

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DEAF INCLUSIVITY IN SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT FUTURE SUCCESS- Written by Lianna Selle

**Lian:** Good morning! My name is Lian, and I am a 17 year old student at Thomas Carr College and St Mary's School for the Deaf. I am here with my Teacher of the Deaf, Miss Mathews, who helps support me while I'm at school.

**Miss Mathews:** Hi Lian, thanks for having me!

**Lian:** You are welcome! I'm here to talk about something that I really care about. Why Deaf and Hard of Hearing students need more support in school to become happier and more successful.

**Ms. Mathews:** That sounds like that's an important issue for you, especially because you are a young deaf person yourself.

**Lian:** Yes! This is important to me because I have been deaf for most of my life. I was born hearing, but now I am about 70% deaf in my ears. I have a hearing aid in my right ear, and a cochlear implant in my left ear. Even though I have them help me hear, it's still very difficult for me to learn and do things that hearing people might find easy.

**Ms Mathews:** Absolutely. What sort of things can deaf people struggle with in your opinion?

**Lian:** I think deaf people have a hard time communicating with people. That makes finding jobs that are supportive after we finish school very hard for us. We don't have many options for jobs or schools in Australia. When schools have special education, it helps a lot.

**Ms. Mathews:** What do you mean by special education? Like, supportive programs to help you learn?

**Lian:** Like having sign language interpreters, videos with captions, in class support with Teachers of the Deaf like yourself and other IT that is very helpful. All of these things help deaf students finish school and get good jobs. For example, schools with these supports have 70% more deaf students finishing Year 12.

**Ms. Mathews:** That's a good point. One of the main reasons I became a Teacher of the Deaf was to make sure education is inclusive! Although it's my job, I think it's everyone's responsibility to make sure we all have equal opportunities to learn and grow, regardless of differences.

**Lian:** Not everyone thinks like that! Sometimes, when we aren't included, it can lead to mental health issues too. Deaf people are twice as likely to have mental health problems compared to hearing people. A way to help is making sure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students have a

chance speak to people they can talk to who know sign language and special therapy programs for them.

**Ms. Mathews:** Like counselors or therapists?

**Lian:** Yes. Deaf people face more mental health problems because they have trouble communicating and can feel very alone. Having counselors who understand sign language and can provide special care can really help them feel better.

**Ms. Mathews:** I understand. What do you wish teachers knew about your experiences as a Deaf person at school?

**Lian:** I grew up in Darwin and went to a primary school where I couldn't communicate with the teachers and had trouble learning. To get better help, I moved to Melbourne and went to a deaf school. I learned sign language in Year 5, but it was hard because everyone signed differently, and I couldn't find friends with the same interests. So, I went back to a mainstream school. I'm still trying to improve, but life as a deaf person is hard. I am always trying my best but sometimes feel not included in everyday life.

**Miss Mathews:** We definitely need to place an emphasis on creating an inclusive school environment where everyone feels comfortable and included. I think one of the main things I've learnt is to listen to my Deaf students! I think listening to, and understanding the lived experiences of the Deaf students and staff members that I work with is the surest way to improve inclusion in schools. By incorporating student feedback, you'll be able to create a more inclusive learning space for all students.

**Lian:** I like it when teachers listen to my needs. It makes me happy, and I want everyone to treat deaf people the same way they treat hearing people, so it can be equal.

**Miss Mathews:** I know that there is a course that teachers and workplaces can do called Deaf Awareness Training as well, that can help them understand more about the Deaf community, the challenges they face and the best ways to communicate with them. This training can be provided in person or online, and it can help education workers feel more confident when interacting with their Deaf students. I know that it can be intimidating sometimes because we don't want to do the wrong thing, or something unintentionally offensive, but it shouldn't be like that!

**Lian:** Exactly. It helps both the individuals and society if we are open to learning about others. Everyone should have the chance to be happy and feel like they fit in.

**Ms. Mathews:** Thank you, Lian. It's been great hearing about what we can do as schools to improve the lives of students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

**Lian:** Thank you, Ms. Mathews. I hope we can make these changes together.