Innovative Practice 2019 on Independent Living and Political Participation

# A Sign Language App, Dictionary and Learning Tool

# South Africa / Wigital – FingerTalk

## Summary:

### In 2015 FingerTalk, a South African start-up company, launched a free app that enables people who are deaf or hard of hearing to learn and communicate in sign language. Moreover, the company has digitalized the South African Sign Language (SASL) dictionary and provides interactive learning tools such as quizzes to test the knowledge of their users. Another feature allows users to share SASL signs via social media and the messenger service WhatsApp. Until mid-2018, more than 4,000 users have downloaded the app.

## Problems Targeted:

### Learning sign language is very expensive in South Africa, and there are no free learning resources available online. Moreover, many people who are deaf or hard of hearing miss job opportunities due to existing communication gaps.

## Solution, Innovation, and Impact:

### FingerTalk is a free sign language app and an online sign language dictionary for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The app is designed as a self-learning tool where the lessons learned are tested through quizzes to determine individual progress. It is the first time the South African sign language dictionary has been digitalized and made available for free.

### In addition to the self-learning tool, the app features a notice board where events and news of the community of persons with hearing impairments are exchanged and where users are encouraged to stay in touch with one another. FingerTalk also allows users to share SASL signs via social media and Whatsapp. The app works with a combination of images and animated sequences. It is based on South African sign language but incorporates some local dialects as well.

### In 2018, FingerTalk had more than 4,000 users and is used at two South African universities as part of their syllabus and as a quick reference guide.

## Funding, Outlook, and Transferability:

### FingerTalk is funded by the SAB Foundation (South African Brewery is an international beverage conglomerate). The app is free of charge and allows advertisers to promote events and products via the app’s noticeboard. FingerTalk aims for sustainability through these advertising revenues.

### FingerTalk intends to further increase the use of the app within South Africa before going international. The company has secured the publishing and distribution rights of the dictionary, which gives it a competitive advantage over possible new entrants.

### The South African Government has recently approved sign language as the country’s 12th official language, which is expected to further increase the usage and coverage of sign language.

## About the Practice at a Glance:

### NAME OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: FingerTalk

### ORGANIZATION: Wigital

### COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: South Africa

## Facts and Figures:

### In use at two South African Universities

### On average, FingerTalk attracts six new users per day.

## Contact:

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### [FingerTalk App Website](http://www.fingertalk.co.za/)

## Links and Further Reading:

### [FingerTalk Website](http://www.fingertalk.co.za/)

## Quote:

“You have enabled me to communicate with my 12-year-old deaf daughter for the first time ever. Thank you!”

—Martin, father of a beneficiary

Factsheet reference: PRA19 1200 ZAR