

# I Love Coffee empowers the hearing-impaired

Every September, Deaf Awareness Month aims to highlight hearing-impaired people, the challenges they face and the accomplishments they have achieved.



Thobeka serving a customer

The month is dedicated to educating South Africa on deafness, the deaf community and their culture, and sign language. And I Love Coffee, a social development enterprise originating in Cape Town, will use this month to draw attention to deaf people and celebrate their achievements one coffee at a time.

## Why coffee?

I Love Coffee recognises the potential of a good cup of coffee to bridge the communication gap and get people to interact –a fact that pushes their purpose to provide training and employment opportunities for the deaf youth.

Established in 2016 by Gary Hopkins and Mike Morritt-Smith, I Love Coffee trains people from the deaf community in basic coffee skills, customer service and other hospitality competencies.

To date, I Love Coffee provides an in-office coffee bar and food services to Virgin Active South Africa and Publicis Group Africa national head offices in Cape Town. The company also has retail cafés in Strand street, Cape Town, and at the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital in Johannesburg.

Marietta Rooi, a chef at I Love Coffee, says she would like to work at the company for a long time and shares how she has built relationships at work, "Before, I had no relationships with my work colleagues even though I worked long hours. Now, I have made great friends with my team".

Barista Thobeka Ketiswe agrees that I Love Coffee has helped her gain more confidence. "I now have full support in my work and love the relationships I have with my deaf teammates and even the hearing staff," she says. "I have learnt a lot and feel more confident in serving and communicating with customers."

## **From bean to...**

To coincide with Deaf Awareness Month, the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship South Africa has committed business-development services to the value of R3 million over the next three years to help accelerate I Love Coffee's growth.

This investment not only provides the company with an opportunity to scale their purpose and impact across the nation by providing coffee-bar solutions in new markets, such as corporate offices, but also aligns with the Branson Centre's mandate of "changing business for good".

The Branson Center's investment is followed by more exciting news for the young social enterprise. I Love Coffee recently received the local contract to supply coffee and barista services for US-based WeWork, a shared-workspace company that has recently opened its first location in Rosebank, Johannesburg. Further sites are planned to open in South Africa by early 2020.

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