

Signature. inspire

Issue 1
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A large, close-up portrait of Sam Evans, a young man with dark, wavy hair, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark t-shirt.

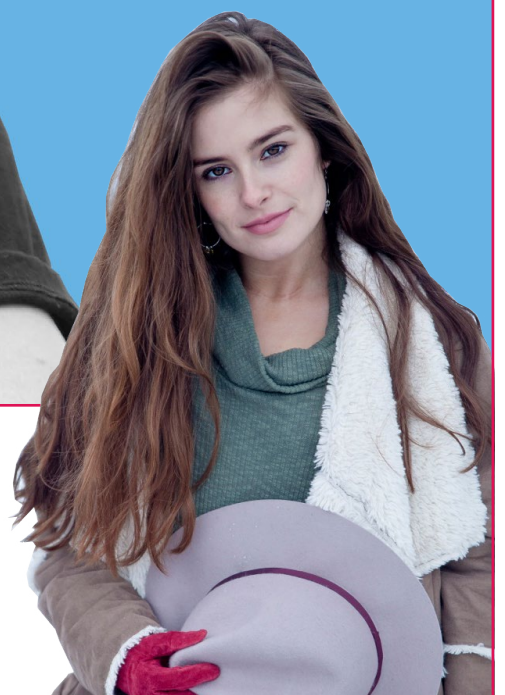
SAM EVANS

Signature catches up with
the 2013 Big Brother winner
and charity campaigner

Former Hollyoaks actress

RACHEL SHENTON

talks about her charity work



Also inside: Rugby star Mat Gilbert, ASL Interpreter Amber Galloway Gallego

Signature Inspire - Issue 1

Welcome to the first issue of **Signature Inspire** magazine, the online magazine aimed at raising deaf awareness amongst young people, and inspiring young people to learn sign language.

Within this issue we speak to the actress Rachel Shenton who discusses her role in the US show Switched at Birth, Rugby star Mat Gilbert who describes what it is like being the only deaf professional sportsman in England, the 2013 Big Brother winner Sam Evans who talks about his charity work and the music sign language interpreter Amber Galloway Gallego.

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Signature
excellence in communication
with deaf people

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"I quickly
fell in love with
Sign Language".

Rachel Shenton



Rachel Shenton

Rachel Shenton is a British actress who is best known in the UK for playing the role of Mitzee Minner in the soap Hollyoaks. Since leaving the soap in 2013 she has successfully made the move from Chester to Hollywood after landing a role on the popular US TV show Switched at Birth.

Rachel is also well known in the deaf sector as a campaigner for raising deaf awareness; she completed a skydive in 2011 for the National Deaf Children's Society, climbed the BT Tower in 2012 for Action on and has been involved in many more projects.

Rachel took some time out of filming series 4 to speak with Signature about her role on her new show, as well as telling us more about her charity work.

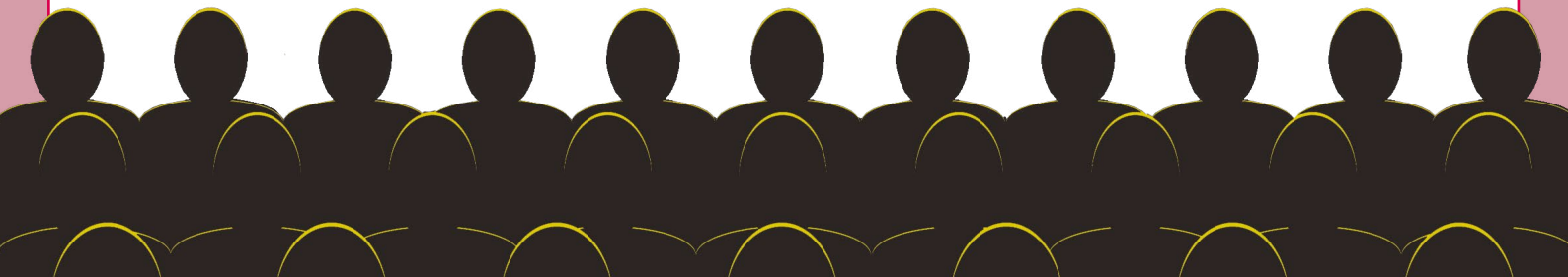
"I'm currently playing Lily Summers in switched at birth on ABC family. It's awesome! I joined the show in season 3 so it was great when I got the call to come back for another season."

The show has been praised in the US for its promotion of deaf awareness, and has been well received by its viewers. The show was launched in 2011, and the premiere episode on the ABC Family network was the highest-rated they had ever had, with 3.3 million viewers.

"It's a pioneering show and has received a lot of critical acclaim, being the first show to have multiple hard of hearing and deaf characters and do full American Sign Language episodes".

Rachel started learning sign language herself when she was younger, and it was her knowledge of British Sign Language that initially helped her get noticed by the producers of Switched at Birth.

"I learnt sign language at the age of 16. Originally I just wanted a basic understanding but I quickly fell in love with the language".



After seeing a video of **Rachel** signing they made the call to meet her for an audition, and her background in the deaf community has really helped with her work on the show.

Rachel initially started learning sign language after her father passed away. He had become profoundly deaf during the last 2 years of his life, and this spurred **Rachel** on to become passionate about campaigning to raise deaf awareness.

"I am a patron of the Deaflinks charity in Stoke-on-Trent. I started volunteering with them about 8 years so I was thrilled to be made a patron by them".

"I'm also an ambassador for the National Deaf Children's Society".

Rachel has shown no signs of slowing down in her campaigning, and told us more about a new project that she has become involved with for the National Deaf Children's Society.

"I have actually just launched a competition for the NDCS called 'raising the bar', and would urge all young deaf performers to join up and showcase their skills".

The Raising the Bar campaign is looking for deaf children and young people who want to show off their skills in dancing or music.

For more information please visit:





Sam Evans - Big Brother Winner, Charity Campaigner

(*deaf)

Signature catches up with Sam Evans, the 2013 Big Brother winner and charity campaigner

On 13 June 2013, Sam Evans made history when he walked into the Big Brother house to become the first deaf contestant of the popular show. A mere 68 days later and he walked out as the **first deaf winner of Big Brother**.

Sam was born with 70-80% hearing loss, and so choosing to live in a house with a group of 14 other people, for 24 hours a day might seem like a strange choice. But Sam isn't daunted by little things like that. He spoke to us about growing up with a hearing loss, and how he's planning to help others.

"Where I'm from there is no one to sign with so I didn't get enough daily practice"

How did you find it growing up as a child with a hearing loss? Did you find that you got much support from your school to help you?

I found it difficult, especially with fitting in at school and meeting new friends. I really wanted to be part of the group. Luckily for me I had a deaf friend also who was in my classes, which helped a lot. It gave me that extra confidence whenever I felt low. The school provided me with a 1 to 1 assistant for each class, which helped especially when I missed what the teacher was explaining.

"At times, I didn't want the assistant because I wanted to be like everyone else"

Were you encouraged to learn to sign from being young?

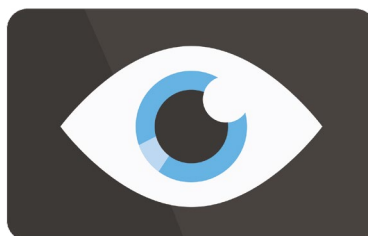
Yes, but where I'm from there is no one to sign with so I didn't get enough daily practice to keep it going. When I move to London etc with more deaf friends in the area I'll start to commit properly.

You became the first deaf contestant to enter Big Brother, and eventually won series 14. Did you find it difficult to bond with the other housemates?

Definitely! Especially the first 5 weeks where there were so many housemates talking over each other. As well as getting used to their way of speech and accents. Luckily I had a friend in the house who made a lot of time for me and had plenty of one to one conversations with me which helped me a lot and regained my confidence. Towards the end it got easier as the number of housemates decreased and I understood them better.

During your time in the house you tried to teach some of the other housemates to finger spell their names. Do you think it is important that both hearing and deaf children are encouraged to learn sign language at school?

I did, some were very interested! Personally I think all deaf children should be encouraged but it's not necessary for all deaf children.



As some may start to depend on sign language and lose confidence in their speech. I think deaf people should fulfil the maximum of their ability to talk as well as learn sign language. (It depends how you grow up also, with deaf friends, or without).

Do you think that you would have found it easier to get involved in group discussions in the house if those you were speaking with had some basic signing skills or had been taught some deaf awareness?

Like I mentioned earlier, a housemate (Callum) was mostly aware about my disability and he often explained again what was going on. That's what I needed. He made sure he was loud and clear, but he didn't use much finger spelling.

You are currently in Malawi working with the Sound Seekers project to help deaf children in the developing World. Have you enjoyed being involved with such a worthwhile cause?

Yes. It is an amazing experience for me, meeting deaf children out here and learning about their background and how much of a difference it is out there compared to here. It was a real eye opener and it was a rewarding experience for me to raise awareness with Sound Seekers about deafness and the poor and lack of services they have out there.

Sound Seekers have done a fantastic job in raising enough funds to build a new audiology clinic out in Blantyre. Which I look forward to hear how it's going.

Are you hoping to get involved with more charities?

I am involved with Action on Hearing Loss, National Children's Deaf Society and SoundSeekers and love to help as much as I can. If other deaf charities were to approach me in need of help, I would be happy to help.

I have recently launched a deaf dating website, where there is an option to donate to Action On Hearing Loss. Which I hope will have plenty of results of deaf singles meeting and finding their 'soul mate' as I understand how difficult it is for a deaf person to get in the dating game, especially when it comes to finding someone.

Finally, what are your main goals and what do you hope to achieve over the next few years?

I would love to be a documentary presenter; I have a couple of ideas. But that's more of a dream than reality. In reality I would love to become an audiologist in the next few years, as well as some TV work on the side.

Sound Seekers runs unique projects and services to help deaf children and adults in the poorest communities of the developing world. We work in partnership with local organisations to deliver sustainable and cost-effective projects that improve deaf people's access to health services, education, and social support. Our aim is to ensure that deaf children can stay in school and deaf adults can find employment.

A child born in Malawi is more than twice as likely to be deaf as a child born in the developed world. Yet Malawi has no free public audiology services. That's why Sam Evans is supporting Sound Seekers' Hear in Malawi appeal. The appeal, supported by UK Aid and Specsavers Hearing Centres, will raise money to build, equip and staff a comprehensive audiology service based in Southern Malawi's largest hospital. The clinic will help over ten thousand children and adults within three years. What's more, every single pound donated is doubled by the UK government until 20 January 2015, meaning that we can help twice as many deaf people in need.



<https://www.justgiving.com/hearinmalawi>



**"It's always been my drive to be a rugby player,
and I've not allowed anyone to say to me that
I'm not going to make it
because I have a
hearing loss."**

Mat Gilbert

Mat Gilbert - Worcester Warriors rugby player

Signature chats with the imposing flanker Mat Gilbert

Mat currently plies his trade in The Green King IPA Championship for Worcester Warriors.

Having begun his career at Llanelli Scarlets, he has also had spells at Mogliano in Italy and Bath in the English Premiership. He has represented his country several times, worked as an ambassador for charities and is well respected by his teammates and management team.

He is also the only deaf professional sportsman in England.

Signature caught up with him recently to ask why he thought there weren't more deaf sportsmen and women making it into the elite of their sports, and how this could be changed for the better.

"Talent only takes you so far, and then determination and self belief take you that step further. "

How does it feel to know that you are the only deaf professional sportsman in England?

It is an honour, obviously, but I do try to see myself being as mainstream as possible. So although I do have that accolade I also try to see myself as just one of the lads. I don't play too much on the fact that I am the only deaf professional sportsman in the Country.

It's more about, I am aware that I do have a hearing loss, and I am a role model to young people, and people of all ages, but fundamentally the society that I need to fit into is one that is hearing so I do try to be as included in that as possible.

Why do you think that there aren't more deaf sportsmen and women making the step up to the highest level?

I think mainly it's the person themselves in my personal experience. Not many people have said to me that I'm not going to make it because I have a hearing problem. I've always driven this, it's always been my drive to be a rugby player, and I've not allowed anyone to say to me that I'm not going to make it because I have a hearing loss.

I think a lot of issues come from the self confidence and self esteem of the deaf person themselves. I think anyone with any kind of impairment or any lack of ability potentially could say that "this isn't for me" and walk away. I think it's about having perseverance and having belief in yourself to be able to say to someone "can you do that for me again, I didn't see it" or "can you say that again, I haven't heard you".

"Do whatever you need to improve".

Do you feel like you have had to work harder than your teammates to make it to where you are today?

I think in some instances yes, but a lot of the boys will have worked hard to be where they are. Talent only takes you so far, and then determination and self belief take you that step further. I may have been more talented than other people, I may not have been, but as a group of individuals everyone will have had to put in their own hard work and some will have worked harder than others.

With a hearing loss, obviously I have had to work harder at understanding the game and the rules, because I need to minimise the amount of communication within the game and communication with the referee. My understanding of the rules is probably far greater than most other individuals because they can rely on being able to hear the referee.

Do you think that more could be done in schools to teach children some level of sign language or deaf awareness to allow more participation?

Yeah I think doing some form of deaf awareness is hugely important in every social group within schools. Obviously it's no good talking to a deaf person with your back turned to them, you need to give them the best opportunity that they are going to hear you or be able to lip read you, and therefore be able to be fully included within that group.

In terms of sign language, personally I don't sign and never have so for me to say I think people should learn sign language may be a bit contradictory. I've never been in an environment where I've needed to use sign, so I wouldn't like to comment for another person

that hasn't got the power in the hearing aid that I am able to get. I know the alphabet but in terms of words my vocab is very limited. But if someone is more deaf than me and needs to go without a hearing aid then to be able to include them in the group,

"to be fully included in the social group, a few words of sign would go a long way."

What advice would you give to a young deaf sportsperson who wanted to emulate what you have achieved?

Definitely to work hard and to have self belief in your own abilities; don't allow other people to tell you that you're not good enough as long as you believe that you are. Keep working hard and keep believing in yourself and you've got to follow those dreams that you have.

The other thing is just to take advantage of all the options you have given to you. When I was in school I always used a radio aid, and right now for this conversation I'm using a ComPilot. Any technological aid that can enhance your inclusion and your experience of hearing, and that could include sign language, then you need to take full advantage of that and not have any embarrassment that you are different to anybody else.



Photo by ajbphotographic.co.uk



When you open yourself up
that is when
you can
truly show

all the levels of music

Amber Galloway Gallego

Amber Galloway Gallego

Amber Galloway Gallego, an American Sign Language interpreter who specializes in music, has worked with some of the biggest names in the music industry, including Madonna and Paul McCartney, Lady Gaga and Rage Against the Machine. Her job is to stand at the side of the stage and interpret the music so that it can be enjoyed and understood by deaf audience members.

She is intensely passionate about music, and wants to share that passion with people who aren't able to hear it for themselves. The feedback she gets from deaf people at concerts is always positive, and she is often told that "They have loved it".

"They tell me they feel like their hearing counterparts. They have said that they feel connected".

It's that connection that is so important to **Amber**, to ensure that all people are able to access music, and to connect with the performer's message whether they can hear the words or not. She remembers vividly when she realised that she could use sign language to interpret music.

"I was at a BBQ and I had music on in the background. I loved music and would play around with signs and music. One of my friends caught me dancing and signing and she told me 'I have never seen music interpreted like that!'"

Amber had started learning sign from an early age, "I started learning sign on the weekend when my Dad started dating a woman who had a Deaf son. My babysitter also had two Deaf children."

After a very bad car accident **Amber** had to learn to walk again. During this time she bonded with a large group of Deaf students during her physical therapy sessions "They sat and taught me everything. A friend of mine who was Deaf became my private tutor and

she drove me over to the interpreter training and told me that this was my path!"

And she has followed that path to where she is today. During her career as a music interpreter, **Amber** has worked with a lot of big names. When pressed to name her favourite performer she said, "If you ask anyone who has worked with me they would say 'everyone is **Amber's** favourite'. So for me, favourites or highlights happen on different levels".

"The One direction concert when I looked to the Deaf section and the Deaf kids were signing along with me. After the Eminem show Deaf people said they understand him better because they saw his rap and angst in the signs I brought. While teaming with Jo Benfield (a working Deaf interpreter) as she interpreted Outkast and watching the magic she brings to the music brought tears to my eyes. While interpreting and Hearing John Legend's angelic voice wash across the crowd and me signing to show the sweet chords that pour fourth from his mouth. Those are a few of my highlights!!!"

We told **Amber** about the young interpreters in Britain who were posting their BSL videos of songs on YouTube. When asked if she could pass on any advice to them she said, "Realise that music is sooo much more than words. Show the music, open your mind to allow yourself to be vulnerable to show what music sounds like. When you open yourself up that is when you can truly show all the levels of music and connect with music in a way that shows all the dimensions of it".

Musical sign language interpreting is also becoming increasingly popular in the UK.

Charlotte's BSL is a YouTube channel with hundreds of subscribers, which has had over 20,000 views since it first launched back in 2013. The channel is run by Charlotte Sheldon, a 16 year old girl based in the UK who has been learning British Sign Language for years.

"I first started learning BSL when I was around 7 or 8, and I have been continually learning BSL for around 8 years now."

We asked Charlotte a few questions about why she first got into music interpreting, and her hopes of how far she will be able to go with it.

"Firstly, I have a love for both music and sign language so I thought both of them combined would be good fun. Also, where I first started learning sign language, we used to do shows at various times throughout the year and interpreted many various songs. So, that's where the first initial idea originated from".

With thousands of views for her videos, Charlotte has received a lot of positive comments from fellow sign language users. "The feedback on my YouTube videos has always been very complimentary, which came as a surprise to me at first. I also seemed to have helped various people who were trying to teach others sign language, which is incredible for me".

"I think interpreting music is very important. I think to enable a hearing impaired person to understand the lyrics of songs is fantastic. It gives hearing impaired people an opportunity to experience music".

We asked Charlotte what advice she might have for any young people who wanted to start interpreting music.

"My advice would be to go for it and don't worry about the reactions you may get. Luckily for me, the feedback has been complementary, which I didn't expect it to be at all. Also, I think interpreting songs that you like, and not what you think the viewers will like is also important. Do what you enjoy! Finally, don't worry if at first you're not very confident! It's taken many months for me to do my videos confidently, and I still have a few shaky moments!"



You can view Charlotte's BSL videos at www.youtube.com/user/CharlotterCB/

What next?

Interested in learning more about Sign Language?

In the UK one in six people have some degree of hearing loss. That works out as about 10 million people. This means that you are more than likely to come into daily contact with a deaf person, either at school or college, or at social clubs and after school activities.

Signature have over 30 years experience in the sector and are a leading awarding body for qualifications in deaf and deafblind communication techniques.

Our qualifications can help you become deaf aware and develop your communication skills with deaf and deafblind people. Learning a new language can even lead to a career you hadn't thought of before; as a communication professional, working with deaf sports and acting groups, music interpretation and many more.

If you are interested in learning some of the basics of sign language, you can sign up free for our BSL Homework online resource, which has information on the manual alphabet and fingerspelling as well as tests and quizzes, all for free.

BSL Homework

Call for submissions

We need your stories!

Have you been inspired to learn sign language by reading this magazine? Have you already started to learn sign language, and want to tell us more about what motivated you to learn?

We need your stories for issue 2 of **Signature Inspire** magazine. We want to hear what you love about sign language or if you are deaf, what activities you like to do in your spare time.

If you want to be included in the next issue, please email your stories directly to our Marketing Coordinator Gavin Shepherdson at gavin.shepherdson@signature.org.uk