

Note, things in square brackets [] are things that were not explicitly said, but add context to the conversation as written and reviewed by interviewee Shawn Phua.

Acknowledgement of Country

00:00 – 00:39

Music Playing at start

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QUESTION 1

00:39 – 07:24

Imi

Today on Raise The Platform, we have, Shawn. And his [Auslan] interpreter Paul. Shawn, would you like say a few words and introduce yourself to Raise The Platform. Go!

Shawn

Hello, me Yes. My name is Shawn Phua, And I'm profoundly Deaf. I was born profoundly Deaf and Auslan is my first language. I live in Brisbane. It's lovely to meet you, Imi.

Imi

Thank you very much. So, tell us a bit about what you do in what you do.

Shawn

I'm 31 years of age [this year of 2023]. And my cultural background is Malaysian-Chinese. I'm a full time TAFE student at moment, studying certificate IV in TAE, Training and Assessment Education. The goal to become an [accredited] Auslan teacher [and Auslan assessor for vocational students who are adult learners]. In my free time, I support the Deaf community, and disabled NDIS participants in advocacy.

And I'm very passionate, to ensure that Deaf people, as well as hard of hearing people, and people with other disabilities have the access that they need, particularly in the employment space, which will benefit not only themselves but our society.

I think that it's important, I mean, that all inverted commas normal people that are particularly our employers, understand how Deaf and disabled people bring strength and advantages, as well as innovative solutions to the workplace environment. It's important to be open minded respectful, friendly, kind, and also empathetic. I think these are all key values, as well as compassion, not to make assumptions or a bias or prejudice. Also not to use a deficit way of thinking. A person can't do this. Rather, a person can do this. And again, not, not to exploit neglect or use or abuse Deaf or disabled people. I think it's very sad that normal people see that people disability as a burden in our society and mainstream society that couldn't be further from the truth. Everyone is normal in their own way subjective. It's all about being human.

Communicating accessing the world in which we live, and the world continues to change at a fast pace, particularly the fast pace of technology. Letting people more aware now of participation diversity and inclusion, as well as equity of participation in the workplace. Deaf people are more confident today. And we are... in the olden days, people who are Deaf and disabled will pushed to the side, and often in Institutes and not able to mix freely in mainstream society.

We're not shy we're not hidden away we are confident out. Employers obviously to make reasonable accommodations and adjustments which require financial resources. There is one government program [under Job Access, a federal Government agency], I want to draw your attention to the EAF, [which means] Employee Assistance Fund. The EAF provides supports for deaf people such as up to \$6,000 for interpreting and captioning, to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing in the workplace to be able to access workplace meetings training reviews.

The EAF is there to provide also [Deafness Awareness Training and Disability] Awareness Training [in the form] of disability workshops in person or remotely, up to the, the value of \$1,500 [per EAF applicant]. You also have an occupational therapist or come to your workplace to ensure that it's accessible for people who are Deaf, in our case that there are visual alarms rather than audio alarms, you may have a device which vibrates in the event of an emergency. There's also [another] \$855 financial assistance for [hearing co-workers] to learn [basic] Auslan, to do Auslan Certificate II, that way the Deaf person can have a buddy in the workplace that understands [basic] Auslan. There are also wage subsidies and incentives available. These are brilliant business [incentives], I believe, it can be up to [around \$10,000 to \$20,000] depending on the type of disability and access needs. It really encourages employers to take on [Deaf and] disabled people. And Job Access is another Government initiative, which looks after the EAF for any questions or concerns I would encourage people to google "Job Access" [for] EAF online give them a call on 1800 [464 800], their staff are really friendly and more than happy to answer any question that people have between business hours Monday to Friday.

Now, my tip for employers is that employers [and] HR recruiters really need to make an effort to apply for the EAF to ensure that it's easy for Deaf and disabled people to be able to enter the work place, and not leave that on the Deaf or disabled person's shoulders because the EAF includes a lot of red tape as a very clear process you've got to go through to confirm

one your disability and two, you are actually employed. I faced a number of barriers. And often, I found that employers want to give you casual shifts [with instable employment in temporary or contract basis]. The EAF is very strict, [it's not available to ad-hoc employers], you need to work eight hour minimum, a shift at least eight hours per week for 13 weeks. To be eligible for the EAF, that [is nearly] three months of work. So the EAF [& the Australian Government] really is encouraging employers in the community, Deaf and disabled people, permanent work. And the EAF [as I said], let's say, one day per week work, then you are eligible for it on a regular basis. Centrelink, the Centrelink system for to set receiving the disability support pension of disabled and Deaf people do not want to lose us those benefits of reduced travel public transport [fees], TAFE education and Pharmaceutical Benefits and that's also a very difficult question so I hope I've answered your question, clearly Imi.

QUESTION 2

07:24 – 11:36

Imi

Well, thank you. That was really good. Those are probably some of the best sort of answers that we've ever had on this show the most organised answers we've ever had. Now we're going to be doing question two. So can you tell us a bit more about your decision to disclose, or not disclose your disability in recruitment and employment.

Shawn

Based upon my personal experience, Imi. It's very difficult to decide, why I say that is because when I tell a person that I am profoundly Deaf and that I use Auslan to communicate and will need an Auslan interpreter for a job interview, many employers or HR professionals, just literally shut off, ignore my responses, hang up on me do not reply to me when I use the video relay service, the VRS, to speak to people via telephone on the National Relay Service, making inquiries about a job interview, that really lessens my confidence. I feel quite sad and frustrated and the Australian community just is not open minded just don't embrace people disabilities in the workplace. When I finished year 12, I was a young man at that time. I went to university and applied for a number of jobs. And I did disclose that I was profoundly Deaf to please only contact me via SMS because I cannot hear on the telephone. The number of people that rejected my applications, that didn't want to work with me at all until I graduated from university, and then looking for my first professional job I applied for 1000 jobs, Imi. I had 50 interviews out of the 1000 applications, and six years ago, I realized that I no longer was going to disclose my Deafness to interviewing staff or panel members on the online application systems, and not to contact me via SMS or just leave my email address there, because I couldn't take people's calls when they called me on the telephone. So, when I received an SMS asking 'Could you please call me', I would say 'look, I'm not available, and available later at night', and they'd say 'no, I can only speak to you during business hours'.

Now I have conversations with many of my friends have different disabilities to myself they can be Deaf or hard of hearing, blind or neurodiverse, and they've told me, based upon their experience they no longer on their LinkedIn profile disclose their Deafness or disability, including on job applications, because HR professionals are biased, employers are biased that discriminate against us.

So when I apply for jobs now, Imi, I act like, inverted commas, a normal person. In my case, a person that can hear so I am not discriminated against, at the point of even getting an interview.

I act like a normal person so that employees do not know that I'm Deaf. So whenever I apply for a job and receive an interview. There's no reference to my being Deaf, I just included my email address, no phone number. And that's how I've found I'm getting job interviews. And it's very frustrating to have to do that.

So, over the last six years [since 2016, I've applied for 3000 jobs, and I have attended 120 interviews [so far which were in person, online and by email/text messaging or slow mail]. Many of the interviews I've had have not utilised Auslan interpreters [or had them provided]. So, we've written to each other, the employer and myself. I put forward the Disability Discrimination Act [1992], and many employers say, I do not want an [Auslan] interpreter so I have to make the adjustment to write with the employer; notes. And you'll see that there are many, many solutions that we have to find, to be able to get those interviews and jobs. I found often that comes down to trust and confidence. And many of my friends who are Deaf, Imi, or disabled, are no longer disclosing that time in application community is not disability friendly in the workplace [when] it comes to recruitment. Hope that answers your question.

Imi

It does really well.

CONVERSATION 1

11:36 – 14:21

Imi

So, Shawn, I have a disability that I can, in a way, keep hidden, though it is not ideal for me to keep it hidden. It is a disability that if I don't tell you, you may not think that I have a disability but you probably will think there is something different about me. Som I have autism, and it is a disability that if I were to have completely hidden it from the world I probably would have gone forever, people, not ever finding out that I had this disability and throughout high school, I, and primary school to an extent, I did that, I did keep it hidden, and I did keep it secret, but when I got to university, I met with a very, it's very interesting

sort of environment where these sort of things are talked about in the open, and I openly talked about my disability with people. And now my disability is printed openly.

Shawn

Thank you for sharing that, Imi. Your personal experience with regard to having autism, and the adjustments that you had to make in the world, I can relate to that, from being a young boy today to being 31. I also disclose openly that I'm profoundly Deaf, that I cannot lip read or speak, that I use Auslan to communicate and written English. And people think because you cannot speak and lipread, you must be dumb [and mute], I say no, I'm not. I have language and communication, I communicate in a different way to you, being a hearing speaking person, doesn't mean that I'm dumb [and mut]e right doesn't mean that you're intelligent, because you can hear and speak, we just communicate in different ways.

So, when I went to work, I find it quite difficult to share my disability, but at university, TAFE, and in the community - sports, and NDIS space I'm very open about that. Everyone knows when I go to a shop, a restaurant, a theater, a doctor or a dentist, I disclose I am Deaf, people know that I'm Deaf. I wear hearing aids, and I use sign language so it's a visible sign.

When I received, employment, then I made it known to all of my colleagues and teams that I'm profoundly Deaf, that I use Auslan to communicate, I do not lip read and [can't speak so] I communicate in written language [English on paper with a pen]. So, I found that you've got to break in, break those barriers. But if you're not given the opportunity at work at all, it's very difficult. But when you're invited in it makes it easier to disclose.

QUESTION 3

14:21 – 16:02

Imi

So, what advice do you have for disabled people seeking work.

Shawn

My advice, Imi, for disabled, young people seeking work today is, look out for businesses who are disability friendly, that have disability inclusion policies and have those values. Look at the culture of the organization, the CEO or the leaders, set the tone and culture. Look for that apply for jobs in those organizations that are supportive and do not discriminate against disabled people. Talk to your friends your network, professional networks, NDIS, try everything that you can. [You can go to the website: www.seek.com to find those employment opportunities, and importantly find jobs that match your skills, align to your values, your dreams, your ambitions, your career goals. Think about transport. How you are going to get to that place of employment, hours, days that you want to work, days, nights,

mornings, afternoons, nights. And also have backup ideas and strategies and solutions to the barriers that know you're going to face in the interview, plus in employment, when you get that job. That's often the hardest part for people, disabled people [and Deaf people] like myself, there's aspects that was highlighted the hardest parts of finding a job.

QUESTION 4

16:02 – 18:31

Imi

And now we have the next question. And here we go. As an Auslan user in the Deaf community, can you tell us more about supporting accessible communication for all people?

Shawn

Yes. As a Deaf person that uses Auslan, my experience, may be a little different to other white Australians who were born Deaf[/deaf/hard of hearing]. As an Asian Deaf person [and Person of Colour[from the CALD[/ESL] community. English is not my first language or my own [or my preferred] language. In fact, it's my fourth language [outside home]. My first language being sign language, and my third language being English***.

I've noticed how difficult it is for many people who do not understand Auslan or sign language, or how to get a Deaf person's attention by simply tapping them on the shoulder, some people rudely tap you on the head or point you will kick you poke you rather than come to your face in front of you, or gently tap your shoulder or catch your eye gaze or. That way, and be able to maintain communication with you by maintaining eye contact.

In Deaf culture, it is very important to engage in Auslan. Auslan is a visual-spatial language it's very rich, and it can be quite direct. Deaf people don't mean to cause offence. Our communication style can be direct. Given the structure of Auslan.

So, what we would ask, is to be patient with us like anyone else would be. And that just ensure that you communicate clearly and concisely like short notes. Don't hurry us. Deaf people love it if you try to show you know some basic Auslan to communicate with us. Auslan has eight states. For example, some of the signs in Brisbane are different to the signs where you are at SYN Radio in Melbourne.

For examples this one for car is probably the one that you familiar with car like putting your hands around the steering wheel here in Queensland. In Victoria, the sign you use for cars that is the one that we use for coffee grinder for coffee. It can be quite confusing! Funny, huh.

QUESTION 5

18:31 – 20:40

Imi

I always thought it was a bit odd that Auslan was never taught at schools, yet they also taught languages, outside of English. How should we make Auslan more widely learned in Australia, and around the world?

Imi

Yeah, that's a difficult question to answer, Imi. I find it a real challenge to answer that in a short period of time. How about I just make a few points. Firstly, governments, both federal and state need to give more opportunities for people who are Deaf, to become Auslan teachers. So Auslan teachers are available to teach in our schools. Right now, the curriculum assessment it's not always flexible or accommodating to Deaf people's needs. And what I found, often is that many people who are not Deaf are learning basic Auslan and culturally appropriating from the Deaf community and getting those jobs, teaching, based upon the basic Auslan they know, rather than employing Deaf people to teach Auslan. How can a person who can hear who has just done a basic Auslan course be able to teach and explain Auslan?****

If it's the case where there's no Deaf person qualified to teach Auslan, I understand that a person is not Deaf could teach, they should be assisted by a Deaf person to provide their content expertise, even though they may not have that qualification. So to answer your question, one more Deaf people able to access higher education become Auslan teachers, then two, making [and ensuring] Auslan is available in our schools. I hope that answers your question.

And another important point is that Deaf people are very protective of Auslan because Auslan is our language. It was created by Deaf people. It is our language that we use every day. So, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who do not want non-Indigenous people teaching their language and their culture and ensuring that the custodians of the language and culture, share that with other people who would like to learn it. Similarly with the Deaf community.

QUESTION 6

20:40 – 22:30

Imi

And we got another question after this. One of your hobbies is learning foreign sign languages. What is your favourite part about doing this?

Shawn

Okay, I really enjoy learning languages, it helps my cognitive development. Plus, my [brain] cells to grow. My meta cognition, from an intellectual point of view, as well as understanding then different cultures, languages, and how they influence one another. I will give you one example.

In Australia, the sign for eat is like this. It uses the hand think about when you're eating something taking into your mouth, or sandwich when China sign for eat is very different. it's like this. And that is taking chopsticks, for example, from a bowl to your mouth, that is their sign for eat. It is very different; you can appreciate how culture informs language. In Malaysia, for example, Malaysian Deaf people do not use very much facial expression. It is a very reserved culture. Whereas in Australia, the Deaf community is much more expressive, [they] use a lot of animation and facial expressions [in the terms of "Non-Manual Features"/NMF]. As a general rule, Asian Deaf people are more reserved, they do not use as much facial expression in their communication *****

Signs continue to evolve every day. Think about the sign for telephone, when it was first invented, and how the telephone has changed throughout the ages. That also is reflected in the signs we use for telephone.

Another example is, how sign languages in countries around the world have been removed and replaced by non-Indigenous sign languages. That now is being challenged and those artificial sign languages, brought in from other countries, being replaced by the natural Indigenous sign language.

QUESTION 7

22:30 – 24:17

[Imi]

Now, is this the last question. Um, so one thing I've noticed that there is a lot of different sign language, even in places that speak English, so Britain, America and Australia, or have a different sign languages. Do you think the variety of different sign languages around the world makes global accessibility a challenge?

Shawn

Yes, I understand what you're saying about every country has its own national sign language, that does present a challenge. However, the World Federation for the Deaf has said that there are over 300 different [national] sign languages around the globe. In addition to that, there are different states and dialects. So, there are local variations. Similar to spoken languages that have different dialects, different accents.

When, when a person, for example, is on zoom, you want to ensure that the interpreter is easy to see and not in a small corner which is like a whisper to a person who can hear you struggle to hear, we need to be able to see clearly like you are able to hear clearly. Many

people assume, you're right, that sign language is universal. It is not as I've just said, there are over 300 different [national] sign languages around the globe.

Each country has its own culture and therefore language, and it's no different in the Deaf community. Yes, in America, they use spoken and written English and American Sign Language is different to British Sign Language. Even though they have the same origin, there's a different education and cultures or the sign language of the Americans developed, and therefore there's more opportunity for [people who are passionate with Disability inclusion and] diversity to learn different languages [or wanting to communicate with the global Deaf communities on social media sites in the online world].

I hope that's a short succinct answer, Imi.

Imi

That's good!

*** Australian Signed English (Manually Coded English – word for word translation of spoken English with grammatical signing markers) is my mother tongue and first language at home but I would say it is a former communication tool (signing system – educational method used in the late 1970s until early 2010s in Queensland schools – the education system had 5 years of 2008-2013 for the Signed English to Auslan transition) used at school when I was young in the 1990s and 2000s. I learnt Auslan late at school so Auslan is my second signed language used in the family home environment but written English is my third language used at home. Extra note: The Queensland School for the Deaf formally used Australian Signed English in 1978 and my old high school finally changed to Auslan in 2010 during my final Year 12 schooling.

**** This is a very complex and sensitive, politically topic so the Deaf community do not mind using Children of Deaf Adults – adult CODAs to teach Auslan alternatively.

***** and language except Asian Deaf people who travel a lot to overseas countries and they are exposed to Western cultures of Deaf communities and are heavily influenced by International Signs (used only in the World Federation of the Deaf's events like Deaf Congress/Deaf international conferences or UN/EU meetings and Deaflympics – Olympic sports for Deaf people to compete with foreign Deaf sportspeople).