


# Signature. inspire

Issue  
1

Spring 2015



# SAM EVANS

Signature catches up with  
the 2013 Big Brother winner  
and charity campaigner

Former Hollyoaks actress

## RACHEL SHENTON

talks about her charity work



**Also inside:** Rugby star Mat Gilbert, ASL Interpreter Amber Galloway Gallego

# What is BSL?

## British Sign Language (BSL)

is a way of communicating that is used by around 150,000 Deaf adults and children, and by their families and friends, in the UK. Knowledge of BSL is a valuable social skill, not only for those working directly with deaf people, but also in the wider community.

Deafness can impact anyone at any point in their life for a number of different reasons. An ageing population also means that there are many people who face hearing loss later in life. There are currently 10 million people who have a hearing loss in the UK, and more than 800,000 are either severely or profoundly deaf.

Any form of disability can lead to social exclusion and isolation and deafness certainly has the potential to cause this problem. As a society, we have a responsibility to address this and encourage the widespread use of effective communication. BSL skills are increasingly relevant as our population ages.

## Learning BSL

If you are interested in learning some of the basics of sign language, why not sign up for BSL Homework, an online resource which has information on the manual alphabet and fingerspelling as well as tests and quizzes.

Developed with BSL teachers from across the UK, BSL Homework helps you to practise your sign language skills. It has over 500 short stories in BSL, clips and questions to test you, and filmed assessment examples and tips.

BSL Homework also comes with a BSL dictionary of over 2,500 individual signs so if you are having trouble remembering a sign, you can go online to find it and practice instantly.

The introductory module is free to sign up for using the link below.

BSL Homework

# Signature Inspire - Issue 1

Welcome to the first issue of **Signature Inspire** magazine, the online magazine aimed at raising deaf awareness amongst young people, and inspiring young people to learn sign language.

Within this issue we speak to the actress Rachel Shenton who discusses her role in the US show *Switched at Birth*, Rugby star Mat Gilbert who describes what it is like being the only deaf professional sportsman in England, the 2013 Big Brother winner Sam Evans who talks about his charity work and the music sign language interpreter Amber Galloway Gallego.

Choose from the links below to read more...

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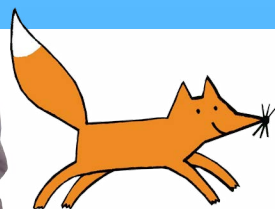
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# Sam Evans - Big Brother Winner, Charity Campaigner

(\*deaf)

## Signature catches up with Sam Evans, the 2013 Big Brother winner and charity campaigner

On 13 June 2013, Sam Evans made history when he walked into the Big Brother house to become the first deaf contestant of the popular show. A mere 68 days later and he walked out as the **first deaf winner of Big Brother**.

Sam was born with 70-80% hearing loss, and so choosing to live in a house with a group of 14 other people, for 24 hours a day might seem like a strange choice. But Sam isn't daunted by little things like that. He spoke to us about growing up with a hearing loss, and how he's planning to help others.

**"Where I'm from there is no one to sign with so I didn't get enough daily practice".**

**How did you find it growing up as a child with a hearing loss? Did you find that you got much support from your school to help you?**

I found it difficult, especially with fitting in at school and meeting new friends. I really wanted to be part of the group. Luckily for me I had a deaf friend also who was in my classes, which helped a lot. It gave me that extra confidence whenever I felt low. The school provided me with a 1 to 1 assistant for each class, which helped especially when I missed what the teacher was explaining.

**"At times, I didn't want the assistant because I wanted to be like everyone else".**

**Were you encouraged to learn to sign from being young?**

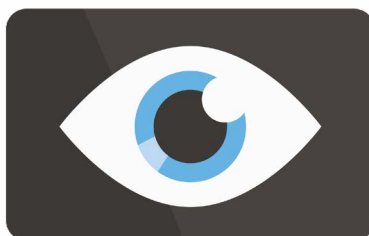
Yes, but where I'm from there is no one to sign with so I didn't get enough daily practice to keep it going. When I move to London with more deaf friends, I'm looking forward to committing properly to learning.

**You became the first deaf contestant to enter Big Brother, and eventually won series 14. Did you find it difficult to bond with the other housemates?**

Definitely! Especially the first five weeks where there were so many housemates talking over each other. As well as getting used to their way of speech and accents. Luckily I had a friend in the house who made a lot of time for me and had plenty of one to one conversations with me which helped me a lot and regained my confidence. Towards the end it got easier as the number of housemates decreased and I understood them better.

**During your time in the house you tried to teach some of the other housemates to finger spell their names. Do you think it is important that both hearing and deaf children are encouraged to learn sign language at school?**

I did, some were very interested! Personally I think all deaf children should be encouraged to learn sign language.



**Do you think that you would have found it easier to get involved in group discussions in the house if those you were speaking with had some basic signing skills or had been taught some deaf awareness?**

Like I mentioned earlier, a housemate (Callum) was mostly aware about my disability and he often explained again what was going on. That's what I needed. He made sure he was loud and clear, but he didn't use much finger spelling.

**You are currently in Malawi working with the Sound Seekers project to help deaf children in the developing World. Have you enjoyed being involved with such a worthwhile cause?**

Yes. It is an amazing experience for me, meeting deaf children out here and learning about their background and how much of a difference it is out there compared to here. It was a real eye opener and it was a rewarding experience for me to raise awareness with Sound Seekers about deafness and the poor and lack of services they have out there.

Sound Seekers have done a fantastic job in raising enough funds to build a new audiology clinic out in Blantyre. Which I look forward to hear how it's going.

**Are you hoping to get involved with more charities?**

I am involved with Action on Hearing Loss, National Children's Deaf Society and SoundSeekers and love to help as much as I can. If other deaf charities were to approach me in need of help, I would be happy to help.

I have recently launched a deaf dating website, where there is an option to donate to Action on Hearing Loss. Which I hope will have plenty of results of deaf singles meeting and finding their 'soul mate' as I understand how difficult it is for a deaf person to get in the dating game, especially when it comes to finding someone.

**Finally, what are your main goals and what do you hope to achieve over the next few years?**

I would love to be a documentary presenter; I have a couple of ideas. But that's more of a dream than reality. In reality I would love to become an audiologist in the next few years, as well as some TV work on the side.

**Sound Seekers** runs unique projects and services to help deaf children and adults in the poorest communities of the developing world. We work in partnership with local organisations to deliver sustainable and cost-effective projects that improve deaf people's access to health services, education, and social support. Our aim is to ensure that deaf children can stay in school and deaf adults can find employment.

A child born in Malawi is more than twice as likely to be deaf as a child born in the developed world. Yet Malawi has no free public audiology services. That's why Sam Evans is supporting Sound Seekers' Hear in Malawi appeal. The appeal, supported by UK Aid and Specsavers Hearing Centres, will raise money to build, equip and staff a comprehensive audiology service based in Southern Malawi's largest hospital. The clinic will help over ten thousand children and adults within three years. What's more, every single pound donated is doubled by the UK government until 20 January 2015, meaning that we can help twice as many deaf people.



## A GCSE in BSL

Signature are currently developing a GCSE in British Sign Language, that will be available to learn in school within the next few years.

We are looking for secondary schools to pilot the GCSE from 2015/2016. If your school might be interested, please get in touch with us

[gcse.enquiries@signature.org.uk](mailto:gcse.enquiries@signature.org.uk)

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"I quickly  
fell in love with  
Sign Language".

Rachel Shenton



# Rachel Shenton

**Rachel Shenton** is a British actress who is best known in the UK for playing the role of Mitzeze Minniver in the soap Hollyoaks. Since leaving the soap in 2013 she has successfully made the move from Chester to Hollywood after landing a role on the popular US TV show Switched at Birth.

**Rachel** is also well known in the deaf sector as a campaigner for raising deaf awareness; she completed a skydive in 2011 for the National Deaf Children's Society, climbed the BT Tower in 2012 for Action on Hearing Loss and has been involved in many more projects.

**Rachel** took some time out of filming Series 4 to speak with Signature about her role in her new show, as well as telling us more about her charity work.

"I'm currently playing Lily Summers in Switched at Birth on ABC Family. It's awesome! I joined the show in Season 3 so it was great when I got the call to come back for another season."

The show has been praised in the US for its promotion of deaf awareness, and has been well received by its viewers. The show was launched in 2011, and the premiere episode on the ABC Family network was the highest-rated they had ever had, with 3.3 million viewers.

"It's a pioneering show and has received a lot of critical acclaim, being the first show to have multiple hard of hearing and deaf characters and do full American Sign Language episodes".

**Rachel** started learning sign language herself when she was younger, and it was her knowledge of British Sign Language that initially helped her get noticed by the producers of Switched at Birth.

**"I learnt sign language at the age of 16. Originally I just wanted a basic understanding but I quickly fell in love with the language".**

After seeing a video of **Rachel** signing they made the call to meet her for an audition, and her background in the deaf community has really helped with her work on the show.

**Rachel** initially started learning sign language after her father passed away. He had become profoundly deaf during the last 2 years of his life, and this spurred **Rachel** on to become passionate about campaigning to raise deaf awareness.

**"I am a patron of the Deaflinks charity in Stoke-on-Trent. I started volunteering with them about 8 years ago so I was thrilled to be made a patron by them".**

"I'm also an ambassador for the National Deaf Children's Society".

**Rachel** has shown no signs of slowing down in her campaigning, and told us more about a new project that she has become involved with for the National Deaf Children's Society.

"I have actually just launched a competition for NDCS called 'Raising the Bar', and would urge all young deaf performers to join up and showcase their skills".

For more information please visit:



## Matthew Jacobs-Morgan

**Matthew Jacobs-Morgan is an Actor and Writer from London.**

You may recognise him from his starring role in the music video for Ed Sheeran's 'You Need Me, I Don't Need You', where he performed an interpretation of the lyrics in British Sign Language.

We caught up with Matthew to ask him about when he started to learn BSL, and how the Ed Sheeran video came about.

"I started to learn BSL after an acting job on the TV series 'My Almost Famous Family' in which there was a Deaf character, meaning we had to learn basic signing".

**"I was fascinated by it, and decided to do my Level 1 and 2 in BSL straight away".**

"It helped having Deaf friends I could practise with, and I have used it often to this day both in everyday situations and for work".

"Ed Sheeran's music video came about through my agents, who said the casting directors were looking for someone who could sign the lyrics in a 'ghetto rap' way. Something I was all too

"I received some help from my friends with prepping for the audition and was lucky enough to book the job".

"It was fantastic working with Emil Nava, the director who had a very clear vision of what he wanted".

**"It was great to see BSL becoming accessible for the masses, and making people realise quite how cool it can be!"**



Photo by Wolf Marloh



**"It's always been my drive to be a rugby player, and I've not allowed anyone to say to me that I'm not going to make it because I have a hearing loss".**

**Mat Gilbert**

## **Mat Gilbert** - Worcester Warriors rugby player

### **Signature chats with the imposing flanker Mat Gilbert**

Mat currently plies his trade in The Green King IPA Championship for Worcester Warriors.

Having begun his career at Llanelli Scarlets, he has also had spells at Mogliano in Italy and Bath in the English Premiership. He has represented his country several times, worked as an ambassador for charities and is well respected by his team-mates and management team.

**He is also the only deaf professional sportsman in England.**

Signature caught up with him recently to ask why he thought there weren't more deaf sportsmen and women making it into the elite of their sports, and how this could be changed for the better.

**"Talent only takes you so far, and then determination and self belief take you that step further".**

**How does it feel to know that you are the only deaf professional sportsman in England?**

It is an honour, obviously, but I do try to see myself being as mainstream as possible. So although I do have that accolade I also try to see myself as just one of the lads. I don't play too much on the fact that I am the only deaf professional sportsman in the Country.

It's more about, I am aware that I do have a hearing loss, and I am a role model to young people, and people of all ages, but fundamentally the society that I need to fit into is one that is hearing so I do try to be as included in that as possible.

**Why do you think that there aren't more deaf sportsmen and women making the step up to the highest level?**

I think mainly it's the person themselves in my personal experience. Not many people have said to me that I'm not going to make it because I have a hearing problem. I've always driven this, it's always been my drive to be a rugby player, and I've not allowed anyone to say to me that I'm not going to make it because I have a hearing loss.

I think a lot of issues come from the self confidence and self esteem of the deaf person themselves. I think anyone with any kind of impairment or any lack of ability potentially could say that "this isn't for me" and walk away. I think it's about having perseverance and having belief in yourself to be able to say to someone "can you do that for me again, I didn't see it" or "can you say that again, I haven't heard you".

## **"Do whatever you need to improve".**

**Do you feel like you have had to work harder than your teammates to make it to where you are today?**

I think in some instances yes, but a lot of the boys will have worked hard to be where they are. Talent only takes you so far, and then determination and self belief take you that step further. I may have been more talented than other people, I may not have been, but as a group of individuals everyone will have had to put in their own hard work and some will have worked harder than others.

With a hearing loss, obviously I have had to work harder at understanding the game and the rules, because I need to minimise the amount of communication within the game and communication with the referee. My understanding of the rules is probably far greater than most other individuals because they can rely on being able to hear the referee.

**Do you think that more could be done in schools to teach children some level of sign language or deaf awareness to allow more participation?**

Yeah I think doing some form of deaf awareness is hugely important in every social group within schools. Obviously it's no good talking to a deaf person with your back turned to them, you need to give them the best opportunity that they are going to hear you or be able to lip read you, and therefore be able to be fully included within that group.

In terms of sign language, I know the alphabet but in terms of words my vocab is very limited. But if someone is more deaf than me and needs to go without a hearing aid then to be able to include them in the group, to be fully included in the social group, a few words of sign would go a long way".

## **"... to be fully included in the social group, a few words of sign would go a long way".**

**What advice would you give to a young deaf sportsperson who wanted to emulate what you have achieved?**

Definitely to work hard and to have self belief in your own abilities; don't allow other people to tell you that you're not good enough as long as you believe that you are. Keep working hard and keep believing in yourself and you've got to follow those dreams that you have.

The other thing is just to take advantage of all the options you have given to you. When I was in school I always used a radio aid, and right now for this conversation I'm using a ComPilot. Any technological aid that can enhance your inclusion and your experience of hearing, and that could include sign language, then you need to take full advantage of that".

## **"Don't have any embarrassment that you are different to anybody else".**



Photo by [ajbphotographic.co.uk](http://ajbphotographic.co.uk)

A photograph of Amber Galloway Gallego, a woman with short, spiky pink hair, wearing a black lace top. She is making a 'shh' gesture with her right hand, pointing her index finger to her lips. The background is a vibrant red.

When you open yourself up  
that is when  
you can  
truly show

all the levels of music  
Amber Galloway Gallego

# Amber Galloway Gallego

**Amber Galloway Gallego**, an American Sign Language interpreter who specializes in music, has worked with some of the biggest names in the music industry, including Madonna and Paul McCartney, Lady Gaga and Rage Against the Machine. Her job is to stand at the side of the stage and interpret the music so that it can be enjoyed and understood by deaf audience members.

She is intensely passionate about music, and wants to share that passion with people who aren't able to hear it for themselves. The feedback she gets from deaf people at concerts is always positive, and she is often told that, "they have loved it".

**"They tell me they feel like their hearing counterparts. They have said that they feel connected".**

It's that connection that is so important to **Amber**, to ensure that all people are able to access music, and to connect with the performer's message whether they can hear the words or not. She remembers vividly when she realised that she could use sign language to interpret music.

"I was at a BBQ and I had music on in the background. I loved music and would play around with signs and music. One of my friends caught me dancing and signing and she told me 'I have never seen music interpreted like that!'"

**Amber** had started learning sign from an early age, "I started learning sign on the weekend when my dad started dating a woman who had a deaf son. My babysitter also had two deaf children."

After a very bad car accident **Amber** had to learn to walk again. During this time she bonded with a large group of deaf students during her physical therapy sessions "they sat and taught me everything. A friend of mine who was deaf became my private tutor".

**"She drove me over to the interpreter training and told me that this was my path!"**

And she has followed that path to where she is today. During her career as a music interpreter, **Amber** has worked with a lot of big names. When pressed to name her favourite performer she said, "if you ask anyone who has worked with me they would say 'everyone is **Amber's** favourite'. So for me, favourites or highlights happen on different levels".

"The One Direction concert when I looked to the deaf section and the deaf kids were signing along with me. After the Eminem show deaf people said they understand him better because they saw his rap and angst in the signs I brought. While teaming with Jo Benfield (a working deaf interpreter) as she interpreted Outkast and watching the magic she brings to the music brought tears to my eyes. While interpreting and hearing John Legend's angelic voice wash across the crowd and me signing to show the sweet chords that pour fourth from his mouth. Those are a few of my highlights!!!"

We told Amber about the young music interpreters in Britain who were posting their BSL videos of songs on YouTube. When asked if she could pass on any advice to them she said, "Realise that music is sooo much more than words. Show the music, open your mind to allow yourself to be vulnerable to show what music sounds like. When you open yourself up that is when you can truly show all the levels of music and connect with music in a way that shows all the dimensions of it".

## Musical sign language interpreting is also becoming increasingly popular in the UK.

Charlotte's BSL is a YouTube channel with hundreds of subscribers, which has had over 20,000 views since it first launched back in 2013. The channel is run by Charlotte, a 16 year old girl based in the UK who has been learning British Sign Language for years.

**"I first started learning BSL when I was around 7 or 8, and I have been continually learning BSL for around 8 years now".**

We asked Charlotte a few questions about why she first got into music interpreting, and her hopes of how far she will be able to go with it.

"Firstly, I have a love for both music and sign language so I thought both of them combined would be good fun. Also, where I first started learning sign language, we used to do shows at various times throughout the year and interpreted many various songs. So, that's where the first initial idea originated from".

With thousands of views for her videos, Charlotte has received a lot of positive comments from fellow sign language users. "The feedback on my YouTube videos has always been very complimentary, which came as a surprise to me at first. I also seemed to have helped various people who were trying to teach others sign language, which is incredible for me".

"I think interpreting music is very important. I think to enable a hearing impaired person to understand the lyrics of songs is fantastic. It gives hearing impaired people an opportunity to experience music".

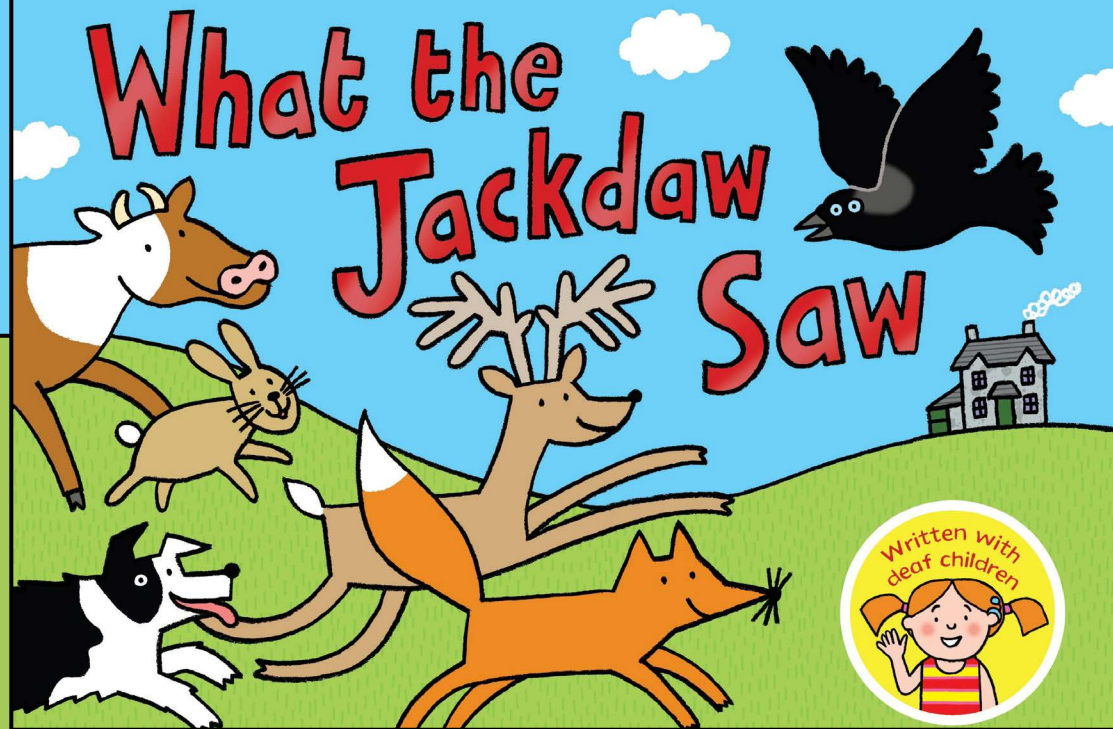
We asked Charlotte what advice she might have for any young people who wanted to start interpreting music.

"My advice would be to go for it and don't worry about the reactions you may get. Luckily for me, the feedback has been complementary, which I didn't expect it to be at all. Also, I think interpreting songs that you like, and not what you think the viewers will like is also important. Do what you enjoy! Finally, don't worry if at first you're not very confident! It's taken many months for me to do my videos confidently, and I still have a few shaky moments!"



You can view Charlotte's BSL videos at [www.youtube.com/user/CharlotteCB/](http://www.youtube.com/user/CharlotteCB/)

Julia Donaldson • Nick Sharratt



## A picture book about friendship and sign language

**Life & Deaf** is an award-winning not-for-profit organisation that supports deaf children and young people to explore their identities through poetry, film, performance and art; this with the aim of improving their literacy, language, self esteem and mental health.

On 26th March 2012 they teamed up with Julia Donaldson, Children's Laureate 2011 – 2013 and author of *The Gruffalo*, to create a unique new children's book.

On the day twenty deaf young people were chosen to take part in a workshop where they worked with Julia to create a new children's book featuring deaf, signing characters entitled *What the Jackdaw Saw*. This was a project particularly close to Julia's heart, as she has a hearing loss herself and is fascinated by sign language.

There exist to date only a handful of children's books in which the characters' use of sign language is incidental. Many books, fiction and non-fiction, have sought to illuminate the experiences of deaf children, only a few feature sign language as an incidental plot device with characters who just happen to sign.

The story in the book is based around a jackdaw, who wants all his friends to come to his party. However, when he calls out his invitation the other animals just touch their heads. The story goes on to explain what their actions mean with the help of a brown owl.

Nearly two years after the workshop took place; the story that was formed has been brought to life with the help of the prize winning artist Nick Sharratt's bright and accessible illustrations. The book is being published by Macmillan Children's Books, one of the UK's leading children's publishers.

This brilliant book about sign language, acceptance and friendship, featuring Julia Donaldson's famously wonderful rhymes and a catchy chorus, is a celebration of Julia's Laureateship and the fantastic collaborations with Nick Sharratt and with Life & Deaf, and is sure to appeal to deaf and hearing children alike.

**The book is available to pre-order now.**

# What next?

## Interested in learning more about Sign Language?

In the UK one in six people have some degree of hearing loss. That works out as about 10 million people. This means that you are more than likely to come into daily contact with a deaf person, either at school or college, or at social events and after school activities.

**Signature** have over 30 years experience in the sector and are a leading awarding body for qualifications in deaf and deafblind communication techniques.

Our qualifications can help you become deaf aware and develop your communication skills with deaf and deafblind people. Learning a new language can even lead to a career you hadn't thought of before; as a communication professional, working with deaf sports and acting groups, music interpretation and many more.

Visit the Signature website now to learn more about the qualifications we offer, and how we can help you to start learning today.



# Call for submissions

## We need your stories!

Have you been inspired to learn sign language by reading this magazine? Have you already started to learn sign language, and want to tell us more about what motivated you to learn? Are you deaf and want to tell us more about what activities you do?

We need your stories for Issue 2 of **Signature Inspire** magazine. We want to hear what you love about sign language or if you are deaf, how you have helped to raise deaf awareness.

If you want to be included in the next issue, please email your stories directly to [gavin.shepherdson@signature.org.uk](mailto:gavin.shepherdson@signature.org.uk), or phone/textphone 0191 383 1155.