

## IN CONVERSATION WITH

# British actress and NDCS Ambassador, Rachel Shenton

**Rachel Shenton**, is a passionate advocate for the Deaf community and people with hearing loss. In this interview she explains why hearing loss is an issue so close to her heart.



© Richard Blake

**Rachel Shenton**

Actress; Ambassador for the National Deaf Children's Society; Patron of Deaflinks and Deaffest, Los Angeles, USA.

## For those who aren't familiar with you career so far, could you give us a quick run through?

I am a British actress. I started my career at Edinburgh Fringe Festival and have worked in TV ever since. You may know me from shows such as *Waterloo Road*, *Sofia's Diary*, *Hollyoaks* and now US show, *Switched at Birth*.

## What drew you to your current role in *Switched at Birth* and how did it feel taking the plunge from the England to LA?

*Switched at Birth* was the perfect job for me. It's an incredibly plucky show - I love what it stands for and obviously the sign language connection was also a huge attraction. Working in Los Angeles is brilliant! I have to drive along Hollywood Boulevard to get to work - that still feels crazy. I've definitely pinched myself a few times!

## You are a fantastic advocate for deaf awareness and became an ambassador for the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) in 2010.

### Why is it important for you to be involved with this charity?

I am a big advocate for raising deaf awareness. My lovely dad lost his hearing very suddenly when I was 14 and lived the last two years of his life profoundly deaf. I saw what a huge effect that had on a family and on him, of course. That gave me the impetus to learn sign language and get involved with the deaf community - I only wanted to gain a basic understanding of sign but I fell in love with it and carried on. I actually introduced myself to the NDCS in 2010 when I first got the part of Mitze in *Hollyoaks*. I'd followed their work for a few years and I just said if there's anything I could do to help, please let me know. As they say, the rest is history. I've been actively involved ever since in fundraising and helping with campaigns.

**"My lovely dad lost his hearing very suddenly when I was 14 and lived the last two years of his life profoundly deaf. I saw what a huge effect that had on our family and on him."**

Rachel and the team on the set of *The Silent Child*.



Rachel doing a skydive to raise money for the National Deaf Children's Society.



Rachel working with school children at a deaf awareness workshop.

### What are the most pressing issues you feel need addressing in this area currently?

A big issue for me at the moment within the deaf community is access to education for deaf children. The statistics of children failing GCSEs is far too high and completely avoidable. In 2003 the government recognised sign language as its own language; yet 14 years later we still don't learn sign language in schools but we learn French, German, Spanish and more. There is a huge lack of awareness within education in mainstream schools and I will do everything I can to change that.

### What are you most proud of, inside or outside of work?

I'm definitely most proud of my involvement in the deaf community. I'm lucky to be able to raise awareness and money, and being ambassador for the NDCS and patron of Deaflinks and Deaffest is a huge honour for me.

### You have recently written a short film: *The Silent Child*. Can you tell us a bit about this project?

Yes I have! With a lot of help from my brilliant fiancé who's directing it. It's the

most creatively satisfying thing I've ever done but I certainly can't take all the credit; we have a fantastic team working on this project.

It's a beautiful story about a profoundly deaf four-year-old girl called Libby who is born to hearing parents, as 90% of deaf children are. Sadly Libby's parents don't know how to best cater for her needs and she ends up going to a mainstream school and, thus, does not receive the necessary support. As I mentioned before, access to education is a big issue for me and one that needs addressing: I believe that film is a very powerful way to convey a message.

### Who inspires you?

My mum – she's a superstar! She's been my mum and dad since I was 14 and she's a very strong lady.

### When not working, what would we find you doing?

I love being with friends and family – while filming in LA, that's the thing I miss the most. I also love being outside and hiking. The Lake District is one of my favourite places – my fiancé and I often escape there.

**"I only wanted to gain a basic understanding of sign but I fell in love with it and carried on."**



### INTERVIEWED BY



**Alex Griffiths-Brown,**  
**BSc(hons) Audiology,**  
Audiologist, The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals  
NHS Trust, Shrewsbury, UK.  
E: alex.griffiths-brown@nhs.net  
@griffithsbrown1