them navigate the job market.
- Develop mentorship and peer support networks to guide Deaf employees, ensuring they have the support they need to succeed and grow in their careers.

10. Evaluate and Monitor Progress

- Track the employment success and career progression of Deaf employees within companies to ensure their integration is successful.
- Gather feedback from Deaf employees to assess their experiences and continuously improve inclusion strategies, creating a more supportive environment for future Deaf job seekers.


PART 2: ALTERNATIVE APPROACH – PARTNERING FOR INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

While workplace training is essential for Deaf individuals, another effective approach is forming partnerships with businesses and organizations that support people with disabilities. Through collaboration, we can create sustainable employment opportunities and bridge the gap between Deaf job seekers and the workforce.

Partnering with Our Director for Training and Skill Development

- We have a dedicated Director, Ms. Yolande Toohey, who actively offers training programs for people with disabilities, including Deaf individuals. She plans to establish specialized training programs specifically designed for Deaf individuals to enhance their skills and improve their career opportunities.
- Ms. Yolande Toohey has close to 20 years of experience in training, recruitment, content development, and project management. She is passionate about empowering individuals and is committed to expanding her courses to meet industry needs and recommendations from professionals.
- By partnering with us, employers can contribute work-related tasks and training materials to help develop specialized courses tailored to Deaf individuals.
- **Example:** A company in the finance sector collaborated with us to introduce a bookkeeping course, equipping Deaf individuals with accounting skills.
- Ms. Yolande Toohey's company is an accredited skills development provider, offering a broad spectrum of project management, skills development, and training solutions that support the success of organizations. The company is a South African BBBEE Level 1 contributor, 100% Black Women Owned and Operated, and specializes in various areas, including young talent succession planning, organizational development, and business coaching.

For more information about the services and training programs, please contact Ms. Yolande Toohey directly at:

 083 790 1013

 www.ytconsultants.co.za

Bianca's Experiences

- *"Ms. Yolande Toohey was training me at Guarantee Trust in 2013 (12 years ago). Thanks to her, the company hired me, and I found that the tasks I learned were the same as what they trained me on. This meant I didn't need former colleagues to train me on how to use the Accounting Program, such as Desktop Pastel."*
- *"Oh, also, they are the ones who taught me how to use Excel for accounting purposes, such as how to use VAT reconciliation with Excel. Once I saw Excel, I fell in love with it and studied it until I became an expert. Now, I sell Excel accounting templates (I convert accounting programs to Excel Accounting to save money for small businesses that are just starting up). You can check out Excel Accounting, Financials, Payroll, and other templates on our Agape PA Website."*
- *"All of this is thanks to Ms. Yolande Toohey (whom I met in 2013) and Mrs. Nothando Ngcobo (whom I met in 2009). I was able to overcome all challenges. Now, I need your hands to help Deaf people achieve their dream jobs."*
- *"Only hearing people have the ability to remove barriers for Deaf people."*

How Employers and Organizations Can Get Involved

- **Providing Job Tasks:** Employers can share real work assignments and tasks, which can be used in training programs for Deaf trainees. This ensures that training is aligned with the actual demands of the job and gives Deaf individuals valuable, hands-on experience.
- **Suggesting New Courses:** Organizations can propose industry-specific courses that align with current job market demands. By suggesting these courses, employers ensure that training programs stay relevant and up-to-date, giving Deaf individuals the skills that are most in demand.
- **Offering Mentorship:** Experienced professionals can mentor Deaf trainees, helping them navigate their career paths. Mentorship provides guidance, support, and valuable career advice, helping Deaf individuals build confidence and advance in their careers.
- **Collaborating on Training Modules:** Businesses can collaborate to develop accessible learning materials specifically tailored to Deaf learners. By contributing to the creation of these materials, employers can ensure that Deaf trainees have the resources they need to succeed in their training programs.

The Importance of These Partnerships

- **Expands Career Opportunities:** By introducing new training courses, we can equip Deaf individuals with skills needed in growing industries, increasing their employability and opening doors to new career paths.
- **Encourages Workplace Inclusivity:** Partnering with training programs helps businesses become more Deaf-friendly by better understanding the communication needs of Deaf employees, fostering a more inclusive work environment.
- **Provides Practical Experience:** Through hands-on training and real-world work tasks, Deaf job seekers gain valuable practical experience, ensuring they are workplace-ready and equipped with the skills required to excel in their careers.
- **Promotes Long-Term Employment:** These partnerships create pathways for Deaf professionals to secure stable, long-term careers, offering them opportunities to thrive in their chosen industries

Moving Forward: A Call for Collaboration

- We hope businesses, organizations, and industry leaders will partner with us to develop customized training programs that cater to the unique needs of Deaf individuals.
- Ms. Yolande Toohey, our director, is ready to implement new courses based on industry demands, ensuring Deaf individuals gain the most relevant and up-to-date skills for success.
- By collaborating, we can create a future where Deaf professionals thrive in their careers, contributing their talents and skills without communication barriers.

For those interested in collaborating, we welcome discussions on how to integrate new training courses and employment pathways for Deaf individuals.



<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1191616>

PART 3: WHY IT WOULD BE EASIER TO HIRE DEAF INDIVIDUALS AFTER SPECIALIZED TRAINING PROGRAMS

It would be easier to hire Deaf individuals who have undergone specialized training programs because these professionals have already demonstrated their skills in a practical and accessible way.

Overcoming the Telephone Barrier:

- **Telephone Communication Challenges:** Many interviews still rely on telephone calls, which can be a significant challenge for Deaf individuals who may struggle with phone communication. This reliance on telephone conversations can create barriers during the hiring process.
- **Easier Hiring Through Demonstrated Skills:** By completing specialized training programs, Deaf professionals can showcase their skills in a way that does not depend on telephone communication. Clients can see these abilities in action through face-to-face interactions, video demonstrations, or written communication, making the hiring process much easier.

Skills Demonstrated in Training Programs:

- **Proven Skills in Action:** Clients can directly observe how Deaf individuals perform tasks, collaborate with others, and solve problems during training programs. This firsthand demonstration of skills makes the hiring decision much easier, as clients can see the professional's abilities without relying on a telephone conversation.
- **Direct Communication with Deaf Professionals:** Specialized training ensures that Deaf individuals can effectively communicate with clients in a way that meets their needs. Whether it's through visual or written methods, these communication strategies make the process more efficient and accessible for both parties.

Why It Would Be Easier to Hire Deaf Individuals After Training:

- **Clear Demonstration of Competence:** After completing the training, Deaf individuals can prove their skills through real-world examples. Clients have a clearer understanding of what the professional can offer, making it easier for them to make a hiring decision.
- **Elimination of Telephone Barriers:** Clients can hire Deaf individuals with confidence after seeing their abilities during training, avoiding the common barriers posed by telephone interviews. This more direct and accessible communication approach simplifies the hiring process.

PART 4: ADDITIONAL BARRIERS – OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN CAREER READINESS

Missing Critical Job Information – A Barrier to Career Success

One common barrier faced by Deaf individuals, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 35, is missing out on essential job-related requirements or skills. For example, someone might graduate with a degree only to later discover that key skills, such as proficiency in Excel, are necessary for the career they want to pursue. This can lead to missed opportunities, career setbacks, and frustration.

The Issue:

- **Missing Critical Skill Requirements:** Deaf individuals may not always be informed about job prerequisites, like specific software knowledge or technical skills, until after they've completed their education. As a result, they may not be aware that essential tools (such as Excel, coding, or other job-related software) are required for success in certain roles.
- **Delayed Discovery:** By the time a Deaf individual finds out that specific skills, like Excel proficiency, are essential for their career, they may already have completed their degree and feel overwhelmed by the need to acquire those skills afterward. This delay can prevent them from applying for certain jobs or hinder their ability to meet job expectations.
- **Lack of Early Preparation:** Without clear communication or guidance from mentors, teachers, or employers, Deaf individuals may miss out on the opportunity to build the right skillset early on. They may not have been informed about these essential tools and missed opportunities to learn them during their educational training.

The Solution:

1. **Clear Job Requirement Communication:** Employers should ensure that job listings, internship descriptions, and training programs clearly specify the necessary skills required. These should be communicated in a way that's accessible to Deaf candidates, such as through written job descriptions, captioned videos, or accessible online resources.
2. **Incorporating Skills into Training:** Schools, universities, and vocational programs should incorporate key workplace skills like Excel into their curriculum. Offering accessible resources, workshops, or partnerships with companies can help students develop these skills early on, preventing surprises after graduation.

3. **Proactive Career Counseling:** Career advisors should work with Deaf individuals to identify potential job requirements that may not be immediately obvious. They can guide students in developing a diverse skillset, preparing them for various roles, including software proficiency, communication strategies, and industry-specific tools.
4. **Online Learning Platforms:** Deaf individuals can take advantage of accessible online courses that teach essential skills like Excel, coding, or other job-specific tools. Many platforms offer video-based tutorials with captions, making them easier to follow.
5. **Mentorship and Networking:** Establishing mentorship relationships with Deaf or hearing professionals in the industry can help provide valuable insights into job requirements, technical skills, and other aspects of career development that might not be covered in formal education.

Key Barrier: Lack of Early Awareness and Learning Opportunities

The Problem:

- **Missed Early Learning Opportunities:** Hearing teens naturally pick up on critical job requirements and skills because they can overhear conversations, attend seminars, or be directly informed in school or work environments. In contrast, Deaf individuals may not have the same access to these opportunities and may miss learning about essential tools (like Excel, Accounting program and softwares, coding, etc.) until it's too late.
- **Delayed Skill Acquisition:** By the time Deaf individuals realize that certain skills are required for jobs or career advancement, they might already be past the point where they can easily acquire them. For example, a hearing teen might learn accounting program through a school project or an internship, but a Deaf individual might not discover the importance of Accounting program until after completing their degree, making it harder to catch up.
- **Limited Access to Informal Learning:** Hearing individuals often gain knowledge informally through overhearing conversations, school announcements, or social interactions. Deaf individuals, however, may need to rely on more structured and formalized learning opportunities, which may not always be readily accessible in their environments.

The Solution:

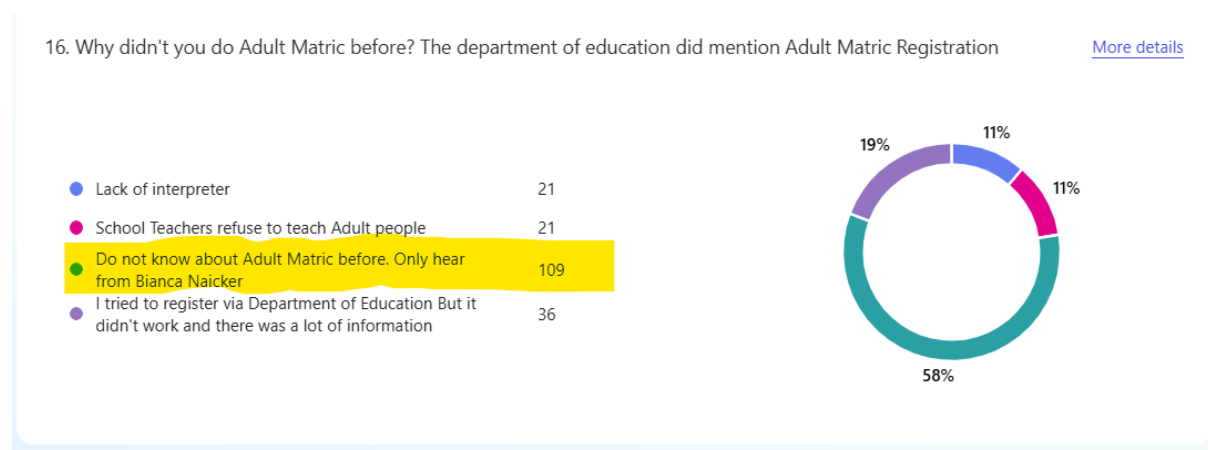
1. **Inclusive Early Education and Training:** Schools and educational programs should ensure that Deaf students are made aware of all essential job skills early on, including Excel, coding, or any technical skills required for their intended career paths. Offering specialized career prep workshops, accessible career counseling, or structured internship programs can help introduce these tools early.
2. **Clear Communication About Career Requirements:** Employers and educators should provide clear communication, early in the educational process, about the skills needed for specific roles or industries. This includes making job requirements (like proficiency in Excel, project management software, etc.) available in formats that are accessible to Deaf individuals, such as through visual aids or captioned content.
3. **Mentorship and Peer Learning:** Deaf individuals can benefit from mentorship programs where hearing or Deaf professionals in their desired fields provide guidance on job skills and career paths. These mentors can help highlight important skills and suggest ways to acquire them early on, reducing the risk of discovering these needs too late.
4. **Early Access to Technology and Tools:** Schools and universities could offer workshops or specialized classes that teach technical skills, like Excel or coding, to Deaf students before they enter the workforce. These programs should be accessible through visual learning tools, captions, and interpreters, ensuring Deaf students have equal access to learning.
5. **Proactive Career Development Resources:** Developing resources that specifically address the needs of Deaf individuals can help bridge the gap in early job skills. This includes accessible training modules that introduce essential tools or job functions in visual or written formats, so Deaf individuals can start learning before they complete their degrees.
6. **Awareness for Hearing Employers:** Employers can actively reach out to Deaf candidates early, informing them about job-specific requirements and offering support in acquiring these skills before they begin applying for jobs. This helps ensure Deaf individuals are equipped and prepared for the roles they seek.

Closing the Gap

By addressing the gap in early learning and awareness, we can ensure that Deaf individuals have the same opportunities to acquire the necessary job skills early, just as hearing individuals do. Early intervention in skills training, mentorship, and awareness-building will help prevent the scenario where Deaf individuals find out too late that they need certain skills for their chosen career paths.

This proactive approach can make all the difference, ensuring Deaf individuals are ready and confident to enter the workforce with the necessary skills, instead of scrambling to learn them after completing their education.

One of the many barriers for the lack of information we mentioned above is that many Deaf individuals are not aware of Adult Matric programs due to a lack of accessible information.



CONCLUSION

Breaking down the barriers that Deaf individuals face in the workforce requires the collective support and assistance of all businesses and companies. Through strategic collaboration, we can create a more inclusive and equitable work environment where Deaf individuals can thrive and contribute their skills and talents.

Key Points:

1. **Support for Deaf Workers:** Businesses play a crucial role in providing the necessary accommodations, such as accessible communication tools, job-specific training, and flexible support during recruitment and onboarding processes.
2. **Internships and Apprenticeships:** By offering internships and apprenticeships, businesses can provide Deaf job seekers with the hands-on experience they need to succeed, helping them develop valuable skills while becoming familiar with the workplace environment.
3. **Specialized Training Programs:** Companies can work together to create job-specific training programs tailored to the needs of Deaf individuals. This ensures they are well-prepared and competitive in the workforce, while also addressing skills gaps that might prevent them from securing employment.
4. **Active Recruitment Strategies:** It's vital for businesses to actively include Deaf individuals in their recruitment strategies. By reaching out to organizations that specialize in supporting Deaf workers, companies can ensure that their job openings are accessible to qualified candidates and align with the needs of the Deaf community.
5. **Inclusion through Communication Tools:** Providing accessible communication tools and ensuring that Deaf employees are able to fully participate in meetings, training, and everyday work processes is essential. This includes using email, video calls with captions, and other platforms that facilitate effective communication.
6. **Employer Awareness and Engagement:** Creating awareness within companies about the needs and potential of Deaf employees helps break down biases and misunderstandings. Employers should actively engage with Deaf individuals, offering support, guidance, and mentorship to build strong, inclusive teams.

By working together, businesses and companies can make a real difference in breaking down the barriers that Deaf individuals face. With the right support, resources, and opportunities, Deaf workers can excel in their roles, contributing to a more diverse, innovative, and successful workforce.

This collective effort will not only enhance the career prospects of Deaf individuals but will also lead to a more inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of hearing status, have the chance to thrive and succeed in their chosen careers.

RESOURCES

For more insights into current barriers, strategies to overcome them, and effective solutions, explore the links below:

- Deaf and hard-of-hearing students need more support from their universities – South Africa study
<https://theconversation.com/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-students-need-more-support-from-their-universities-south-africa-study-229816>
- Breaking Down Barriers: Understanding Deafness and Fostering Inclusion
<https://medium.com/@ayienuawi0152/breaking-down-barriers-understanding-deafness-and-fostering-inclusion-c881103d9917>
- Poor communication and language skills due to deafness
<https://forum.hearingtracker.com/t/poor-communication-and-language-skills-due-to-deafness/76657>
- Profiles of deaf and hard of hearing individuals who pursue English as a career
<https://repository.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5016&context=theses>
- Inclusive Employers: Supporting D/deaf People at Work
<https://www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/blog/supporting-deaf-people-at-work/>
- Build a More Inclusive Environment for People Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/build-more-inclusive-environment-people-who-deaf-hard-toby-mildon-kwt1e/>
- Improving Access to Work
https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AccessToWorkRecommendations_web.pdf