

# Facilitator Helps Many Take Up SASL

By Viwe Mazwana

The year 2023 marked a historic moment for the deaf community when President Ramaphosa officially declared South African Sign Language (SASL) as South Africa's 12<sup>th</sup> official language. This was an important decision which helped service the urgent need for building a safe and inclusive community through enhanced communication and understanding.

Barely a year after the landmark decision, Tembisa Mdudi, a dedicated Sign Language Facilitator, is today actively bridging the communication gap between the Deaf and Hearing community in and around Germiston, Ekurhuleni. She emphasises the importance of the Hearing community learning Sign Language, highlighting times where a lack of communication tools led to difficulties and discrimination of deaf people.

"Sign Language is not just for the Deaf but an official language that everyone should learn. It is a beautiful language that can be learned by all ages," she added, encouraging curiosity and continuous learning.

In the beginning, learners and the community were hesitant about the program, lacking an understanding of the significance of inclusivity and empowerment through language skills. But, through Mdudi's dedication and love for social inclusivity and sign language, these doubts quickly faded as learners became empowered leading them to engage in SASL classes.

"As a parent of a deaf child, it is encouraging and supportive to have such programs in our communities, my child and others will grow up in an educated community that encourages other people to learn the importance of communicating in sign language to support, communicate and not discriminate deaf or people living with disabilities," said Nokhanyisa Kubalo, alluding to the fact that communication is the best tool to bring communities together.

Awande Sithole, a 9-year-old learner at Ekurhuleni Primary School and a Sign language learner, expressed her excitement for the Sign Language program, saying, "I am able to sign all alphabets, I can sing using sign language, but importantly, I can communicate and even translate for my friends who speak isiZulu."

The program accommodates three levels: Beginners, Intermediate, and Advanced, these groups are diverse, ranging from 8 to 45 years old. Their communication skills continue to grow, encouraged by exposure to SASL content on social media platforms like TikTok and interactions with Deaf individuals at church and in the community.

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