

# Signature. inspire

Issue  
2



## SOPHIE STONE

Shares her acting  
experiences

## Deaf Singer/Songwriter JAMES HOLT

is taking the music industry by storm



**Also inside:** ... 'Day in the life of a deafie' blogger and Music and the Deaf....

# What is ....?

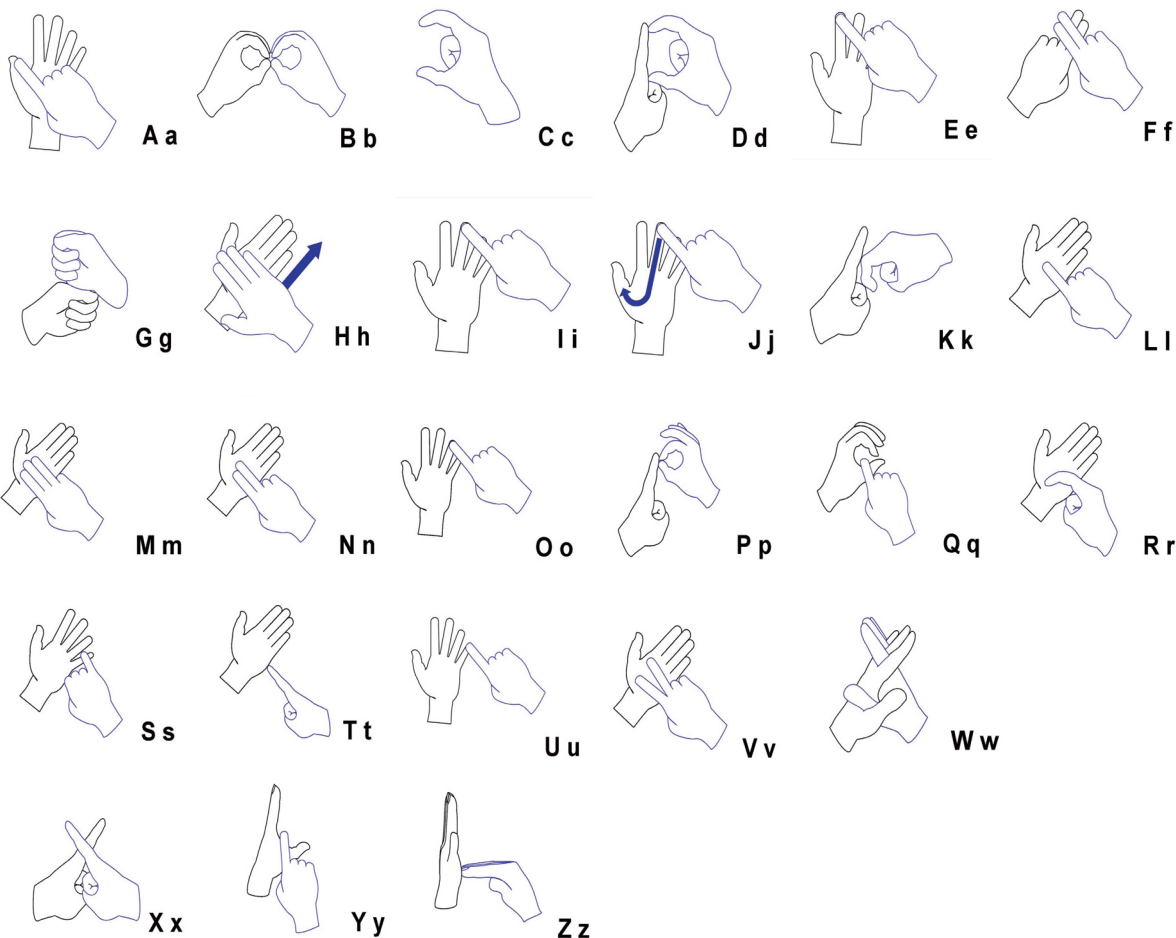
## British Sign Language (BSL)

is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression and body language. It is used mainly by people who are Deaf or to support those who have a hearing loss. BSL has its own grammatical structure and syntax; as a language, it is not dependent upon or related to English.

Each country has its own sign language. In the UK, the most common sign language used is British Sign Language. Would you be surprised to learn that BSL was only recognised by the British Government as a language March 2003?

Fingerspelling is part of British Sign Language. Fingerspelling is a method of spelling words using fingers and hand movements. Fingerspelling is used in sign language to spell out names of people and places for which there is not a sign.

Have a go at spelling your name...



Find out more at [www.signature.org.uk/british-sign-language](http://www.signature.org.uk/british-sign-language)

# Interested in learning more about Sign Language?

BSL is the first or preferred language of an estimated 70,000 Deaf people in the UK. BSL is a visual-gestural language, with its own grammar and principles, which are completely different from the grammatical structure of English.

We offer qualifications in British Sign Language from Level 1 to Level 6. Learning a new language can 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.

Learn more about the qualifications we offer, and where your nearest course provider is.

Visit [www.signature.org.uk/studying-with-signature](http://www.signature.org.uk/studying-with-signature)

## What learning resources are available?

### **BSL Homework**

Our online BSL Homework package is perfect for anyone studying towards a Signature Level 1 Award in British Sign Language or Signature Level 2 Certificate in British Sign Language qualification.

BSL 101 is free to register. Why not sign up and unlock a wealth of online content full of BSL clips, fingerspelling, tests and quizzes.

Register now at [www.bslhomework.org.uk](http://www.bslhomework.org.uk)

### **The Signature Shop**

The shop is stocked with books and DVDs. We have used our 30 years experience to develop a range of resources to help you get the most out of your course. They are easy to follow and will help to build on what you are learning in the classroom.

You will find support materials for BSL, Irish Sign Language (ISL) and deaf awareness.

View the shop at [www.signature.org.uk/shop](http://www.signature.org.uk/shop)

# What's inside this issue?

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# Life and music of James Holt

## Signature catches up with James Holt Deaf singer/songwriter taking the music industry by storm

James Holt is a deaf singer/songwriter from the Manchester area that is attracting the attention of many music lovers with this unique mix of folk and alternative rock music.

**"Music has been my life from a very early age."**

From as young as 6 James has trained classically in piano, guitar and cello. He now has grade 8 in each instrument and also grade 8 theory. Having been born with a moderate to severe bi-lateral hearing impairment, James has not let his deafness be a barrier to the music industry but he has embraced it, telling us

**"Being deaf, the main challenge for me was coming up against other people's preconceptions that deaf people can't study music or it would be a struggle. So it has been the case of proving them wrong and doing what I love to do."**

Having graduate from the University of Salford with a First Class BA Honours Degree in Music, majoring in composition and arrangement and

achieving the Derek Scott Composition Award. James is now studying part time for a MA in Music Composition at Salford University.

### **What would you say to deaf young people who want to forge a career in the music industry?**

I think being a musician takes a lot of hard work. A lot of practice is involved, perseverance and dedication. As a deaf musician you will have more barriers and some people assume that deaf people "can't do music", and you'll have to try even harder to prove them wrong and not be put off. The theory helped me a lot to progress as a musician but you should also seek to enjoy playing music at whatever level you're at. It's also a good idea to link in with people who can help you.

**"Being involved with Music and the Deaf means that I've had chance to meet other deaf musicians"**

### **What opportunity has Music and the Deaf given you?**

Music and the Deaf has given me the opportunity to perform at many of their events and they also gave me my first opportunity in mentoring /teaching, which I do a lot more of now.



**What is your greatest achievement to date?**

Playing at the Royal Albert Hall! I really enjoyed hearing the sound reverberate around the room, it was an amazing experience hearing it from the middle of that space - though at the time I was just concentrating on my playing and singing!

Also, Brian Eno acclaimed and chose my song 'Whatever Happened to John?' for the NOISE Festival 2014. He said of the track: "Brisk, funny, exciting. Great drumming. This track feels fresh and exciting to listen to". I was also invited to meet him at his John Peel lecture for BBC Music which was a great experience. See James performance at the Royal Albert Hall [here](#).

**"I hope that I can be an inspiration to other aspiring deaf musicians."**



**What would you like to achieve in the future?**

I would like to keep writing and releasing new music and reach as many people as possible through my music, and possibly explore other mediums such as music for stage and film. I find composing/songwriting the purest form of expression, I have both music and words to express myself and I can't see myself ever stop writing songs. I'm releasing a new EP called 'Sanguine On the Rocks' in April 2016.

To find out more about  
James Holt and his music at  
**[www.jamesholtmusic.com](http://www.jamesholtmusic.com)**

Or follow him on social media  
**[www.soundcloud.com/jamesholtmusic](http://www.soundcloud.com/jamesholtmusic)**  
**[www.facebook.com/jamesholtmusic](http://www.facebook.com/jamesholtmusic)**  
**[www.twitter.com/jamesholtmusic](http://www.twitter.com/jamesholtmusic)**  
**[www.youtube.com/jamesholtartist](http://www.youtube.com/jamesholtartist)**





**“Blogging has had a huge impact as I can write about my life as a deaf person”**

Ellie

## New blogger ‘E’

Nineteen year old Ellie, also known as ‘E’ or ‘deafie blogger’, took the leap and opened her world to the public on 15 May 2015 with her first blog post, Welcome!

E’s blog ‘Day in the life of a deafie’ is fresh and inviting with thoughts, rants and experiences of life as a deaf person. ‘E’ was born profoundly deaf in both ears and uses Phonak Sky Q hearing aids combined with lipreading to communicate with others day to day. We caught up with E to find out what inspired her to blog and where she is now.

### **What motivated you to start your blog?**

I began ‘Day in the life of a deafie’ as there were lots of situations which involved my deafness where I got quite annoyed, and I just needed somewhere to express my frustrations, so I thought a blog would be the best way to go about doing it!

### **How has your deafness affected your blogging?**

It’s had a huge impact as I can write about my life as a deaf person, and lots of people have

been able to relate to it. Sometimes as I have certain views on things like cochlear implants, sign language etc- people often think that we are going against the deaf society. An example would be my parents not teaching me sign language when I was younger- well I’m glad they didn’t as I wouldn’t be speaking as well as I do now. It’s just easier to learn to speak, as you’re growing up in a hearing society. But, of course I’d love to learn it now.

**“Achieving an A in Media Studies and C in German A Level were probably my biggest educational achievements!”**

### **Did you find attending a mainstream school challenging?**

Yes, it was hugely challenging. Both educational and social sides were difficult for me. I didn’t have many friends throughout my school life, and I felt isolated many times. The support staff were always my ‘proper’ friends, as I could always talk to them. School is hard, but it’s



over before you know it. When you finish, and look back- School is actually one of the best memories!

**What was the most challenging moment in your blogging journey so far?**

Creating the blog! I wanted to choose a name that was catchy, but related to me. Some people have said how they found the term 'deafie' quite offensive because some people used to be called it as part of bullying. I want to change that, as I am proud to be deaf and I felt 'deafie' was a quirky way of describing myself!

**"In July of London 2012, I was an Olympic Torchbearer. My 'time to shine' and it was surreal!"**

**Who has impacted you most in blogging and how?**

My boyfriend has had the biggest impact. He was the one who motivated me to start the blog as I had many concerns that people would criticise my writing style, being deaf. I also worried what my parents would think, but I guess I surprise them! So, I'd just like to say thank you to them all.



Her blog posts include:  
'Love, relationships and my stories',  
'Public Transport', and 'Sink or swim'

To read E's blog visit  
[dayinthelifeofadeafie.wordpress.com](http://dayinthelifeofadeafie.wordpress.com)





"My imagination was very vivid  
and colourful and performing allowed  
**me to give life to  
that visual world."**

Sophie Stone

## Sophie Stone - TV, Movie and Theatre actor

Sophie Stone took time out of her very busy theatre schedule to tell us about her drive for acting and her experience as a deaf person in the industry.

### **Where did your passion for acting come from?**

It came from a need to express myself before I could fully access language due to my deafness & pure escapism from my own reality. I enjoyed stories and as a child would lose myself for days in books. My imagination was very vivid and colourful and performing allowed me to give life to that visual world.

**And then when I discovered the taste of new words in my mouth (and later, my hands: sign language) I relished creating new ways to play with these tools and share stories on stage.**

### **How has your deafness affected your acting?**

It has enabled me to appreciate language

in all its layered forms and there's a richness to the way things are 'observed' (physically, emotionally, metaphorically) that can be tuned into when a sense is limited. There are things I have to work a little bit harder at, like voice work and reassuring those around me that my presence is not a burden. In many areas being deaf has given me the journey I'm on and for that I'll always be grateful, but it does have areas of limitations imposed by others but that's true for a lot of actors, deaf or not.

### **How does it make you feel that you were first deaf woman to train at RADA?**

I felt incredibly fortunate to get in as an aspiring actor, before deafness was even a factor, many actors desire to train there and it's notoriously hard to enter. Being the first deaf person wasn't a huge deal to me, I was more concerned that I wouldn't be the last.

**So I entered knowing there was a responsibility to help set the environment to accommodate future deaf potentials.**

**At what age did you start to learn to sign?  
And why did you start to learn?**

I learnt a tiny bit of sign at primary school and aside from all the kids signing 'Dog' 'House' 'tree' at me every lunch break, it didn't become a shared language.

**It was only from deciding I wanted to go to a deaf boarding school at the age of 12 that I acquired the skills to communicate with other deaf people & in turn developed an identity and a sense of belonging.**

**Does your daughter Angel sign too?**

Yes she does, mostly for demonstrative purposes or necessity but she's incredibly articulate, patient and clear that we mostly lip read. She's a better lip reader than me and that's saying something!

**What do you do in your spare time?**

Spare time? Haha.

Sometimes I find work and life balance a bit of a challenge so when I'm not working we like to camp or take random road trips and explore new places. But my down time usually consists of writing, reading and painting, which isn't often enough for my liking. I also have a theatre company that I'm a co-founder of, so we occasionally try and create new material when we're not committed to other jobs.

**I'm currently in my final week of a run at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre of a Simon Stephen's show called 'Herons' - at the same time I'm running around rehearsing Gogol's 'The Government Inspector' in Birmingham (Rep) during the day which will tour till the end of June, so it's all kicking off right now. I can't complain but I could sleep for a month!**

**Which roles have been your favourite and why?**

Doctor Who and Marchlands have been close to my heart because of the storylines, the way they've been written and the opportunity to play interesting, whole characters with depth and purpose. Being a part of Mother Courage as Katrin at the National Theatre was a pivotal point in my career that I'm very proud of and learnt a lot from and grew as an actor.

**What has been your biggest achievement in the field of acting?**

Being employed in the field of acting!

**Finding my voice & trusting my ability.**

Being able to make a difference and give something back - I'm on the board of governors for the Conservatoire of Dance and Drama and am hoping to be in a position of supportive positive change within the training field for future deaf/disabled actors.

**What advice would you give to someone aspiring to become an actor?**

Treat every job as an audition for the next. Everyone you meet could have the ability to make or break your next step, so treat yourself as a business on the outside but a child in the room - meaning be brave, make mistakes, be hungry to learn, open to new things and be kind.

**Convince yourself you're the right person for the job then prove it - you always have something to offer.**

**Want to see Sophie in theatre visit:**

**[www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/event/the-government-inspector/](http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/event/the-government-inspector/)**



pushing the boundaries of  
**what deaf  
musicians can  
aspire to**

# Music and the Deaf

Music and the Deaf is the only charity in the UK entirely dedicated to providing music access and opportunities for deaf people of all ages, including the country's 45,000 deaf children.

They believe that being able to participate in music making greatly assists in a person's social, emotional, and intellectual development, regardless of their level of hearing.

From working in Australia with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, to performing in the Royal Albert Hall, or running workshops in Surrey or Sydney, Music and the Deaf aims to enrich the lives of deaf people everywhere through music. Founded in 1988, the charity has built an international reputation for pushing the boundaries of what deaf musicians can aspire to and achieve, engaging those with a hearing loss through workshops, performances, talks and training, and its many groundbreaking projects.

Danny Lane, a profoundly deaf pianist, was supported by Music and the Deaf when he was 15 years old and struggling to access his GCSE music course. He joined the charity in 2003 and now takes the lead as Artistic Director.

**"Being deaf, I used to think it was easier to isolate myself from my peers as I was afraid of getting lost in conversations. Music changed that for me. I took part in a brass band and it helped me to overcome my fear of socialising. I also wouldn't have become public speaker that I am today if it wasn't for performing on stage. Music gave me confidence to do that."**



But, as is often asked,

**“if you can’t hear music, how can you understand it?” Danny says “You can still connect to it physically. The action of playing music always fascinates me most – playing Debussy on the piano is like painting a picture that you conjure in your head and this requires delicate fingers which is totally different to the percussive nature of music by Shostakovich, which can be exhilarating.”**

The charity has been at the forefront of developing the provision of music services and opportunities for deaf children and adults in many different ways. Music and the Deaf has recently begun “Frequalise”, a project that will engage deaf young people in using technology to create their own music. The participants have already made amazing progress, imaginatively exploring and experimenting with sound, and recording and sharing their music – we hope that Frequalise will inspire the next generation of artists and music producers!

4ORTE is their brand new programme that champions performances by professional deaf musicians. They hope that this will raise awareness of deafness and music, and demonstrate that music can and should be played and accessed by people with all levels of hearing. When the new 4ORTE ensemble, a group made up of these professional deaf musicians, performed at a special recital recently, a guest said that the musicians “gave such excellent performances... The work you do at Music and the Deaf is clearly so very much appreciated by so many people... You can be very proud of what you do.”

Music and the Deaf is also closely associated with the Yorkshire Music Club, a unique music group for deaf and hard of hearing children and young people. All are welcome, whether they’re a skilled musician already or a complete beginner, and it’s a great space for young people who face similar challenges to get together, play together, and develop their musical potential.

A parent said

**“my son has grown in confidence... whilst maintaining his love of music... he appears to be more mature and accepting of his hearing loss as a teenager”. His son Adam says “It’s been a great way to meet and make new friends... a chance to be part of a group of other children with a hearing loss”.**

No one should be without the sound of music, so if you or someone you know may benefit from what we do, or know of a school, college or organisation that might find our services useful, please let us know at [info@matd.org.uk](mailto:info@matd.org.uk).

For more information, check out our website at [www.matd.org.uk](http://www.matd.org.uk)







# Life & Deaf

Life & Deaf is a not-for-profit organisation that uses poetry and the arts to help deaf children explore their identities and to develop communication skills and emotional literacy; their overall aim is to improve the mental health of future generations of deaf people.

Life & Deaf have spent the last ten years working with deaf children to help them to explore their experiences and feelings within a secure environment. They have been repeatedly amazed by the creativity of children, the poignancy of the imagery in their poetry and their raw honesty. By sharing the children's work they aim to raise deaf awareness within families, schools and the wider community.

Life & Deaf offers deaf young people the opportunity to come together to creatively explore their identities outside of the curriculum and the boundaries imposed by formal language, combating the isolation that may be experienced within mainstream schools and communities.

**"It explored my imagination and made me feel confident."**

Like their allies, Inclusive Minds, they seek to promote inclusion and accessibility for all and hold dear a vision of literature where all children are seen and heard, where barriers are removed, stereotypes are challenged and every child can access and enjoy great books that are representative of our diverse society; mainstream books need to represent every child. There exist to date only a handful of children's books in which the characters' use of sign language is incidental. Many books, fiction and non-fiction, have sought to illuminate the experiences of deaf children, only a few feature sign language as an incidental plot device with characters who just happen sign.

Kayleigh Goacher, a member of the Life & Deaf committee and one of the authors of *What the Jackdaw Saw*, commented “Personally I believe it is really important that books, as well as television, media and so on, include diversity, especially disability and deafness. This would influence disabled people to feel included in the world. Take me for example, I was born severely to profoundly deaf and brought up with a hearing parents who encourage me to speak and use British Sign Language. I haven’t noticed many deaf characters on the television or in the books so I don’t feel part of the world. I feel like the hearing community is part of one world and the deaf community is part of another world. I think the reason for this is that hearing people don’t have enough knowledge about disability and deafness so they can’t act the correct way to make deaf people have access to this world. This is another good reason why we should include disabled characters in books, to raise and influence people’s awareness of disability and deafness”.

Frankie Kelleher, a deaf teenager from the project, has taken seriously his role as an ambassador and champion for young people. In September 2015 he appeared on BBC Newsround conducting an emotional interview with Emma Hopkin, Head of Children’s and Educational Publishing at Bloomsbury Publishing Company, about the general need for more inclusive children’s books. He bravely confronted this top publisher about the lack of disabled characters in young fiction. This powerful interview led to an article about inclusive literature in *The Guardian*. Frankie called for truly inclusive books, i.e. mainstream books that feature characters who just happen to be deaf, disabled or otherwise representative of the diversity in our communities in their appearance, religious beliefs, sexuality or their physical and mental health, without giving this undue attention. Frankie raised the question of why ‘in most books villains are usually deformed’. By challenging trends like this, Frankie is bringing issues about inclusion to the forefront of the minds of authors, illustrators, publicists and, of course, readers. Life & Deaf share Frankie’s belief that this will lead to change for the better.

**“My day experience with Julia Donaldson is epic! I can’t believe it that I have an opportunity like this!”**

Life & Deaf are a tiny volunteer-led organisation and are so proud to have enabled a great number of deaf young people to express themselves with honesty and creativity and to have a voice within their communities.

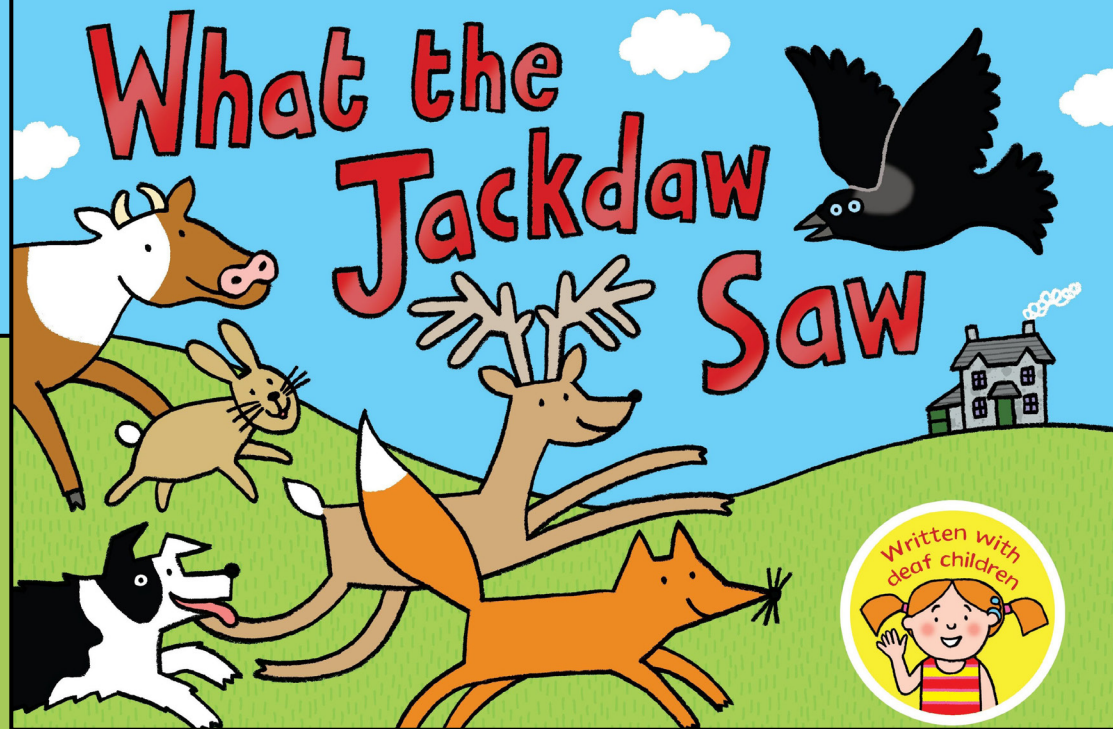
This year they celebrate their 10 year anniversary and to mark the occasion, later in year they will be launching an international poetry competition for deaf children and young people and their family and friends. The judging panel will include at least one celebrity and the prize will bring deaf young people and their families to London to enjoy some of the fantastic arts events in the capital.

The competition will be launched through direct communication with schools, national media and in publications for deaf children and their families and professionals working with deaf children and young people. Look out for updates on:

Website: [www.lifeanddeaf.co.uk/](http://www.lifeanddeaf.co.uk/)  
Twitter: @LifeandDeaf



Julia Donaldson • Nick Sharratt



## A picture book about friendship and sign language

**Life & Deaf** is an award-winning not-for-profit organisation that supports deaf children and young people to explore their identities through poetry, film, performance and art; this with the aim of improving their literacy, language, self esteem and mental health.

On 26th March 2012 they teamed up with Julia Donaldson, Children's Laureate 2011 – 2013 and author of *The Gruffalo*, to create a unique new children's book.

On the day twenty deaf young people were chosen to take part in a workshop where they worked with Julia to create a new children's book featuring deaf, signing characters entitled *What the Jackdaw Saw*. This was a project particularly close to Julia's heart, as she has a hearing loss herself and is fascinated by sign language.

There exist to date only a handful of children's books in which the characters' use of sign language is incidental. Many books, fiction and non-fiction, have sought to illuminate the experiences of deaf children, only a few feature sign language as an incidental plot device with characters who just happen to sign.

The story in the book is based around a jackdaw, who wants all his friends to come to his party. However, when he calls out his invitation the other animals just touch their heads. The story goes on to explain what their actions mean with the help of a brown owl.

Nearly two years after the workshop took place; the story that was formed has been brought to life with the help of the prize winning artist Nick Sharratt's bright and accessible illustrations. The book is being published by Macmillan Children's Books, one of the UK's leading children's publishers.

This brilliant book about sign language, acceptance and friendship, featuring Julia Donaldson's famously wonderful rhymes and a catchy chorus, is a celebration of Julia's Laureateship and the fantastic collaborations with Nick Sharratt and with Life & Deaf, and is sure to appeal to deaf and hearing children alike.

**The book is available now.**



## *Nominations are now open!*

The Signature Annual Awards are now in their eighth successful year and are firmly established as a well respected annual event to celebrate those who are breaking down the barriers for deaf and deafblind people.

This year's awards focus on the influential educational establishments, teams and individuals that are brightening the futures for so many. We would like to highlight and reward those who enrich education for deaf people and spread understanding through teaching deaf communication and awareness.

### **Nominations are now open in eight new categories:**

**Leadership in Education Award**

**Enriching the Student Experience Award**

**Educational Support Award**

**Transforming Lives through Education Award**

**Emerging Teacher Award**

**The Community Champion Award**

**Training Initiative Award**

**Signature Lifetime Achievement Award**

To honour this year's shortlisted Nominees and announce the Winners, we will host Signature Recognises... the educators, at a prestigious awards evening in January 2017.

**Start your nomination now**  
**[www.signatureannualawards.org.uk](http://www.signatureannualawards.org.uk)**

  
**Signature**  
**Annual Awards**