



**Summer School**  
Reviews and 2021



**AGM news**  
Core team members



**Summer events**  
2020 cancelled?



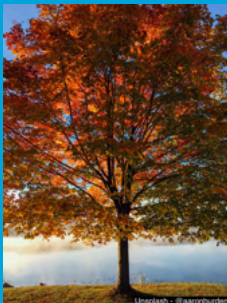
**Diversity**  
Life experience

# NEWSLETTER

Greetings from Signs of God - welcome to our 2020 Autumn edition

## *Signs of God*

*British Sign Language in Christian Settings  
Training and Exploration*



### Greetings from the Trustees

As our summer gives way to Autumn we are reminded that we live in a world of seasons. A world where leaves fall slowly to the ground as the sunlight fades. A world where trees store up the sunlight-energy they harvested and prepare to still themselves for a long rest of wintry quietness before ready to begin their cycles of growth fresh in the spring.

Our lives too are cyclical. Our growth happens in stages: from spring's new growth to summer's joy, into autumn's fruitfulness and winter's gradual decline. We must learn to live seasonally, especially in strange times as these which we are living in, with the Coronavirus around us. Instead of clinging onto what we have enjoyed we should open our hands and let the sands of time run through our fingers. Life is about learning to let go and enjoy the season and not worry about what is to happen.

We made changes within Signs of God – Summer School 2020, for the first time was held online! We can adapt to changes to God's world and work together to meet those changes as the world adapts seasonally.

Thank you all for your continued support and prayers. Take care, keep well and safe.

God bless you.

*Sarah Tupling - Chair of Trustees*



## Annual General Meeting

### AGM 2020 with tribute

This year has seen a lot of firsts for many of us and this was no different for Signs of God as we had our very first online Annual General Meeting.

There were some advantages to being online as more members were able to attend the meeting. We are grateful that so many joined

to hear what we have been doing and how the organisation is moving forward. It was also a time to remember two people who passed away during the past twelve months. Sarah Braithwaite and Catherine Farmbrough (pictured below) were both loyal participants at Signs of God events and will be greatly missed.



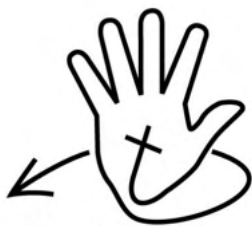
*Sarah*



*Catherine*

On a brighter note we received three nominations for Core Members and they were welcomed to the team. From an administrative point of view there will of course always be areas that I feel could be improved on but all in all the Trustees and myself were thankful in how it all went. It is hoped that next year we will be able to return to holding the meeting in person as the social aspect of any AGM is really what helps us to connect and strengthen our relationship with each other. 🙌

### Christian Interpreter Network - what is it?



Christian Interpreter Network

The Christian Interpreter Network is where we can respond to requests to source interpreters. If you or your organisation needs an interpreter for members of the Deaf community to access services such as a baptism or christening, Alpha course, conferences, marriage preparation, training, meetings, weddings, funerals, festivals and other events in a Christian setting. When we receive your requests we email our network and anyone who is available can respond, either direct to the requester, so any queries can easily be resolved as well as to discuss financial arrangements. On occasion, we offer to collate responses or for conferences can assist in putting a team together.

As a training organisation, our network includes qualified (RSLI) and trainee interpreters (TSLI) and those who hold BSL Language 6 but have not yet undergone or completed interpreter training. Signs of God does not charge for the admin involved in finding interpreters.

Those on our network will respond to requests that they feel they are suitably skilled and trained for and will include their fees; some offer reduced fees for church related work. We are, however, not an agency so cannot guarantee that an interpreter will be found.

If you have an event you would like an interpreter for or would like more information about requests or are yourself eligible and would like to register with CIN please do email Judith at [interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk) 🙌



## Good news!! Summer School 16-22 August 2021 update

The Hayes Conference Centre, Hayes Lane, Swanwick,  
Alfreton, Derbyshire, DE55 1AU

**Bookings are now open!!**

We're excited to be planning Summer School 2021, especially because of the new venue - modern conference facilities set in beautiful grounds. The worship for the week will be based on the theme of 'Mission' because we serve a missional God.

Open to adults with BSL Level 1 ability and above  
Internship programme open to trainee and qualified interpreters

### Cost

£675.00 Full board per person in en-suite room  
£150.00 Non-refundable deposit at time of booking  
Full payment by June 2021

### Early bird offer

£625.00 For the first 20 people to book and pay in full

There are 9 Early Bird places still available. You may not realise that you can pay by instalments, please just contact our treasurer at [treasurer@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@signsofgod.org.uk)

To alleviate any worries, we want to clarify that if we have to cancel Summer School for any reason, we will refund all money paid up to that point in time.



## Signs of God Bursary Fund

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the fund allows those struggling financially to attend our residential Summer School week.

If you are able to contribute to the bursary fund, as a one off, or more regularly, please do get in touch. It is much appreciated by those we can part fund to attend.

Please see our website for full details, and email [admin@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:admin@signsofgod.org.uk) with any questions. <https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/resources/510>

Our bursary fund is open again for applications, the deadline for all Bursary applications is 14 February 2021. 🙏

## Meet our new core team members

Core team members are people who nominated at our annual general meeting because they have various skills and commit to supporting the work we do. We are delighted to welcome Mary-Jayne Russell de Clifford, Dawn Lynch and Bex Walls to our core team. Dawn and Bex introduce themselves below and Mary-Jayne's article is on page 6. Happy reading!



### Dawn Lynch

It was my first time attending Summer School online and it was an excellent experience. I attended the BSL Level 3/4 session to observe the teaching styles. It was interesting to learn from Clark Denmark and Jonathan Field, such a brilliant learning experience for me.

I enjoyed the presentations from different people such as Gill Behenna, Mike Depcik and others; I have learnt so much and it was so interesting to watch, I had to replay them twice because I forgot to write notes the first time. But my notes have helped me increase my knowledge for the future.

I found the information fascinating and want to learn more about the Bible, and other things; so much is new to me which I didn't know. I would love to learn more in the future.

I enjoyed the quiz night which I found quite hard but we all had a good laugh and shed tears of joy. I was on the Deaf Warrior team.

I would like to say thank you Susan Myatt for nominating me to join the Core Team. I am excited and looking forward to working with you all.



### Bex Walls

Hello. I'm Bex and I'm a Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI) and now a Signs of God core team member. Here's just a little bit about me. I grew up in a Christian family and became a Christian at a young age. I started learning BSL 20 years ago and have worked as a mental health nurse for the deaf community since this time. Years ago, I used to attend a local deaf church but stopped attending due to family commitments. I started my TSLI training last year and felt it was the perfect opportunity to become involved again as I felt that God was

calling me back. So, I became involved in my local deaf church and looked on the internet to see what was available. I had heard of Signs of God and the work they do a few years ago but hadn't really got involved. Becoming more involved in deaf church gave me the chance to meet other Christian interpreters who have encouraged me.

This year was my first year at Summer School. We had been due to go away during the week that it was planned and I wouldn't have been able to attend as I couldn't have had a week away from my family. Due to the pandemic, our holiday was cancelled and Summer School was being run online so it was the perfect opportunity to attend. God had a plan!! So, I signed up. I then found that Signs of God were asking for interns and I decided to give it a go. I'm glad I did!! The other interns were friendly and welcoming and it was great getting feedback about the two devotions that I interpreted.

I enjoyed Summer School itself. The devotions and lectures were all interesting and gave me food for thought, not just as a Christian but also watching and listening to the interpreters. It was useful being able to watch the lectures at a later date as well so that I could combine spending time with my family and attending Summer School. It was a "win-win" situation for everyone!!

As Summer School was approaching I was asked if I had considered becoming a core team member. I hadn't but decided that it was an opportunity that God was giving me!! To be honest, I don't really know what my role or input will be as yet, but I know that God has a plan for me and I'm looking forward to getting to know other core team members and finding out where God is leading me. Watch this space...





## Summer School Online 2020 - Participants' Review

by Steph Whittington-Bradley

When I was first invited to join summer school for the first time this year I was very nervous and unsure about it. I love signing and learning about God's word, but I'm not a confident signer and even though I have passed my level 1 and 2 I find it hard to sign within a group. I spent time in prayer and talked to a good friend who helped me a lot. I plucked up the courage to sign up and joined both the level 1 and 2 teaching groups, my idea was that I would do the level 1 to gain some confidence and if that was ok I might join in with the level 2 group. I found that my nerves were completely unfounded, the groups I joined were so welcoming and friendly and I learnt such a lot from teachers.

Somehow, to see the Bible delivered in sign language brought the stories alive and gave them a much deeper meaning to me, the whole experience was really moving. I found Mark Peel's devotional from Proverbs spoke to me and was particularly helpful. *"Trust In the Lord and lean not on your own understanding."* I felt that I was being told that I needed to learn to trust God in everything, the good and the bad, trusting that he has it all mapped out and all I needed to do is put my trust in him and allow him to take control of my life. Living close to the sea I found it easy to see what Mark was saying about seeing God's control our surroundings, his power over all things.

I love talking to God in my prayer times as I walk along the beach and I often listen to the words of the song Sparrows by Jason Gray (Lyrics source: LyricFind):

*You can't add a single day by worrying  
 You'll worry your life away  
 Oh don't worry your life away  
 You can't change a single thing by freaking out  
 It's just gonna close you in  
 Oh don't let the trouble win  
 You may feel alone  
 But you're not on your own  
 If He can hold the world He can hold this moment  
 Not a field or flower escapes His notice  
 Oh even the sparrow  
 Knows He holds tomorrow  
 Lean in and it's hard to miss  
 Everything can change  
 When you make it His  
 Oh He wants to carry it  
 Carefree in the care of God  
 When you let it go  
 You'll find that He's enough  
 Oh you never leave His love  
 You don't walk alone  
 If He can hold the world He can hold this moment  
 Not a field or flower escapes His notice  
 Oh even the sparrow  
 Knows He holds tomorrow  
 There's not a single star that's out of place  
 There's nothing broken He can't remake  
 If you long for hope when you're afraid  
 Oh look at the sparrow  
 Look at the sparrow  
 If He can hold the world He can hold this moment  
 Not a field or flower escapes His notice  
 Oh even the sparrow  
 Knows He holds tomorrow  
 Even the sparrow knows  
 He holds tomorrow*

This song also helped me to see that I needed to put my trust in God and lean on him and not myself as Mark was saying. Thank you for helping me to grow in my relationship with God through the teaching and ministry of Signs of God. 🙌



## Summer School Online 2020 - Participants' Review by Mary-Jayne Russell de Clifford

From Liturgy to Trinitarian hints and plenty of glorious in between, the Sign of God conference gave fruitful tastes from the Bible and guidance from each of the experiences that deaf and hearing speakers shared together one by one during the week BUT we became part of His body even though we were watching the conference online individually.

The speakers were giving different options that were clearly aimed for each kind of audience but as a Deaf person, I was also learning what hearing people wish to learn because the hearing audience would be on the path of learning British Sign Language from Level 1 to Level 6 qualified interpreter status. I would like to share some of the points I learnt as a Deaf person that week.

Liturgy! That word just simply got stuck into my beautiful mind! I really want to watch this topic again and again. It is like I'm rising again and again (metaphorically!) The language of liturgy is expressive, informative, identifying, performative, historical, social, legal and aesthetic.

To be as 'aesthetic' as possible, following up from the Early Church, it was more free, creative and open during worship. The aesthetic of this would be contributing poems, images, songs and the beauty of the Holy Spirit moves the room. As I am passionate about drama and visual stories, arts and music, I am seeing the lacking of it in the Deaf church and the church with a signer/interpreter.

In Psalm 134, imagine you are standing in the crowd of His steadfast love and seeing the liturgy of the surroundings among His people. Now, bring the drama back, the visual arts back, the theatre aura back and we would comprehend His breath, His words and His moves. That is the aesthetic language in liturgy. BSL can bring so much more into liturgy by creating and establishing more resources.

As Bob Shrine said, "We wouldn't understand the Old Testament without the New Testament'. That sums up the church from Liturgy to The Restoration.

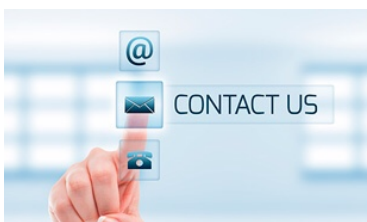
Gill Behenna, who introduced topic of Liturgy, made my heart sing and desire to see more visual drama in churches where there are deaf people present.

I felt richly blessed by the daily reflections from Deaf presenters, every morning and evening! Such a rare moment in history. I enjoyed and loved them all in various ways. Plus the BSL workshop about the word 'glory' by Sarah Clarke. Our glory is in His glory!

Thank you to the fantastic team. The theology, theory and thoughts have been carefully put together with His throne.

1 Chronicles 29:13 ESV

"And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name." 



### Our contact details


Signs of God is managed entirely by volunteers, please be patient if you contact us and there is a slight delay receiving a response.

### Postal address:

275 Downham Way, Bromley, BR1 5EN

**Emails:** [info@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:info@signsofgod.org.uk), [admin@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:admin@signsofgod.org.uk), [interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk), [summerschool@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:summerschool@signsofgod.org.uk) and of course [workshops@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:workshops@signsofgod.org.uk).

**W:** [www.signsofgod.org.uk](http://www.signsofgod.org.uk) **F:** <https://m.facebook.com/SignsOfGodBSL/> **T:** @SignsofGodBSL

Don't forget to "like" us on Facebook, "follow" us on Twitter and subscribe to our YouTube channel [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT3thuTfntZqvLe1S2\\_GEHQ/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT3thuTfntZqvLe1S2_GEHQ/) Thank you. 



## Summer School Online - Deaf Tutor's perspective

by Sarah Clarke

Pandemic! Oh no! Church buildings closed? Christian get togethers stopped? Signs of God summer school cancelled? Wait, what? No, oh no, no it's not - phew! Where there's a will, there's a way!

A few churches in my area that have Christians who are deaf or use sign language, got together via text and we agreed to have an online group where we could share virtual fellowship, and I was asked if I'd like to contribute to making devotions and sharing them with the group. My answer? Oh yes. It has been something I had wanted to do for a number of years but I felt I had no idea how to get started.

At first it was a way to encourage others in our area of Coventry and Warwickshire to keep looking to God through the unknown, the uncertainty, to not worry, to take it one day at a time, and to share God's word with one another. With another friend we took turns making devotions and sharing them. With the abundance of technology these days, it was easy to use our smartphones, film ourselves signing with some Bible verses to encourage others to be strong whilst we were in lockdown, and venturing into unknown territories. Eventually I started sharing the devotions with a wider group as I recognised the need for Deaf and hearing Christians who can sign to be encouraged through these mysterious times. Now they are on Vimeo and you can access them (and previous ones) here:

<https://vimeo.com/471447486>

I also got involved with Summer School Online, having been there in person a few times. This time was different. It was all online. The biggest challenge was getting myself prepared to host a live Q & A session for 30 mins, have a quick lunch break, then teach 3 sessions of BSL to differing levels back to back with only a 15 minute break - all whilst keeping 3 children occupied as my husband has just started his new job only the week before! Thankfully, the children were very understanding and we had such fun running around in the garden in those breaks before they continued watching tv or playing delightfully together whilst I was teaching.

I taught the same topic yet differentiated to adequately match each level. It was about "glory" and I encouraged each participant to think about the sign variations for glory. We looked at some Bible verses and discussed how we would sign them, all depending on the context. The participants showed interest and asked some questions which led to more questions and discussions and before we knew it, it was the end of the session!

Overall, these experiences during uncertain times has once again strengthened my faith in our Lord Almighty that all things are possible for those who believe. Matthew 19:36. 🙏

## Summer School Online 2020 - making it happen! By Gill Behenna

When we first discussed the idea of running something online instead of our planned Summer School, none of us really knew what could be done, or how to make it work. We had all learnt a lot of skills during Lockdown, but whether these skills were enough to run the event we had in mind was unknown!

We had all become accustomed to Zoom and felt that it offered the best option for what we wanted. Hannah Robinson was the main person responsible for setting up all the various Zoom meetings we needed - and for getting her head around how many meetings we could run at the same time with the Zoom package we had. Bookings started coming in and we reached the scary moment when we had to upgrade our package to accommodate more people! I'm still not sure how Hannah managed to set up all the meetings and the correct emails to go to the right people at the right time! It was an amazing feat!

We were so pleased when some of the people who had agreed to come to Summer School originally, agreed to provide us with recorded content so we could run a lecture programme. We were also pleased when our American friends agreed to get up early in order to participate in the Q&A sessions! Sarah Haynes was the main liaison with the Presenters and gave them all very precise instructions about how long their recorded lecture was allowed to be. (I know this because when I told her mine was 48 minutes I was told very firmly to cut it down!)

*Continued below...*

### Summer School Online 2020 - making it happen! By Gill Behenna cont'd

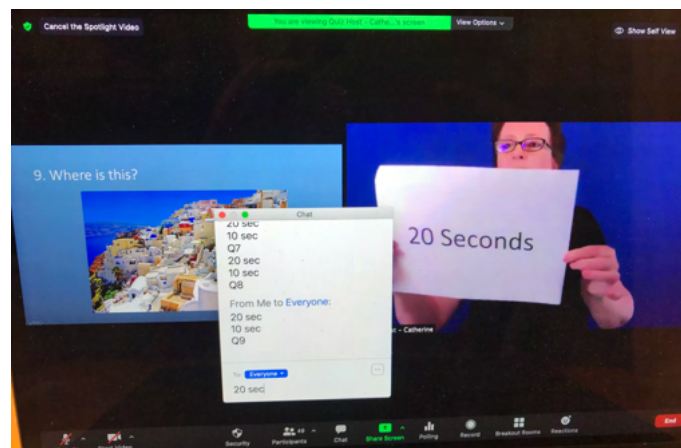
There were two problems that took a bit of working out – how to run an intern programme and what to do about worship. We decided to ask Deaf people to present a “thought for the day” each day, that would be pre-recorded and interpreted into English by the interns.

I had the job of editing all the videos in order to add the spoken English interpreting. In the end, Janice Silo did such a good job of recruiting that we had enough volunteers for a morning and an evening reflection each day. It was lovely to see them all – and they are all still available on our YouTube channel. All those videos gave plenty of working opportunities for the intern interpreters! But we also had the main presentations to interpret and the live Q&A sessions so the interpreters were kept busy. The interpreters learnt a lot about framing for a camera and voice quality when recording and I learnt a lot about editing videos!

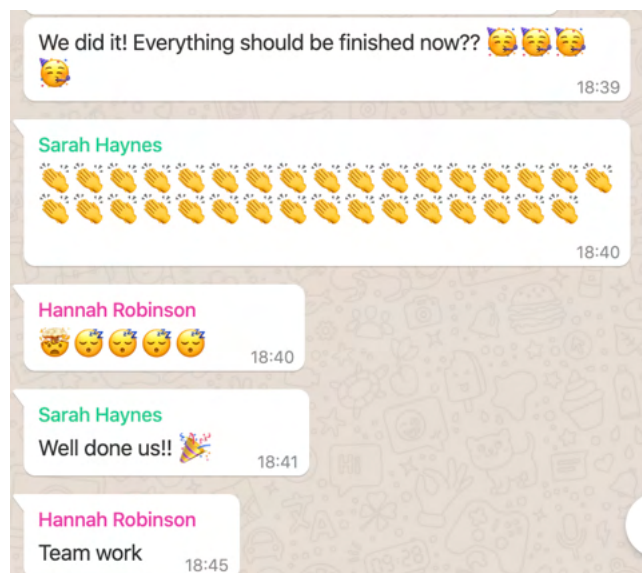
The main lectures were presented as Webinars because by the time Summer School started, we had 203 participants so it was hard to have interactive sessions. But people got busy typing their questions and commenting in the chat box so there was quite a social buzz going on.

There was quite a buzz going on behind the scenes as well as a group of volunteers did various tasks, including monitoring the questions and choosing which ones to send to the panel via WhatsApp whilst also keeping an eye on the chat to answer any problems or technical queries. There was an interesting moment when my internet connection went down and I was no longer able to see the questions so they had to be sent by text to me and then forwarded to the panellists whilst I tried frantically to get back into the meeting!

We ended the week with an amazing quiz put together by Catherine Carlyon with teams coming together virtually (and internationally) and communicating with each other however they could! Catherine made it all work via Zoom – including some old fashioned visual aids!



During the 5 days we ran 5 main lectures, 5 live Q&A sessions, 11 devotionals, 26 teaching groups, intern interpreter feedback every day, two intern meetings, a quiz, and a social get together and chat. Thanks to everyone who taught, hosted, facilitated, interpreted, and prayed! It was an amazing feat of team working and I'm not sure I ever want to do it again! 🙌





## Thoughts and prayers for Summer School 2021

by Janice Silo

We took a cautious, but prayerful, step in booking The Hayes for 2021. We had prayed and thought about it collectively and decided it is a 'go'. The theme we had planned for 2020 was based on the idea of "Mission" in its widest meaning. We've decided to keep that overall theme for 2021 since it covers almost everything we do as Christians; God gave us this responsibility. But we also will cover, as you all know, BSL (at all levels)

Deaf culture, the Bible/Theology, both practical and theological, and other relevant subjects - not forgetting fun sessions such as having a quiz and hopefully different ways of learning from each other and our tutors. There will be opportunities for tutorials in groups and one to one to enhance one's understanding of BSL/Deaf culture.

Both BSL and Deaf culture are much better caught than taught. Lectures and teaching by both Deaf and hearing tutors are helpful, but not without Deaf people being socially involved every day from morning to the evening during the week. That's what makes being at Summer School *in person* so unique!

After reading 2 Samuel 7 v 18-29 I thought I would share some of my thoughts on 'the prayer of David'. It starts:

*Then King David went into the Tent of the Lord's presence, sat down and prayed, "Sovereign Lord, I am not worthy of what you have already done for me, nor is my family. Yet now you are doing even more, Sovereign Lord;*

What struck me was that David 'sat down' to talk to God. We sometimes forget it is important to sit down to talk AND listen to God. That verse seemed quite informal as if God was David's good friend and they knew each other well. Do we sit down and talk to God?

David was claiming what God promised to Israel. It reminded me that we need to claim, to take what God has said and promised. The Bible contains all his promises. Promises of wisdom, guidance, spiritual leadership, empowerment and blessing are there for us to claim from our God.

Therefore:

- Pray for leadership within SoG that we will listen to what God is saying.
- Pray that we will move wisely and choose wisely.
- Pray that we will be guided to invite tutors and lecturers and all manner of workers for Summer School 2021 so that there will be something for everyone.
- Pray that all involved will stay well and healthy.
- Pray that those in our Signs of God team and church family who have been ill will be healed and strengthened by God. 🙏



## Lockdown 2020: Penny for Thought by Penny Beschizza

2020 started with good intentions, then in only a few months into the year, everything changed. As we inch closer to 2021, with justifiable apprehension at what is coming next, it is OK to "pull the brake, let's pause and review" from time to time.

True, having technology has transformed our daily lives – especially with Signs of God's two objectives, improving BSL in the Church and Deaf people's progression within the Church. Vocabulary new to us all at the beginning of lockdown are now commonplace; like Zoom, zoomed out, pin (someone in Zoom), Microsoft Teams, lockdown, test and trace – or test and track? – peppering our everyday dialogue. We were compelled to navigate steep learning curves with increased IT and real-time online interactions.

It was great to work as part of a virtual teaching team during Signs of God's Online Summer School in August 2020. It was a privilege to participate in real-time teaching, as well as working with the 'tech team' behind the scenes. There were pluses as well as minuses, in teaching online. It was noticeable that the more online-savvy people are, the more they would participate compared with those new to Zoom, sitting there quietly, watching, and trying to stay composed in their new experience of online BSL learning. *Cont'd ...*

### Lockdown 2020: Penny for Thought by Penny Beschizza cont'd

Soon, I recognised those differences and I took on a stronger teacher-directed approach with questions towards different learners from time to time, drawing them out to share with the rest of their class. It reminded me of the popular game, "Guess Who?" the face-matching game, all facing the same way as 2D images. That was a drawback for BSL teaching, as BSL is more 3D as a visual-gestural language with its own infrastructure within a spatial area in front of, behind and all around the signer.

Being involved with such teaching, and online church services with BSL, has shown us all, the "New Normal" would not return us 'to what life was like before lockdown'. The general consensus is seeing a developing mixture of face-to-face and online provision within the Church. There is no doubt that more people have logged in online, accessing learning as well as attending services more than they would face-to-face. The challenge for us is to attain good quality visual features, with high quality Wi-Fi and make access easily available through video platforms. Also, the experience has enhanced how we present God and the Bible in different formats.

We can say that God is in such endeavours. There is always a place to pray over our efforts in online Signs of God provision. That is a real comfort, that the same God who was there with Adam & Eve, who was there with Noah & family in the Flood, who was there with David in his fleeing from Saul, who was with Ruth, who was with Jesus in His three-year ministry on Earth – the same God is still with us today. May we always remember that in the "New Normal". 🙏

### A Summer on-line, not in a tent! - pt 1



We always know that Summer will be busy because several of us volunteer for the interpreting teams for both New Wine and Greenbelt, but what no one could predict was that we would spend the beautiful Summer days this year, in front of computer screens or in a studio rather than in a tent! Both New Wine and Greenbelt moved their events on-line and Signs of God worked with these organisations to help make everything accessible.



#### New Wine

We recruited willing volunteers to interpret pre-recorded content so that the New Wine staff team could edit the interpreter onto the screen. We also actually went to some live filming sessions so we could interpret the worship which was live-streamed in Covid-secure conditions from various locations. In the end, we interpreted an amazing 50 videos – thank you to all 15 interpreters who worked so hard and who turned the videos around, sometimes with just days to spare! It was strange, but rather wonderful, to spend a whole afternoon signing worship songs to a camera (and to God, of course!).

At the time of the event itself, we sent interpreters to studios in Reading and Manchester to interpret the live links and any odd bits that hadn't been done. New Wine made us really welcome and ensured we had everything we needed and that we were safe. At the end of the week we held a Zoom meeting, with some of the Deaf people who had watched the videos, for fellowship and sharing and we also did a brief feedback session which we recorded and sent to New Wine.

The New Wine interpreted content is still available via the New Wine YouTube channel. If you click on Impact or Arena or do a search for BSL you will find it.

Of course – we would have preferred to be in a tent! But still we managed to engage with God and each other during New Wine...

*Part 2 continues below...*

## A Summer on-line, not in a tent! - pt 2

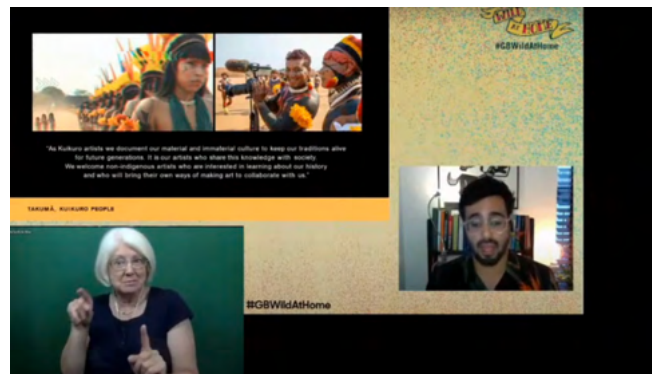


### Greenbelt

The Greenbelt Festival went on-line for just one day, but it was packed full of seminars and presentations. We were able to interpret remotely and stream the Festival and the interpreters to a YouTube link so Deaf participants could watch. We also ran some Zoom chat sessions for the Deaf participants.

Just like the “real” Festival, Deaf people could choose which of the sessions they wanted to watch within a selection offered. Thank you to the 5 interpreters who sat at their computers to make this happen, and a huge thank you to Mark Smith who managed the technology so it all came together so beautifully, even moving the interpreter on-screen when the presenter moved so the presenter wasn’t hidden by the interpreter box.

We also interpreted the pre-recorded Greenbelt Service that was broadcast on the Sunday. This was quite a challenge both for us and for the Greenbelt team because the turnaround was so tight to get everything back to the editors. But we managed it, and you can watch it on the Greenbelt Wild at Home YouTube channel as the “Great Big Festival Picnic.” Even from the comfort of our homes, we’d all have preferred to be together in the usual rain, mud, and wind! However, we thank God for the technology to enable us to provide access and the Deaf people could continue to enjoy the events. 🙌



### Diversity and visibility by Shaunett Harris

Lord knows I love my Signs of God family. Everybody who knows me knows this; I talk about it so much and invite so many people to the party. Yet I’m sad to still be in a minority. Being in a minority is not a new experience for me. I’ve endured it all my life from nursery to university, socially and throughout my working life. And I know some of you may be wondering “where are you from?” South East London. “Before that?” North West London. “No, where are you *really* from?” Worksop, Nottinghamshire.

I first attended a Signs of God event in 2008, Summer School in Northamptonshire and loved it. I was on a level 3 course at the time and felt God leading me to become an interpreter so that Deaf people have access to church. I qualified at the end of 2011 and became a registered freelance interpreter in 2012. I’ve always enjoyed interpreting at church events and being part of Signs of God; attending workshops and Summer Schools over the years has been excellent. I was overjoyed when asked to become a Core Team member in 2014. I’ve met so many lovely people, learnt so much from peers and have been able to give back by participating in and leading sessions on one day workshops up and down the UK. It’s been a joy to invite people along to events to serve together on interpreting teams and as delegates at Christian events over the years; it’s so good to serve God and each other, I love it.

Over the years though, I’ve found it more and more difficult to often be the only person of colour in the room at Signs of God events and meetings. And now more recently, the only person of colour on screen. This happens in other areas of my life too, but that doesn’t make it any less isolating. I’m not sure if this is even seen as being an issue, because throughout my life I’ve had people say to me “I don’t see you as Black”. Whilst this may be well meaning, it is not a compliment because not only does this raise the question of what do you see me as? But also what do you see so terrible about being Black? “God created you beautiful and loves us equally.” Whilst this may be true, some people don’t treat me beautifully and not all people treat us equally. And some people, both inside and outside the Church, don’t take time to speak to me to find out what type of person I am before judging me on my skin colour and deciding if I’m worth talking to let alone making space for me to walk by. *Continued below...*

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There are probably some people reading this saying “that happens to me too as an interpreter/Deaf person, we’re invisible too.” I’m aware that there are many similarities to the Deaf experience in a hearing world. However, deafness is often not as visible as someone’s skin colour or hair type. Deafness as an invisible disability is a very real and very much separate issue. It can often be easy to blend in and not attract name calling or overt discrimination, however, skin colour, hair texture, facial features can all be very visible. So there may be plenty of places you can guarantee you can safely walk into, Deaf or hearing, and have people smile at you, attempt to talk to you and treat you as an equal without explanation. No need to justify your existence or seat at the table. But it’s not a competition - my experiences do not detract from a Deaf person’s experiences, neither are worse than the other, they both happen. Unfortunately. It would be great to see a consistent level of equality in every aspect of church.

There seems to be an expectation that at Christian festivals I’ll be the one to interpret Christian rap music or interpret the overseas/African guest speaker or gospel music artist. And despite not having the same height or body shape I’m often mistaken for another interpreter of colour who also interprets at an annual Easter Christian event. These and many other micro aggressions have taught me that I am still hyper vigilant, something I had to learn at a very early age. Everyone has a natural physiological response to stress or danger, which we can’t turn off, known as ‘fight or flight’. And I’ve realised now why life has been so exhausting recently. Years of high and low profile racially motivated attacks and murders in the US and here in the UK mean I and a lot of people that look like me still constantly have to look and listen out for racist behaviour; to constantly scan to seek the safe space and the safe allies in the room, our lives depend on it. I still have to filter racist comments “having to wear masks at church? How will I recognise all the African people when they keep changing their hair...” and I have to assess and analyse whether it’s safe or even worth pointing out that “what you just said was racist.” It’s also exhausting because I then have to brace myself for the “I’m not a racist but they all... but I don’t mean you” comment that inevitably follows. It absolutely broke my heart to tell really good friends who I consider family that I don’t always have the privilege to safely call out racism because I’ll risk being labelled as aggressive or worse. Someone asked me if I was going to any of the #blacklivesmatter protests up in London and I said no because if anything went wrong and we had to run away, I’d be the one that would be chased, arrested, beaten and possibly killed and I couldn’t risk leaving my mum to deal with that.

When someone in the Signs of God community celebrated becoming a naturalised Briton, I watched with interest the numerous comments, which said “oh wow, I didn’t know you weren’t British” because the person was White. Sadly, it makes me wonder if those people treat this person any differently now they do know of their ‘other-ness’; are they now excluded or tolerated because whilst they look British they haven’t been British all along...?

These are experiences inside the wider church family and it shouldn’t be *anywhere*; it’s time to make it stop. It’s time to normalise and validate people of colour in the church and in the Signs of God family. Representation matters. Having role models is important. So I’d like to appeal to other people of colour that may be reading this to come on board, get more involved. Signs of God is not just a White Church of England thing. There is diversity in the world, there is diversity in the church and there is diversity in the Bible. I’m not particularly familiar with Church of England liturgy or vocabulary, neither do I attend a Black majority church and I didn’t let that put me off getting involved. My church is evangelical and multicultural, which is a great testament to God’s love and inclusivity. So no matter what shade of skin you have, come and take part in events and meetings at Signs of God. Everyone is welcome and I would love for more people of colour to be present and take an active role. Feel free to contact me, I’m a registered sign language interpreter, am on the CIN list, am a member of the Interpreters of Colour Network and I don’t bite.

Unless you’re made of cake, in which case... 🍰 😊



### Workshops in 2021

Want a workshop in your area? Please email: [workshops@signsofgod.org.uk](mailto:workshops@signsofgod.org.uk)  
We still hope to deliver 2020 postponed workshops in spring 2021 and are trialling an online workshop this month! Exciting times.

