

Signature. inspire

ISSUE 5 | APRIL 2022



GABRIELLA LEON

Signature catches up with
the Casualty Star

HALL OF FAME

Introducing the Signature
Hall of Fame

BSL BILL

The latest on the BSL Act
Now! campaign

IDENTITY

Deaf identity by
Rebecca Withey

WELCOME

to the 5th edition of Signature's
Inspire magazine

"I'm delighted to welcome you to our latest edition of the Signature Inspire Magazine. Our magazine aim is to raise deaf awareness amongst young people, and inspiring young people to learn sign language

We are really excited to be back at Deaf Day, meeting with old and new friends.

It's great that after having to postpone the last couple, the team at City Lit have managed to get this event to take place again this year. I have been to a number of these days and it's a fantastic way to meet new people.

Signature have been exhibitors at this event for many years now, so we were delighted when we found out it was happening again, it's great to be finally able to get back out face to face.

Our team have a combined 80 years experience at BSL qualifications, so any questions you have I am confident between them so they'll be able to answer it.

Thank you to City Lit again for all of their hard work organising this event and for bringing together so many people to celebrate Deaf provision and the Deaf community."

Lindsay Foster, Executive Director

**"WE ARE REALLY
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AND NEW FRIENDS."**

Signature

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BSL ACT NOW! CAMPAIGN



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HALL OF FAME

SIGNATURE CELEBRATION!

We are delighted to introduce the 'Signature Hall of Fame'!



BSL BILL MOVES ONTO THE HOUSE OF LORDS

by Liam O'Dell

With the third reading reported to take place in the Lords on 27 April, there's a real prospect we'll have a British Sign Language (BSL) Bill ready to become law by the end of the month.

It's quite remarkable how far the Bill – which would finally give legal recognition to BSL – has come in the space of mere months. When Labour MP Rosie Cooper was selected in the Private Member's Bill ballot almost a year ago, there were fears her Bill fail to pass in time – due to the position in which her name was called out.

Yet the Bill has sped through the legislative process since it had its second Commons reading in January - no doubt thanks to the unanimous, cross-party support for its proposals. With the exception of a change to the draft law's 'long title', no MP or Lord – at the time of writing – has tabled an amendment.

It remains pretty much unchanged, with the three main elements of the Bill concerning: legal recognition of BSL in England, Scotland and Wales (Northern Ireland is excluded with respect to devolved matters);

" DEAF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR 230 YEARS FOR THE LEGAL RECOGNITION OF BSL, AND THAT GOAL IS NOW IN SIGHT."

Rosie Cooper MP

regular reports from the Work and Pensions Secretary on the UK Government's work to 'promote and facilitate BSL'; and the issuing of BSL guidance.

The Bill cleared the Commons on what was a monumental day for the Deaf community. On 18 March, 19 years prior, BSL was officially recognised by the UK Government. This year, however, it saw hundreds of Deaf people descend on Trafalgar Square to celebrate the language, and the fact MPs backed the Bill at its final stage in the chamber.

So Ms Cooper then handed over the reins to Lord Holmes of Richmond to champion the Bill in the Lords, when some tweaks were made to its explanatory notes which gives background information and context about the Bill.

At this point, acknowledgement was finally given that "a range of forms of British Sign Language [are] used by Deafblind people in the UK", and clarification around a non-statutory BSL Board was issued.

The Board, it said, would advise on guidance regarding the "promotion and facilitation" of BSL, and "convey the perspectives and priorities" of BSL signers "across England, Scotland and Wales". Details of who will be on the Board are to be confirmed, of course, but the organisations behind the BSL Act Now campaign have committed to it being made up of everyday Deaf signers.

It's just one discussion taking place ahead of the Bill actually becoming an Act, but there's a few things to suggest it isn't premature to get the ball rolling on long-term actions.

The third reading in the Lords this month could very well be its last stage before receiving Royal Assent - provided there's no last-minute amendments.

That's unlikely, given just how much support is behind the Bill. When we celebrate its eventual passing, I hope we also commend the rare occasion of all parties coming together for change, but also question why it wasn't done sooner.





JOHN WALKER ANNOUNCED AS NEW SIGNATURE CHAIR

by Signature

Signature are delighted to announce that John Walker as our new Chair.

John has been on the Signature Board of Trustees for the last 7 years and Vice-Chair for the last 6 years.

John is a Lecturer at University of Sussex and is convening an undergraduate programme in British Sign Language and Deaf culture as an elective pathway or minor. He also recently submitted his doctoral thesis in human geography, which includes mapping how deaf people perform cultural capital within Deaf spaces.

John started his career as a chemist before switching to training and development of future deaf leaders for FYD, a charity for deaf young people.

He then set up Chereme Ltd, a deaf and sign language centric solutions to human resource issues as well as developing bespoke training packages for different clients. In 2006, he was invited to work at Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex delivering programmes and EU projects. After completing his PG Dip study in BSL linguistics and interpreting at the University of Durham, he was the first deaf trustee of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, where he served as Treasurer for 4 years.

At Sussex Centre for Language Studies, John has received education awards in 2017 and 2019, and was the first academic lead on disability in 2021 for the university as a whole.

John Walker said “the landscape of teaching and learning has changed during this period of restrictions and Signature has adapted to offer different approaches to assessment; this has provided an opportunity to offer our qualification portfolio to a wider audience.

My benchmark is my own experience of when I was an isolated deaf child in a mainstream school, and whether the current portfolio would now enable deaf children and deaf people to have access to clear communication, to British Sign Language, and to language/communication professionals. Signature will need to respond to upcoming challenges including the GCSE in BSL, ensuring there is an availability of teachers, and a qualification portfolio that meets the needs of deaf people in a more complex society.”

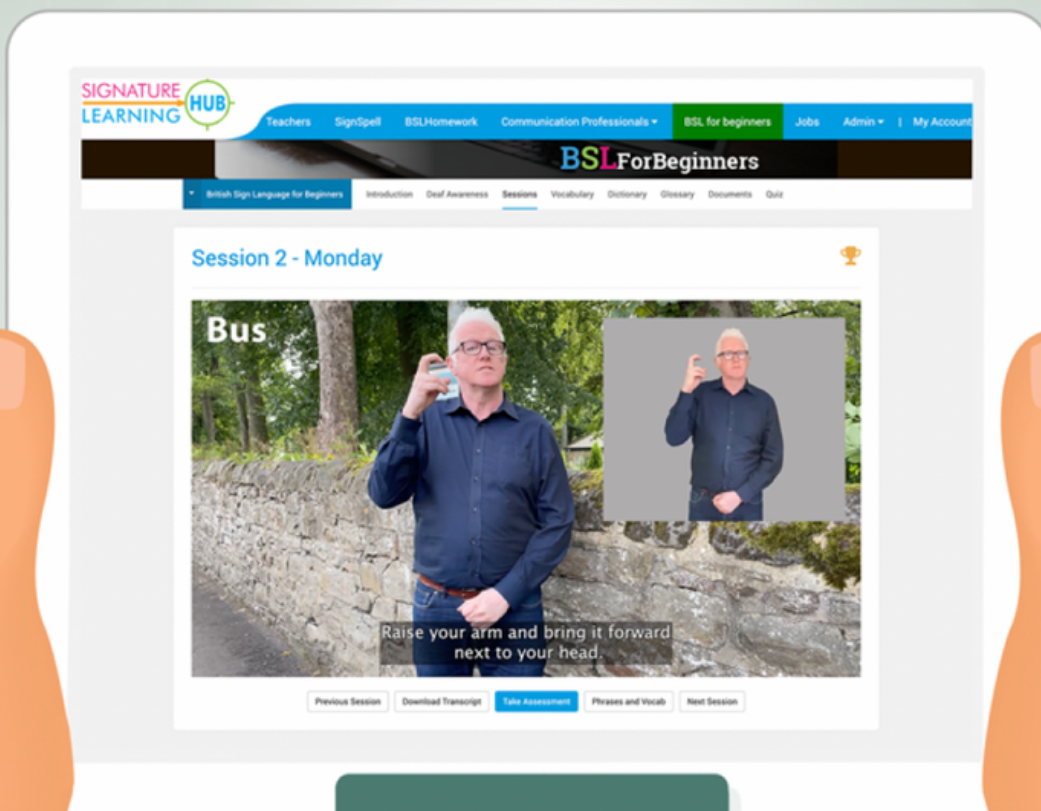
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BSL for beginners was created by consulting with language experts and Deaf teachers.

- ✓ Immersive experience
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- ✓ Support documents
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INTERVIEW WITH CASUALTY STAR GABRIELLA LEON

by Signature

Gabriella Leon starred as 'Jade Lovall', Casualty's first deaf series regular in the shows history between 2018-2021.

Gabriella's main storylines on Casualty involved a team of deaf creatives, where her character 'Jade' met her birth mother for the first time and put the authentic experience of being deaf at the front of the narrative.

The episode contributed to 'Best Continuing Drama' BAFTA win 2021, it was also nominated for a Rose'D'or.

Q: Can you tell us a little about yourself and your deafness?

Hello, I'm Gabriella, I'm a deaf actor, writer, and theatre maker and I'm half Spanish. And I would say that comedy is my favourite genre in terms of acting.

I have something called cookie bite syndrome in terms of my deafness, which basically just means a big bite is missing from my hearing.

My story I would say, is individual, just like every deaf person's story is. I found out I was deaf when I was 18, so later in life. But I've actually been deaf from birth.

But I thought that lipreading really heavily was normal. It was a big shock, if I'm honest, I had a massive identity crisis. At the time I didn't know where to start discovering my deaf identity and what it meant to be deaf and the pride and the identity that comes with that. And I didn't have the right support at the time when I found out. It took me quite a few years to get used to my hearing aids because I had 18 years without access, basically, so I didn't have access to sign language growing up.

I do think about the difference it would have made to me in my education, etc., but better late than never.

Q: You use British Sign Language as well as lipreading, at what age did you start learning BSL?

So, at 18 I found out I was deaf, and then I started drama school with hearing aids literally about three months after I found out. So, it was a massive life change, and I really did struggle sort of navigating who I was and all of that. I always say that it was only when I grew in confidence as a deaf person and started talking about my deafness more.

I would say that sign language found me. I think that's how I feel about it.

I was 22 when I started to learn BSL and it kind of coincided with my journey on Casualty, it kind of married up. And that's why I think Jade will always be really special to me as a character, because it was, you know, the first time I played a deaf character and I'm a deaf actor. It was just beautiful.

It was you know, right place, right time. I'm so happy that I have sign language in my life now. I get emotional thinking about it because it has just given me full access, full clarity to my communication and I'm still learning. It's a beautiful language, it grows, and you meet different people, you learn their signing styles and it's a beautiful gift of a language, I think.

It's my third language because I speak English and Spanish, so sometimes my brain gets a little bit confused.

Q: Do you do any Spanish sign language?

Sadly not, no, I don't have any Spanish family members, but I think I will learn one day. But I kind of want to do one at a time, I'm sure it's beautiful as well.

Q: What was your favourite part of learning Sign Language?

It's a really good question!

Meeting deaf people that I look up to and being able to have a conversation with them, converse and talk and laugh. That was probably my favourite bit because it meant that I was a part of the deaf community. So yeah, the first time that I could probably properly converse with a deaf person.

And I think that will always be my favourite. My favourite signs change every week. But yeah, I would say the moment of having full access and fluid communication with the language.

Q: Do you think your deafness has impacted on you as an actor?

Oh, see, I think this is a really interesting question because I think people would answer it differently.

I would say that my deafness has never affected my acting, but only non-accessible environment can and has because if there's no access, I can't do my job to the best of my ability and we're not equal in the room. But I feel like that has nothing to do with deafness or disability and everything to do with attitude. I feel like no one's deafness or disability would affect their ability to act or their ability to do what they're really good at. But I think society and the environment really impacts that ability to do our jobs properly, I guess.

Q: Do you think your deaf identity changes the way you act and certain rules?

Yeah, I think so. Because, you know, sometimes I play characters that aren't openly deaf, you know, it's not about a deaf character or a deaf person signing. I'm just an actor playing a character, and I wear hearing aids so my character's automatically deaf and it's almost like my character's secret, my character's thing. It doesn't have to be spoken about, it's normalised. I always really enjoy those roles because, I'm a deaf woman, I'm a deaf actor here I am doing my job.

"I WOULD SAY THAT SIGN LANGUAGE FOUND ME. I THINK THAT'S HOW I FEEL ABOUT IT."

Gabriella Leon

So, yeah, I think my deaf identity does positively affect and impact some of the characters that I play because I have that extra layer and that extra level of understanding. I think it's something quite amazing and special to bring to that character.

Q: And where does your passion for acting come from?

When I was little, I saw *Singing in the Rain* for the first time. It's a classic, and I just felt this surge, a spark and I was really hooked, with that film. The visuals and the colours and the story and tap dancing. It's literally why I started dancing when I was younger. I loved it, it was visual storytelling, and I didn't realise at the time, probably why I enjoyed those stories more because of the visual aspect. I think that was the spark. I always just used to go to acting classes, I'm quite lucky in the sense that I've just always known that I wanted to tell stories and pretend to be different people.

I used to make plays with my sisters growing up and I'd force all my family to watch them. I'd write, direct and star and, you know, have all the costumes and the different sets and all that stuff.

Acting, the arts and theatre and dance and film, everything else has just always been a part of my life and something that gives me great joy. And I think satisfaction. To be honest, I have never thought about doing anything different.



Q: You're involved in the Red Tree stage show and Maryland this year, can you tell us anymore about those?

Yeah, I am.

Red Tree was back in January it was a theatre play, it was cool it integrated a BSL performance, working with other deaf actors and hearing actors as well. I'm really interested in new writing that's kind of my background in terms of theatre making. So that was interesting.

I'm not allowed to talk about Maryland just yet.

Q: Do you have anything else coming up that's exciting to look forward to?

Again, I can't really say, everything is really secretive in the acting industry. We're not allowed to talk about anything exciting that's happening. But there's a couple of things that I'm doing that I'm really looking forward to, people will still see me.

I look forward to what the rest of 2022 will bring, as the world sort of recovers from what we're continuing to go through with covid and things like that.

I just want to continue doing what I love doing!

Q: And what would you say has been your greatest achievement in acting?

I want to say, because I think it's important that people and young people seeing this understand that success is judged by the individual. I think that's really important to remember. Because there are so many things in my acting career so far that I'm really proud of, that someone else might say, Oh, that's really small, that's nothing. You know?

I'm really proud that I was the first deaf regular in Casualty's history. I think the first actor with a disability in the history of that show, as well, so that felt, monumental.

Obviously, the episode where Jade met her birth mother for the first time, that in itself was a massive achievement because it was deaf led, creatives, the whole team. And the story just felt really special to be on mainstream television with all of these deaf people involved. And then the fact that that episode was one of the episodes that helped Casualty win the BAFTA that year, is so memorable I think I will remember that forever.

But you know, the thing about achievements is the list keeps growing, it goes on. So, bring on more good things.

Q: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I really love foreign films because I love different languages and the best thing about foreign films is that there's always captions. There's none of this messing about. Beautiful. I would watch foreign films all day.

I like seeing my friends. I enjoy doing 1000 piece jigsaw puzzles I find that really relaxing, strangely, I know some people get stressed by them I find them really relaxing to do.

I love going to art galleries, all the normal things that people do.

I like cooking as well.

Q: What's your favourite thing to make?

Oh, it has to be Spanish food, because I'm a bit biased. Yeah, something like Tapas or a really good Paella. Yep. Chef's kiss.

Q: The BSL bill is currently going through the process of becoming a legal language, hopefully. What difference do you think that might make to the deaf community?

I feel like it will be life changing. I really, really do. I think it's that serious for the whole deaf community and all people that support us and our allies as well. I think that the effect will be felt throughout society. Even on a personal note, the thought of being able to go to my medical appointment and accessing that better and not have my partner with me communicating. You know, I got the privacy back of the individual, just like hearing people do when they go to the medical appointment. I mean, I feel like the effect will be seen and felt everywhere.

It's been a long time coming and I hope the act will put less responsibility on deaf people to fix, organise and plan all of our access. You know, we're the ones that think about access more than anyone because how do we access anything? How do we integrate with anything? And I feel like passing some of that responsibility back to the government will change everything hopefully

We just need to meet and make sure that we're still being listened to and received. It is exciting that we're going to be a bit more equal, it's mad that we're even talking about this. You know, it's monumental. I just think about all of the young deaf children that will benefit from this and as they grow up. It can only be a positive thing.

It makes me emotional; I think it makes every deaf person emotional and the community and their allies as well.

Yeah, so bring it on!

Time for a new career?

Careers in Deaf Communication



Signature qualifications can set you on the path to a number of careers in deaf communication.

Whether starting your career, changing career, professional upskilling or just looking at the options available, we will provide a simple breakdown of career pathways, including qualification, routes to registration and continuing professional development.

With a potential GCSE in BSL in the next few years, now is great time for you to start learning!

Recently during National Careers Week we launched our refreshed Careers in Deaf Communication webpage to promote a number of rewarding careers available.

Lindsay Foster, Executive Director at Signature said: "National Careers Week gives us a perfect opportunity to launch our new careers pages and to share with you all the great careers available from completing one of our qualifications.

We want more people to know about the fantastic careers that you can have by learning Sign Language, careers that are fulfilling, rewarding and really do make a difference.

If you would like to understand more about these career paths, you can reach out to someone doing that career, they will be happy to chat and tell you why they love what they do. With the BSL Bill which is currently passing through parliament, there is going to be more

demand for all of these careers, there's never been a better time to consider them.

If you want to know if BSL is for you, then give BSL for Beginners a try. It is a comprehensive online course developed alongside language experts and Deaf teachers from across the UK, it's a great way to give the language a go to see if you enjoy it. It's also great for upskilling as an employee and even basic sign language skills really make a difference to deaf people across the UK."

For more information visit our careers page: www.signature.org.uk/careers-in-deaf-communication



SIGNATURE'S 40TH CELEBRATION EVENT

by Signature

We are delighted to introduce the 'Signature Hall of Fame'!

This is a one-off event, where we will come together for Signature's 40th-year celebration, recognising those people who have gone above and beyond to improve deaf communication over this time.

Over the 40 years we have seen so many inspiring stories and people doing amazing things to improve access for deaf people from the historic BSL Bill, the potential GCSE in BSL and Rose Ayling-Ellis winning BBC's Strictly Come Dancing. We believe many of these people deserve to be included in the Signature Hall of Fame.

The event will take place on Friday 18th November 2022 at the National Football Museum in Manchester.

Lindsay Foster, Executive Director at Signature said "we really wanted to come together to celebrate what has been achieved over the last 40 years in the sector. So many people and organisations have achieved so much and we want to honour that."

It's exciting to have an event to look forward to where we'll be able to welcome friends again after a few challenging years."

How to make a nomination

The Signature Hall of Fame is open to everyone - individuals, teams, and organisations working in the UK, recognising those people and organisations who have gone above and beyond to improve deaf communication over the last 40 years.

Nominations for inductees to the hall of fame will open on Monday 4th April and will close at 5pm on Monday 29th July 2022.

We will be inducting 10 people or groups into the Signature Hall of Fame, with up to 50 on the shortlist – each of those are inspiring better access to deaf communication.

"SO MANY PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS HAVE ACHIEVED SO MUCH AND WE WANT TO HONOUR THAT."

Nominees can come from anywhere, they could be teachers who have inspired a generation of people to learn Sign Language, a organisation that has gone way beyond the 'norm' to improve access for Deaf customers or a celebrity who has inspired millions to try BSL throughout their careers.

Visit: [Signature.org.uk/hall-of-fame](https://signature.org.uk/hall-of-fame)





WIN AN IPAD

Win an iPad with Signature, nominate someone to be inducted into the Signature Hall of Fame and we'll select 1 lucky person to win a brand new Apple iPad. Each nomination counts as 1 entry, so the more people you nominate the more entries you will have.

The Signature Hall of Fame is open to everyone - individuals, teams, and organisations working in the UK, recognising those people and organisations who have gone above and beyond to improve deaf communication over the last 40 years.

Nominations for inductees are now open and will close at 5pm on Monday 29th July 2022.

We will be inducting 10 people or groups into the Signature Hall of Fame, with up to 50 on the shortlist – each of those are inspiring better access to deaf communication.

Nominees can come from anywhere, they could be teachers who have inspired a generation of people to learn Sign Language, a organisation that has gone way beyond the 'norm' to improve access for Deaf customers or a celebrity who has inspired millions to try BSL throughout their careers.

HOW TO MAKE A NOMINATION

- Go to the [Signature.org.uk/hall-of-fame](https://signature.org.uk/hall-of-fame)
- Complete a nomination form
- Go into plenty of detail and tell us as much as you can. If you're nominating yourself, don't be modest!
- Make sure your details are correct so we can contact you if you win our prize draw.
- Make sure you leave the right contact details for the nominee so we can let them know if they are shortlisted
- Do all of this before the nomination deadline at 5pm on Monday 29th July 2022.
- iPad winner announced on Tuesday 30th April 2022.



MAKE 2022 THE YEAR TO LEARN BSL

by Signature

The last 24 months have been incredibly challenging for all of us, so now is a great time to plan on doing something that is fun, rewarding and challenging.

British Sign Language is all these things!

BSL is a visual language, requiring you to use a mixture of hand shapes, facial expressions and body movement to communicate effectively; making it a fun and tactile language to learn. You'll get quick rewards because of the nature of the learning; you'll learn skills and signs that you will want to share with your friends and family.

You'll also be gaining a new skill that really makes a difference to the hundreds of thousands of deaf people across the UK. BSL is great for upskilling your career, it can also introduce you to several career pathways that you may not have thought of.

With a potential GCSE in BSL in the next few years, now is great time for you to

start learning and gain the skills needed to deliver this in your school.

At the end of last year, trail blazers Rose Ayling-Ellis and Giovanni Pernice lit up our screens on BBC's Strictly Come Dancing - but their top marks weren't the only thing that caused a stir. Rose is the first profoundly deaf British Sign Language user to take the Strictly Dance Floor since the show launched back in 2004.

She used her newfound platform to raise awareness of BSL – causing a surge in people searching for information.

During one of their performances, Rose and Giovanni signed to each other at the beginning as they portrayed an argument between the two characters. Rose said "I just love to show my language and to incorporate it into the dance, I think it's very special for me"

A later performance saw a 'silent dance' showing what it was like for Rose as a deaf person dancing. It was voted as one of the TV moments of the year, Giovanni said "This dance meant so much to us and we are so proud that we could show a glimpse into Rose's world and represent the deaf community in this way".

This has inspired so many people to learn, they've showed what is great about BSL and why everyone should gain a BSL qualification.

150,000 Deaf adults and children in the UK who use BSL and for 70,000 of them, BSL is their preferred means of communication. The actual number of people using BSL on a day-to-day basis is of course considerably higher. Indeed, these figures do not take into account the families, friends and colleagues of Deaf people who use BSL to communicate with them.

Learning British Sign Language can break down communication barriers, proving basic access for a large proportion of our population.

British Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression and body language with its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. It is not dependent upon or related to English and is used mainly by people who are Deaf or to support those who have a hearing loss. BSL is a real, full and living language that is part of a rich cultural heritage and one of the UK's indigenous languages.

With almost 40 years' experience, Signature, the leading awarding organisation for deaf communication qualifications, have supported more than 450,000 people to learn British Sign Language. All Signature qualifications are nationally recognised and accredited by Ofqual (The office of the Qualifications and Examinations regulator).

Signature prides itself on the quality of their qualifications - providing learners with the skills they need to become successful communicators and upskill in their careers by creating learning opportunities for every stage of life.

Finding a Signature course couldn't be easier. All you need to do use the centre finder on their website (signature.org.uk) and locate a Signature centre in your local area or find one offering online courses.

Signature have also created BSL for beginners a short online British Sign Language (BSL) course accredited by the CPD Certification Service. BSL for beginners is a comprehensive online course developed alongside language experts and Deaf teachers from across the UK.

This immersive course introduces BSL and deaf awareness using a range of informal clips, receptive practice, short quizzes, vocabulary and more, whilst also contributing towards your CPD portfolio (www.signature.org.uk/british-sign-language-for-beginners).

Interested in becoming a Signature centre?

Due to the rise in interest in British Sign Language Signature are looking for more centres to teach their qualifications; if you are interested in finding out more information visit signature.org.uk/delivering-a-signature-course, alternatively get in touch with their friendly customer support team at communications@signature.org.uk or call 0191 383 1155.

"THIS DANCE
MEANT SO MUCH
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IDENTITY

by Rebecca Withey



Despite going to a mainstream secondary school with a deaf unit, nobody there once asked me or told me about the idea of a 'deaf identity.' It's only now when I'm questioned on how I identify, I can pinpoint exactly how I feel and be proud of all the different parts that make up me.

Loosely speaking, an identity of any sort relates to how you see yourself – whether it's do with your looks, beliefs, culture or social preferences. In relation to deafness, I see a deaf identity as how a person feels about their deafness and their individual preferences such as communication methods, lifestyle, viewpoint etc. There's no right or wrong, it's just how YOU feel.

In addition to this, I do believe that a deaf identity goes hand in hand with a sense of deaf pride. I didn't fully understand this growing up, and my deafness was always attached to a sense of awkwardness or lack in some way. I wasn't really 'that deaf' anyhow during my childhood so for the majority of the time, I felt very comfortable and at home with being solely in the 'hearing world.' I spoke, lipread, enjoyed music, and went to dance school, all with relative ease.

It was only in certain social situations that a feeling of unease would arise. I wouldn't catch a conversation or somebody would tell me that a missed joke 'didn't matter' and I would start to feel the emotions of someone who didn't quite fit in.

I also had a bit of a blushing problem. If I didn't understand what was going on or someone spoke to me unexpectedly, my face would burn bright red. Because of this I abhorred any kind of event that meant

people would have to look at me when I was talking and I especially hated being asked to read in front of the class at school. I didn't understand it at the time but I can see now how this social embarrassment stemmed from feeling inadequate if I didn't hear.

On top of my personal insecurities at secondary school, my support teachers were often at a loss as to what exactly to do with me. They wanted to support me in classes but I felt their level 2 BSL was too slow for me and I preferred to lipread the class teacher. They also took notes in class for me but I would often finish my work before they'd completed writing these up.

I was also told that I wasn't 'deaf enough' to have certain support in classes, even ones that I found exceptionally hard such as French or Music. So although I was clearly deaf (severely at the time) I still felt under pressure to function independently without much interaction or support from others.

I can appreciate now how hard I worked at mainstream school. Looking back I can see how I was often exhausted after school, silent in the car ride home and needing to take a nap at home before rushing out to my dance class. On other days I'd shut myself in my room for hours while laying down and listening to the stereo blaring


out. I needed this alone time to decompress from focusing so hard on filtering information and lipreading.

Because I worked so hard to fit into the hearing education system, it seemed all of my time was spent studying, dancing or relaxing, with very little time for socialising.

That all changed when I went to a deaf school for sixth form, and boy did I make up for lost time! I suddenly had a great big bunch of friends instead of just one or two and I felt able to relax and enjoy myself during school time. I no longer had to concentrate intently to make sure I didn't miss anything.

Because I made friends with deaf peers from all over the country, I also no longer felt like the 'unusual one' as I soon discovered that there were in fact plenty of us deaf folk scattered across the world!

By meeting more deaf people I had widened my perspective on what being deaf actually meant. I also made more use of sign language (which, fortunately I did already know) and I felt more confident at expressing myself – without the blushing!



I later had to return to my secondary school to pick up an award and a member of staff there commented on how surprised he was at my sudden confidence. I had greeted him with an outgoing 'hello!' instead of waiting to be spoken to, and my increase in self esteem was evident in the way I behaved and interacted with others.

It seemed that being around deaf peers had given me the boost in confidence I needed and resulted in a feeling of pride and self acceptance in regards to my deafness. My deaf identity had begun to form!

Saying that, I do remember a time at sixth form where something had angered me. In a rage, I burst into a torrent of accusations – all in spoken (shouty!) english. My deaf friends found this most amusing and pointed out to me how my initial reaction was to respond in english rather than BSL. My hearing identity was still there, it seemed.

There are many aspects of me that still stem from the hearing world. Even my (deaf) husband jokes that I'm the hearing one in the family sometimes and a lot of deaf people do assume when they first meet me that I am, indeed, hearing. I guess two decades of living with hearing parents and growing up with hearing friends has shaped a lot of who I am, yet – more than anything – I am pleased and proud at how I've come to accept and embrace my deaf identity.

I used to think that my deafness was a flaw. Something I had to try and 'overcome' or work hard enough around so it justified my existence. I tried so hard to blend in with others it exhausted me. But now – I see it as something that makes me unique. I loooove sign language and all

of its depth. I recognise the parts in me that are synonymous with deaf culture and I identify with and relate to so many other deaf people worldwide.

I also have no qualms telling people I'm deaf and asking them to repeat themselves or find a way for me to understand something. I'm confident enough to do that now. I wasn't always, believe me. I remember my childhood friend would always order for me in McDonalds because she knew I didn't 'like talking to others.'

I guess your own identity is equally unique to you. How you identify with your deafness or the hearing world depends a lot on your background, exposure to communities and personality type too. I'm not as much of an extrovert as most of my deaf friends are, but I'm also a little more open minded at trying new things than my hearing buddies.

If you asked me when I was 12 years old if I had a deaf identity, I would have firstly blushed (ha!) and then probably muttered 'no, not really.' But here and now, I well and truly do have a deaf identity. It just goes to show how life experiences can really empower and influence you. Along with a sense of assertiveness, my deaf identity has taught me to embrace ALL parts of myself, despite whatever anybody else says or thinks.

However you identify, I hope you always have the courage to be true to yourself and find people around you that love you just as you are.

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BEING A DEAFENED TEACHER IN A MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

by Evie Cryer

I was five years old when I decided I wanted to be a teacher. I had all my teddies lined up on the floor of our living room while I took the register (because that's what being a teacher is, obviously!)

All the educational choices I made from that point on, got me to where I am now – a teacher. However, over the course of my 14 years as a teacher, I've gone from a mild, manageable hearing loss to a moderate/severe hearing loss with two hearing aids, and it has changed my whole experience of teaching.

I am very lucky to have been able to afford some very, very good private hearing aids, which can filter sound and give me directional hearing, through separate settings for different situations, which I control with my mobile phone. Thanks to these (which I affectionately call Bert and Ernie, because they go everywhere together) my access to sound in the classroom is good. If my class are working in silence, I can hear individual children breathe if I want to, so they have no chance of talking or even whispering! I struggle more when the children are talking to each other about their tasks, and the noise level begins to rise, but I can usually manage this by either turning my hearing aids down or turning the children down!

My school have been amazing through the pandemic, and made allowances or adaptations in regards to masks and visors, so that I can feel comfortable and safe, but still do my job effectively.

I also teach my class, every year, about hearing loss; what I can and can't hear, how I access sound, how it feels to wear hearing aids and what being part of the deaf community means to me. In my experience, children are incredibly respectful of disabilities, and I find that, once they know,

they look after me, consider my hearing loss and are quick to explain my deafness and defend me to other children from other

classes. I like to think it helps develop their empathy.

But all this takes energy, and that is the one part of being a deafened teacher in a mainstream school that I would call a down-side. The listening and concentration fatigue involved is immense, and I get far more tired far more quickly than my colleagues. But they are supportive and respect that if, after school, I've taken my hearing aids out or turned them off, that they are just going to have to adapt if they want to communicate with me, which they do. I'm so lucky to work with such lovely and understanding people.



Evie Cryer



An additional, and unexpected, benefit of being a deafened teacher in a mainstream school is that I get to step into the job of 'role model' for young deaf/Hard-of-hearing children. To be clear, I am not the SENDCo and I do not have any formal qualification in education for special needs children (except that my daughter is autistic), but as a vocal, proud deafened person who talks a lot about hearing loss, staff frequently come to me for support with how best to provide for children in their classes who wear hearing aids or who are deaf/HoH.

At least once a week an adult from somewhere around our huge school will appear at my door with a hearing aid that won't stop whistling or batteries that have died. Fixing these issues not only gives me chance to talk to the member of staff about what the child experiences as a hearing aid wearer and how they can best support them, but it also gives me chance to talk to the child about how they feel. I have the unique opportunity to show them that deaf children can grow up to be anything they want – just like their hearing friends.

I also get to soothe the worries of the children who start wearing hearing aids for the first time and are dealing with the sensory overload which comes with it. I can answer their questions and reassure them that they are not alone in their experience.

Being a teacher is all about growing the next generation. Not just in how we fill their heads with knowledge and give them the skills listed in the National Curriculum, but in how we help them develop as humans, as individuals, and my hearing loss broadens my remit for that, and helps me grow deaf children into confident deaf adults.

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