

# SOLAR BEAR

Best Practice for Creating Accessible Theatre for D/deaf Audiences

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## **Why consider BSL Interpreted Performances when touring to Scotland?**

Deaf communities across the globe have a rich culture of performance and storytelling. As technologies advance many communities have become dispersed and integrated into mainstream culture. Deaf people enjoy the theatre as much as everyone else and in Scotland we have number of Deaf Artists and audiences.

Under the Equality Act 2010 and the BSL Act (Scotland) 2015 people in the UK and Scotland have the right to access cultural activities equally.

Solar Bear has worked for several years to develop and improve services for Deaf audiences in Scottish Theatre. We have provided programmes of Deaf Awareness Training for venue staff, performance and text analysis training for performance interpreters and best practice for promoting productions for Deaf audiences.

We now work in partnership with the following organisations to promote BSL Interpreted Performances across Scotland:

- Access Scottish Theatres
- Birds of Paradise Theatre Company
- Edinburgh Festival Fringe
- Edinburgh International Festival
- Edinburgh International Children's Festival
- National Theatre Scotland
- Royal Conservatoire Scotland
- Scottish Youth Theatre
- SignArts
- Youth Theatre Arts Scotland

Solar Bear is happy to advise on BSL interpreted & Captioned performances.

## Development of BSL Interpreted Performances

This is best practice guidance for the development of BSL interpreted performances for theatre companies creating work in Scotland.

There is no one best way to include SLIs in performance, but it is worth remembering, that SLI's are not only translators, but performers, who will interpret not only the words that performers speak, but the motivations, intentions and emotions of the characters, all of which are an integral part of stage interpretation. The use and integration of SLI's in performance is therefore much more than an access enquiry, but rather an artistic enquiry, that should run alongside other creative discussions about a production.

An SLI is therefore concerned with both ensuring that deaf audience members can access the translation of the language, but also that their performance complements the production, and does not sit at odds with the intentions of the piece or detract from the experience for hearing audiences.

The earlier that an SLI can be secured, and engaged in discussions about a production, the more effectively they can be involved in the successful artistic planning and delivery of a production.

[Newall. C. (2015) *A Guide to working with Sign Language Interpreters*, Glasgow, NTS]

There are different ways to perform an interpretation of a production:

<http://www.solarbear.org.uk/resources/information-graphics/>

- Static: Where the interpreters are positioned in a fixed place on the stage/set, many performance interpreters are now costumed to match the design of the production.
- Zonal: Where the interpreters are located in specific zones of the set and often engage with the cast as part of the production.
- Integrated: Where the interpreter is a member of the cast and is rehearsed into the scenes, sometimes as an additional character.

Creating an interpreted performance should involve the following people:

- Directors/Designers/Writers
- LX & Costume designers
- Cast & Stage management
- Performance interpreters & Deaf consultants

### Recommended Attendance for Performance Interpreters:

- Design meetings, to discuss staging options with Director & Designer
- Meet and greets, to meet the cast & stage management team in advance of their inclusion into later parts of the process
- Rehearsal calls (if integrated)
- Costume fittings (if costumed)
- Production meetings, to discuss LX requirements
- Runs and following notes sessions, to ensure the performance interpreter is rehearsed alongside other performers, is given feedback from the director and the cast are aware of blocking (ideally a deaf audience member could attend a run to give feedback on quality of interpretation)
- Calls/stagger through with cast/crew at venues on the day of interpreted performances

### Finding a Performance Interpreter:

- Solar Bear would recommend contracting an interpreter experienced in theatre performance.
- Not all Registered Sign Language Interpreters have performance experience.
- Discuss your requirements with the interpreter before confirming the booking.
- There are registers of Sign Language Interpreters where skills and qualifications are listed:
- [www.nrdpc.org.uk](http://www.nrdpc.org.uk)
- [www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk)
- [www.sasli.org.uk](http://www.sasli.org.uk)
- Solar Bear also holds a list of interpreters who attend performance training & have theatre experience.

### Contracting:

- It is recommended in Scotland that 2 interpreters are booked to co-work each production.
- Companies should contract performance interpreters before season brochures/websites go to print/live. Naming interpreters in brochures/media has a big influence on the Deaf audiences.
- RSLIs' contracts should include the following:
  - translation of script/performance material
  - development of BSL performance interpretation (in partnership with creative teams and a Deaf/BSL consultant.)

- translation of promotional material into BSL (Solar Bear would encourage RSLIs to work with a Deaf/BSL consultant to ensure that the translations are accessible for the target audience).
  - support of the Deaf actor/presenter during filming of BSL promo video.
  - provide voice-over of BSL promotion for captioning purposes.
- Using the same RSLIs for performance and promotion is preferable and gives continuity of language/character sign names etc.

#### **Reaching your audience:**

- Solar Bear will happily help to advertise your events through our social media and specific email and text contact lists that we have.
- We are also very happy to support you in other ways should you feel this is necessary.
- If you have any concerns then please do talk to us.

#### **This best practice document has been developed in line with the following:**

- The Equality Act 2010
- BSL Act (Scotland) 2015
- National Theatre Scotland [NTS] & Solar Bear Deaf Audience Project 2011/12
- NTS, Solar Bear, FLIP/Birds of Paradise, SignArts & Access Scottish Theatre Interpreter Performance Training programmes 2015 - 2017
- Solar Bear Deaf Theatre Club events 2012 – 2016
- The Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow DTC
- Eden Court Theatre, Inverness DTC
- Dundee Rep Theatre, Dundee DTC

## **Development of Deaf Theatre Club events**

This is best practice guidance for the development of Deaf Theatre Club events into your venue programme.

Solar Bear is delighted to assist you where we can but we would encourage the venue to host their own in-house events to build up your venue's own Deaf Theatre Club (DTC).

- Venues should contract registered sign language interpreters (RSLIs) for the performances before season brochure/website goes to print/live so their names can be listed. It is recommended that 2 RSLIs are booked to co-work for the production and each interpreted performance. If receiving a touring production and the company is bringing their own interpreter, then it is vital to get hold of the name of the interpreter and print this on any promotional information about the interpreted performance. Named interpreters do have a big influence on the DTC audiences.
- RSLIs' contracts should include the following:
  - translation of script/performance material
  - translation of promotional material into BSL (Solar Bear would encourage RSLIs to work with a Deaf/BSL consultant to ensure that the translations are accessible for the target audience).
  - support of the Deaf actor/presenter during filming of BSL promo video.
  - provide voice-over of BSL promotion for captioning purposes.
  - development of BSL performance interpretation (in partnership with creative teams and a Deaf/BSL consultant.)
  - consultation on positioning on stage and within the auditorium for box office purposes.
  - Engagement with Pre/Post show RSLI [see page 8 bullet point 6]
- Using the same RSLIs for performance and promotion is preferable and gives continuity of language/character sign names etc.
- RSLIs & Deaf consultants are then involved early in the process and may be able to offer input to the creative team/box office on optimum seating for the best view of the performance interpreters prior to seats going on sale.
  - This information can then be added to the website/BSL video promotion.
  - Box office booking can then have a separate band of seating as advised by the RSLIs and Deaf/BSL consultants so that the DTC member can book through the venue's booking system in the knowledge that they will have an appropriate seat with the correct sightlines.
  - DTC tickets have traditionally been offered at £5 each.
  - Traditionally approx. 30 seats have been allocated for DTC participants. Solar Bear would suggest that the venue offers the discounted DTC ticket price as an early bird offer with a closing date which will allow resale of unsold tickets at full price.

- Once the translation of the promotional material is ready then a Deaf actor/presenter should be employed to film the BSL promo video using the text that the performance RSLI has translated. Solar Bear can support venues in recommending and engaging a Deaf actor/presenter to be in front of the camera.
- Venues should engage a film team in plenty of time to film the BSL promo video. The venue should advise the Deaf actor of what they want them to wear and advise of the kind of background they will be signing against. Generally, it is accepted that white, black, yellow or red are not good colours. Spots and stripes should be avoided and if possible so should wearing spectacles or glasses.
- On the day of filming, the Deaf actor/presenter will request how to have the translation/script presented so they can sign it. This could be by PowerPoint presentation, written large on flip chart paper or on a whiteboard. If written on flip chart paper be aware there should be minimal page turns involved.
- Natural lighting has always proved best for filming purposes.
- The RSLI on filming day will be asked to give a live voiceover of the signing so the film crew can subtitle afterwards. In our experience, a take without voice-over is approved first then the voiceover is done afterwards so the RSLI can watch the first take and approve of the signing.
- It is usually a recommendation that a third RSLI should be booked for the actual DTC event; this contract should include the following:
  - Delivery of Pre-show information: synopsis of the performance, introduction of character sign names (this is the BSL equivalent of reading the programme before curtain up)
  - BSL/English Interpretation of the Post show discussion and Q&A. This is normally hosted by the Director/Assistant Director or the Creative Learning Director
  - Debrief with performance RSLIs to allow for constructive audience & professional feedback on the interpreted performance.
- It is recommended that once the venue has received Deaf Awareness training then as many staff as were involved in the training should be rota'd on for the interpreted/DTC evenings. This gives them a chance to practice their BSL. Staff who have not received Deaf Awareness training should have access to a pen and paper if communication becomes very difficult.
- On the night DTC audience members can collect their tickets from box office as usual. Ticket packs should include:



- Performance tickets
  - Interval drinks slip
  - In house feedback slip inc. the venue/company Facebook link for leaving video feedback.
- 
- Solar Bear will happily help to advertise your events through our social media and specific email and text contact lists that we have. We are also very happy to support you in other ways should you feel this is necessary.
  - If you have any concerns then please do talk to us. This format is a guide to the best way of holding a DTC event but we appreciate that venues may need to adapt to suit circumstances.

This best practice document has been developed in line with the following:

- The Equality Act 2010
- BSL Act (Scotland) 2015
- National Theatre Scotland [NTS] & Solar Bear Deaf Audience Project 2011/12
- NTS, Solar Bear, FLIP/Birds of Paradise, SignArts & Access Scottish Theatre Interpreter Performance Training programmes 2015 - 2017
- Solar Bear Deaf Theatre Club events 2012 – 2016
- The Citizen’s Theatre, Glasgow DTC
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- Dundee Rep Theatre, Dundee DTC

## Creating Accessible Media

This is best practice guidance on how to produce accessible media for D/deaf audiences.

BSL is a visual language and any media should engage visually with the target audience. A translation from the written media format to a signed BSL video which can be viewed on the same website page is ideal.

If you are unable to create a BSL signed video, think about using filmed footage with captions rather than just written text.

Ideally you want to entice your audience to book; allowing them a flavour of the production by sharing photos of model boxes & costume drawings is a good way to communicate the context of the piece.

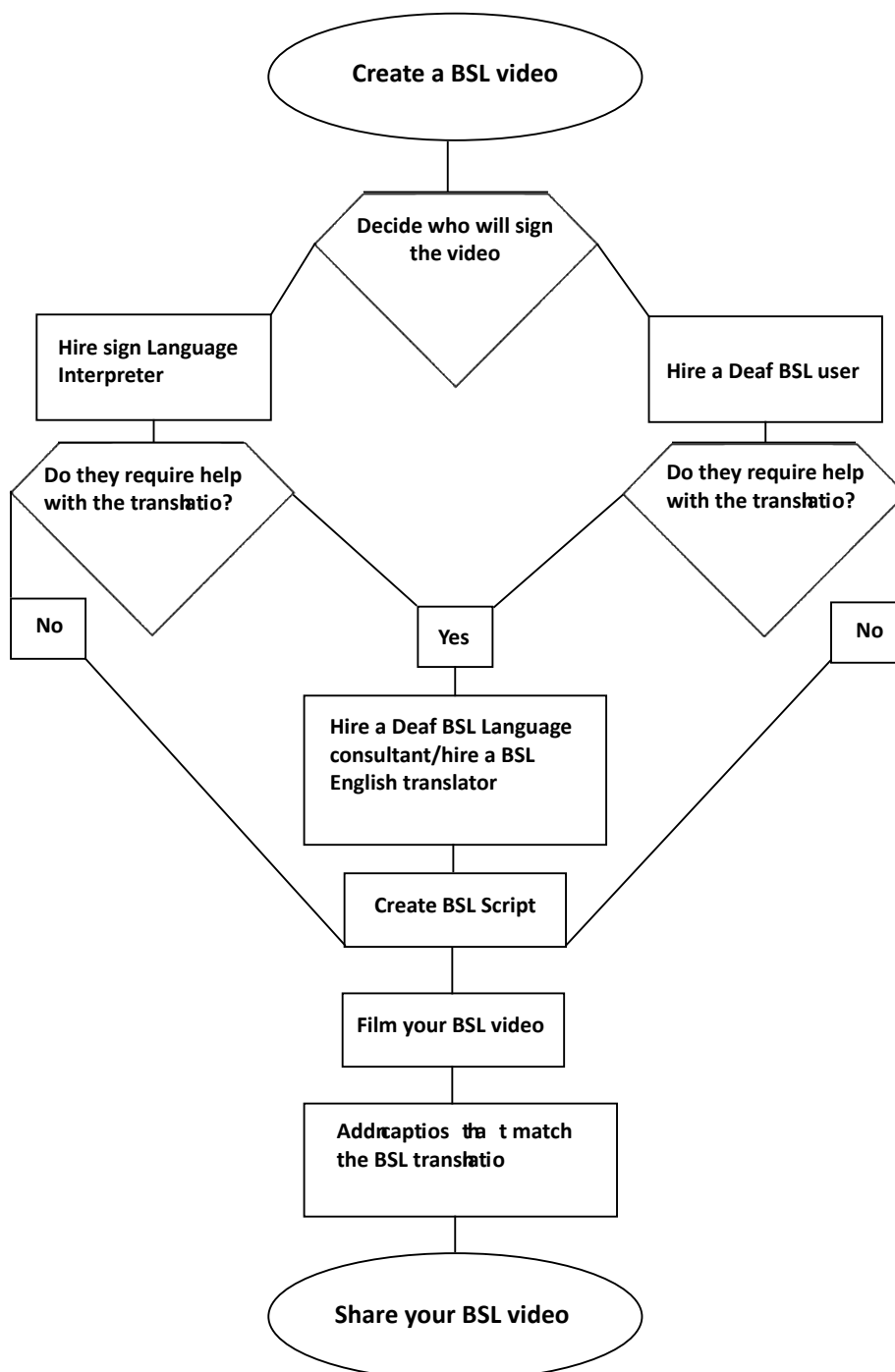
A short synopsis of the play is very useful, once a performance interpreter has been engaged and had the opportunity to translate the piece, adding a BSL synopsis to your website is great. Again, if this can't be recorded as a BSL signed video, think about creating a storyboard or infographic.

Deaf Theatre Club events aim to hold a pre-show discussion; this gives Deaf audiences an accessible way to gain information offered in the printed programme. It allows the performance interpreters to introduce the characters, their sign names\*, the relationships between the characters. If this is not possible an easy read programme which uses plain English and visual references can be provided.



\*Sign Names in BSL are given to people/characters to remove the need to fingerspell their name each time they are referenced.

When creating a signed BSL video the following guidelines may help:



## Creating Accessible Venues

This is best practice guidance on how to create an accessible venue for Deaf audiences.

All audiences are the same, they all want the following:

- Captivating marketing
- Quick Easy ticket booking/collection
- Friendly, welcoming FoH staff
- Pre-show/interval drinks
- Information about the play
- A great night out.

How do venues make the above standard for Deaf audiences?

- Create accessible media [see page 10]
- Have a link to BSL information on the first page of your box office website
- Have a text number/email as well as a landline for your box office
- Provide information on where the interpreter will stand before point of sale
- Make sure Box Office, FoH, Bar Staff and Cloakroom attendants all receive Deaf Awareness Training and if possible support them in learning British Sign Language.
- Include pre-order drinks slips with tickets/e-tickets
- Provide a pre-show talk in lieu of the printed programme [see page 10]
- Make sure that as well as the performance, additional events, post-show talks, creative learning workshops, opportunities to leave feedback are accessible to everyone.

How do venues start to make this happen?

- Speak to Creative Scotland, National Theatre Scotland, Solar Bear and Birds of Paradise for advice
- Speak to Access Scottish Theatre venues & the Federation of Scottish Theatres
- Build access into your budgets
- Liaise with producing companies
- Liaise with other venues for training/BSL classes

## **Useful Links**

### **Access information:**

- [www.solarbear.org.uk](http://www.solarbear.org.uk)
- <http://turtlear.squarespace.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/inkblot.collective/>
- <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/blog/deaf-inclusive-arts-events>
- <http://graeae.org/>
- <http://www.deafinitelytheatre.co.uk/>

### **Performance interpreters:**

- SignArts - <https://www.facebook.com/pg/yoursignarts>
- SignArts - as well as providing theatre interpretation, Catherine & Yvonne facilitate training performance interpreters, so can recommend Scottish SLIs with theatre training in your local area.
- <http://www.theatresign.com>
- <http://www.alexcom.org.uk/>

### **Captioning options:**

- <http://talkingbirds.co.uk/pages/differenceengine.asp>
- <http://www.scottishtheatre.org/projects-services/captioning>
- <http://www.stagetext.org/>

### **Promoting your production:**

- Access Scottish Theatre Guide:
- Email: [contact@accessscottishtheatre.com](mailto:contact@accessscottishtheatre.com)
- Euan's Guide: <https://www.euansguide.com>
- BL4D [www.bl4d.co.uk](http://www.bl4d.co.uk)
- Email: [info@businesslink4deaf.com](mailto:info@businesslink4deaf.com)
- Limping Chicken: <http://limpingchicken.com>

## Glossary of Terms

**Deaf:** Has many meanings; Deaf relates to the cultural community, deaf relates to someone who medically identifies with hearing loss. People who use Sign Language, have Cochlear Implants and wear hearing aids may all identify as D/deaf.

**Hard of Hearing:** relates to refers to someone who doesn't hear well. May be because they were born with a hearing loss or have lost some or all of their hearing.

**British Sign Language [BSL]:** a recognised minority language in the UK [2003] and an official recognised language in Scotland [BSL Act (Scotland) 2015]. BSL is an organic, visual language with its own lexicon, syntax and regional variations.

**Hearing Loop:** a type of sound system used in public buildings to enhance personal hearing devices such as Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants, when switch to the 'T' [Telecoil] setting, using a magnetic, wireless signal.

**Interpreter:** Registered Sign Language Interpreters are fully qualified in BSL & English Interpretation and Translation. RSLIs are registered to national bodies that regulate communication and Language professionals who work with D/deaf and Deafblind people. Trainee Sign Language Interpreters [TSLIs] are qualified in BSL & English whilst still undergoing training in Interpretation and translation. Communication Support Workers [CSWs] are qualified to a specific level in BSL & English and should hold a CSW qualification.

**Subtitles:** Text of spoken/signed content that has been time-synchronised with the media/performance.

**Closed Captions:** Text that has been time-synchronised with the media/performance. Captions convey all spoken/signed content as well as relevant sound effects.

## Appendix 1

Visit <http://www.solarbear.org.uk/resources/information-graphics/> to download this guide.

# Making your theatre performance accessible for D/deaf and hard of hearing audiences



**SOLAR BEAR**