

“HiddenGems”: empowering WA’s Deaf community through entrepreneurship education

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Tuesday 26th March 2019, Perth, Australia.

Adults with hearing loss are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and they face many obstacles in their careers, from unexpected barriers, to attitudinal discrimination in the workplace. But a new entrepreneur and innovation program, HiddenGems, is set to change that, and will launch first in WA next month. The first-of-its kind program aims to empower the deaf community through entrepreneurship education. At a time of digital disruption, traditional career pathways are changing, and people are approaching their working lives differently. The HiddenGems program will equip Deaf and hard of hearing people with essential skills that are required to not only start and run a business, but that are also invaluable to any future workplace. Access Plus WA Deaf - a profit for purpose organisation known for supporting the Deaf and hard of hearing in WA since 1921 – is a recipient of a combined Commonwealth and Western Australian government NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant to increase employment opportunities for people with disability in WA. Access Plus, has partnered with Australian entrepreneurship educator and consultancy, Gemstar, to co-create HiddenGems, a modified version of Gemstar’s very successful and internationally recognised, ‘YoungGems™’ Entrepreneur and Innovation Program, now an accredited Diploma with Kaplan in Singapore. David Gibson, CEO of Access Plus WA Deaf said, “We’re excited to collaborate with Gemstar to bring this program to the Deaf and hard of hearing community in WA”. “People with hearing loss can be socially isolated and economically disadvantaged with data indicating that the employment rates for people with hearing loss are 20.5% lower for men and 16.5% lower for women.” Mr Gibson said that there is a global trend, buoyed by innovative technology, of deaf and hard of hearing people opening their own businesses or becoming part of the gig economy, however we haven’t quite seen this happen to the same level yet in Australia. “The HiddenGems program will prepare deaf or hard of hearing people in learning ‘real world’ skills coupled with mentoring, training and strategic guidance, for deaf-owned or operated businesses to be successful based on their unique circumstances.” Gemma Manning, CEO and Founder of Gemstar said, “We’re delighted to bring our international program to WA’s Deaf and hard of hearing community as a first in Australia. We are firm believers that entrepreneurship should be accessible by everyone yet unfortunately this isn’t the case. “Entrepreneurship still lacks diversity and as leaders, we need to change this and open up entrepreneurship to all members of the community, especially those who are often overlooked and not given the opportunity to participate in such programs. Being independent through skills to help you create and run a business is incredibly empowering and this is an area that Gemstar champions. We provide a safe and nurturing environment for all and can’t wait to assist Deaf and hard of hearing people in WA with solving real world problems and developing solutions with global relevancy.”

Any person who is deaf, culturally Deaf, or hard of hearing and wishes to learn more about the HiddenGems program can contact Access Plus WA Deaf at enquiry@accessplus.org.au or at 9441 2677.

For media enquiries, please contact Kate Bagnell on kate@gemstartechnology.com or at (08) 6381 9110

Additional background information:

- One in six Australians currently suffer from some form of hearing loss.
- In 2005, a study found that over 3.55 million Australians were living with hearing loss. Nearly half of them were working age (16-64 years).
- A person with hearing loss earns an average of \$10K less than people with no hearing loss or treated hearing loss.
- Labour force participation rates decrease substantially as the degree of hearing loss increases.
- Hearing loss costs Australia a staggering \$12 billion annually in lost productivity and other impacts.
- Deaf - with a capital "D" - is used to refer to people who are culturally Deaf. These people actively use Sign Language; they see themselves as being culturally Deaf and part of the Deaf community. The use of the "lowercase d" deaf simply refers to the medical condition of having hearing loss.

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