

## **Interacting with the Deaf**

Getting a Deaf person's attention

- Tap gently on the shoulder to get attention
- Wave in the air to establish eye contact if beyond reach

Communication tips

- Establish a comfortable distance between you and the Deaf person
- Establish eye contact before initiating communication
- Wait for your turn before signing/speaking
- Keep the face clear of any obstruction
- Do not stand with your back against a light

## **Sign Language interpreting**

What is a Sign Language interpreter?

- A Sign Language interpreter facilitates communication between a hearing and a Deaf person
- Sign Language interpreters are bilingual
- Sign Language interpreters should conduct themselves according to a code of conduct
- Sign Language interpreters convey the message from the Sign Language to the spoken language and vice versa
- Children of Deaf parents who have Sign Language as a mother tongue often become Sign Language interpreters
- Please refer to the back of the pamphlet for contact details of individuals and organisations involved in Sign Language and Sign Language interpreting

Using a Sign Language interpreter

- Always address the Deaf person directly
- Ensure that the signer's face has enough light
- Ensure that the light is not shining behind the person signing
- Ensure that you have at least two interpreters for conferences, seminars, symposiums, etc.
- Interpreters interpret for 20 to 30 minutes at a time
- Deaf clients have the right to choose the interpreter they prefer
- Your choice of interpreter will depend on the situation, e.g. conference, meeting, classroom, etc.

## More about Sign Language

What is Sign Language?

- Sign Language is the language of the Deaf
- Sign Language is a visual language
- Sign Language is a visual language based on distinctive spatial movements called signs
- It is produced using the hands, face, head and upper torso
- Sign Language is processed by the eyes
- Sign Language is an integral part and identifying feature of the Deaf Culture
- Sign Language can be used to communicate with any Deaf person provided that such a person interacts with and is a member of a Deaf Community
- Sign Language has its own grammatical structure independent of spoken languages
- Different Sign Languages have developed in different countries where Deaf communities exist, e.g. British Sign Language, American Sign Language, etc.
- South African Sign Language (SASL), despite regional differences and variations has the same grammatical structure countrywide
- In South Africa there are 12 identified Sign Language dialects
- Sign Language is neither universal or international, despite some similarities of grammatical features that are shared by all known signed languages
- Sign Languages can be analysed at any of the same levels used by spoken languages in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis

The structure of the sign

- There are four aspects to producing a sign, i.e. handforms, location, movement and orientation
- Handforms are the different forms the hand takes
- Location are the areas where the handforms are placed, i.e. the head, chest and in front of the body
- Movement is an integral part of every sign
- Orientation refers to the orientation of the palm in relation to the body

Facial expression

- Facial expressions in Sign Language express the grammar
- They are referred to as non-manual grammatical markers
- Facial expressions are rule-governed, e.g. facial expressions for yes/no questions differ from facial expressions for "Wh"-questions like WHO, WHY, WHEN, WHERE, etc.

- In yes/no questions the eyebrows are raised, eyes are open wide, head and shoulders are forward
- In WH-questions the eyebrows are lowered, eyes are narrowed, head forward with slight tilt and shoulders forward
- If you change the facial expression you could convey a totally different message than intended

### Fingerspelling

- It is the way in which the 26 letters are made on the hands
- It is used to spell names of people, places and to spell concepts that one may not have a sign for
- Fingerspelling is not Sign Language in itself
- Fingerspelling is limited to literate people

### **More about the Deaf**

#### Who are the Deaf

- Deaf people across the world view themselves as belonging to a linguistic minority with its own culture
- The Deaf community has its own language, i.e. Sign Language
- Deaf culture has its own history, shared values, social norms, customs and technology, which are transferred from generation to generation.
- The term "Deaf" is written with a capital "D"
- For the Deaf community Sign Language is the binding factor
- The Deaf community does not exist in one common geographical area
- Schools for the Deaf form the foundation upon which the Deaf community, Deaf culture, and Sign Language develop and thrive
- In school Deaf children learn to sign from their peers and Sign Language becomes their first language

#### Involvement in the Deaf community

- There are four main ways of becoming involved in the Deaf community, i.e. audiological, political, linguistic and social
- Audiological refers to the loss of hearing
- Political refers to the potential ability to exert influence on matters which directly affect the Deaf community
- Linguistic refers to the ability to understand and use Sign Language fluently
- Social refers to the ability to participate in social events of the Deaf community

#### Deaf Church

- Deaf people form their own congregations where Sign Language is used
- In the absence of an exclusive Deaf church or congregation, Deaf people go to ordinary churches, provided there are interpreters
- The church is an important venue for meeting and talking to other Deaf people
- Deaf people sing in Sign Language
- Deaf people pray open-eyed in Sign Language

### Deaf Clubs

- Deaf people form clubs to socialise
- Deaf clubs are the best places for hearing people to improve their signing skills
- Culturally Deaf clubs are the next most important places after schools for the Deaf

### Technology

- Instead of a telephone Deaf people use a telewriter where a message is typed on the receiver
- When the doorbell is rung a light in the house flashes
- Sound detectors are used in babies' cots to alert mothers of crying
- Vibrating clocks are used to wake up
- Vibrating pagers are used by Deaf people to get messages from callers
- Vibrating cellphones are used by Deaf people to get messages from callers