



## **Sign Language skills in the South West set to soar**

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education (the Academy) is taking part in 'I - Sign' the largest ever project to ensure the future provision and improve the status of British Sign Language (BSL) for deaf children in England. The Academy is inviting teachers of BSL to a free development event, on Thursday 5 March 2009, 12.30pm -3.45pm, at The Academy, Topsham Road, Exeter, to find out how they can get involved in this ground breaking project.

Jonathan Farnhill, the Academy's Chief Executive, explains:

"Many deaf children need sign language in order to communicate, to develop socially and emotionally and to learn at school. Their own knowledge of BSL is a critical factor in them developing their full potential. Deafness is not a learning disability, but not being able to learn in BSL can be. They cannot learn BSL if they are not taught it, and this is why this project is so important. Hearing children often learn language by overhearing it, but deaf children need to learn BSL by 'overseeing' it. BSL Tutors are crucial for this and so we are delighted to be involved in raising the profile of British Sign Language in the South West.

"This event, for existing teachers of BSL, is just the first of many activities we have planned for the next two years. At the Academy we have already been heavily investing in the sign language skills of our own staff and soon aim to be able to offer high level BSL classes for the general public. We urge all teachers of BSL to come along and find out how they can get involved".

The Academy is part of a consortium of deaf charities and educational establishments that was recently awarded almost £800,000 by the Government to ensure the future provision and improve the status of British Sign Language (BSL) for deaf children in England.

There is currently no national framework for children and families to learn BSL and this has left too many parents struggling to communicate with their deaf children. The lack of teachers and courses in BSL also affects the quality of support that these deaf children receive as they go through their early years, school and the transition into adulthood.

Government funding will allow the consortium to run a two year project to help families with deaf children learn BSL skills. The project will also ensure that communication support workers who assist deaf children in the classroom have higher skills, and will increase the number of BSL teachers, courses and interpreters.

Susan Daniels, NDCS Chief Executive adds:

“This project will make a huge difference to the lives of deaf children who use sign language. At present too many deaf children are excluded from so much in both their home lives and at school, because they can not communicate with those around them. Their families and the professionals working with them are also left frustrated and upset that they don’t know how to communicate effectively with them to help them learn, develop and feel valued and included. I hope that teachers of BSL in the South West get involved in this project right from the start – the more people who are involved, the more deaf children will benefit”.

The consortium represents a unique partnership of national and regional organisations, each one bringing a great deal of experience and expertise to the project. All partners have excellent links throughout the deafness field and with education professionals.

Interested people can book their place by emailing  
[lfox@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk](mailto:lfox@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk).

-Ends-

## **Notes to editors**

The consortium, which includes the BDA, Signature, Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education, Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP), National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), RNID and UCLAN, will work to rectify the vast lack of sign language provision and will aim to raise greater awareness of BSL as a communication option for families with deaf children.

### **For further information please contact:**

#### **Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education:**

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