AIMS For a better birth...

The BSL Birth Certificate

AIMS Journal, 2024, Vol 36, No 4



Tom, and his and Paula's daughter, Hazel (sign name 'big smile')

By Salli Ward

When Tom Lichy and his partner Paula Garfield had their second baby, they wanted her BSL name to feature on her birth certificate as BSL was their first/preferred language. There is a way to notate movements of a signed language, and the parents first consulted a linguist to help. The bigger fight was a legal one, but they eventually won and their daughter, Hazel UbOtDDstarL Holly Eileen Garfield-Lichy was registered as just that.



The BSL name can be translated as something like 'big smile' in English but that's not how signed names work – they can't really be translated, just as many names in other languages can't. Sign names are often visual, referring in some way to how a person looks (my BSL name indicates my usual hairstyle of one plait) but Tom and Paula chose a quality of their baby's personality.

These days the BSL Act 2022 gives Deaf people greater rights than back in 2013 when the birth certificate battle was won; however, many institutions still deny BSL-users full access and campaigning goes on.

Author Bio: Salli is mother/stepmother to 8 grown-up children and Nana to 3. She has been a dramatherapist, a charity CEO, a celebrant, a fundraiser and writer. Having worked with and for Deaf charities for many years, she is a less-than-fluent-but-okay BSL-user with a good understanding of Deaf heritage, culture and campaigning.