

Friday, Sept. 25 - "Call to Action: #WhyI Sign"

[Slide: Wavefront logo + IWD logo]

[Jodi appears]

Hello! Welcome back to day five of International Week of the Deaf in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

I'm Jodi Birley, Manager of Translation Services and Community Engagement. Yesterday, our Deaf, DeafBlind, IBPOC pioneers (elders) were honoured by Deaf Youth for all their hard work and advocacy to get the Youth to where they are today with accessibility and sign language rights.

As we all know, sign language comes with a long history of oppression, misconception and suffering in all countries. It can be disheartening but there is also another side that we need to see as well. Sign language opens us up to a different world that is beautiful, loving and amazing. It gives us the freedom to express our thoughts into words just the same way a spoken language would. However, sign language can be frightening to many parents and families who discover that their child(ren) is deaf or deafblind.

So for this reason, #whylsign campaign was founded in 2016 by Stacy Abrams (USA) to encourage people, especially parents and families, to come forward with optimistic and inspiring stories explaining why they choose to sign. This campaign went viral on social media and the hashtag still exists today with new stories every day from all walks of life. You can check them out! Today's episode will take us through the history of #whylsign campaign to inspirational messages shared by Wavefront Centre's staff and community members on why they sign.

[play video from Stacy Abrams, #whylsign Founder]

Hi everybody. I'm Stacy Abrams (sign name). I started #whylsign campaign about five years ago. The main purpose was to support hearing families with deaf and hard of hearing babies and children. Often families feel alone, and wonder if they are the only ones who are learning to sign. Are there families who are experiencing the same things? What about the deaf community? Sometimes, it can be intimidating. Who are they? Do they support me? What about the signing community? CODAs, Interpreters, medical professionals, ASL students, friends, etc. Do they support me? Again, am I the only one who signs? Where is the community? Yes, there is, but how do I connect them and at the same time, I know that the deaf wants to support the families by sharing resources and information, as well as sharing their experiences and encourage, but where do we find them? How do I connect them both, where and how? I thought about the power of social media, the power of

using hashtags, and that led me to do a lot of thinking, and I decided I would try to start something. What would the hashtag be? Hashtag what? Something to do with ASL? No, no. I did not want to exclude the world. In the world, there are so many different cherished sign languages, cultures, people and communities. Everyone has an individual story that is theirs. I thought about the word, sign, as everyone uses it and it can be used in everyone's own personal story. So I went ahead with #whylsign to test it out. Then I thought whose stories do I start with first? My parents as they are hearing, so I decided to ask, "Why do you sign?" First, I asked Mom, then Dad. My dad's answer was, "Why not? Why not learn to sign? My parents then shared their stories. I have always stated that if my parents did not sign or if the deaf/signing community did not support my parents, I doubt I would be here today. Because of the connection between my parents and the community, I am here today. In my own way, I am a successful happy deaf adult. I know that it can also happen if deaf children and their families become connected through sharing stories. All people has their own personal story to share. Some people state that their stories "isn't much" or "not a big deal" or "just similar". Never underestimate the power of sharing stories. You never know what kind of an impact or connection that can happen by just sharing stories. All stories must be seen, heard and felt. So please go ahead and share your story today. Thank you very much.

[Slide]

Stacy Abrams
#whylsign
www.whylsign.com
whyisign@gmail.com

[play video message from Wavefront Family]

[Janice Lyons - WIDHH Retiree & Freelance Deaf Interpreter](#)

#whylsign

I am culturally and linguistically Deaf. The reason why I was interested in becoming a Deaf Interpreter (DI) is because I often noticed Deaf people in general would think they understood the Interpreter but there were in fact some misunderstandings between them and the Interpreter. Or they thought they had to nod in response to the Interpreter. I identified that gap as a breakdown in communication so I decided to team with the Interpreter as a DI to fill out that gap with full information that they needed because it is their right in order to make informed decisions in settings like the court system, with doctors, and in the mental health system etc.

[Jenn Wilson - Interim Director of Accessible Communication Services](#)

#whyIsign

I was born to Deaf parents so I grew up signing and then later I decided to involve myself in the Deaf community some more. So I became an Interpreter and since then I love my job. Well, I love to sign.

[Ryan Ollis - DeafBlind Coordinator](#)

Hello! My name is Ryan Ollis. #Why I Sign.

Growing up, sign language was part of my culture and my identity. ASL is an amazing visual language. My parents and extended family are hearing but they know sign language. I am the only Deaf person in the family. When my sister was born, her first language was ASL, and then later she learned speech. I am grateful to my parents for engaging me with sign language. The wider hearing society believed speech to be the best option, and my parents initially followed this approach but it was a failure for me. They changed course and put me into a situation where I could socialize with Deaf children. In a signing environment, I rapidly acquired and developed language. Really sign language is incredibly beneficial. ASL has many benefits over spoken language and this is why I sign.

[Ava Hawkins - Certified Sign Language Interpreter](#)

Hello everyone ! Happy International Deaf Week. I was asked, " Why did I become an interpreter ?" Well, truthfully, 2 reasons: friends of mine wanted to study and attend university and college and tried to convince me to interpret for their studies. They asked if I wouldn't mind interpreting as that would help them excel in their career, and improve their quality of life, and secondly, my dad, he really persuaded me to be an interpreter. and so here I am, an interpreter.

[Christopher T. Sutton - Chief Executive Officer](#)

#whyIsign

When I was a young child, I identified as hard of hearing at the age of 7. My parents were living in a small and isolated community where I was the only hard of hearing child. One day my mom brought me a newspaper showing they have classes for ASL and thought it would be a wonderful opportunity for dad, mom, and myself to take weekly classes together. So the three of us went to classes every week to learn the ABC's, 123's, and signs like "dog", "cat", whatever. But it is interesting that it was the start of my exposure to sign itself. Then, later in life I decided to go to a Deaf institute where I signed everyday. The same can be said for when I graduated from Gallaudet University where I signed everyday but really what was interesting for my family was that signing itself was really only for me. I have an autistic brother, who himself didn't speak until later so those signs like "dog", "cat", "milk", and other signs really were helpful for my family to communicate with him. So signing is only for communication for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. No, but it is communication, period. #whyIsign

[Cindy Haner - Staff Interpreter / Manager of Interpreter Training & Development](#)

Hi, I am Cindy Haner #whyIsign. When I was young I went to work at my parent's

store. They had a few Deaf customers and I wasn't sure how to communicate with them, which was frustrating. I decided to learn basic sign language. I left that work and went to college, got married and had children. One day I saw a small advertisement that said to become a Sign Language Interpreter and realized that was for me, that is what I wanted to do. Now it is my privilege to be involved with the Deaf community.

[Darshan Kaur - Front Desk Receptionist / Seniors Client & Volunteer Outreach Liaison](#)

Why I sign. In Malaysia, I saw many Deaf people in groups and was fascinated with their signing. So I wanted to become friends, yes have Deaf friends but my signing was limited. Later in university, I met one Deaf woman and became friends with her. She asked me "Do you have Deaf friends who sign?" I said no. She then taught me sign. I practiced and went to classes. With practice, I slowly became ok. So now I am proud that I can sign! That's why I sign.

[Gray Straw - Employment Placement Specialist](#)

It is part of who I am. It has never left my blood and soul but I did not realize that until later in my life, in my late 20s when I began working with the Deaf community.

I was born Deaf and raised in a hearing family in a small rural town of 8,000 to 12,000 people as the only Deaf child. It was isolating and frustrating to not feel included in communication. My exposure to sign language was basic in elementary and high school and at home.

After receiving a CI at age of 9, more focus was on oral communication. I was excited and thankful to have some hearing and to speak but...

I was feeling lost, confused, and knew something was missing. At that time, I didn't realize it was the absence of signing and lack of exposure to the Deaf Community and Culture, including peers who'd be able to understand, support, and include me through sign.

When I rediscovered the beauty of sign language and ASL, it was an aha moment as if I was finally home, found my one of my identities, and now I feel much more happy and at peace. Compared to speaking and hearing, with signing I can have a fully accessible conversation. Signing allows me to express the missing part of myself, to be more fully myself. I am proud to be Deaf, to be able to sign. That's why I sign. ILY

[Audiology Remote Offices](#)

Hello, we celebrate Sign Languages too!

[Joy Borgonia - Employment Placement Specialist & Counselling Team Assistant](#)

I want to learn ASL for communication accessibility with Deaf staff and clients.

[Marco Chiaramonte - Acting Head of Counselling](#)

My first language was sign language when I started at the school for the Deaf. I had lots of friends I could communicate in sign language. As I got older after grade 5 my parents decided to transition me to hearing school all the way through University. I have lost some of my sign language skills.

I was involved in sports (Judo / Wrestling). I've competed across Canada. Through University, my coach introduced me to the Deaflympics where I competed in Judo/Wrestling. It was through the Deaflympics where I made new connections with many people from all over the world.

I was able to communicate with different people learning about their background and culture using sign language. It was a really inspiring and wonderful experience. Wow.

The Deaflympics provided me the seed to become more involved with the Deaf community where I continue to use sign language through my work and personal life with the Deaf Community.

Signing gave me a way to communicate and opened my world. That is #whyisign

[Rachel Kavanagh - DeafBlind Intervenor](#)

Hello, my name is Rachel. #Why I Sign. First, I love learning languages, like French, Spanish, and ASL because I get to learn new perspectives and cultural values. Sign language really teaches me about Deaf values, Deaf history, and a different way to communicate visually. Secondly, language accessibility is so important. As a Deafblind Intervenor, many people in the DeafBlind community communicate using ASL, so sign language is an integral part of my role in facilitating communication and sharing environmental information. Using ASL allows for connection. I also have friends and co-workers who sign and I prefer to be able to communicate directly with them. To me, sign language means connection, communication accessibility, and language development benefiting children and adults, whether people are Deaf, hard-of-hearing, hearing or DeafBlind. That's why I sign.

[Robert Azevedo - Registered Sign Language Interpreter](#)

#WhyISign? Lots of hearing people look at signers and think 'Wow, that's a beautiful language! It's so cool that they can sign. I wish I knew sign language.' I used to be like that too, and then I realized there wasn't anything stopping me from learning. I decided to take a class, and then became more and more immersed in the language. Now a whole new world has opened up to me. I feel pretty lucky!

[Ruth Gessner - Executive Assistant & Facility Manager](#)

I sign because it is my first language. My mom is Deaf and my dad is DeafBlind. They have taught me a lot, growing up. I value language. I value the different experiences given to me and I think it is a wonderful language that everyone should learn.

[Suzie Giroux - Registered Sign Language Interpreter](#)

Hi there, my name is Suzie and this is #WhyISign. As a young girl, I had a friend who

lived close to me. His name was Jay. The two of us would communicate by fingerspelling everything! Jay is Deaf and I'm hearing. I would fingerspell everything to Jay. For example, H-o-w a-r-e y-o-u t-o-d-a-y? Wow! Communication was a long, drawn out process! It was challenging! Many years later, I went to school. Learned sign language, and was finally able to communicate clearly with my friends. I also work as a professional sign language interpreter.

But most importantly, I've always had a strong belief that all people: Deaf, hearing, women, men, different cultures, I value the importance of equality. I feel that for equality to happen, communication is vital. People need to be able to express themselves. They need to be able to interact and share. It means we need ASL for communication so everyone can express themselves equally. Thank you so much to the Deaf community for sharing your precious language with me. I love you all!

[Vanessa Tobar - Communications Assistant](#)

#whyIsign

I started learning ASL because I think visual language is interesting. Now I continue to learn and practice as I want to connect with the people I work with. I enjoy learning about people and their culture, history, and community. That's why I sign.

[Quebec Street Audiology Team](#)

Hello. We celebrate Sign Languages!

[Back to Jodi]

Okay, now it's my turn to share with you all the reason #whyIsign. It is because of news like this of a Deaf 4 year old boy, Iliyan, who is inspired by and looks up to our local Deaf Interpreter Nigel Howard as a role model. After seeing Nigel, who is Deaf himself, signing beside Dr. Bonnie Henry at the BC government news conferences during COVID-19, Ilyian felt proud to be Deaf and his self-esteem was boosted. Feeling so proud and as a way to thank Nigel, Ilyian asked his parents for several copies of "Listen to Nigel" 2m social distancing posters to put up at home. To see youth, especially Ilyian, be positively impacted by Deaf representation and sign language exposure in the media is incredibly inspiring, heartwarming, and shows how powerful the media is in delivering key messages to a wider audience. That is why I sign.

What a truly inspiring and informative week with Deaf, DeafBlind, and IBPOC leaders, elders, youth, and communities across Canada collaborating to share their messages of hope, love, their passions, and desires for the future! We have learned how the power of media connects leaders to the youth, elders, communities across Canada and vice versa. Our appreciation and gratitude for our elders will be in our hearts forever and we, along with the Youth, are here to carry the torch to continue to better the lives for all individuals. We must press on and utilize the power of the

media to the best of our abilities to advocate for accessibility, sign language rights, including the preservation and exposure of sign language, along with celebrating IWD and International Day of Sign Languages every September. We cannot do this alone! This is your opportunity to shine and we know you can do it! Let's hear your story!

Oh, don't forget to look over and listen to Nigel on his poster... stay safe and stay healthy, everyone! We are all in it together! Until then!

[Slide: Wavefront logo / www.wavefrontcentre.ca]

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