



WASLI is committed to the development of the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide

New Zealand

General information

Population:	4,4 million
Capital City:	Wellington (Te Whanganui-a-Tara)
Official Languages:	<i>de jure</i> Te Reo Maori (Maori Language Act 1987) New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL Act 2006)
	<i>de facto</i> English

Sign Language(s)

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is closely related to British Sign Language and Australian Sign Language. Australasian Signed English was introduced as part of a Total Communication philosophy in the 1980s and has had some influence on NZSL.

Spoken Language(s)

English (spoken by 95% of the population) and Te Reo Maori (spoken by 4.1%) are official languages in New Zealand.
A number of immigrant languages are also spoken, including increasing numbers of Hindi, Chinese, Korean and Afrikaans speakers.

National Association of the Deaf

Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand (www.deaf.co.nz) (Previously Deaf Association of New Zealand: changed its name in June 2009)

How many Deaf people?



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Precise statistics about the number of Deaf people in New Zealand are difficult to find. A 2005 report looking into 2001 Census data estimated the prevalence of self-reported hearing loss at 10.3% (or just under 400,000 people).

Census data from 2006 shows that just over 24,000 New Zealanders could hold a conversation about everyday things in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), with 2,220 people reporting NZSL as their only language.

Rough estimates place the number of Deaf people whose preferred language is NZSL at between 4,500 – 7,000.

Laws to protect their rights

1. New Zealand Sign Language Act (2006)

Purpose:

- declaring NZSL to be an official language of New Zealand
- providing for the use of NZSL in legal proceedings (such as courts)
- empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of NZSL
- stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of NZSL.

A review of the NZSL Act took place in early 2011, covering the operation of the Act and whether any changes are needed to ensure that it fulfills its aims. The outcomes of the review are not yet known.

2. UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2007)

New Zealand was a leader in negotiations on the Convention. It signed the Convention in March 2007 and ratified it in September 2008.

Deaf Education

There are two Deaf Education Centres in New Zealand: Kelston Deaf Education Centre covering the northern and central part of the North Island) and Van Asch Deaf Education Centre covering the South Island and the lower part of the North Island). Both centres function as special residential schools, day schools and resource centres for the wider area.



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The majority of deaf children attend their local mainstream school, some with support from teacher aides and/or peripatetic teachers.

Sign Language Interpreters Association: SLIANZ (www.slianz.org.nz)

How many interpreters?

While exact numbers of qualified sign language interpreters in New Zealand are not known, it is estimated that just over 100 students have graduated from the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting since its inception in 1992. In addition a small number of interpreters who trained overseas also work and live in New Zealand. A number of graduates no longer work as sign language interpreters, leaving the number of working interpreters at an estimate of at least 65.

A number of unqualified interpreters are also working both in the community sector and, as teacher aides, in mainstream education settings.

How many members?

SLIANZ had 68 ordinary members in 2010, showing a growth in numbers (compared with 52 at the time of the previous WASLI report).

At the beginning of the current membership year, SLIANZ has 64 Ordinary members (full members who are qualified either in New Zealand or with a recognised overseas qualification, usually from Australia or the UK). In addition there are 5 Associate members, 3 Honorary members and 7 Corporate members.

Interpreter Training

Professional training for NZSL interpreters has been offered since 1992 through the Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting (DipSLI) programme at Auckland University of Technology (now AUT University). This was a two-year full time undergraduate course, with an entry requirement of basic NZSL proficiency as well as standard university entrance requirements. Since the Diploma's introduction, it has become clear that an adequate level of bilingualism and



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interpreting competence takes a longer period of formal study; the training course has therefore been extended to a three-year BA Major programme. The first cohort will graduate in 2013.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Auslan/English Interpreting (NZSL) is currently delivered jointly by Macquarie University (Australia) and Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand). A cohort of 12 interpreters is currently undertaking the second year of this course.

Interpreter Testing/Assessment

There is currently no independent system for testing or accreditation of sign language interpreters after graduation. In the absence of a national interpreter accreditation body, the Diploma of Sign Language Interpreting (DipSLI) is recognised as the minimum standard of qualification to work as a sign language interpreter in New Zealand.

Other than the Maori Language Commission for Maori interpreters and translators, there is also no national accreditation system for spoken language interpreters and translators. In some cases, spoken language interpreters therefore apply for accreditation through the Australian NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters). This option has not been open to NZSL/English interpreters in the past since this particular language pair is not in use in Australia. However, arrangements have been made for students on the Postgraduate Diploma in Auslan/English Interpreting (NZSL) to sit the NAATI tests as part of the course.

Important events since 2007

- NZSL Week has been held each year since 2007, in the week marking the anniversary of the NZSL Act. Organised by Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand, the week promotes NZSL as an official language and raises awareness about the Deaf community and the barriers which stop its members from taking part in society. NZSL week has led to an increased awareness of NZSL within the wider community. As part of NZSL Week, Deaf Aotearoa awards the NZSL in Action Awards, including awards for Interpreter of the Year.



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- Following a review of services, Deaf Aotearoa restructured its interpreting service. iSign, an independent online booking system for sign language interpreters, was established. The establishment of iSign was accompanied by a review of pay and working conditions, which has led to an overall increase in the hourly rates charged for interpreting services.
- Video Relay Interpreting was piloted in 2009 and is currently offered on a 24/7 basis from one call centre. Video Remote Interpreting will be introduced shortly. (source: www.nzrelay.com)
- The devastating earthquake in Christchurch in February 2011, and subsequent frequent aftershocks continue to impact on New Zealanders in Christchurch and beyond. In the wake of the earthquakes, sign language interpreters in Christchurch were quick to provide their services for the frequent media updates. Interpreters Evelyn Pateman and Jeremy Borland were awarded the Interpreter of the Year award for their outstanding work in difficult circumstances.
- SLIANZ has become increasingly involved in the Oceania WASLI region and has sponsored interpreters from Fiji to attend the yearly SLIANZ conference. We successfully raised funds to support a project whereby interpreters from Fiji could assist newly emerging interpreters in the Solomon Islands.

What SLIANZ can you offer WASLI in the next 2-4 years

Continued outreach and sponsorship of other nations in the Oceania WASLI region, including ongoing support of interpreters in Fiji and the Solomon Islands.

Goals for the future

- Review of Code of Ethics
- Closer liaison with Deaf and hearing clients of interpreting services: including work on interpreting standards, complaints procedure, review of our membership categories.

References



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