

# NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE (NZSL)

Sign language is a combination of hand shapes, facial expressions and body movements.



Nearly every country has its own sign language, complete with a unique vocabulary and grammatical structure (the same as any language). NZSL is the natural language of the Deaf community in New Zealand; so it reflects the country's culture by including signs for Maori terminology and concepts unique to New Zealand.

As one of the country's official languages, more than 24,000 New Zealanders use NZSL daily. It is also the 12th most frequently used language out of approximately 190 languages currently used in New Zealand (Census 2006).

Sign language is a combination of hand shapes, facial expressions and body movements. It is not simply signed representations of spoken words.

Each May, Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand organises and runs a celebration of New Zealand Sign Language – NZSL Week. NZSL Week helps promote the language as well as raise awareness about the Deaf community and the issues/challenges its members face each day.

NZSL Week is a chance for the Deaf community to stand proud as Deaf and promote their language and culture. It is a chance to break down barriers, fears and misconceptions, and allow Deaf New Zealanders to 'put their hands up' – a chance to be 'heard'.

## How do Deaf people learn NZSL?

For the ten percent of Deaf children born to Deaf parents, NZSL is their first language. These children learn to sign from their parents; just as hearing children learn spoken language from their hearing parents.

However, the majority of Deaf people are born to hearing parents, therefore NZSL is not automatically their first language. While some hearing parents do teach their Deaf children NZSL, the majority learn the language at a Deaf school and/or by interacting with other Deaf people at Deaf education centres, clubs or other Deaf social/sports activities.

## NZSL is:

- A true and natural language that conveys information via a wide array of movements and expressions
- Not based on English or other spoken languages nor is it just finger spelling
- Not a universal "Deaf" language
- Unique to NZ and includes Te Reo Maori
- Not mime or gesture

## Learning NZSL

The best way to learn NZSL is by attending a NZSL class taught by a registered tutor or member of the NZSL Teachers' Association. Visit [www.nzsign.co.nz](http://www.nzsign.co.nz) for more information.

The Think. Sign. Connect programme is designed to provide your business with an understanding of specific New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) vocabulary that will increase your ability to effectively communicate with existing and potential Deaf clients/customers

Managers and staff will learn words and phrases they use regularly in their workplace, which they can then quickly apply in a practical setting when assisting Deaf customers/clients.

A "Concise Dictionary of NZSL" is available at most bookstores and in the reference section at libraries. This dictionary includes more than 4000 signs and meanings.

Other good ways to learn about Deaf culture and NZSL are to visit a Deaf club or attend a Deaf sports/social event.

## Deaf Awareness Training

Approximately only 40% of Deaf people can read handwritten notes and they only identify 30% of speech sounds from lip reading.

The Think.Deaf.Discover workshops provide training to overcome barriers with Deaf people so communication is more effective.

The programme provides an insight into the Deaf world, explores New Zealand Sign Language, Deaf culture and community.

The workshop covers:

- Some basic New Zealand Sign Language
- Tips for communicating more effectively with Deaf people
- Overview of the Deaf community
- Deaf culture and Deaf history
- How to book and work with NZSL Interpreters

Clients can choose between:

- 1 comprehensive day (also available in 2 half days)
- Introductory 4 hour workshop
- 1 ½ foundation workshop

Workshops are presented by a highly skilled Deaf Tutor using a very interactive delivery style. NZSL Interpreters are available to make sure each participant is able to communicate clearly with the Tutor. Workshops can be held at your premises or ours.

## Deaf Aotearoa

Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand is a Deaf-led, not-for-profit organisation formed more than 30 years ago by D/deaf New Zealanders.

The organisation focuses on promoting Awareness of, Access to and Advancement of NZSL – to help strengthen the rights of Deaf people and give them the confidence to be an active part of society.

As the only nationwide provider of services to Deaf people, Deaf Aotearoa works with Deaf people and provides information on a range of services, including legal advice, education opportunities and employment issues.

Deaf Aotearoa also works with government agencies, businesses and other organisations to provide information and resources on life for Deaf New Zealanders, the Deaf community and NZSL.

Deaf Aotearoa:

- Promotes the advancement of human rights for Deaf people
- Celebrates NZSL
- Works with Dedication, Discipline and Determination to strengthen the rights of Deaf people

As a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), Deaf Aotearoa is accountable to the Federation's principles – promoting the human rights of Deaf people in accordance with the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

*For more information about Deaf Aotearoa and the services it provides please visit [www.deaf.org.nz](http://www.deaf.org.nz)*

*For more information about learning NZSL please visit [www.nzsign.co.nz](http://www.nzsign.co.nz)*