

The Deaf of Peru The Peruvian Sign Language Community



The Peruvian deaf people can be found living in the poorer sections of the largest cities in Peru. Most live in Lima, the capital, where the majority of resources (though very limited) for the deaf can be found. There are only two secondary schools in the whole country where the deaf can learn through sign language but, after that, they are on their own. However, most deaf Peruvians do not even finish school because they can not afford to or they live too far away from established schools for the deaf. They need more interpreters who can assist them in hospitals, courts, churches, and schools, etc.

Most Peruvian deaf people are unemployed or receive lower than minimum wage. Their life is a daily struggle of trying to understand and be understood. They are often looked down upon by hearing society. Sometimes there is even discrimination within their deaf community based on the variation of signing that is used. Despite this, there is still a great deal of camaraderie among the deaf, often more so than with their biological families. The deaf people look out for each other and consider each other as family, even if they've never met. They are known to travel long distances for deaf gatherings.

When asked, the deaf people in Peru said they adhered to the same religion as their parents, although they may not fully understand what that religion entails because they never had it explained to them through a language they clearly understood. The deaf people who did understand their religious beliefs and practices were those who had been reached by the Jehovah's Witness and Evangelicals, who teach using a form of Peruvian Sign Language. Deaf Peruvians need people who can tell them about God and His great love for them through Peruvian Sign Language.

Primary Religion:

Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

2%

Churches:

10

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

42,000 - 1.4 million (2007)



The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Have They Heard the Gospel?

Hindrances to Scripture Use

There is no form of Scripture available in Peruvian Sign Language (LSP).

Response to the Gospel

If the gospel is presented in a respectful way and not condemning, the Peruvian deaf are receptive. The current situation seems to have a slow steady growth though a dividing line is forming between a few denominations. It is hard for the deaf people to understand the Spanish Bible so they do not often read it and only learn what is presented in the church service through sign language.

Bilingualism

There is a definite sign language distinction between older adults and youth. If the adults have received any education, it is an oral one; whereas, since the 1970's, schools have begun to use a total communication philosophy which includes sign language. Either way, many deaf people would not be considered bilingual due to their low level of Spanish.

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?

There is a definite sign language distinction between older adults and youth. If the adults have received any education, it is an oral one; whereas, since the 1970's, schools have begun to use a total communication philosophy which includes sign language. Either way, many deaf people would not be considered bilingual due to their low level of Spanish.

Number of Christian Congregations Serving Group

10

Number of Congregation Using Primarily Local Language

6

Language of Outside Communication or Trade

Spanish

The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Group Description

Geographical/Environmental

Climate

Varies from tropical in east to dry in the west; temperate to frigid in the Andes

Language/Linguistics

Attitude towards mother tongue

Very receptive

Second Languages

Spanish (written)

Other mother tongues of this group

Deaf people who were raised orally (focus on speech and lip-reading)

Others speaking this language as MT

Hearing children of deaf Peruvian adults

Linguistically related

American Sign Language

Neighbor Languages

Spanish, Quechua

Corrections to Ethnologue

Entry Language use

There are various deaf associations that have been established in the major cities of Peru and are working on standardizing the sign language. Variations of LSP can be seen in different cities and even between generations. Even though the government is trying to mainstream most deaf students there seems to be enough social gatherings that will help keep the sign language strong.

Language development

3 sign language dictionaries have been published but there is still debate whether they are true Peruvian signs.

Comments

Deaf Peruvians are proud of their sign language though they are having a hard time agreeing on which variations of signs to include in a dictionary.

Literacy

Adult Literacy

87% of general population but much lower for the deaf population

Literacy Attitude

Somewhat receptive to written Spanish

Active Program

National Deaf Association is working on a new LSP dictionary that will incorporate input from deaf people around Peru.

Publications in Mother Tongue

3 LSP dictionaries, Jehovah's Witness have 3 videos in circulation yet deaf Peruvians not associated with Jehovah's Witness say that it's not really LSP

Comments

For written Spanish most deaf Peruvians think it's important to learn Spanish but not more important than learning Sign Language

Economics

Avg. Annual Income

\$2,080 - 2,600 USD a year; but the deaf person would earn much less

Occupation

Cleaning, computer work, construction, electrician, factory work, fishing market, food service, running errands for people, hair dressing and manicures, hotel work, janitor, maid, painting, pastor, peddling, security guard, sewing, working in state offices, teaching, weaving, and other types of manual labor

The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Modernization/Utilities

Most deaf Peruvians have access to very modern items (including internet café's equipped with web cameras) depending on their financial status

Comments

Skilled deaf people still have a hard time finding employment or not enough hours. In 2006, 44.5% of the general population was below the poverty line.

Community Development

Clothing

Traditional Andean to western, though mostly western since the majority live in urban cities

Transportation

Public bus system and walking, though a few may own a car

Infant Mortality Rate

29.5 deaths/1,000 live births (average for general population)

Life Expectancy

70.44 (average for general population)

Society

Family Structures

Deaf people often stay with family because they can't afford their own housing or not allowed to be independent

Social Habits/Groupings

Deaf groups are usually formed by school or by religion

Identification with Nat'l Culture

Integrated; though oppressed by hearing population/sometimes taken advantage of

Self Image

Threatened

Attitude to Outsiders

Somewhat receptive

Attitude to Change

Somewhat receptive

Cultural Change Pace

Medium

Local Lang Broadcasting

20 min. to 1 hour daily

Comments

Outsider is respectful of deaf person; willing to learn sign language; TV programs with SL interpretation.

Education/Youth

Primary Schools

26 schools across the country in 6 different cities that serve the deaf population (9 in Lima, 6 in Iquitos, 5 in Arequipa, 2 in each Chiclayo, Cusco, and Trujillo)

Secondary Schools

4 schools (3 in Lima and 1 in Chiclayo)

Language of Instruction

Schools use LSP or a total communication philosophy (sign, Spanish spoken/written); 2 schools are strictly oral (Spanish)

Language of Textbooks

Spanish

Unmixed Schools

11 are deaf-only schools

Problems/Needs

Interpreters to be able to continue their education

The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Religion

Religions

1. Christian (81% Roman Catholic 2003)

Number of Adherents

83%

2. Other

17%

Primary Religion

Christianity

Comments

Deaf people tend to claim the religion of their parents even though they may not fully understand what their religion is because they have no interpreter

The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Total Believers	Fewer than 2%
Pastors	7+
Lay Leaders	3+
Churches	10
Bible Schools	Efata

History of Christianity in Group

Year Began	1970s
By whom	Deaf couple from Independent Baptist Church in the USA
Significant Events	Deaf couple started deaf school/ministry then sent out missionaries" to 9 other locations across Peru, DOOR International has two missionaries currently working among the deaf in Lima
Comments	Ministries who use a more ASL variation of LSP are not as openly received among non-Christian Peruvian deaf people

Scripture/Literature/Media

Translation Status	Definite need
Hindrances to Scripture Distribution	They have no Scripture portions
Other Literature/Video Materials	
Comments	Some ASL Bible videos are being used in parts of Peru

Missions/Churches Working Among People Group

Organization #1	Efata
Main Ministry	Evangelism, church planting
Number of Congregations	At least 5 (Lima, Iquitos, Arequipa, Pucallpa, and Callao)
Use of Local Language	11
Total expatriate missionaries	2
Total national missionaries	6
Total local workers	1
Organization #2	Iglesia Cristiana y Misionera de Lince
Main Ministry	Evangelism, church planting
Use of Local Language	2
Total expatriate missionaries	2
Total local workers	1

The Peruvian Sign Language Community

Organization #3	Harvest Deaf Church and School Chiclayo
Main Ministry	Evangelism, church planting, education
Number of Congregations	1
Use of Local Language	4 staff members use a local sign language unique to this social group
Total expatriate missionaries	3
Total local workers	1
Comments	Missionaries formerly worked for Efata before branching out and founding their own church. They are still connected with the Lima Efata church.

Responsiveness

Attitude to Christianity	Somewhat receptive
Attitude to Religious Change	Indifferent
Spiritual Climate and Openness	Deaf Peruvians are open to anyone who will share the truth with them
Approaches/Ways to Reach Group	Deaf Christian Peruvians be provided with resources to reach other deaf Peruvians. Deaf Peruvians seem to be most open with other deaf Peruvians like themselves because they understand each other.
Current Needs	Interpreters, Bible stories in their sign language, Bible translation
Items for Prayers	Pray for current needs to be filled