

**News Release**

**For Immediate Release**



## **Businesses Focus On Serving The Deaf**

**Bridgetown, Barbados, 5 October 2023-** “Don’t call us hearing-impaired nor ‘deaf and dumb’,” Marcelle Boxill and Lionel Smith signed emphatically.

“We prefer to be called deaf, it is simple, it doesn’t need any addition,” Boxill said assisted by interpreter Paula Medford.

“And hearing-impaired is just a politically correct term,” Lionel Smith explained, “We carry the term ‘deaf’ with ... pride; deaf or hard-of-hearing.”

“Calling us anything else ... makes us feel less than what we are.” This was one of the several messages which professionals and businesspeople from several local companies found out first-hand from people in the deaf community during the recently-held, “See the Invisible!” Spreading awareness, education and support for Deaf people” workshop held at the CIBC FirstCaribbean’s Great House in Warrens.

But the messages were several during the workshop. Chief Interpretation Consultant at Signature Interpretations, Bonnie Leonce referring to the workshop’s title, told the audience at the opening session that the deaf were invisible because their disability could not be recognised by looking at them.

“You don’t know until you try to communicate with them, then you are likely to have a challenge as you seek to serve them with professionalism because you don’t know how to communicate with them.” Leonce stressed the workshop’s importance, advising participants that they would be exposed to some of the challenges faced by the deaf and hard-of-hearing as well as the methods that could be employed to better serve and support them.

The importance was also underlined by CIBC FirstCaribbean’s Managing Director, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Donna Wellington who said she particularly liked the challenge the title threw out, “because sadly persons with disabilities continue to be somewhat invisible to too many in our society. Their ideas, skills, knowledge, abilities and unique ways of seeing, navigating and contributing to society are lost to so many who simply won’t see past their disabilities.”

“Workshops like this one and other activities and efforts to fully educate, sensitise and empower us to engage with persons with disabilities on an equal level, are vital steps in the journey toward the full integration of persons with disabilities in our communities” she added.

Wellington outlined the bank’s attitude towards people in the disabled community. Regarding careers, she said the “bank is committed to providing employment opportunities for any individual we believe is best able to contribute to our success and that definitely includes persons with disabilities.”

On customer service, she said that over the years, the bank had worked with the Barbados Council for the Disabled to provide sensitivity training, mainly for its frontline staff, to better enable them to serve its clients and customers who have disabilities with dignity and professionalism.

And she added that the bank's partnership with Bonnie Leonce and Signature Interpretations to host the workshop was "another key milestone in the journey of inclusion".

She said "advances in technology have allowed us to develop a number of digital products and services such as our mobile banking app, which has enhanced the way the deaf and other persons with disabilities do their banking.

"However, this workshop will ultimately help us as businesses and service providers to better understand and communicate effectively with our clients who are deaf or hard-of-hearing leading to them having greater confidence in us and we being able to optimise our service to them."

Responding, Leonce noted how awareness had helped CIBC FirstCaribbean, particularly its Wildey branch, to improve its service to the deaf community.

She recalled that once deaf people had to monitor who came in the bank before and after them to know when it was their turn to be served since the alert for 'another customer' came with a beep which they could not hear but she said CIBC FirstCaribbean was the first to add flashing lights to the alert which was helpful to them as well as other customers.

Advocating for a need to change attitudes, she stressed that attitudes could not be legislated but that through awareness more people would understand and be able more to create a culture of inclusion and equality across Barbados. And she suggested to the participants, that each one of them had the opportunity to effect that change by being part of the change movement.

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*CIBC FirstCaribbean International Bank's Managing Director, Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Donna Wellington addressing the opening session of the "See the Invisible!" Spreading awareness, education and support for Deaf people".*



*Inclusive approach: Chief Interpretation Consultant at Signature Interpretations, Bonnie Leonce, second from left, called for a culture of inclusion and equality, Paula Medford the interpreter (left) signing for that the deaf attendees.*



*Chief Interpretation Consultant at Signature Interpretations, Bonnie Leonce, at the podium told the audience that each one of them could be part of the drive to change attitudes towards the deaf.*

## 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 twelve (12) countries around the Caribbean, providing the banking services through approximately 2,700 employees in 48 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 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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