



# Power in our hands

**Director:** Angela Spielsinger  
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**“Don’t sign small, sign big and proudly.”**

The above quote by the charismatic deaf ‘missioner’ Leslie Edwards encapsulates the defiant spirit that resonates through this groundbreaking project. *Power in Our Hands* draws on the British Deaf Association’s (BDA) unique film archive to tell the story of Britain’s deaf culture, community and language – from the early days of well-meaning missionaries who fought the corner of deaf people to the politically engaged deaf activists of the 1970s who’d been inspired by the American civil rights movement. At the centre of their protracted struggle for equal rights has been the campaign for the official recognition of British Sign Language (BSL). It was finally recognised as a minority language by the government in 2003 – a landmark breakthrough for the community.

Thankfully the BDA recognised that film was the best way of preserving BSL and deaf culture for future generations and actively encouraged people to document their everyday experiences at work or socialising at deaf clubs as well as other community events and campaigns. The results are showcased in *Power in Our Hands*, and beautifully woven into a coherent and moving narrative. The film brims with wonderfully vivid scenes and entertaining accounts from some of the people who were present at gatherings where “deaf people began to question hearing control”, in the words of one of the participants.



From: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/power-our-hands-films-about-uk-deaf-community>

*Power in Our Hands* is a ground-breaking documentary – containing newly digitised archive footage available to the public for the first time – on the Deaf community's fight for civil rights and principally, the right to be heard. Combining social history and archive film with contemporary interviews, and released in the 125th anniversary year of the British Deaf Association, *Power in Our Hands* explores the secret history and heritage of the Deaf community in the UK.

It will be essential viewing for a number of audiences, including those interested in political activism and social and civil rights developments; audiences of archive film; and Deaf people, their family members and friends. As such it represents a superb, ready-made opportunity for venues to engage with new groups and diversify their existing programme offer.

At the heart of the Deaf world is British Sign Language (BSL), the first language of many Deaf people. The Deaf community does not see deafness as a disability; instead positioning itself as a significant cultural and linguistic group with a rich and exciting history stretching back hundreds of years, and with the word ‘Deaf’ (with a capitalised ‘D’) an expression of cultural identity.

From: <http://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/films/powerinourhands>