



WASLI is committed to the development of the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide

The Gambia

Information about The Gambia

The Gambia is situated in West Africa. It is the smallest country on mainland Africa and has a population of 1.5 million. Banjul is the capital. English is the official language but local languages include Fulla, Mandinka, Wollof, Jola and also Gambian Sign Language for those that are Deaf.

Information about Deaf people in The Gambia

The Gambia association for the deaf and hard of hearing was established in 1993. There are four functioning branches throughout the country with over 900 members. Statistics say there could be up to 53,000 people living in the Gambia who are hard of hearing or Deaf.

Most deaf people in The Gambia have limited access to education. This is due to a lack of deaf awareness both at family and society level. It is the general consensus that it is a waste of money to send a Deaf child to school, as they will not learn. There is no disability policy in The Gambia nor has the UN convention for human rights been ratified, so deaf people have no rights when it comes to disability support from the government. Furthermore, employment figures for the Gambia are very low, and uneducated Deaf people fall into this number. Deaf people who have employment generally have unskilled jobs, such as selling newspapers or phone scratch cards. A very small number of deaf people have benefited from apprenticeships and work as welders, carpenters, builders and mechanics.

Gambia has one school for the Deaf. St Johns was established in 1983 and is a catholic missionary school that will educate Deaf children up to grade 9. The school is based near to the capital Banjul. Unless children in the rural areas have family there, it is unlikely that they can attend the school. However, two teachers from the school have been trained as itinerant teachers of the Deaf and are currently responsible for travelling to villages and towns to engage with Deaf students and provide support for teachers.

In September 2009 the VSO volunteer at GADHOH started a pilot project interpreting for Deaf students one day a week at a local college. She was then able to attract a donor to fund a full time interpreter at the college for the next



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year with deaf awareness training for the staff. It is hoped that this will lead to the college paying for the use of interpreters and to allow more Deaf to access further education.

Information about sign language interpreters in The Gambia

The sign language interpreting service is run by GADHOH. There are currently four full time interpreters employed with three trainee interpreters. The trainee programme was enabled by attracting a donor. This is the first time (2011) GADHOH has had the opportunity to provide a better quality of interpreter by using in-house training and assessment. There is no formal interpreter association as yet and there is also no formal training or assessment for sign language interpreting in The Gambia. However, the interpreters have benefited from ad-hoc training from international sign language interpreters and also from a 3 year full time interpreter, from the UK, based at GADHOH through a VSO placement. The majority of interpreting undertaken is for the national association staff: the interpreters mainly work in meetings and at GADHOH activities, but will also interpret at hospitals and police and family meetings from time to time.