

## SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT SIGN LANGUAGE

- Sign Language is an Integral part and an identifying feature of membership in the Deaf Culture
- Sign Language has it's own grammatical structure independent of any spoken/written language, e.g. English, Zulu, Xhosa, etc.
- The majority of Deaf people (90%) are born to hearing parents and therefore do not acquire Sign Language as a mother tongue. They acquire Sign Language at school from peers. Sign Language is the first language of the majority of Deaf children.
- A minority (10%) of Deaf children are born to Deaf parents and these children acquire Sign Language as a mother tongue
- South African Sign Language (SASL), despite regional differences and variations, has the same grammatical structure countrywide.
- There is not a one-to-one relationship between Sign Language and English. One sign may be translated into English by more than one word (perhaps a phrase or a sentence). Likewise an English word may be represented by more than one sign.
- SASL is not more or less abstract than any spoken language. It is capable of expressing all that natural human language is capable of expressing with all its subtlety and complexity.
- That is, SASL can be used to tell jokes, ask riddles, express sarcasm, tell lies, create idioms, make poetry, etc.

## WHAT SIGN LANGUAGE IS NOT

- Sign Language is neither universal nor international.

Each country's Deaf Community develops its own Sign Language despite some similarities of grammatical features that are shared by all known signed languages of the world.

- The way Deaf Americans may decide to name the world about them is different from the way Deaf South Africans may do.
- Different Sign Languages may have handforms which in some instances, may be culturally unacceptable in other Sign Languages.
- Some handforms and combination of movements may be the same in two Sign Languages but the meanings could be completely different.
- Signed exact spoken Languages, that is making a sign for each word in a spoken language e.g. English, Zulu, Xhosa are not Sign Languages. They are merely forms of communication because they do not follow the grammatical rules of either spoken or signed languages.