



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

Lesotho

Name of Association: Lesotho Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

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Introduction

The intention of this short presentation is to give an idea of how the situation of sign language interpreting is in my country, as well as the situation of the Deaf community. Lesotho, whose capital town is Maseru, has a population of about 1.8 million. The country is divided into ten districts.

The current situation for sign language interpreting

We have an association (since November 2008), which is still developing. However we are experiencing a considerable growth as new sign language users show a lot of interest in Lesotho Sign Language and interpreting. The result of this is new membership for our association. Currently we have more than thirty members and we are still expecting more since the Deaf Association (NADL) is recruiting new interpreters. Those people who enrol for sign language learning are also briefed on interpreting. They later improve their ability and skills in real life situations as they continue interpreting. This is to say that we do not learn sign language or interpreting professionally, because there is no formal training for this anywhere in the country.

We occasionally have training workshops held by the Deaf Association. Here it is worth mentioning that some of our interpreters, who have been in the field for more than seven years, have had such trainings only two to three times since they began interpreting. The majority of our interpreters have no idea of what these trainings are. This situation accounts for our lack of professionalism, skills and confidence. As a result, we do not give quality services to the Deaf community and this has negative impact on them for they cannot fully participate in matters affecting them due to our poor interpreting. We are willing to help, but the problem is our ability: it takes training to perfect one's skills.

Despite all these challenges and problems, we managed to form our association under the advice and guidance of the Deaf Association. We also succeeded in



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keeping the members together regardless of difficulties we came across. Thirdly, we managed to draft our governing document. On top of that the process of registering our association legally is in its advanced stage. We have handed in our application for registration to the law office recently.

For the future we want to see sign language interpreting recognised as a profession in our country. This requires a lot of training. Our plan is to have training workshops which are intended to assist our members with sign language and interpreting skills. The biggest challenge is to get funds for all these plans. We are determined to remove all barriers to our development. In order to translate this dream into action, we need to put efforts to ensure the strength of our association. We also need the help of our brothers and sisters in this profession from around the world. In the next 3-4 years we want to give WASLI an active membership which will be demonstrated, among other things, by the presence of international sign language interpreters from our developing association.

The current situation of the Deaf Community

The services in this country are generally not Deaf friendly due to lack of sign language interpreting and lack of Deaf awareness. In spite of this, the Deaf Association is working hard to advocate for the rights of the Deaf. Their efforts are not in vain since many people are coming to learn sign language from Deaf instructors.

There are only two official languages approved by the constitution: Sesotho and English. The exclusion of sign language in this regard makes things difficult for the Deaf community, as there are no specific laws to protect them. However, the government has recently approved the disability and rehabilitation policy.

Some teachers of the Deaf do not have good sign language skills. The same problem exists even in some vocational schools, where Deaf learners do not have access to instruction in sign language. There are no Deaf learners who go beyond primary level.