



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2024*

### **New Zealand Sign Language Week 2024: Celebrating "an Aotearoa where anyone can sign anywhere"**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand - April 10th, 2024 - Deaf Aotearoa is delighted to announce the upcoming New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Week, taking place from Monday 6th to Sunday 12th May. This year's theme, "an Aotearoa where anyone can sign anywhere," aims to inspire widespread adoption and celebration of NZSL throughout New Zealand.

Lachlan Keating, Chief Executive of Deaf Aotearoa, expressed excitement about this year's theme, stating, "this year, it's about spreading the joy of NZSL to every corner of Aotearoa. We want to make NZSL a language for everyone, everywhere, from hikers in the South Island to fisherman out on the ocean in the upper North Island."

The theme for this year's NZSL Week is inspired by the vision of the World Federation of the Deaf, emphasising inclusivity and accessibility in communication.

Jon Tai-Rakena, who is Deaf and will be returning for a second year as the face of NZSL Week, shared his enthusiasm for the event, saying, "I'm passionate about teaching NZSL to everyone I meet. With dedication and passion, we can showcase the beauty of NZSL like never before. I'm honoured to continue as a Deaf hero for NZSL Week this year."

NZSL Week offers an opportunity for individuals of all backgrounds to learn and engage with this useful language. Whether it's through basic signs or more advanced communication, everyone is encouraged to participate in the celebration.

Some key points about NZSL highlighted for this year's event include:

- NZSL is easy to learn and fun to use, with practical applications for everyday life, from teaching communication to your baby to signing through a window at your kids outside.
- NZSL became an official language in New Zealand in 2006, alongside Te Reo and English, and is one of only two native languages in the country.
- Approximately 4,600 Deaf people in New Zealand and 23,000 Kiwis regularly use NZSL, according to the 2018 NZ Census.
- NZSL is accessible to all children regardless of hearing levels, and it plays a vital role in the lives of Kiwi families with Deaf children and the wider Deaf community.

Visit [nzslweek.org.nz](http://nzslweek.org.nz) for resources, challenges, and activities to make the week enjoyable and engaging for all Kiwis.

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#NZSLWeek24 #HandsUp

- Ends -

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**About NZSL Week:**

Every May, Deaf Aotearoa takes center stage to organize New Zealand Sign Language Week, a vibrant celebration of one of the country's official languages, alongside te reo Māori.

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Week is not just a celebration; it's a moment for the Deaf community to stand tall, embracing their identity and heritage. It's a time to showcase the richness of NZSL and the diverse culture it represents. NZSL Week serves as a platform to dismantle barriers, dispel misconceptions, and foster greater inclusion.

Our vision for NZSL Week is clear: to elevate awareness and appreciation of NZSL and the Deaf community, while fostering empowerment and unity among its members.

The journey to NZSL's official recognition in 2006 was a testament to the tireless advocacy efforts of the Deaf community, championed by dedicated individuals like MP Ruth Dyson.

Since its inception in 2007, NZSL Week has become a cherished tradition, bringing together people from all walks of life to celebrate our beautiful language – NZSL.

Explore our resources and join the nationwide campaign to learn NZSL.

Let's come together, learn, and celebrate the vibrant tapestry of NZSL during this special week!