

Signed Stories

ITV launches £1.5m online project to bring storytelling to deaf children

ITV has launched a major web-based initiative to improve the literacy of thousands of deaf children.

www.signedstories.com, is a unique free online library of signed books and is ITV's contribution to the 2008 National Year of Reading.

Backed by twelve leading UK publishers, The National Literacy Trust and a host of stage, screen, literary and sporting icons, Signed Stories features the best of contemporary children's books in sign language with audio, animation and text.

The £1.5 million initiative is designed to enable deaf children to access stories at a much earlier age, and share in the joy and benefit of storytelling with hearing family and friends.

It follows a report from the National Deaf Children's Society last year that the UK education system is "a national scandal" because only a third of deaf children achieve five A-C GCSE grades compared with 60% of hearing children. Poor literacy is blamed for the growing attainment gap.

And the former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen is backing the initiative. He said: "I am delighted to give my support to Signed Stories, an important and timely project which has the potential to change lives."

Celebrity supporters

Celebrity supporters of Signed Stories include Robbie Coltrane, Joanna Lumley, Bill Oddie, Zoe Wanamaker, Julia Sawalha, Ricky Hatton and Jonny Wilkinson.

Another supporter Dame Helen Mirren said: "This is a wonderful idea that spreads storytelling to kids that might not otherwise be able to have one of the most important experiences of childhood."

Some of the UK's best known voices will feature on the website telling the stories which are being signed. They include Dawn French, Ian Holm, Kevin Whately, Martin Clunes, Bernard Cribbins, Andrew Sachs, Jane Horrocks and Peter Sallis.

Antonia Byatt, Director of Literature Strategy at Arts Council England said: "No-one should be without stories in their lives and it is particularly important that all children have the chance to experience the wonder of story from the earliest age.

www.signedstories.com

Signed Stories

"Signed stories has the potential to open up a creative world to young people, deaf and hearing, it's a really exciting development."

Get involved

Companies and individuals interested in sponsoring a story should contact ITV SignPost Managing Director Malcolm Wright on 084488 15200 or via email Malcolm.Wright@itv.com.

Each story will be sponsored at a cost of £5000 – with 100 going onto the website in the first 12 months after launch, and a further 200 to follow by 2011.

ITV's Executive Chairman Michael Grade said: "ITV has a proud tradition of creating on-screen access for deaf people. Web technology is enabling us to extend inclusion. We hope the Signed Stories initiative will make a real difference to the lives of deaf children and their families."

Regional Development Agency One North East has already pledged support for the project, which will be produced at ITV SignPost's Gateshead studio.

Why Signed Stories

Research shows that many deaf children miss out on storytelling because their command of the English language is poor. Signed Stories gives all the family – deaf and hearing – the opportunity to share the enjoyment of storytelling in either signs or English. The venture will also benefit children in New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, where British Sign Language is used.

This project will be a major resource for parents of deaf children – 90% of whom are hearing – in the home as they help their children become literate. It will provide advice and guidance for parents, and give access to the NDCS Family Curriculum so that they can learn basic BSL.

It will also provide resources around which teachers can base lessons for deaf children in either special or mainstream schools.

Signed Stories will be an interactive, fun and inclusive space where children of all ages and abilities can enjoy reading, while learning English and improving their literacy levels.

Notes to editors

According to the RNID, there are nine million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. It's estimated by the NDCS that there are 35,000 deaf children and young people in the UK.

www.signedstories.com

Signed Stories

Signed Stories is being delivered by ITV SignPost, the broadcaster's awardwinning centre of excellence for on-screen access services based on Tyneside, which developed the first fully bi-lingual sign website in the world.

Signed Stories is one of the many exciting online projects ITV is developing to ensure it remains on the cutting edge of social change, improving access and inclusion for all.

A key partner in this project is Northern Counties School at the Percy Hedley Foundation in Jesmond, Newcastle which teaches children with communication difficulties.

ITV has also linked up with partner Seven Stories, The Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle which plans to hold more live events for deaf children.

Contact us

Press enquiries: Adelle Hopper
Adelle.Hopper@itv.com
08448815220

Sponsorship enquiries: Malcolm Wright
Malcolm.Wright@itv.com
08448815200

Who is supporting Signed Stories? So far...

Eight of the leading UK publishers have already agreed: Puffin, Walker Books, Hodder Hachette, Andersen Press, Bloomsbury, Macmillan, Egmont and Frances Lincoln.

The National Deaf Children's Society

Susan Daniels, NDCS Chief Executive said: "All too often the parents and family members struggle to develop fluent communication skills with their deaf child, and deaf children tend to develop language at a slower rate than their hearing peers. The child-centred approach of Signed Stories is vitally important and will provide deaf children with the opportunity to improve and develop their literacy and language skills, whether signed, spoken or both.

"As our 'Close the Gap' campaign highlights, deaf children are 42 per cent less likely to achieve 5 GCSE's graded A to C, than their hearing peers. This is a scandal; the only thing a deaf child cannot do is hear, deafness is not a learning disability. Initiatives such as the Signed Stories project will enable deaf children to access information that their hearing peers take for granted and in turn could really help them improve their reading and language skills in the classroom."

The National Literacy Trust

Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust said: "Increased literacy levels encourage social inclusion and give children better economic opportunities once they are old enough to work."

The Children's Laureate Michael Rosen (2007-2009)

"I am delighted to give my support to Signed Stories, an important and timely project which has the potential to change lives."

One North East – the regional development agency

Margaret Fay, Chairman of One North East said: "I'm delighted that the North East region is behind this ground-breaking website."

A long list of celebrities including Dame Helen Mirren, Robbie Coltrane, Zoe Wanamaker, Julia Sawalha, Bill Oddie, Jonny Wilkinson, Ricky Hatton, Joanna Lumley, Sir Trevor McDonald, Fern Britton, Denise Welch, Jill Halfpenny, Kirsty Young, Monty Panesar, Brendan Foster, Kris Akabusi, David Almond, Brendan Foster, Richard McCourt, Dermot Murnaghan, Sam Allardyce and Ade Adepitan.