

(New Zealand Sign Language, n.d.)



1987

SIGN NINJA



NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE HISTORY

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is unique to New Zealand and is one of our official languages.

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

NZSL is the natural language of the Deaf community in New Zealand; it reflects New Zealand culture by including signs for Maori terminology and concepts, which can not be found in other sign languages or countries.

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).

So why aren't other languages recognised in the same way? Other languages - Samoan, Tongan, Mandarin, Cantonese etc - have recognition in their own country of origin. Like Maori, NZSL is strictly "home-grown" in New Zealand.

There are hundreds of sign-based languages in use around the world, and even within a given language there can be regional dialects. For example people in Christchurch may use slightly different signs than people in Wellington.

As spoken languages can be different from one region or country to another (for example English), so too can sign languages. American Sign Language for instance, is quite different from British Sign Language.

Points to remember about NZSL

- NZSL is a true and natural language that conveys information via a wide array of movements and expressions.
- NZSL does not interfere with or reflect a signer's knowledge and use of English.
- NZSL is not based on English or other spoken languages - it is not just finger spelling.
- NZSL is not a universal "Deaf" language.
- NZSL is not mime or gesture, as is used by professional artists.

NZSL TIMELINE

- 1880 Sumner School for Deaf opened in the 1880s in Sumner, Christchurch. At Sumner School for Deaf students were educated only in spoken language skills (oralism).
- 1970 In the 1970s, Signed English was introduced in Deaf education. Signed English uses signs in an English language structure.
- 1995 In 1995, NZSL was introduced at Kelston Deaf Education Centre (Auckland) and soon after at van Asch Deaf Education Centre (Christchurch).
- 1997 The Concise Dictionary of NZSL was launched. It was a landmark publication with over 4000 illustrated signs.
- 2006 The New Zealand Sign Language Act came into effect on 6 April 2006. This saw NZSL become an official language in New Zealand alongside English and Te Reo Maori. Visit the Office of Disability Issue's website for [more information about the history of the New Zealand Sign Language Act](#).
- 2011 NZSL Interpreters are used for televised media briefings following the February 2011 earthquake in Christchurch. The 5th anniversary of New Zealand Sign Language Week – 2nd-8th May 2011.

