

# Parent talk

**Marie Ange Nimpaye** shares her parent experience on raising two deaf children in Burundi

I'm the mother of two beautiful deaf children, a daughter aged 13 and a son aged 4 years old. When my daughter was born, I did not realise that she was deaf until she was 1 year old. It was the same with my son. During the first year I kept talking to my children in the normal way, but at some point I felt that something was amiss because they would not pay attention to my voice. At this time I had no clue about deafness as there was nobody who was deaf in our family.



With no audiology, children's service or information on deafness, I struggled at first to accept that my children were deaf. I did not know what to do or where to look for help or information. It was very depressing. But I became accustomed to it and accepted that my children are deaf. I still struggled to communicate with them though as I didn't know any sign language and there was no support groups or information for parents of deaf children. We had to make up our own signs to try to communicate, but it was not full communication, just basic things.

There were times when my daughter would get angry with me. She was so frustrated that I couldn't understand her. I couldn't understand why she was unhappy, or what she wanted. I was upset too.



The situation was no different with my son. I struggled to bring up two deaf children in my home without any support from the government at all. There was no social or health service to support us, I felt helpless.

Things started to change when my daughter was five years old. I learnt that there was a school for deaf children, in the capital Bujumbura, called Ephphata School for Deaf. I went there with my daughter and I was happy to enrol her there. It is a boarding school, which means that she has to stay there.

My daughter would only come home during the school holidays (Christmas, Easter and summer). I started to notice changes in my daughter. When she returned for her first school holiday, I was surprised to find that she could write words and numbers (mom, dad, 1+3=4,) like the other children in the neighbourhood. It was obvious that she was trying to talk to us using sign language, but the problem was that no one at home could understand her or reply to her. Neither I, nor my husband, nor either of my other children could communicate by signs. This meant that the frustrations continued for my daughter and for us.

One day, a teacher at our daughter's school told us that there is sign language training for parents of deaf children. My husband was very interested in this training and he started to attend this sign language training.



After this training, my husband could communicate with our daughter in basic sign language (greetings, express some basic needs, etc). My husband's understanding of basic sign language has made our daughter much more attached to him than to the other members of our family. Our daughter felt comfortable with my husband. Both could communicate easily and tell each other stories. It



comforted our daughter. I found myself using my husband as an interpreter between our child and the rest of the family. However, my husband and our daughter taught us some signs that allowed us to communicate a little with her and also her little brother.

Later, with funding from an association called 'Aurora Deaf Aid Africa', training was organised for parents of deaf

children, which I attended. With the signs learnt in this training, I can easily communicate with my daughter using these signs. And this has contributed to the development of both of our children.

Thanks to the sign language training received by my husband, and later by me, communication is no longer an issue in our family. Our daughter now feels accepted and comfortable in our family. We now have another deaf child in our family, and we communicate with him in sign language too, and it works well. I benefited greatly from the sign language provided by Aurora and it brought me together with other parents which make us feel like a peer support group, we help each other. I would recommend the sign language training to other parents who have deaf children.

I am also one of the founder members of a new parents association called the Association of Parents for the Education of Deaf Children in Burundi (APEES Burundi). Through this organisation we hope to spread awareness of deafness and be a valuable source of support for parents of deaf children across the country. We also hope to raise the issue of the needs of deaf children with the Burundi government to ensure they provide for the education needs of deaf children, and recognise and provide for their wider rights.



*Marie Ange is a mother of two deaf children and is one of the founder members of a new parents association called the Association of Parents for the Education of Deaf Children in Burundi (APEES Burundi).*

*Translation by Chris Kubwimana the Founder & Director of Aurora Deaf Aid Africa. In August 2019, Aurora Deaf Aid Africa joined forces with DeafReach, with a view to full amalgamation during 2020.*

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