

Insights into the Deaf Community

The Deaf Community: Membership.

The Deaf Community

The Deaf community is a network of people who share a language and culture and a history of common experiences – similar to an ethnic community. The Deaf community is well organized with national, state and local networks of sporting, recreation, social, special interest and advocacy groups.

Membership of the Deaf community

The single most unifying factor of the Deaf community is the use of Auslan (Australian Sign Language), not how deaf a person is. A common assumption is that only severely or profoundly deaf people use Auslan, however many members of the Deaf community are only moderately deaf and some members of the Deaf community are actually hearing people (for example hearing children of Deaf adults, known as CODA's, spouses of Deaf people and interpreters). A hearing person who is an accepted member of the Deaf community will, without exception, use Auslan.

Most Deaf people are effectively bicultural. They interact with both Deaf and hearing communities and cultures. However it is true that many Deaf people marry other Deaf people and spend a large proportion of their social, sporting and leisure time within the Deaf community where they are understood and accepted and communication is more comfortable.

How big is the Deaf community?

There are no definitive statistics for how many people belong to the Deaf Community though at this stage the most reliable study (Hyde and Power, 1991) indicates there were 15,400 Deaf users of sign language and possible another 15,000 hearing users. Of these it is estimated that as few as 6,500 are native Auslan users (those who have signed from birth or early childhood).

For more information on this topic see the Australian Association of the Deaf (AAD) website: www.aad.org.au