

# Introduction.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Lydia Gratis". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lydia" and the last name "Gratis" written in a single, continuous style.

South Africa, Malawi & Ireland

Activist, Public Speaker, Creator, educator and Writer.

Social Inclusion and Communications officer.

BA International Development & Anthropology,

Maynooth University, Ireland



Some of us didn't  
choose to become  
activists, we were  
activated.



# Education & Representation

3 R's that Black deaf youth don't experience in the European education system.

- Rigour
- Relevance
- Relationship.

Education must be rigorous and relevant, but most importantly...  
the educator must have a relationship with the student.

No relationship = No learning

Whenever you see a Black deaf child academically underperforming, it's because the teachers do not have a vested interest in that child.

Very FEW Black deaf youth in Europe enter 3rd level education, proving that the lack of Black deaf teachers and role models significantly affects the identity, communication and education of Black deaf youth.

# Sign Language & Community

- According to the European Union of the Deaf, there are approximately 80,000 deaf people who use sign language in Europe.
- The lack of representation and cultural understanding in important community spaces can create a challenging environment for Black deaf children in predominantly white deaf communities.
- All the countries in Europe have their own sign language which limits Black deaf people especially youth who are not given enough opportunities to meet.

# Identity & Heritage

"Growing up in a predominantly white environment can have negative psychological consequences for Black youth, including decreased self esteem and a heightened sense of racial identity confusion."

- Dr. Monique J. Ward, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan

Psychological

Anthropological

Sociological

"Black Deaf youth often encounter difficulties in schools and other institutions because they are forced to navigate spaces where their race and deafness intersect. They are further disadvantaged by the absence of Black Deaf teachers, leaders, and role models who share their cultural and linguistic background. This can result in a sense of cultural discontinuity and isolation, which can have negative impacts on their sense of self and well-being"

(Smith & Padden, 2014, p. 123).

# Becoming.

Involved in;

- Founded “Saved By The Sign” with Romel Belcher.
- EUDY President 2022-2024 (1st Black president in 35 years)
- Founder of Ubuntu European Deaf Youth (EUDY focus group)
- Member of the Gaisce Council 2023-2025 (President of Ireland’s advisory board for youth.)
- Irish Deaf Society board member (Irish NAD)
- Media manager at Deaf Women Space
- 2017-2019 president of Irish Deaf Youth Association (Irish YNAD)



# Being The Change We Want To See.

Association



**European Union for the Deaf Youth (EUDY)** is a European non-profit organisation consisting of 30 national associations all over Europe.

EUDY's mission is to create a Europe where all young deaf people are able to come together and share their experiences across cultures and boundaries, so they can enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. Full social and political participation empowered by non-formal training and cross-cultural youth exchange, including access to education and employment.

# Being The Change We Want To See.

Focus Group



Ubuntu European Deaf Youth (UEDY) is one of EUDY's focus groups set up to advocate for the social inclusion and elevation of deaf Black, Indigenous and Youth of colour.

# Being The Change We Want To See.



*Saved By The Sign*

Our mission is to unify across differences and advance belonging within the deaf community.

Our vision is to spark a movement of unity and shared understanding through innovative digital media, intercultural education and events.

# Being The Change We Want To See.

In 2021 we hosted;



- 24 Anti-racism, raciolinguistics and DEI workshops for Sign Language Interpreting companies, youth organisations, deaf schools, universities and companies in 8 European countries.
- Participated in numerous digital panel discussions with the Black deaf community in around the world and wrote a 13 chapter e-learning course for Deaf Australia on anti-racism issues and global development.
- Whilst also delivering a little something for the culture, through podcasts, Black deaf empowerment brunches and so on

# Call To Action

*“ Alone you can go fast, but together we can go far. “*

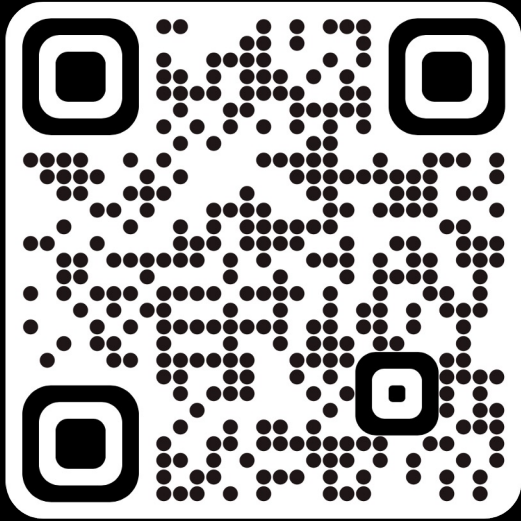
- African Proverb



There is a need for Pan-African unity within the global Black deaf community and it all starts with education and youth it starts with us documenting our truth, passing on our history and sharing what Blackness and Black history look like in the deaf context.

Without each other this fight for equality is a long road.

# *Saved By The Sign*



Scan me!



Thank you!