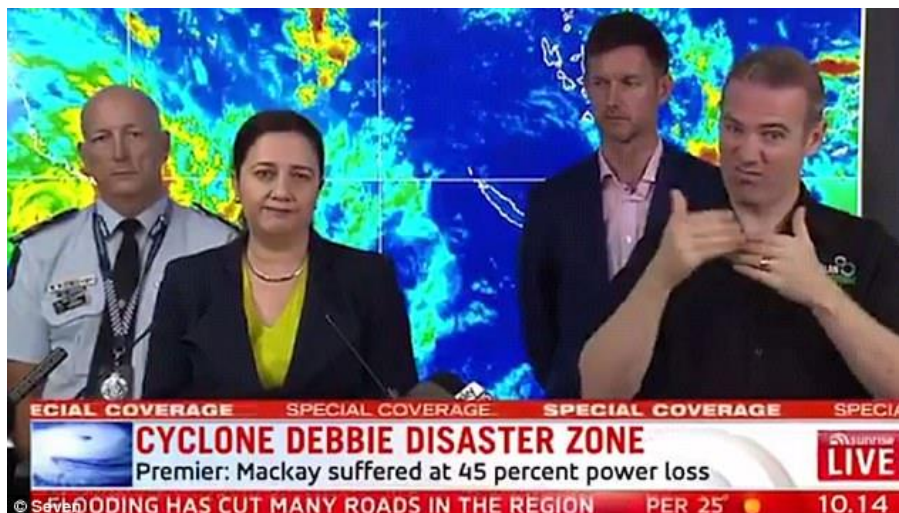


2017 ASPG – ‘Seen but not heard, Deafness and Democracy in Australia’

Theme: Inclusive Parliament - Rethinking conventional engagement strategies to give minorities a voice. How can Parliament better engage with under-represented groups?

Abstract: This paper examines the question ‘How the value of bilingual education can be understood by decision makers?’ from the perspective of the engagement of the Australian Deaf community with elected representatives in Australian Parliaments.

Presentation: Often in Australia and New Zealand natural disasters bring sign language into the media spotlight as it is used to communicate emergency-related information in a timely manner. The animated facial expressions of the professional interpreters frequently capture public attention because we are fascinated by the vibrant, visual, physical, full-bodied and embodied properties of signed languages - properties that exhibit grammatical patterns just like any other language, signed or spoken.



SLIDE

Sadly, however there have been occasions where government authorities have not engaged professional interpreters. Before Hurricane Irma hit Florida, Manatee County leaders were preparing to address the public with “crucial” information. What

reportedly happened was when a qualified interpreter wasn't available, officials asked Marshall Greene, a lifeguard in Manatee County, who could vaguely sign, in preference to not having anyone sign at all.

Sign Language Interpreter Warned of 'Pizza' and 'Bear Monster' at Irma Briefing

By CHRISTINA CARON SEPT. 17, 2017



A screenshot from a Sept. 8 news conference in which Manatee County, Fla., officials announced a

SLIDE

To draw a comparison that would be like saying we couldn't get a fireman so we sent a boy scout instead.

However, what has become the most infamous occasion that was seen by millions of television viewers worldwide was the individual appearing to fake the sign language interpretation of Mandela's memorial service into sign language by making up his own signs whilst standing alongside world leaders including US President Barack Obama.

Fake sign language interpreter on stage with Barack Obama at Nelson Mandela memorial

Deaf people across the world were outraged after the imposter signed nonsense as he stood beside world leaders including Barack Obama



3027 SHARES

BY NIGEL ATKINS, ANDY LINES

21:59, 11 DEC 2013 | UPDATED 12:32, 13 DEC 2013

NEWS



RECOMMENDED



First picture of five-month-old triplets as two of them die in 'tragic accident'



Bride accused of running off with £11k stag do kitty is spotted holed up in a homeless shelter



North Korea says Donald Trump's 'Rocket Man' jibe means missile attacks on US mainland 'inevitable'

SLIDE

Both these events grabbed headlines around the world.

So why is it that sign language, which elicits such fascination from the public and the media, is often discriminated against, and made inaccessible to the very people who need it: the deaf and hard of hearing.

In a modern and thriving democracy such as we have across Australia, the right to vote and to engage in democratic processes is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. Australia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, which includes under Article 19 the right to "... full inclusion and participation in the community."

“ SHALL TAKE EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO FACILITATE FULL ENJOYMENT BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OF THIS RIGHT AND THEIR FULL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY ”

Article 19 – UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



SLIDE

The reality is vastly different, disappointing and discriminatory for the Deaf community.

This is no surprise when no State, Territory nor the Commonwealth Parliament caption their live broadcasts for the community, nor have information in Auslan on their websites.

It is of no surprise when Government Departments do not have a legislative or policy requirement to provide information in Auslan on their websites nor it is a surprise when legislation actively discriminates against the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from participation such as to prevent Jury Service due to the archaic restriction on the use of professional interpreters for Deaf jury members in the jury room.

A contemporary example of how decision makers fail to value sign language is the current marriage equality debate that is occurring here in Australia.



SLIDE - Equality

I'm sure I could ask anyone in this room about the issue, the process of the postal survey, the merits of Governments outsourcing decisions that ought properly be made by the country's elected representatives, or the steps that will then need to be taken post the survey if, as I hope, a yes vote is successful to make the necessary changes to Australian law to remove the discrimination against the LGBTI community. But then we are the ASPG!

So, let's just look at one part of that process that the broader community might be expected to have a simple understanding of - the postal survey.

In a modern and thriving democracy such as we have across Australia, the right to vote and to engage in democratic processes is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. Australia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, which includes under Article 19 the right to "... full inclusion and participation in the community."

So, one would expect that the Australian Government would have directed the Australian Bureau of Statistics to ensure that the survey information was accessible to all Australians. No official Government website provides any information in Auslan on the Marriage Equality Survey. To be blunt that is a disgrace in a modern democratic society like Australia.

Sadly, this is just another example of the harsh truth that in Australia deaf people continue to face barriers to both access (equity) and opportunity (equality) by the failure of decision makers to fully appreciate the value sign language and a bilingual education.

It is acknowledged that Australia has no official language. Whilst English has always been entrenched as the de facto national language especially for all official documents and communication, Auslan (Australian Sign Language) has no legal standing.



SLIDE – Countries which have recognised their sign language as an official language.

I draw your attention to the fact that two of our ASPG members NZ and Papua New Guinea have recognised their countries sign language as an official language.

Back in 1991 Auslan was recognised by the Australian Government as a "community language other than English" and the preferred language of the Deaf community in the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. However, this recognition does not ensure any provision of services in Auslan and has no legal binding on the Government to provide information in Auslan.

It is not good enough to say that having written information is accessible for the Deaf community, it doesn't provide equal access for people whose first language is Auslan. It's equivalent to arguing plain English is accessible for someone who was brought up speaking only Miriam Mir - one of the two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Islands.

Without information in their own language, Auslan users aren't able to fully participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens. Without equal access, there can be no equal opportunity; without equal opportunity, a fundamental right of citizenship and democracy itself is denied.

This is why article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) guarantees political rights to people with disabilities.

It is fundamental to an inclusive society that those with disabilities be accommodated when interacting with the institutions of government. The nature of the interests affected is central to the dignity of deaf persons. If they cannot participate in government surveys or interact with government officials they are not able to fully participate in democratic life.

Discrimination against and oppression of the deaf frequently has its roots in attitudes of audism. Audism is a form of discrimination towards deaf or hard-of-hearing people. It's a very broad term that could be used to describe what happens when hearing people don't have the same attitude or view of deaf people as they would of any other hearing person. A view of them as unequal is a reflection of audism.

The theme of this section – 'How can Parliament better engage with under-represented groups?' forces us to consider how can create inclusive, barrier-free environments for the deaf and hard of hearing within our democratic institutions.

To address this, we must firstly accept that status quo is unacceptable, and therefore our Parliaments must evolve into a more inclusive institution. This will require standing orders and policies being re-written, for example to permit interpreters on the floor of Parliament and the provision of additional resourcing to caption live broadcasts.

“ *MUCH OF WHAT DISABLES PEOPLES FROM PARTICIPATION IS NOT THE DISABILITY ITSELF BUT RATHER THE ENVIRONMENT OR ASPECTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT, EXTERNAL FEATURES OF SOCIETY CREATED BY PEOPLE* ”

World Health Organisation



SLIDE

The World Health Organization states that “much of what disables people from participation is not the disability itself but rather the environment or aspects of the environment, external features of society created by people”.

Defining disability as an interaction within an environment means that “disability” is not an attribute of the person. Progress on improving social participation can be made by addressing the barriers which hinder persons with disabilities in their day to day lives.

To that end, I’ve culled together five simple yet powerful ideas that can help start the journey to a barrier-free Parliament. It means identifying and removing barriers and creating an environment so that its use and interaction with people is maximised regardless of culture or abilities:

- *CREATE A WELCOME MESSAGE IN AUSLAN*
- *CONDUCT ANNUAL DEAFNESS AWARENESS TRAINING.*
- *INVITE THE DEAF COMMUNITY INTO PARLIAMENT.*
- *INCORPORATES THE DESIGN ELEMENTS OF ‘DEAF SPACE’*
- *CONTACT YOUR DEAF SOCIETY FOR ASSISTANCE.*

SLIDE

- Create a welcome message in Auslan for your official website and have it easily accessible on the home page.

- Conduct annual Deafness Awareness Training for all staff, but especially those who have contact with the public like electorate staff.
- Invite the Deaf community into Parliament. During my time in the Queensland Parliament we successfully hosted the Deaf community for a question time with interpreters during the National Week of Deaf People.
- Incorporates the design elements of 'Deaf Space' in new construction or major renovations. This is predominantly a visually-oriented design concept, which results in a built environment that provide the same experience for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as it would for a hearing person. It deals with lighting - natural and artificial. Technology that's available for the deaf especially in communications, for example communication systems that works for both the deaf and hearing or visual fire alarms, integrated FM systems, or visual announcement systems.
- Contact your Deaf Society for assistance to identify the barriers and to develop and implement customised accommodation strategies.

Note: Capitalization of "Deaf" is used to represent its status as a cultural identity; lowercase "deaf" indicates the physical trait of deafness.