

***Signs of God* is 10!**

So, *Signs of God* is now 10 years old! That statement will no doubt spark different thoughts in different people's minds. Some of you may be saying "10 years?! How can a decade have gone so quickly since my first *Signs of God* workshop, and I still have my youthful complexion!" Some may be saying "10 years?! I didn't even know there was such a thing as BSL 10 years ago!" Still others may be saying "10 years?! And I still have so much to learn!"

Personally I encountered *Signs of God* initially around 7 years ago, ending up on the waiting list for Summer School (sound familiar to anyone?) in Exeter in 2000. Noone ever did drop out so I could attend! I had no idea at that time how much influence the organisation would have on my development in BSL in Christian settings and ultimately in my continuing development as an interpreter. So, after a slightly false start in 2000, the following year I answered a plea from Debbie Harvey to join the *Signs of God* team at New Wine, advertised with real 'camp' cooking and everything! I had NO experience of Christian interpreting, and approached Debbie cautiously to say I was available, expecting her to turn me down. She didn't! I joined the team and had an amazing week, meeting some people who have become close friends and experiencing the support, encouragement and challenge that *Signs of God* is now famous for. It had a major impact on me in my sign language studies, but also on my relationship with God and my development as a person.

But it all started long before that with a one-off workshop set up by Ros Hunt and Gill Behenna looking at sign language use in liturgy (church language). The event was a 24 hour residential event and the story goes that at the end, someone approached them and said it had been great and they would like more of the same. Gill and Ros responded that they would continue to run workshops like this, and the response they received was something like "That's what people always say, it never happens". The challenge was set! So, out of refusal to conform to the norm, *Signs of God* was born. 18 months later the first Summer School happened – 10 days of intense learning and then practical application in a real church setting with real Deaf people (I believe there were tears in between the laughs... and people say that current Summer Schools are hard work!!)

That was January 1997 and since then *Signs of God* has run numerous day workshops, residential workshops and 5 Summer Schools, as well as providing training for professional interpreters and specialist courses. We have over 1100 people on our mailing list and we have a team of 25 Deaf and hearing tutors who make up our membership. We field hundreds of enquiries from organisations and individuals about access and interpreting in their events. We provide teams to many of the major Christian conferences. We have a Christian Interpreters' Network (our CIN list) with over 100 listed interpreters. (CIN actually started before *Signs of God* workshops thanks to Gill Behenna and Gill Stediford, but that's another story!) We are a registered charity with 4 trustees (of which I am privileged to be one) and have an administrator (who has been there since the beginning but still doesn't get paid!) We even have our own bags... Do you have yours yet?



But it's not time to become an idle teenager yet! *Signs of God* Summer Schools are still fully booked and have a waiting list. We still receive invitations to run workshops all around the country, and then get invited back to do it all again! As the Deaf community becomes more aware of its rights, the Church gains better understanding and training improves, so

do we. Our standards have risen dramatically over the past decade, but we are still committed to ensuring that people understand the value of their skills and potential, as well as their limitations and encouraging everyone to keep on learning.

Like me, I know many of you will have stories about how *Signs of God* has impacted your life and your study of BSL. We'd really like you to tell them to us. Were you at that first workshop?

Can you spot yourself (or your friends) in this photo of the 1998 Summer School?



Do you know these people?!

Were you here in 2002?

So, we're not finished! At our recent AGM we were told "*Signs of God* is here to stay". So please invite us to your area to run a workshop, please ask your questions on the egroup and please pray with us that God will bless the next decade even more than the last!

Here's to the next 10 years!

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