

## New British Sign Language book launched at festival

DeafEducate launched its latest British Sign Language (BSL) book, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, at Sheffield's Off The Shelf Festival on Saturday 30th October.

Steve Gibson, DeafEducate's publisher, gave a brief talk on the importance of books in the modern world and, fundamentally, for members of the Deaf community. He said he was sure that Deaf people would benefit a lot from books, which would enrich their lives and awareness of what is going on in the wider world. Unfortunately, many Deaf people spurn books because of inadequate literacy skills. DeafEducate's BSL books offer them opportunities to improve their reading skills by offering stories in English and BSL, allowing Deaf readers to access the texts in English and BSL video clips. The BSL book, *Romeo and Juliet*, which has just been launched, is one such example. Steve demonstrated it via a smartboard.

Betty Seal, the author, related her experience of working with Deaf children and the difficulty they had in understanding Shakespeare, leading to her recognition of the need for such a BSL book. After much persuasion by Steve Gibson, she decided to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* and was glad to see the BSL book come into fruition. She commented, "Now Deaf children across Britain can access and understand Shakespearean plays through BSL books. I look forward to adapting more plays."

Janice Connolly was the book's BSL signer, but was unfortunately unable to attend the launch. Trishy Gibson took her place, and shared her experiences of seeing the BSL book become a reality. She thought that Janice had excelled and congratulated her for all her painstaking work in



Trishy Gibson and Betty Seal, the author.

translating the English text into BSL. She said that Janice had to sign sentences of the text several times to ensure the signed clips were appropriate to the English text. Trishy recalled; "When I read Shakespeare at school, I couldn't understand any of the language used. I really wish I had had these BSL books then."

One signer who was in the audience asked if libraries stocked the BSL books so that she could borrow them. Steve Gibson responded; "At present, few

libraries buy BSL books. I have noticed that they stock books in languages like Turkish, Polish and Chinese, but not in BSL – this cannot be right. DeafEducate is intending to resolve this.”

Finally, Steve announced that two more Shakespearian BSL books would be published in Spring; *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Only through these BSL books will Deaf readers appreciate Shakespeare and understand why his plays are so popular.

“It’s an aim of DeafEducate that Deaf people should access any books in their own language, BSL, as well as English,” said Steve. “It is only then that they will become literate and be able to read any books in English without needing BSL translation. Deaf learners in schools and colleges would benefit from BSL books in developing their literacy abilities, thus overcoming deaf education provision that continues to be inadequate.”