



NextGen DEAF!

OUR TURN TO SIGN

BDA Youth Strategy 2026–2029
For Deaf Young People aged 13–30

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



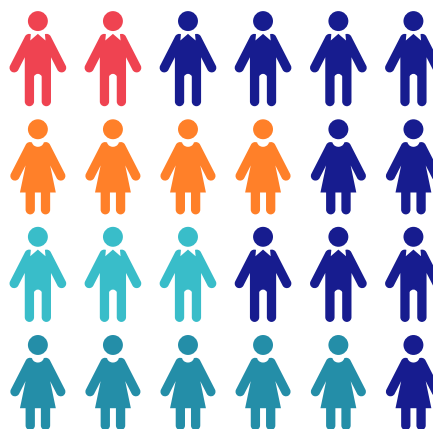
Deaf young people are the future of the Deaf community – rich in talent, creativity and leadership potential. Yet many also encounter barriers in education, wellbeing, employment and social connection. Although the BSL Act 2022 marks a major milestone for recognition of British Sign Language, much more is needed to ensure Deaf young people can fully access opportunity and thrive.

The BDA is committed to improving outcomes and opening pathways to success. This Youth Strategy sets out how we will work alongside Deaf young people aged 13–30 to strengthen identity, wellbeing, leadership and opportunity.



This three-year Youth Strategy (2026–2029) is grounded in extensive consultation with:

- Deaf young people (n = 114)
- Parents and carers (n = 53)
- Educators and professionals (n = 51)
- BDA staff interviews
- BDA Roundtables (2022)
- Youth Consultation Day (2025)
- National evidence and policy analysis



The findings show strong consistency across groups:

- Community spaces have declined
- Young people want leadership roles but feel under-represented
- Transition into adulthood and employment is uncertain
- Deaf young people value BSL but lack confidence in identity
- Education is inconsistently accessible
- Deaf-friendly mental health services are limited

The BDA Youth Strategy 2026–2029 responds by committing to a national, Deaf-led youth framework that builds identity, strengthens access, develops leadership, and restores Deaf community infrastructure.

2. VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



Vision

A Deaf youth community where every young person is empowered, proud to be Deaf, and ready to achieve for their future.

Mission

To empower Deaf young people aged 13–30 through language, leadership, wellbeing, opportunity and community, ensuring BSL and Deaf culture thrive for future generations.

Values

- **Access** – Deaf young people have the right to full participation.
- **Empowerment** – Deaf young people shape their own futures.
- **Leadership** – Deaf youth lead change.
- **Preservation** – BSL and Deaf culture are protected.
- **DEAF POWER** – Deaf identity is celebrated and visible.



3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

BDA's long-term strategy Taking BSL Forward (2022–2032) provides a strong foundation across language rights, education, health, employment and community. This Youth Strategy builds on that framework by creating a dedicated pathway for Deaf young people aged 13–30.



Consultation confirms:

- Youth services are currently inconsistent and need stronger national coordination.
- Deaf young people would benefit from more targeted and visible support.
- BDA has a strong opportunity to become more relevant and visible to Deaf young people.
- Trust will continue to grow through consistent action, youth leadership and accessible delivery.

This strategy bridges that gap.



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4. STRATEGIC OUTCOMES 2026–2029



Strategic Outcomes by 2029

By 2029, BDA will work towards Deaf young people aged 13–30:

1. **Feeling proud and confident in their Deaf identity**, with regular access to Deaf role models, peers and cultural spaces.
2. **Having clearer information about, and routes into, Deaf-friendly mental health support** with BDA collaborating with key stakeholders to influence policy and campaigning for improved access and inclusion for Deaf young people.
3. **Being better informed about their rights in education and transition**, and better equipped to self-advocate, with BDA influencing systems to become more accessible.
4. **Having meaningful opportunities to participate in leadership and governance**, within BDA and across the wider Deaf community.
5. **Feeling better prepared for the transition into adulthood** through mentoring with Deaf role models, skills development and supported volunteering opportunities, while BDA campaigns on structural barriers such as Access to Work and signposts to specialist employment services.

Delivery Principles

BDA Youth will operate under five delivery principles:

1. **Youth-led** – Young people co-design and shape the programme.
2. **Rights-based** – Grounded in the BSL Act, Equality Act and international frameworks.
3. **Deaf-first** – Deaf culture, leadership and language are central.
4. **Partnership-led** – We work with others; we do not duplicate.
5. **Sustainable** – Growth will match capacity, funding and safeguarding.



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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026-2029

The BDA Youth Strategy focuses on four strategic priorities that reflect consultation findings, align with sector partners and ensure BDA remains within its remit while delivering maximum impact. These priorities build identity, strengthen rights, empower leadership and support Deaf young people through transition into adulthood.

Priority 1: Deaf Identity, Language and Culture

What the evidence shows

- Identity support for Deaf young people is inconsistent
- Pride in Deaf identity does not always match the value placed on BSL
- Young people want and need regular access to Deaf role models
- Deaf cultural and community spaces have decreased
- Digital visibility and youth-led content are underdeveloped

What BDA will do

We will create spaces, connections and experiences that strengthen Deaf pride, identity and belonging.

We will:

- Deliver Deaf-led youth camps, regional activities and national cultural events
- Provide role model opportunities and supported volunteering experiences
- Support peer networks and identity-building spaces
- Produce youth-led digital BSL content to amplify Deaf youth visibility
- Champion Deaf-led BSL teaching and promote cultural literacy

What BDA will influence (Campaigning & Partnership)

We will:

- Advocate for Deaf cultural provision and community youth spaces
- Campaign for Deaf leadership across education, arts and youth sectors
- Work with partners to support early-years identity development
- Promote best practice in digital accessibility and BSL-first content



Priority 2: Education, Transition and Adulthood

What the evidence shows

- Access to education is inconsistent
- Understanding of Deaf learners remains poor across systems
- Transition points (school → college → work) are moments of vulnerability
- Young people and families lack clear guidance on rights and pathways
- Work experience and progression opportunities are limited

What BDA will do

We will empower Deaf young people with knowledge, confidence and accessible routes into adulthood – without duplicating specialist employment services.

We will:

- Deliver BSL-accessible “Know Your Rights” workshops on education and transitions
- Provide BSL resources explaining rights, pathways and navigating systems
- Support young people to build confidence through Deaf role-model mentoring
- Create volunteering and internship opportunities within BDA and sector partners
- Signpost young people to specialist employment and careers services

What BDA will influence (Campaigning & Partnership)

We will:

- Campaign for stronger Deaf education policy and equitable SEND reform
- Advocate for national BSL-medium and Deaf-led education provision
- Work with BSL Alliance partners to coordinate volunteering, mentoring and work placement pathways
- Contribute evidence to sector-wide advocacy on Access to Work (led by SignHealth’s Deaf Together initiative)
- Promote inclusive apprenticeship and early-adulthood policy

BSL VIDEO



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Priority 3: Mental Health and Wellbeing

What the evidence shows

- Mental health services for Deaf young people are rarely Deaf-friendly
- Pathways into support are unclear
- Young people report feeling isolated and unsure where to get help

What BDA will do

Our role is to promote wellbeing, strengthen peer support, and ensure young people know where Deaf-specialist support exists.

We will:

- Produce BSL wellbeing content designed by and for Deaf young people
- Support identity, resilience and belonging through peer networks
- Improve crisis and support signposting to relevant services
- Share consultation findings with SignHealth to inform their work
- Promote positive wellbeing, confidence and protective factors such as Deaf community connection

What BDA will influence (Campaigning & Partnership)

We will:

- Collaborate with SignHealth and other partners to advocate for accessible Deaf mental health pathways
- Campaign for Deaf-inclusive NHS practices and BSL access across services
- Raise awareness of the wellbeing needs of Deaf young people in national policy conversations

BSL VIDEO



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Priority 4: Leadership, Voice and Governance

What the evidence shows

- Deaf young people want meaningful influence
- Youth voice is under-represented in policy, practice and governance
- Leadership pathways for Deaf youth are limited

What BDA will do

We will build structures and opportunities that support Deaf young people to lead, influence and participate.

We will:

- Strengthen the existing BDA Youth Committee's remit and governance, ensuring it plays a central role in implementing the Youth Strategy
- Deliver Deaf-led leadership, advocacy and campaigning programmes
- Develop mentoring pathways, linking young people with Deaf adults in varied sectors
- Support youth co-production across BDA's work

What BDA will influence (Campaigning & Partnership)

We will:

- Promote Deaf youth leadership nationally and internationally
- Work with BSL Alliance partners, youth-sector bodies and Deaf organisations to expand leadership opportunities
- Strengthen youth representation in decision-making and advisory structures
- Amplify Deaf youth voice across policy, campaigning and public forums



IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Capacity & Staffing

BDA commits to:

- A dedicated full time Youth Lead
- Youth Volunteer Network
- National coordination
- Phased delivery



Safeguarding

The safety and wellbeing of Deaf young people is central to everything BDA does. Delivering youth work requires high standards of safeguarding, particularly where activities involve residential provision, digital engagement and one-to-one support. BDA is committed to developing a safeguarding culture in which every young person is protected, respected and able to participate with confidence.



We commit to:

- **Strong safeguarding policies and procedures**

We will maintain up-to-date safeguarding policies that reflect current legislation, national guidance and best practice, and which support new ways of working including online engagement, residential activities, and peer-led programmes.



- **Designated safeguarding leadership**

BDA will appoint clear safeguarding leads for youth services, ensuring accountability, consistency and expert oversight across all activities involving young people.

- **Training and supervision**

All staff, volunteers and partners involved in youth activity will receive safeguarding training appropriate to their role. This will be supported by regular supervision, reflective practice and guidance to ensure safeguarding is embedded in day-to-day work.

- **Clear reporting and response pathways**

We will ensure all young people, families and staff know how to raise concerns, and we will maintain clear, accessible reporting procedures that are responsive, confidential and supportive.

- **Safer recruitment and workforce standards**

We will apply robust recruitment processes including DBS checks, references and role-specific safeguarding expectations for anyone working with or supporting young people.

- **Risk management and safe practice**

Activity planning will include formal risk assessments, safety planning and safeguarding checklists, particularly for residential activities, online spaces and peer-led work.

- **Continuous improvement**

Safeguarding practice will be reviewed regularly through audits, policy reviews and learning from incidents or near misses to strengthen systems and responsiveness.

Evaluation and Accountability

BDA is committed to delivering a Youth Strategy that is accountable, evidence-led and responsive to the needs of Deaf young people. Regular evaluation will ensure the strategy remains effective, transparent and driven by impact rather than activity alone.

We will report annually on progress against all strategic priorities, including:



- **Participation and reach**

Tracking the number of Deaf young people involved in BDA activities, including events, programmes, leadership roles and consultations, with attention to age range, geography and inclusion.

- **Quality of engagement**

Measuring not only how many young people take part, but how meaningfully they engage, including repeat participation, leadership uptake and contribution to co-production.

- **Leadership and progression**

Monitoring the number of young people moving into mentoring, governance, advocacy, volunteering or training roles, and how many progress into broader leadership positions within and beyond BDA.

- **Digital access and visibility**

Reviewing online reach, accessibility of content in BSL, growth of social platforms, and engagement levels with youth-led digital resources.

Co-writer and Joint Bookrunner



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- **Advocacy and influence**

Evaluating the impact of campaigns, policy activity and partnerships, including improvements in visibility, impact on policy development and contributions to national discussions affecting Deaf young people.

- **Youth experience and satisfaction**

Gathering regular feedback from young people on the quality, relevance and accessibility of youth activity, including what works well and what needs to improve.

- **Learning and continuous improvement**

Using evidence to adapt practice, improve programme design, and inform future planning, ensuring learning is embedded into all areas of delivery.

Annual reporting will be shared with the Board, partners and young people to ensure transparency, accountability and shared ownership of progress. Findings will inform ongoing improvements and shape future priorities.

Governance

Youth participation and accountability are central to the successful delivery of this strategy. Governance arrangements will ensure Deaf young people influence decision-making, delivery and evaluation - not just through one group, but across the organisation.





BDA Youth Committee

BDA Youth Committee is a volunteer panel of Deaf young people and forms an important part of the governance structure for youth work within the organisation. The panel provides:

- Insight into young people's experiences and priorities
- Feedback on BDA projects and communications
- Youth consultation and co-production
- A mechanism for testing ideas and policy positions
- Support for strategic direction on youth issues

The Youth Committee will be supported through:

- A clearer remit and terms of reference
- Transparent recruitment and rotation
- Induction, training and mentoring
- Safeguarding oversight and wellbeing support

Wider Youth Governance

To ensure youth voice is embedded across BDA and not isolated within one group, the organisation will also:

- **Introduce youth representation at board level**, including participation on the Board or Committees where appropriate.
- **Involve young people in working groups and project steering groups** across BDA policy and operational areas.
- **Ensure youth input informs strategy, campaigns and priorities**, rather than only youth-specific activity.

Distinguishing the Youth Committee and Young Person Representatives

To ensure Deaf young people influence both programme delivery and organisational decision-making, BDA operates two complementary mechanisms: the **BDA Youth Committee and Young Person Representatives within BDA governance structures**. These serve different functions but work together to embed youth voice across the organisation.



BDA Youth Committee

The Youth Committee is a voluntary advisory group of Deaf young people aged 13–30. It provides:

- Insight into the experiences and priorities of Deaf young people
- Feedback on BDA projects, communications and campaigns
- Support for co-production and youth consultation
- A broad and diverse youth perspective

The Youth Committee informs and shapes BDA's youth work, but it does not carry formal governance responsibilities.

Young Person Representatives in Governance

Young representatives who sit on the BDA Board or Committees hold a formal governance role.

They:

- Contribute to organisational decision-making and strategic oversight
- Bring youth insight directly into governance discussions
- Support accountability and scrutiny from a youth perspective
- Ensure that Deaf young people's priorities influence the organisation as a whole

These roles operate within BDA's formal governance framework and carry defined responsibilities and expectations.

How they work together

The Youth Committee provides **breadth of insight**, while governance representatives provide **formal influence and decision-making power**. Together, they ensure that youth voice is embedded at every level of BDA's work from programme design to organisational strategy.

Accountability Structures

To support transparency and learning, we will implement:

- **Annual Youth Reporting**
A formal Youth Report will present participation data, learning, feedback and progress against priorities to the Board and members.

- **Formal feedback mechanisms**

Including youth surveys, digital feedback tools, forums and structured consultations to ensure young people can shape services continuously.

- **Clear accountability lines**

Designating leadership responsibility within BDA for youth delivery, safeguarding and governance coordination.

- **Review and evaluation points**

Regular review meetings will track progress and ensure feedback influences decisions.

Leadership Development

Governance will be developmental and supportive, recognising that young people will engage in different ways and at different levels:

- Youth Committee will be offered leadership training and mentoring to build confidence, skills and understanding of governance.
- Young people will be supported to explore a range of opportunities within BDA, including volunteering, advocacy, project involvement and advisory roles.
- Clear information will be provided about possible pathways into deeper involvement in BDA, for those who choose to take them, without expectation that all participants will move into formal leadership positions.

Together, these structures will ensure that Deaf young people are:

- **Heard**
- **Involved**
- **Supported**
- **Accountable**
- **Empowered**

and that youth leadership becomes an integrated part of the BDA's future.



TIMELINE



Year 1 (2026) – Foundation and Design

The first year will focus on creating strong foundations for delivery, ensuring that governance, partnerships, digital infrastructure and early programmes are established before scaling.

We will:

- **Appoint a Youth Lead**

Recruit a dedicated Youth Lead and design the role to reflect strategic delivery, coordination, safeguarding and partnership working across the four priority areas.

- **Strengthen governance structures**

Confirm and expand the remit of the existing Youth Committee, strengthen governance arrangements, formalise youth representation within BDA structures and embed youth co-production in early planning.

- **Explore and design youth-facing digital platforms**

Consult with Deaf young people on preferred digital platforms, content styles and accessibility needs, and develop a BSL-first digital strategy aligned with youth communication habits.

- **Launch a BSL-first digital presence**

Pilot a youth-focused digital platform or channel featuring BSL content, youth voices, identity resources, rights-based information and wellbeing signposting.

- **Design and pilot a volunteer-led mentoring project**

Develop a safe, supported mentoring model delivered by trained volunteers and Deaf role models, including policies, supervision and safeguarding frameworks, and pilot with a small group of young people.

- **Pilot programmes across identity, wellbeing and leadership**

Run early-stage activities that test delivery models in:

- identity and cultural connection
- peer support and wellbeing
- youth leadership and advocacy

Refine programmes based on youth feedback.

- **Develop youth rights and transition tools**

Create the first BSL “Know Your Rights” resources, transition guidance and early adulthood navigation tools, tested with youth working groups.



- **Build strategic partnerships**

Engage Deaf organisations, BSL Alliance partners, youth services, education providers and SignHealth to agree roles, referral pathways and collaboration plans that avoid duplication.

- **Develop monitoring and evaluation systems**

Establish baseline data collection, youth feedback processes and impact measures for identity, confidence, participation and leadership progression.

Year 2 (2027) – Delivery and Growth

Year 2 will focus on expanding delivery based on learning from Year 1 pilots, strengthening strategic partnerships and increasing regional and digital reach.

We will:

- **Expand identity and cultural programmes**

Deliver Deaf-led regional activities, cultural events and digital identity-building programmes, with increased reach across priority regions.

- **Deliver structured wellbeing and peer support initiatives**

Launch BSL-accessible wellbeing workshops, online peer networks and resilience-building activities, co-designed with Deaf young people. Improve signposting pathways in partnership with SignHealth.

- **Roll out rights-based education and transition support**

Deliver national “Know Your Rights” workshops in BSL, alongside targeted transition support for young people moving between school, college, university and early adulthood.

- **Strengthen mentoring, volunteering and internship pathways**

Expand mentoring opportunities with Deaf role models and create supported volunteering and internship placements within BDA and BSL Alliance member organisations.

- **Develop partnerships for work experience (signposting only)**

Work with sector organisations and Deaf-friendly employers to promote and signpost work experience routes, without duplicating specialist employment services.

- **Grow digital reach and access**

Increase production of youth-led digital BSL content, improve platform accessibility and broaden engagement through targeted communication strategies.



- **Strengthen partnerships across the Deaf and youth sector**

Formalise collaboration agreements with SignHealth, youth-sector partners and Deaf organisations to maximise impact, improve pathways and avoid duplication.

- **Review learning and adapt delivery**

Use monitoring, evaluation and youth feedback data to refine programme design and delivery, ensuring activities remain relevant and effective.

Year 3 (2028–2029) – Influence, Consolidation and Sustainability

Year 3 will focus on national influence, embedding successful models into BDA's core work, and preparing for the next strategic phase.

We will:

- **Further expand identity and cultural programmes**

-Deliver Deaf-led Youth Camp and further build on regional activities, cultural events and digital identity-building programmes.

- **Strengthen national advocacy**

Use evidence from youth programmes and consultation to influence policy on Deaf education, transitions, youth rights, wellbeing and access to services.

Amplify Deaf youth voices in public forums, consultations and national conversations.

- **Scale leadership and influence opportunities**

Expand pathways for young people developing as leaders, advocates and representatives within BDA and externally.

Support youth representation across the BSL Alliance, Deaf sector committees and national youth forums.

- **Embed successful models into business-as-usual**

Integrate identity programmes, digital content production, rights workshops, mentoring and volunteering pathways into core BDA activity.

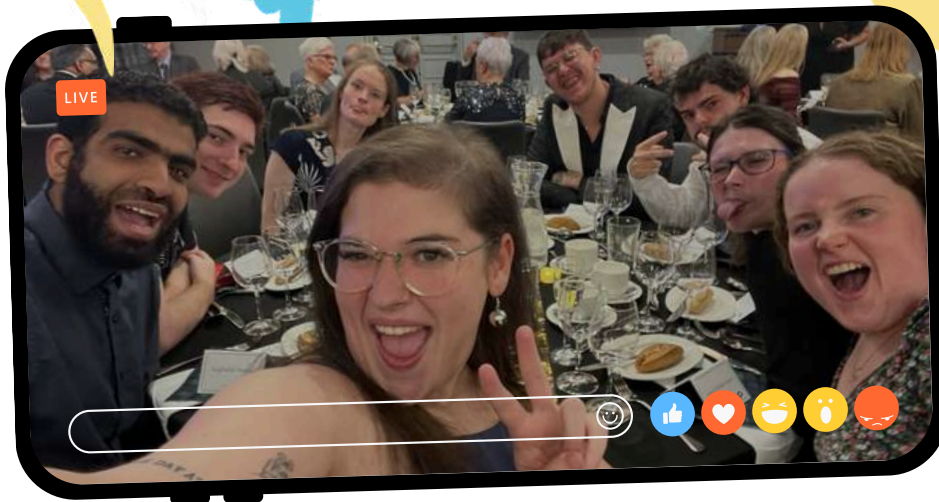
- **Deepen long-term partnerships**

Formalise multi-year partnerships with employers, Deaf organisations, universities, funders and youth-sector bodies to strengthen infrastructure and opportunities for Deaf young people.

- **Consolidate wellbeing and signposting partnerships**

Continue strategic collaboration with SignHealth and partners to strengthen Deaf-friendly mental health pathways and share youth insights.





- **Evaluate impact and outcomes**
Conduct a full evaluation of the Youth Strategy, assessing progress across strategic outcomes including identity, wellbeing, rights awareness, leadership progression and influence.
- **Renew and co-produce the next Youth Strategy**
Conduct a full evaluation of the Youth Strategy, assessing progress across strategic outcomes including identity, wellbeing, rights awareness, leadership progression and influence
- **Renew and co-produce the next Youth Strategy**
–Work with Deaf young people to design the next strategy cycle, ensuring new priorities reflect lived experience, national developments and sector capacity.

CONCLUSION AND COMMITMENT

NextGen Deaf! – Our Turn to Sign marks a renewed commitment from the British Deaf Association to Deaf young people across the UK. This strategy is not simply a plan of activity – it is a promise to listen, to act, and to stand alongside Deaf young people as they shape their futures and their community.

Over the next three years, the BDA will build the structures, partnerships and platforms that enable Deaf young people to develop strong identities, connect with their peers, grow in confidence, and take an active role in leadership and governance.



We will work to strengthen rights, improve access across education and transition, promote wellbeing and belonging, and ensure Deaf young people have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

This strategy has been shaped directly by Deaf young people. Their experiences, aspirations and honesty have informed every priority and every commitment. Our implementation approach will therefore continue in the same spirit: youth-led, collaborative and rooted in the values of Deaf culture, community and language.

Delivering this vision will require long-term commitment, investment and partnership. It will also require courage – the courage to try new approaches, to learn and adapt, and to stay focused on sustainable change rather than short-term fixes. The BDA is ready to take on that responsibility, working alongside the Deaf sector, the BSL Alliance, families, educators and young people themselves.

NextGen Deaf! – Our Turn to Sign is about building a stronger future not only for Deaf young people, but for the Deaf community as a whole. Together, we will ensure that the next generation grows up proud, connected, confident and ready to lead.

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