

BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP BETWEEN DEAF COMMUNITY AND THE HEARING

Kabelo Selebogo and Vusi Kama

In a bid to improve communication between the deaf and their families, relatives and friends, the Department of Arts, Culture, Sport and Recreation (ACSR) organised a workshop to help the hearing understand South African Sign Language (SASL) and deaf culture.

The event, held under strict Covid-19 regulations, was held in Potchefstroom from November 11-13.

Co-ordinated by Kabelo Makgata, from ACSR South African Sign Language Development Unit, the workshop urged participants to continue practising sign language and befriend deaf individuals in order to improve their skills.

“Deaf people would be more than happy to communicate with you,” said Makgata.

The main objective of the workshop was to present quality professional SASL practical training to provide hearing persons with official sign language skills to communicate with the deaf community.

They were also given information on how to improve their skills further.

Thirty-seven-year-old Joyce Rammekwa of Extension 11, Potchefstroom, said she jumped at the opportunity to attend the workshop because in her everyday life, she deals with a lot of deaf people.

“Now that I have learnt the language things are going to be much easier,” she said. “Will practise more with my friends, the facilitator has given me more tools to do that.”

Of particular interest to her is how she will use the skills at church. “As a leader at church, you want deaf people to enjoy the service in the same way as everybody else does. You find sometimes they have a problem and they cannot communicate it because of the gap. With my skills, they will enjoy the service more because they will understand better what is happening. We need these skills more for churches and schools.”

Many of the participants at the workshop said they had always wanted to learn the skill.

Andile Sizani, 24, who is the Head Coach of the North-West University Basketball team in Potchefstroom, said he is also involved with the Lovelife programme with the youth, said he learnt of the workshop in his interactions with staff from ACSR.

“I decided that it was an opportunity not to miss. I have a lot of friends who are deaf and some of them are in my Lovelife programme. I struggle to communicate with them, but now things will be different. I wanted to empower myself to be able to communicate with them. I will encourage others to attend similar workshops.”

Individuals who want to learn more about sign language can contact SASL Development by sending an email to kmakgata@nwp.gov.za or visit any ACSR Offices.