

Cape Town centre drives inclusion of hearing-impaired children in SA

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As the world celebrates [International Day of Persons with Disabilities \(IDPD\)](#) on 3 December 2019, South Africa must focus on educational inclusion for people with disabilities, asset management firm Coronation said.



Coronation supports the Carel du Toit Centre for hearing impaired children at Tygerberg. The centre is an industry leader in preparing hearing impaired children for mainstream education, and socio-economic inclusion. It is widely acknowledged that SA is facing a crisis of educational inclusion for disabled children.

South Africa commemorates National Disability Awareness month annually between 3 November and 3 December. The campaign currently focuses on the empowerment of disabled youth to chart their own destiny.

Global and local leadership on the issue of disabled inclusion

Globally, the IDPD focuses on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which also prioritises disabled empowerment as part of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently launched the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy to further these goals.

In South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa's Presidential Working Group on Disability has set down five overarching goals for government attention, including the adoption of SA sign language as the 12th official language and the development of more early childhood development (ECD) facilities for disabled children. One key advocate is Dr Diane Bell, a specialist educationalist with a focus on hearing impairment who is both board chair for the Carel du Toit Centre and a Presidential Working Group member.

The private sector, however, also has a role to play in supporting inclusive education. Coronation provides funding for pre-school children from no- or low-income families to attend Carel du Toit and receive critical interventions and therapies.

“As we strive towards a more diverse and inclusive society, we must consider the needs of people with disabilities. If hearing-impaired children can get support and education early enough in their lives, it lays a solid foundation for them to be able to thrive as they grow up,” says Coronation CEO Anton Pillay.

Successful current interventions to transform children’s lives

The Carel du Toit Centre provides onsite audiologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, and has a CHAT (“children hear and talk”) centre for parents whose children are born deaf, and wish to learn to hear and talk. The centre follows a mainstream curriculum in small classes.

This has been a personal journey for Dr Bell whose daughter Jody was born with profound bilateral hearing loss. Jody was schooled at Carel du Toit until age 10, and at 27, is now an accomplished academic.

Principal Adri Hodgson says hearing impaired children have the same capacity as hearing children to learn speech, but need exposure to day-long listening experiences and natural interactions to achieve linguistic competence. “Through the use of appropriate hearing technology, together with committed parental support and the intensive, holistic intervention of a pre-primary and foundation-phase schooling, these children can achieve this dream.”

Hearing-impaired children all over South Africa need support. “As the trust and centre, we thank Coronation for their support, and we encourage other donors to join us so that we can expand our centres,” says Bell.

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