



## **8th Annual Silent Walk & Run 2024: A Resounding Success in Promoting Sign Language Awareness**

17 September 2024, Johannesburg. The 8th Annual Silent Walk & Run took place this past weekend, and the event was an overwhelming success, with hundreds of participants coming together to promote sign language awareness and inclusivity for the deaf community in South Africa. Held in partnership with local organizations, the event sought to raise awareness around the importance of learning and embracing South African Sign Language (SASL) and Deaf Culture, which is recognized as the 12th official language of South Africa.

The event featured several key activities, including a masterclass, hosted by African Bank, where staff learned basic sign language skills as well as visiting the Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf to donate food parcels. These efforts, aimed at educating staff, contribute to the greater goal of fostering understanding and communication between the hearing and Deaf communities.

"We're all very excited." says Sbusiso Kumalo, Chief Marketing Officer of African Bank, "We've had the masterclasses in terms of learning sign language. The participation has been overwhelming. So the commitment is there. What we need to do, is to continue to push our resources and increase our efforts into creating this awareness.

If every single person in this country could at least understand the basics of sign language, it means it's easier for us to communicate with the hard of hearing and that's the start. Whenever we introduce this to any part of the business, there's so much excitement and so much willingness, which is very encouraging. We can only get better from here on."

African Bank, in partnership with the Neema Foundation for the Deaf, through its #SilentWalk initiative, is launching a WhatsApp Chatbot aimed at providing real-time access to critical information for the Deaf community. This platform offers immediate support for Deaf victims of GBV, including services like legal representation, police access, and psychosocial support, while also extending African Bank's financial services to the Deaf community.

The Silent Walk & Run event also serves as a crucial platform to highlight the experiences and challenges faced by the Deaf community, encouraging businesses, schools and the public sector to take further steps towards inclusivity.

Neema Foundation Chairperson, "This year's turnout was truly inspiring. Seeing so many people come together for the same cause is a testament to how far we've come in promoting inclusivity, but it also highlights how much more we can still do to ensure Deaf individuals are fully included in society."



In addition to the walk and run, attendees participated in interactive workshops, panel discussions, and exhibits that showcased innovations in assistive technologies for the Deaf community. The event closed with a performance by local Deaf artists, further demonstrating the creative talent within the community.

The Annual Silent Walk & Run is an initiative aimed at promoting inclusivity and raising awareness about the Deaf community in South Africa. It brings together people from all walks of life to learn, engage, and support sign language education, creating a bridge between the Deaf and hearing communities.