

Highlights from 2023 – 2024

From the Chair:

It is good to look back and we thank God for his continued faithfulness. He has guided and provided during these times for us as a charity as well as for many of the people involved in this ministry on a personal level. I think of our time at Summer School, it is always such a privilege to see new faces, catch up with old friends, laugh, sometimes cry, pray, learn and worship together. It was not the only thing we did this reporting year and much happens behind the scenes. It is my hope that, by reading the below summary, it gives you a little insight into all areas of our work.

We are so thankful for the continued support we have from the many people and organisations linked with our ministry and look forward to see what God has planned for the future.

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

*Sarah Tupling
Chair, Signs of God*

Volunteers

Signs of God do not have employed staff. All its activities are carried out by volunteers (both Core team members and non-members). Volunteers are sought for specific roles and tasks as the need arises; these are usually held for a period of 2 years minimum. We look to build capacity in the organisation as well as enable volunteers to hand over tasks should they need to step back.

Volunteers have supported the work of the charity in a manner of ways such as reviewing policies, website maintenance and data processing, advisory roles, being part of teaching teams for workshops, respond to enquiries, deal with merchandise purchases, social media presence, and administration.

The 2023 Annual General Meeting took place on 16 August 2023 during our bi-annual Summer School residential which was held at The Hayes Conference Centre, Derbyshire. This was an opportunity for those interested to learn more about what we do as an organisation and potentially become interested in getting involved.

Dawn Lynch and Paul Pryce-Jones were nominated and duly elected to join the Board of Trustees. Janice Silo and Susan Myatt both stepped down as members of the Board of Trustees, they were recognised and thanked for their years of excellent service and commitment to the organisation. They remain members of the Core Team.

The current number of core team members is 48 (8 of the Core Team are also trustees).

Overview of what we have been doing

- *Approximately 52 members of the public attended in-person Signs of God workshop events.*
- *The bi-annual Summer School residential returned to the Hayes conference centre and was attended by 88 delegates.*
- *Summer school had 21 staff members expertly deliver lectures/teaching/support on a variety of themes and topics relating to sign language, church, faith and deaf community.*
- *The Christian Interpreters' Network (CIN) received and responded to approximately 205 requests amounting to over 300 interpreting places.*
- *Volunteers wrote and emailed occasional Brief News updates, prayer requests, and greeting cards to those subscribed to the mailing list, giving details of events and articles to engage those having shown an interest in the work of the charity.*
- *A CIN Survey was carried out to find out what stops people offering to be on a signing team at conferences and find out how we can help.*
- *Funds were rewarded to a further 5 applicants therefore making their attendance at Summer School 2023 possible (a total of 11 received bursary funding).*
- *The Trustees and Secretary to the Trustees (Administrator) held regular meetings either in-person or online to discuss governance and planned charitable activities.*
- *We joined the membership of the BSL Alliance and Signs of God are represented by one of our Trustees.*
- *Monitoring of interpreting teams at Christian conferences took place offering support, observe and gather feedback from Deaf delegates.*
- *A Core team member continued to represent Signs of God as Associate member of Churches for All.*
- *Following a review of the email handling system this was migrated to a platform which is more secure; thus reducing risk of data leakage as well as streamlining Board papers and communications.*

Workshops

Two in-person workshops took place where approximately 52 members of the public attended the training. These workshops were held in Ipswich and London. Some participants had no previous knowledge of the Deaf community or sign language. Being open to this group of people increases awareness of Deaf people amongst the general population as well as the specific accessibility issues faced by them in accessing religious services. The London workshop was exclusive to that churches' members and the team delivered bespoke training for them.

One workshop was postponed due to planned public transport strikes.

You can contact the Workshop Coordinator by emailing workshops@signsofgod.org.uk

Summer School

This bi-annual residential training week took place in the summer and saw 88 students of all abilities, both Deaf and hearing, explore the use and application of British Sign Language in Christian settings. The staff team consisted of 21 people expertly delivering lectures/teaching/support on a variety of themes and topics relating to sign language, church, faith and deaf community.

The intern programme was successfully run during Summer School. While this provides full access for all attendees it also provides trained interpreters the opportunity to work together in this specialist domain. This includes preparing together, the giving and receiving of constructive and structured feedback on their work thus supporting their continued development.

Training is available to all Christian denominations, as well as other faith groups or those with no faith connections. It also offers valuable opportunities of co-working and receive constructive and structured feedback on their work from both tutors and peers.

You can contact the Summer School Coordinator by emailing summerschool@signsofgod.org.uk

Christian Interpreters' Network

The Christian Interpreters' Network consists of approximately 230 people. It is a network (not an agency) of Deaf Translators, trained interpreters both qualified and trainees, and those with a high level of BSL (minimum Level 6). When available, they will respond to requests for significant life events, vocational training, ministry placements, pastoral, church community, conferences, special services, prayer meetings, etc.

Sourcing interpreters for various Christian events and services is one of the main ways in which Signs of God seeks to benefit members of the public. Individuals as well as organisations request interpreters, aiming to include those who use British Sign Language. During the year we dealt with approximately 205 enquiries, amounting to over 300 interpreting places.

We helped source skilled Christian interpreters to give access for Deaf people attending significant life events, vocational training, ministry placements, pastoral, church community and prayer meetings. This widened their ability to attend a range of faith-building activities and events of their choosing, both in person and using online platforms.

Signs of God does not charge for this administrative service and do not get involved in the financial arrangements. The interpreter may offer the support on a voluntary/reduced-fee basis or charge a fee. You can contact the network co-ordinator by emailing interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk and can sign up to join the CIN network via our website.

Finance

Hannah Robinson our Treasurer prepared the accounts which were approved and signed off by the independent examiner. The full Annual Report and Accounts will be 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 encourage 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 just under £500 per month, including a regular donation to the Bursary Fund. We also receive occasional one-off donations.

During Summer School gifts were received to support specific projects working with a variety of Deaf communities this totalled £ 1,700.00.

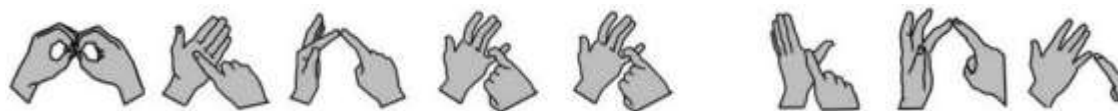
The Bursary Fund scheme benefits members of the public who may otherwise not be able to attend a residential training event due to financial hardship. This financial year a total of £1,935 was awarded which enabled a further 5 recipients to attend Summer School in August 2023. In total 11 students who attended Summer School had been awarded partial funds towards the cost of the training, enabling them to participate.

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

Charity expenditure 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 online workshops, which are likely to run at a deficit.

Thank you to all who served during this time - organisers, welcomers, teachers, translators, trainers, advisors, interpreters and all those who attended our events. Some travelled far and worked long hours to provide British Sign Language at events/conferences; we recognise and very much appreciate their commitment.

Thank you once again for your support during this time we value your prayers and giving in the many different ways.



*And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables,
that he may run that readeth it.
Habakkuk 2:2*