

# INTRODUCTION

Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language is the language created and used by deaf people and many hearing people in the Al-Sayyid village in the Negev region of Israel. It came into being in the 1930's when four deaf children were born into a single family in the village. The parents and children needed to communicate and began to make gestures to one another, which gradually became conventionalized within the family.

With each subsequent generation, the number of deaf people in the village grew, so that today it is estimated that there are 150 deaf people in Al-Sayyid. Through use and interaction over time, the language has developed, and serves both deaf and hearing people in communicating about a very wide range of topics in an effortless and rapid manner.

The language is of special interest to researchers because of its very newness: We can learn things by studying it that we can't learn by studying other languages—signed or spoken—which are older and more established than Al-Sayyid, and have had more outside influences from other languages. We hope to learn more about the basic ingredients that any language must have in order to function as the language of a community, as ABSL does so effectively.

The people of Al-Sayyid have welcomed us into their homes showing true Bedouin hospitality, and we have developed real friendships with many Al-Sayyid people, for which we are very grateful. Our research team, consisting of two researchers from the University of Haifa, one from the University of California at San Diego and one from Stony Brook University, has been studying Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL) for about ten years at the time of first publication of this dictionary.

This dictionary is a compilation of vocabulary we collected from many deaf people in the village. We showed them pictures for various objects and videotaped their responses. We also videotaped signs that are hard to show in pictures—for example, signs for actions or emotions—through translation from written words.

Two points about the dictionary are important to note. First, the dictionary is not complete. There are many more words in the language than the 300 we have recorded and present here. Second, many of the signs have more variants than we have shown here. We found quite a lot of variation in signs across the village, even for everyday objects. The dictionary, then, provides a sampling—a taste—of the language of the Al-Sayyid people.

We thank the people of Al-Sayyid for the opportunity to work with them on this dictionary of their language, and look forward to further refining and adding to it together with them.