Turning crisis into opportunity

BY MINDO SIBANYENI | 25 October 2017 - 14:27

October 13 2017 Managing Director Deaf Empowerment Firm Siqekwa Alex Moshiana He Yeti Nhlovu-Sowian

When Alex Moshiana, 49, lost her hearing she struggled to progress in her career. The Soweto-based entrepreneur has now found a way to use her disability to bless others.

How did you become deaf?

I lost my hearing after extensive exposure to TB treatment. Such hearing loss could have been avoided if regular audiological screening was conducted, something that clinicians must ensure happens and patients should insist on.

What is the name of your organisation and how long has it been in existence?

My company is the Deaf Empowerment Firm (DEF). I established it in August 2015 but it started operating in January 2016.

What inspired you to start it?

DEF was established to address impacts that affect deaf people after I realised the challenges deaf people experience when they want to access opportunities. I was not born deaf.

My challenge in securing employment after my disability opened my eyes to a bigger problem.

I struggled to get employment notwithstanding my academic credentials and that I had 10 years work experience.

An organisation for the deaf gave me an opportunity to work with young students in their work-placement programme.

Through their determination not to fail, I also became determined not to let them down.

Together with my colleagues we were able to place close to 50 deaf youngsters – in just two years – in work placement opportunities.

In 2015 the organisation could no longer sustain the programme and when it became apparent that I was going to lose my job, I had to think strategically about how I was going to continue with the work I was doing.

I then got the idea to start my own business so I can carry on and empower more deaf people.

And how did you start?

The SAB Foundation was in search of entrepreneurs with disabilities.

I made my pitch to them and that is how the business came to life.

This year I was one of 58 successful entrepreneurs chosen out of 2000 applicants to participate in the Thobela Enterprise Programme.

I am learning tools that are helpful in ensuring that I run the business professionally and comply with necessary regulation.

How does your organisation empower deaf people?

We empower deaf people through various programmes which include skills development, learnerships, internships, work placements and enterprise development.

Some challenges that deaf children face are that not all their schools teach up to metric, so you find deaf children leaving school before they complete metric.

One out of three deaf adults are functionally illiterate.

Because of poor or no education, deaf children grow up to be adults excluded from tertiary education, which in turn leads to exclusion from employment opportunities.

DEF has two types of candidates, the younger ones who can be absorbed into the learnership and internship programmes, and older candidates who, due to their age, cannot be absorbed into these opportunities.

Our approach for older candidates is to put them through skills development programmes and thereafter we find them employment or assist them to start their own businesses.

How does your organisation generate income?

We generate our income through various sources which include: employers who place our candidates and pay us placement fees for the service; project management fees from proposals we submit to corporates and SETAs for skills development programmes; and enterprise development fees from corporates we partner with.

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