

## News Release

### **CIBC FIRSTCARIBBEAN AFFIRMS ITS COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY BY HOSTING A WORKSHOP ON DEAF AWARENESS FOR MEMBERS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

**Bridgetown, Barbados. 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022.** “I use my eyes to hear you”. Those were the words of guest speaker, Lionel Smith as he gave the feature address at a workshop designed to give business houses in Barbados a glimpse into the life of the hearing impaired. The workshop was a joint venture between The Barbados Council for the Disabled and Signature Interpretations and was hosted by CIBC FirstCaribbean at its Great House Conference Room.

Participants learned more about the experiences of the deaf as they navigate a world dominated by those who can hear. The workshop, entitled “**Hi There, I Can’t Hear!**” was designed to help those in business in Barbados to increase their knowledge of how to effectively communicate with deaf people and to understand the barriers they face. The training was aimed at improving customer service and engendering in the various organisations a culture of community, equality, inclusion and diversity.

During his speech, Mr. Smith, who was born deaf and was assisted by an interpreter, told the participants of his experience as a deaf student at the Barbados Community College, where he studied Tourism and was the top student in his year. He noted that he went on to a successful work attachment at FLOW but noted that many deaf people struggle to earn a living as businesses are not often equipped to accommodate them in the workplace. He noted that even as customers, deaf people often struggle to make themselves understood or even navigate the customer service areas of many businesses. He made a passionate plea for businesses to provide improved, simple signage and to make changes to their customer service areas which would improve access to service by the members of the deaf community and all those who were living with a disability.

Welcoming the participants to the workshop was Chief Administrative Officer at CIBC FirstCaribbean, Neil Brennan. Mr. Brennan spoke of the bank’s commitment to inclusion and diversity, which includes hiring members of the deaf community and other disabled members of society among its staff and ensuring conditions for transacting business in its offices were accommodating and welcoming for them. He noted that the bank had facilitated a work experience programme for several members of the disabled community prior to the Covid pandemic and was keen to restart the programme as soon as conditions were safe to do so.

Mr. Brennan also spoke of his personal experience with a deaf person, as his niece was born deaf in Scotland, and he told the participants of the adjustments he and his family had to make - like learning sign language - to ensure she developed into a happy and productive member of society.

He asked the participants to present the output of the workshop to CIBC FirstCaribbean and other businesses, so that companies would have a better understanding of what they need to do both as

employers and as service providers to help those in the deaf community. Mr. Brennan made an offer to host further workshops of this nature at the bank's conference facilities.

The facilitator of the workshop was Bonnie Leonce, assisted by members of the Deaf Community. Bonnie Leonce is an American Sign Language Interpreter by profession and has been so for over 25 years. She is the founder of "Signature Interpretations", a business which is committed to providing quality and professional sign language services and training to individuals and organisations to effectively communicate with members of the Deaf community".

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#### **About CIBC FirstCaribbean**

CIBC FirstCaribbean is a relationship bank offering a full range of market leading financial services through our Corporate and Investment Banking, Retail and Business Banking and Wealth Management segments. We are located in fifteen (15) countries around the Caribbean, providing the banking services through approximately 2,800 employees in 64 branches and offices. We are one of the largest regionally listed financial services institutions in the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean, with US\$13 billion in assets and market capitalization of US\$1.3 billion. We also have a representative office in Hong Kong that provides business development and relationship management for our fund administration. The face of banking is changing throughout the world and CIBC FirstCaribbean intends to lead these changes with the expertise, integrity and knowledge gained from banking in the Caribbean since 1836.

CIBC FirstCaribbean is a member of the CIBC Group. CIBC is a leading Canadian-based global financial institution with 11 million personal banking and business clients. Through our three major business units - Retail and Business Banking, Wealth Management and Capital Markets - CIBC offers a full range of products and services through its comprehensive electronic banking network, branches, and offices across Canada with offices in the United States and around the world. For more information about CIBC FirstCaribbean, visit [www.cibcfib.com](http://www.cibcfib.com), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) or [YouTube](#).

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Neil Brennan, Chief Administrative Officer at CIBC FirstCaribbean, address a workshop on Deaf Awareness entitled “Hi There! I Can’t Hear!”



Members of the Deaf Awareness Workshop “Hi There! I Can’t Hear” applaud the speakers.



Feature Speaker, Lionel Smith, tells of his experience as a deaf person at school and in the world of work.