

Highlights from 2020 – 2021

From the Chair:

Many of you will have been glad to say goodbye to 2020 with a more positive 2021 anticipated. For Signs of God there too have been many challenges in events and activities having to be changed or cancelled. We thank God for opening new doors with the use of technology and the continued support, love and prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Below you will read of all that has been happening between March 20 – March 21; join me in giving thanks and praise to our Lord Jesus as for all this would not have been possible if it were not for His mercy and grace.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

Sarah Tupling
Chair, Signs of God

Building capacity –core team

Our 2020 AGM was held virtually, and we were pleased that many Core team members were able to join the meeting. During the meeting we welcomed three new core team members who were nominated and subsequently added; the total number of core team members stands at 45 people. Trustees and the board of trustees now consists of 8 members.

We continue with the plan to build capacity in the organisation by bringing more volunteers from the Core Team into active roles within the Charity. During the year, the Trustees actively sought volunteers to carry out specific tasks relating to the Charity’s work. Some of these tasks are short term such as for the website content review which is in progress.

Editing work translating organisational procedures from written English into British Sign Language is ongoing. This is to make charity information and objects more easily accessible and open opportunities for people, in particularly members of the Christian Deaf community to engage with the work of the charity. Work on adding the clips to the website is in progress.

Newsletters are produced seasonally along with occasional Brief News updates which are emailed to those subscribed. These give details of events and articles to engage with those having shown an interest in the work of the charity. Engagement with Core Members was increased by way of “Prayer letters” which were emailed out during the past year.

Signs of God

COVID-19: The pandemic had a considerable effect on the usual activities of Signs of God. We successfully moved many of our activities on-line, including all our Trustees’ meetings, Summer School Planning meetings, AGM and training.

The on-line Annual General Meeting had a record number of core team members attend and three new people were voted in as Core Team Members. Mary-Jayne Russell-de Clifford, Bex Walls and Dawn Lynch and one person stood down from being on the core team.

The Summer School 2020 residential training week was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been rescheduled to take place in August 2021. To ensure people were still able to access training the team were able to offer an online-summer school which was very popular with 203 participants.

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. The main presentations (presented as webinars) and live Q&A sessions were interpreted by both trainee and qualified interpreters as part of the intern programme; they learnt a lot about framing for a camera and voice quality when recording. In addition to the online summer school a number of members of the Deaf community recorded a Thought for the Day which were made available to the public via our Facebook and YouTube platforms.

Skilled Christian interpreters enable and support Deaf presenters and speakers to contribute to major Christian events, raising the level of Deaf awareness at the events and helping to promote a positive view of deafness. Below are some of ways we have been active during 2020/21:

- Approximately 210 members of the general public attended Signs of God Training events. These included participants with no previous knowledge of the Deaf community or BSL. This includes 8 people who attended the pilot virtual workshop.
- During the year we responded to 68 requests for interpreters, amounting to 97 interpreting places.
- Skilled Christian interpreters were provided to support Deaf people attend vocational training including theological college, ministry placements, pastoral, and prayer meetings. This has facilitated their ability to attend and access training/events of their choosing in order to participate in a faith activity.
- We provided on-site, pre-recorded as well as remote live interpreters for a variety of National Christian events thereby enabling Deaf people to attend and access the events of their choosing.
- Over the past 12 months we have been contacted by and liaised with a variety of Christian organisations who were adapting to the new virtual way of holding their conferences/events and wanting to explore accessibility for BSL users.

Signs of God do not have employed staff. All its activities are carried out by volunteers (both members and non-members).

Thank you to all who served during this time; the organisers, teachers, trainers, interpreters, and all those who attended. Some travel far and work long hours to ensure BSL is provided at events/conferences, we recognise and appreciate their commitment.

Workshops and Training events

The team has been exploring various options as to how to meet the demand for workshops to be held safely both on-site as well as online. Following the experience and success of the online Summer School Trustees decided that this would be an area to explore for possible future workshops.

We ran a pilot online workshop at the request of a church in Chelmsford. As a pilot this was limited to number of attendees, but feedback was very positive both from attendees and the teaching team. This has led to Trustees deciding in favour of future national online workshop events being arranged for 2021. This is a new and exciting venture opening access for those otherwise not able to attend events for a variety of reasons including travel limitations.

Christian Interpreters - meeting challenges!

The Christian Interpreters' Network continued to support the Deaf community by providing trained and experienced interpreters for a wide range of events. Most of the requests were for online/remote services which limited the opportunity for those not experienced in such work.

Many summer conferences, traditionally held in big venues around the country, moved events on-line and Signs of God worked with organisations to help make sessions accessible in addition to collecting feedback from the Deaf community for the event organisers. This greatly increased the amount of work requested from our volunteers. For example, Signs of God provided 54 interpreted videos and attended 3 live recording events for one online Summer Festival in August 2020

There are over 230 people registered in the Christian Interpreters' Network and Trustees aim to grow this number as demand is increasing. This is not an agency; it is a network comprising of Deaf Translators, trained interpreters and those with a high level of BSL (Level 6) who may be available to offer communication support for special religious and life events. Signs of God does not charge for this administrative service; the interpreter may offer the support on a voluntary basis or charge a fee. You can contact the network co-ordinator by email at interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk.

Finance

Hannah Robinson is our Treasurer and she has prepared the accounts. The full Annual Report and Accounts are freely available via the Signs of God website and the Charity Commission website following each AGM. Hannah can be contacted at treasurer@signsofgod.org.uk.

Most of our income comes from individual donations and we continue to build on encouraging people to consider giving on a regular basis which enables us to plan for future training and events. Our monthly income from individual donations currently averages at £500 per month. We also receive occasional one-off donations.

The Bursary Scheme is receiving regular donations as well as one-off donations. The scheme benefits members of the public who may otherwise not be able to attend a residential training event due to financial hardship. Those who were awarded financial support through the Bursary Scheme in the initial allocation for Summer School 2020 have been offered for the award to be carried over to Summer School 2021; should they still be in need and able to attend.

Signs of God has a range of branded goods for sale that result in a small amount of funds. The purpose of such merchandise is mainly to publicise the Charity.

Charity expenditure has supported the events and achievements as outlined above, all of which fall under the Charity's two objects. Consideration is given to each training activity to try to ensure that participants' fees cover all the costs of the event and it makes a small surplus. Surplus funds enable Signs of God to develop new work such as the new national online workshops, which are likely to run at a deficit.

Thank you for your support, prayers and giving in the different ways.

To God be the glory

