

**Every Child Can Learn Podcast**  
**Episode 27: Cyprian on communicating through sign language**

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**Glades:** Welcome to our 27th episode of Every Child Can Learn my name is Lanyero Glades, I work at Backup Uganda as the lead trainer. Today, I am happy to meet a new guest, who is going to tell us something about himself. Thank you so much, our guest. You're welcome.

**Cyprian:** Thank you so much, Gladys. I am glad to be here. And thanks for having me at Backup Uganda. My name is Cyprian Anyi, I am a social worker, I am qualified in the field of Adult and Community Education. However, over time, I have had a great interest in disability inclusion. I've also had a background in sign language interpreting which I've done it for quite a number of years, interacting with the Deaf communities, and also stretching to other categories of persons with disabilities. So I am so delighted to be here today. Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you so much, Cyprian for that introduction, I have heard you mentioning something to do with hearing impairment. Can you tell us more about that, and what inspired you to be a sign language interpreter?

**Cyprian:** Yes, I have been a sign language interpreter. And starting with hearing impairment, hearing impairment can also be termed as deafness. This is when a person is said to have a hearing loss when they actually cannot hear like any other ordinary person. But there are those who have complete or profound deafness. And then there are those who can hear partially. And then there are those who are called Hard of Hearing, those who have learned spoken language and then got, therefore lost hearing along the way as they as they're living. But then going back to the other part that you ask about my passion, to do sign language. You know, being able to express yourself verbally. And also for somebody who uses sign language, I've always thought and wondered if they could communicate the same exact thing if they're doing sign language, and somebody speaking it out. So this curiosity led me into learning sign language to find out exactly if I can say something verbally, can it also be you know, equated with somebody who is doing it in sign language? And so that gives me the opportunity to learn to discover that.

**Glades:** I know you'll tell us whether after getting the experience, I believe you are enjoying it or you love it really. That's why today we're having this conversation. You have hinted on different categories of hearing impairment. I don't know if there is some that you've left out. And maybe you could you also give us a few of the signs or how can someone tell that you have a hearing impairment?

**Cyprian:** Well, there are basically three or four categories, which can be mild. It can also be moderate, severe or profound. Now mild is when a person does not have the full capacity to hear. But when it's loud enough, they can actually hear, we've all had people in our community or mids that need an extra tone or increase in voice for them to be able to hear something that's a mild hearing loss or a mild hearing impairment. But then there is also moderate, which is now at a higher level, then when it comes to severe, this is quite hard for them to hear around their environment. And when it comes to severe, usually we can get a means of correcting it by using hearing aids, hearing aids or simply amplifiers. So it amplifies the sound around them for them to be able to hear. But then the one which is total deafness is called profound deafness. This one, they don't hear anything at all. And so the only way or the only intervention is for them to use sign language, because correcting it medically would be tricky. So usually they are advised to learn sign language and communicating sign language.

**Glades:** I also asked how can someone tell that one has a hearing impairment, maybe a little bit of the signs for someone to tell? I know you hinted on the categories that somehow they can be able to hear, of course, when you speak louder, and then they also those that understand when you use a lower pitch. So those are few a few signs. But also, I know there are other signs that you would want to share to the listeners. Thank you.

**Cyprian:** Yeah, there are a number of ways that you can tell that somebody has a hearing impairment. And the obvious one is the one where we see people communicating in sign language, when they are not able to speak so you see them using science. And this is an alternative for spoken language, where it's a visual kind of communication that deaf people or people with hearing impairment use to communicate. But also when you see people trying to produce sounds which are hard to understand or does not, I would quote, make sense, within our communities, we have these people who have you know, they try to make some sounds so that they're able to say something or they're able to get attention. This can also make you understand that maybe they don't hear you or they can speak. But also, these can be uncoordinated sounds when they're trying to express themselves. But another way is also when somebody has a disconnect between the sound and actions, because in our environment, when you call somebody's name, the reaction is usually to look at where they're calling them from. But when you call somebody's name, and they are not reacting at all, or maybe they are giving you an opposite, or uncoordinated action, you can tell that maybe they are not hearing, actually, for little babies, when you can identify that they can't hear when you make sounds behind them or clap or do certain kinds of sounds and they are not reacting, we know how babies are so sensitive to

sound. So if they don't, you can tell that maybe this child is having a hearing impairment. So the other way that you can also tell is you can actually take to a specialized person to actually test, we have a means of understanding or measuring the level of hearing or the level of hearing impairment that the person has. And this process is called audiometry. Where you, you have something sort of like headphones, and then it has sounds from the lowest of the lowest frequency and then it keeps getting louder. So where you can start to hear from that's where somebody can tell that your hearing level falls in. Now that brings us back to where the mild, the severe, or the profound deafness coming because you'll find at a certain level, which is measured in the form of a unit called Hertz. You can be termed mild or severe or profound, profound is when even the highest of the sound you're unable to hear

**Glades:** The obvious ones that we've always talked about is, sometimes they're the kids, or they're the people who asked for pardon, many times, or they.... And then also there are cases where one ear has issues and the other side is okay. So many times, you will find that they will turn their head to the side that listens clearly so that they're able to pick the information. And the ones that Mr. Cyprian has talked about, thank you so much for sharing that. I would also love you to help us, what do you think could be the cause of all, all this, what brings about hearing impairment, and then you could also tell us more about the myths that people say about persons with hearing impairment that you've ever had, or that, you know,

**Cyprian:** Maybe just to add on before I go into that question. The other way you can tell for, for instance, for children when they have a delayed language development, because at a certain point, you expect the child to start learning certain words. But when they delay, chances are that they may not also be hearing, because we hear and then we repeat what we've had for us to tell that somebody's learning. Now, some of the causes of deafness, there are a number of them. But one of the very common ones is what's called Congenital hearing loss when it happens during the gestation and childbirth. Between that period, it can happen during the formation of a foetus in the womb, or during the process of birth, or slightly after birth. So this entire process is called the congenital deafness, it can be because of maybe there was some certain sickness that the mother went through, or maybe certain medication, or even certain physical issues that might have happened to the mother during that guest session period that might affect the child. Then, we also have some of the chronic infections or diseases, most of the Deaf people have interacted with, or they have shared with me stories of them suffering illnesses, such as malaria and others. And remember, before 2000s, there was a great use of quinine. And most of them relate their story to being, you know, given the dose of quinine, and then after that, they just lost their hearing. Some just had severe sickness, and then it went away with their hearing. But it's also important to note that deafness only does not have been around that time or child who don't gestation, but even at an adult age, it can happen I know of another person who actually had a tooth problem and when they went to the dentist to extract the tooth, they came back not able to hear. So, there was a connection around there that must have been interrupted with. Then there can also be the hereditary cause of deafness. This is the kind that runs in the families. In Uganda,

we actually have a family that has hereditary deafness, their their parents had and then the children they had, some children became deaf others became hard of hearing. And then the grandchildren a few also lost their hearing, some are born hearing but along the way they lose their hearing, but this has been flowing in the family for for the generations. There can also be an issue of your hearing actually being blocked by wax, excessive wax, which blocks your hearing canal and when they become really excessive, as they say, there are chances that it might you know, cause issues into the hearing canal. But also there are people who have experienced maybe serious accidents. And this when you say hit your head and then it disorganizes the, the area where your hearing is connected. This can also cause hearing loss. And some of you must have come across children in our communities that start having some fluids flowing out of their ears. This is because of some of the infections and if not intervene within time can also make this child to lose their hearing. And finally, old age is also another thing as a person grows older, some of the senses including sight, including smell, including taste and hearing starts degenerating. And this can also bring about hearing loss. Those are the ones I can share. But there are a number of them that that we that we can always discuss.

**Glades:** Thank you so much. So as to you to help us understand, what do you think could be the biggest myths that people have ever said about persons with hearing impairment that you have ever had? Or that you know.

**Cyprian:** Yes, thank you so much, once again, Gladys. Yeah, there are so many myths around hearing impairment, around deafness that we interface with a lot in our communities. And the one that is prominent most especially in our rural communities, is deafness is associated with superstitions or, you know, spiritual beliefs. Some actually say there are curses when a child is born and can't hear and you know, they can't communicate. Sometimes we have the tendency to think that maybe the parents have been cursed or it's some, you know, superstitious belief that is carried on into that family. But this is not the case, because it happens. And it's been, you know, recite a point that the number of causes that brings about deafness. This is just a myth, but it's not the reality. Also, in our communities, I've also been a victim myself, is the thought that deaf people are very violent, that you can't really get next to them, you can't, you know, befriend them. But what I've learned over time and working with them is that when you can't communicate with a person, chances are that there will be miscommunication and the fact that you can't understand each other, there are other avenues that you might resort to. And sometimes we try to communicate to them not knowing that we are actually being, you know, vulgar to them, and saying things that are offensive to them. So that also caused certain reactions. But if we knew how to communicate in sign language, you'd see how friendly they can be. And also, most times, we think that if a person cannot hear or cannot speak verbally, we think that they can't be educated. But this is a myth, because there are very many successful people who have had hearing loss, some event from childbirth, we have a number of professionals in different fields in this country, actually, we have even a PhD holder, who was born deaf, and has never heard of any sound, but was able to achieve a higher level of education, which some of us hearing are not even

able to reach at. So this cannot justify that they are not, they are unable to be educated. As long as you take them to the proper, you know, education system that understands their challenges, they can always get an education. And also, you know, in line with that, we also think that maybe because they're in that situation, they can't excel in community. But we have so many that have stories of how they've excelled. I've known a very many families where the actual person who has hearing impairment is the one supporting the rest of the family, because they've actually excelled, they've achieved and they are supporting the rest who are able bodied, who can hear and have all, you know, the capabilities. Yeah, we also think that hearing people, I mean, people with hearing impairment or deaf people, are a very tiny group of the community, but this is not the fact because there is actually significant people who have hearing impairment. The last census which was done in 2014, had actually 3.1% of the then population, which was about 34,000,000 and 3.1% of them, were having hearing impairment, and that's about you know, 1 million or 1.1 million people. And this is a very significant population of the society. But that was 10 years ago, 10 years later, we have so many that have come along. So there are actually many within the society, but also the fact that sometimes we engage in certain things that exposes us to becoming death, chances are that we might be many. And that means being a significant group within the society should not be ignored, and should be planned for in all the programs. And then also, we think that another myth is that once a person is deaf, or having a hearing problem, people think that that's the end of which nothing can be done. But they actually, you know, a number of interventions that can be done for somebody that has severe hearing loss, they can say before, can be corrected, they can check. And then they can give them a hearing aid, which amplifies sound. And they can say be able to hear for somebody who, you know, has lost it all. They can also still learn sign language and communicate in sign language. But there is also another procedure, it's called a cochlear implant, although it's a very expensive procedure, and I think it has not yet come to Uganda. But it's a surgery that can be done. And then the hearing canal fixed so that you're able to hear. But if you are born deaf, and you've never had any sound, and you take this procedure, it means you have to do a speech therapy, all over again, for you to be able to learn to interpret sounds and then to make meaning out of it. But for somebody who lost along the way, of course, you just recall how to communicate and then you go along with it. Sometimes you also think that, you know, being deaf, how do they you know, get into relationships, do they procreate? Do they, you know, marry and all that. But the problem is actually the hearing only everything else is perfect, and they have beautiful, amazing children. And in line with that, we also think that if a couple is deaf, the woman and the man is deaf, chances are they also have a deaf child. But that's not true, because 90% of the scope was actually they produce hearing children. And this children's first language, which is their mother tongue will be sign language, and then they will learn spoken language afterwards. So that is the interesting thing, interesting fact about it, and this myth, but we can learn to live with these people within our communities. If we can communicate to them, we'll have no difference with them.

**Glades:** I'm learning a lot of things here. And then I also believe this will help our people out there. And many of them have had all this kind of myth in their heads. And I love the fact that



you've brought it out so clearly. And I feel like we can still have a live radio talk show on this because you really bring them out so clearly. And the beauty of it is they are there, these people, they're there within us. And we have failed to know sometimes I also don't want to blame our parents, because they don't know what to do. But I love the fact that this information is being shared to our parents to the community so that they get to know this and improve on them. I want you to also help us understand what are some challenges you see with persons with hearing impairment? What challenges do you see that they face? Maybe a few of them.

**Cyprian:** You know, being a minority group and, you know, quoted the, you know, different from the ordinary people. Obviously, there will be challenges, especially in communication. If a person can't hear you or can't speak to you, you definitely have a barrier in communication. And then it makes it hard for them to receive information from us when we are speaking. And when we are trying to you know, air information via radio or via TV, the fact that they can't hear becomes a barrier. So they missed a lot on mainstream information, but also relating to the recent COVID-19, it was equally a very huge challenge because when it Everybody was expected to use a mask, it becomes hard for somebody who communicates, you know, visually, visual communication. And you know, with visual communication, you expect to see the faces to see the eyes to see the mouth patterns. And there are actually some sign languages, which move along with mouth patterns. And so when somebody is in a mask, you can't be able to communicate clearly, they can't be able to get you. And there's so much information that we have on the face that if covered up, we are not able to, I mean, a person with deafness is not able to get it. And also, the other challenge is access to services, this can be access to health services, when they go to health facilities, and maybe the attendant or the doctor or the nurse cannot communicate to them in sign language. So it becomes very challenging for them to actually express what they really need. Usually they end up you know, going back with a Panadol, or something of that sort, because they think it's just maybe pain in the head, or some stomach ache, but when the diagnosis is not done fully, because there is that barrier for the deaf person and the doctor to express themselves to actually know the issue. You know, the services also stretches to some of the social services within the community that does not cater for people this you know, kind of challenge. So they miss a lot already talked about radio stations, news bulletin. In the community spaces when we, you know, when we are sending information they miss on this, if they do not have sign language interpreters or people can interpret to them, what is being communicated. There is also a challenge with having sign language interpreters. Right now, here is a training school for sign language interpreters and Kyambogo at a professional level. But there are also other, you know, short courses in sign language, but still, the the ratio of sign language interpreters to the Deaf people who need the service is not balanced, you find the very few and some of them are converged within the city centres. So the people in the outskirts, the people in the countryside still have a big challenge when it comes to service of sign language interpreters. So they keep missing a lot on the mainstream information. And this is also common with other persons with disabilities, most of their families tend to over protect them, because they fear that the fact that they can't hear or can communicate, once they go out within the community or out

of their home, they can get lost or something can happen to them. And they can't express themselves, they can't communicate, they can't raise an alarm. So there is a tendency of them being protected within the home and not being allowed to explore. And yet we all know that for you to be knowledgeable in certain things, for you to be able to gather information, you have to expose yourself, you have to meet up, you have to network. And so a lot of times they're you know, kept within that same environment and they don't get to have the exposure that will help them in future. There is also a lot of you know, discrimination, marginalisation, when you are deaf and then you go to search for a job opportunity. And then the competitors are hearing, there are chances that they will drop this one because somebody would think how would I communicate with this person? If I employ them? How would I communicate? How would they deliver to expectation so you find most of the times you know they are left out and they're not considered first place. And yet they can actually deliver if given the appropriate environment too, if they maybe there is an interpreter if there are means of communication put in place. They can deliver equally like anyone else. So in an environment where there is one deaf person and everyone else is speaking, they're cut out, but imagine you're the only one who can hear and you're in an environment of all deaf persons who feels disabled. Well, in this case, that will definitely be you. So, if we can make the environment accommodative for them, we would feel that equality for everyone. So, these are some of the challenges, but they are not like some things that can be dealt with, we just need to have a mindset change, and create an accessible environment for these persons. And then we can have them, you know, deliver, like, like, like anyone else can do.

**Glades:** What do you think parents can do to prevent their children from getting hearing impairment, looking at the before and after causes?

**Cyprian:** Yeah, parents can do a number of things, starting with taking precautions, like we had talked of the congenital causes of deafness, some of the things, you know, it needs to be, you know, taking the precautions as early as conception and gestation and childbirth. If a mother is expectant, it's important to take all the necessary steps, the antenatal visits, they, you know, medical advice, so that we don't take chances, you know, sometimes people take chances, and then you produce a child with a challenge. And then, you know, it's related to a curse, and then a problem and then a problem. So some of the things are basics, if we put in the right, you know, procedures, we do all that is necessary. And then you reduce the chances of having a child with congenital deafness. But also on a day to day, you know, practicing healthy, healthy ways to do things, healthy practices around home, guiding our children, to keep your ears clean, to you know, play in safe spaces, because some of the things actually might bring about these problems, if they get an accident. If they get blocked ear, if they get infections into their ears, then they can lose it at some point. So keeping, making sure that they are keeping healthy practices, but also for mothers to mothers who are expected to keep away from drugs and alcohol, because this can also affect the foetus. And then bring about some of these challenges, including deafness. But also when children get diseases such as measles, such as jaundice, it's good for them to get early

interventions, early treatment. I've told you of cases where there are people who are now adults, but there there deafness, or their hearing loss is associated to severe illness, that was not intervened in time. So this has costed them and left a lifetime of not being able to communicate. So if we see this, and then we, you know, if we are swift with the interventions, we can get to avoid them. And also keeping our environment healthy, making sure that certain medications, certain equipment away from the children, that would cause them some of these issues. And sometimes, over exposure to loud sounds, very high volume, very loud sounds can also overtime, degrade our capacity to hear well. So as parents can always make sure that the children within our homes or environments, use, you know, moderate sounds. We've seen kids on the street, you know, holding headphones on their head, and then they're playing so loud, very, very, very loud music. And then over time you call them and they can't respond. And then this keeps degrading and degrading. So just keeping, making sure that, you know, they're doing some of these practices. But it's important also to seek a professional to screen yourself once in a while. If you notice, there are some irregularities on how somebody is responding. You can take the time to check out how they're performing in terms of their level of hearing. But above all, programs like this, that Backup Uganda is doing to sensitize the community to give information so that people can know some of the things and then get to practice them through you know some of the means of sensitization. This is also very key and we are grateful this for.

**Glades:** How about mothers who go to happen in places where there is loud noise? Does that also affect the unborn child? I know someone will be thinking of the same way we've seen people go to clubs, when they're pregnant. And you know the sound that they play when you're in the club, it's not that sound that you talked about. It's usually a loud sound, actually, there. There are many of us who want to dance close to the speaker, you know how you want to feel the music, deep down in your heart. So does that also affect the unborn child?

**Cyprian:** Yes, it does. Because a child's in formation actually starts hearing the parents. It's about five to six months. And medically, a mother is advised to keep speaking to the foetus or their pregnancy. And this happens that when the baby is finally born, they can recognize certain sounds that they've been hearing when they when when they were still not inborn. So whatever sound that this child gets exposed to, it can affect them positively or negatively. So if it's very loud sounds, there are high chances that it will also affect this child. And this is a period that a mother has to be so careful with what they expose their foetus to. Because yeah, they get to be affected by this. So yeah, it's a precaution. Mothers can also keep away from this.

**Glades:** Mothers out there, you've heard this information. Lastly, what do you think about teachers? I know, you've already talked about parents, but teachers, and what the government can do to help persons with hearing impairment as we summarise this discussion.

**Cyprian:** Thank you so much. For teachers, I think it's very important to keep our schools and our environment accessible as much as possible. For children with hearing impairments, it's good



to have as much visual aids as possible when teaching them so that they can learn visually, as they also communicate in sign language. But on a government perspective, it's good to ensure that facilities or service points such as health facilities, you know, public places where people can get different services have at least interpreters that can communicate and pass the information to them. But also to make sure that sign language is in the media spaces, I want to applaud the government for making sure that some of them the news bulletin in some of the national TV stations have interpreters. But that's not enough because this only provides for news house, but there are other programs, other educative programs and so much more that these people can benefit from, for instance, during COVID-19 When schools resorted to online learning through TVs, there were teachers who would speak but you know, a child who who has hearing impairment will not be catered for. But if this was in, in the exclusive programming, then they will also get to get some of these educative programs, some of the entertainment so that they feel not left out. And it's also important to, to promote education for persons with hearing impairment, even if it comes to wave us. For instance, in Kyambogo University, when a person is when a person has a disability, including hearing impairment, and they are taken on government scholarship, the university provides for them sign language interpreters, but this is something that can be you know, duplicated in all the institutions of higher learning and even you know, secondary schools, they're able to, to be to access education, and to have a feature like anyone else. But it's also important to promote scaling and to give to open up employment opportunities, irrespective of somebody's you know, status of disability because, like they say this abilities not inability, when you see somebody with a disability, somebody who has a hearing impairment, and then you're fast to judge that they can't do it, you may be missing a very good talent, but it's good to take that opportunity to find out how much they can do, and the chances that they will do even better. But also importantly, is to ensure that, you know, sexual and reproductive health services are open up to persons with hearing impairment, because this information helps in you know, managing families managing children, and and it's also economically important to them on how much they can save for themselves, and how much they can develop themselves in the long run. So this is very important for them. And of course, making information available as much as possible.

**Glades:** Thank you so much, Cyprian, for sharing all that. It has really been amazing. And the information has been so good. I believe our listeners will take everything that you've been sharing, and more emphasis to the government as well that our schools should as well employ teachers with the knowledge of sign language because this has always been the biggest challenge in our schools. And that is why you will find that children with total deafness will always have their separate unit, which is not the best thing since we are looking at inclusion in this context. Thank you so much. Mr. Cyprian. As Backup Uganda we always say every child can learn. Thank you.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to Every Chance Can Learn. Please share your thoughts with us. Join the conversation on Facebook, or send your questions to 0772630078. Do you want to learn



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