

# We’re marking Sign Language Week

**We highlight the services we have on offer as we mark a historic milestone**

This week is [Sign Language Week](https://signlanguageweek.org.uk/) (March 13 to 19) and **we want to mark it** by highlighting the British Sign Language (BSL) services we offer for clients.

We’re committed to making sure our advice is **accessible to all** – and are able to arrange BSL interpreters if you need them to access our advice.

This is provided by **Gloucestershire Deaf Association** – which has these [helpful suggestions](https://www.gda.org.uk/understanding-deafness) on understanding deafness.

Anyone who requires an interpreter is able to request an appointment to speak to an adviser.

We also provide **BSL information videos** on the key advice issues areas of Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). These are available [on our website](https://www.southgloscab.org.uk/get-advice/bsl-information-videos/).

Sign Language Week is a campaign from the [British Deaf Association (BDA)](https://bda.org.uk/) – and this year marks 20 years since British Sign Language (BSL) was **acknowledged as a language in its own right** by the UK Government.

We want to extend a welcome to all BSL speakers in South Gloucestershire and pledge our commitment to making our advice**available for all.**

# ****Accessing Help To Claim for clients who are deaf****

Citizens Advice South Gloucestershire is one of the partners delivering the national Help To Claim service, which provides advice to clients making their first Universal Credit claim.

For clients who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, there are two options for accessing the service, explains Peter Newman, one of our Help To Claim advisers.

“One is through the [webchat](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim/),” says Peter – referencing the online portal which allows clients to type a conversation directly with an adviser.

“Over the phone there is [Relay UK](https://www.relayuk.bt.com/how-to-use-relay-uk.html),” he adds. “There is an operator, and if I am speaking or giving advice, the operator types that verbatim to the client. If the client replies, the operator gives the responses to me.

“These are the two main ways clients who are deaf would be able to access Help To Claim. Help To Claim is accessible for these clients.”

Anyone wanting to use the Help To Claim service should call 0800 144 8 444 or visit: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim](https://mailchi.mp/southgloscab/www.citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim)

We are trained in providing an accessible service

Staff and volunteers receive support on providing an accessible service from Gloucestershire Deaf Association – who delivered a day of training last year.

“It was amazing, the training we had,” says Session Supervisor Samantha Edmunds. “It was delivered by a person who is deaf with support from two signers.

“It’s very intensive to expect one person to sign all day. It shows how hard it is and the levels of concentration needed.”

The session covered areas including the impact of deafness on the person, how to approach someone who is deaf or hard-of-hearing, the services provided by GDA and sessions on lip-reading and British Sign Language.

Samantha was struck in the session by the prevalence of mental health problems in deaf children. Around [40 per cent](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-psychiatrist/article/addressing-mental-health-needs-of-deaf-children-and-their-families-the-national-deaf-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-service/B74917D5F1C84FB073EE4F52A14AB57E) of deaf children experience mental health problems, compared with 25 per cent of their hearing peers.

“Now, if somebody comes to us who is hard-of-hearing or deaf, I go above and beyond,” says Samantha. “I have a deeper understanding of what’s needed.”