A FUTURE IN
NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE (NZSL) & INTERPRETING
WHAT IS NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE (NZSL) & INTERPRETING

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of New Zealand’s three official languages and people who understand and can work constructively with the Deaf community play an important role as advocates and intermediaries for the Deaf community.

It is a fundamental human right to be able to access a sign language interpreter whenever Deaf and hearing people come into contact with one another and wish to impart information in a clear and concise manner. People who are fluent in NZSL and skilled in interpreting play an essential role in enabling Deaf people access information and provide another way for Deaf people to have a voice and contribute equally in society.

Since NZSL was recognised as an official native language of NZ in 2006, there has been a steady increase in the need for qualified sign interpreters, particularly if they have a good understanding of professional terminology in areas such as health, education, law and social service.

If you want to work in Deaf community-based services or education, provide a useful service to the NZ Deaf community and increase your language acquisition in English and NZSL, then this could be a great career path for you.
OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

The September 2013 Human Rights Inquiry into NZSL has highlighted areas where interpreting is needed, including public debates and submissions, government departments, educational settings and medical or healthcare. Most jobs are in healthcare and educational settings.

Increased employment opportunities are likely since the 2014 budget announcement of $6 million over four years to set up a dedicated NZSL Advisory Board to provide a national role and focal point of expertise, reference and support, including advice about NZSL as an official language.

Most NZ interpreters are self-employed. Work opportunities fluctuate throughout the year with less opportunity over the school break of December to February.

First Signs, a new Deaf Association service that involves people going into homes to teach/model NZSL for newly diagnosed Deaf children, is opening up more educational interpreting opportunities.

Most countries have their own national sign language. NZSL is used daily by more than 20,235 New Zealanders but the 2013 census shows use of NZSL down 25% on the last census. The decline is particularly sharp among teenagers.

UNIQUE TO AUT

AUT is the only tertiary institution in New Zealand where you can complete a degree majoring in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and Deaf Studies or NZSL – English Interpreting. The NZSL–Deaf Studies major is unique within Australasia.

Immersion into the Deaf culture occurs for students through AUT’s close relationship with the Deaf community.

SALARIES

NZSL interpreters usually work through booking agencies, invoicing fortnightly or monthly, and taking responsibility for their own tax. They are usually paid on an hourly basis as casual/or permanent part-time employees. It is quite rare for interpreters to be employed full-time.

A new graduate can expect to earn $40 - $45 an hour before tax. Hours vary depending on the contracts available. Sometimes interpreting work needs to be supplemented by other work.

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication and should only be used as a guide.
WORK SETTINGS

NZSL interpreters work in a range of diverse environments providing access to interpreting for any situation where a Deaf person needs information in NZSL.

Healthcare interpreting: Involves interpreting for Deaf patients or their families in any healthcare situation, including hospitals. Sessions could range from GP appointments and antenatal classes to surgical procedures needing informed consent forms.

Legal interpreting: Includes any situation from court rooms and police stations to lawyer appointments.

Educational interpreting: Involves interpreting from new entrant level to tertiary classes. Interpreters work in classes interpreting lectures and lessons, and ensuring communication during discussions and group work. NZ has two main schools for the Deaf, Kelston Deaf Education Centre and Van Asch Deaf Education Centre. Staff are required to know NZSL and have a good understanding of Deaf culture, whether as teachers, teacher aides or residential service staff.

General public: Includes social gatherings such as funerals, weddings, political rallies, protest marches, disasters. For example, during the Christchurch earthquakes two interpreters worked with media to keep the Deaf community of Christchurch updated and informed.

Social service: Involves interpreting for clients of Work and Income, Child, Youth and Family, Housing NZ and social workers.

Media outlets: A small number of television programmes now include NZSL interpreters for Deaf viewers and for news and current affairs programmes that include items pertaining to the Deaf community.

Business settings: Involves attending meetings with employees to provide access to discussions and professional presentations, and attending professional conferences where a high standard of professional conduct and the ability to work under pressure is paramount. Some interpreters travel to interpret for tourism or business groups.

Service coordination: Employment consultants help Deaf people into work. Youth advisors work with Deaf youth, community relations advisors work in communities. Trainers run workplace programmes such as Deaf Aotearoa's Think. Deaf. Discover to teach staff in workplaces ways to provide a Deaf-friendly business and achieve positive experiences for current and potential Deaf customers/clients.

Other: There are also a number of mainstream careers where people’s ability to do their job is enhanced by knowledge of NZSL and Deaf culture, including teachers, health educators, mental health experts, counsellors, social workers and community service coordinators. NZSL is a compulsory requirement in educational settings specifically for the Deaf, like Kelston Deaf Education Centre.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

• Able to work collaboratively as well as independently with a high degree of professionalism
• Demonstrate information literacy and ability to use relevant technologies
• Bi-lingual with an excellent command of the two languages, English and NZSL, including linguistic knowledge and application
• A thorough understanding of the theory of the interpreting process and the ability to put this into practice and mediate effectively using a range of interpreting techniques
• A comprehensive understanding of the (SLIANZ Inc) Code of Ethics and Practice and ability to apply these to a variety of interpreting contexts
• A working knowledge of healthcare, education and medical terminology and the ability to research specialist areas or subjects for a range of interpreting jobs
• Knowledge of the Māori language
• Able to listen to speakers over the telephone or face-to-face, and repeat what is said in the required language/sign language
• Able to interpret simultaneously (while the person is speaking) or consecutively (after the person has spoken)

PERSONAL QUALITIES

• Have an affinity with the Deaf community
• Approachable and adaptable
• Interested in people of all ages and cultures
• Skilled communicator, empathetic and caring
• Comfortable in all environments; legal, medical etc.
• A problem solver who enjoys challenges

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study in language and culture is available at postgraduate certificate, diploma, master’s and PhD level. Our research areas include creative writing, digital literacies, sociolinguistics, refugee and migrant education, academic literacies, language teaching and learning, translation and interpreting.

PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

There is currently no professional accreditation for NZSL interpreters; but the development of a NZSL Advisory Board may change this in the near future.
“Currently I am self-employed and contract to two NZSL interpreter booking agents, iSign and Connect Interpreting Services. I also take direct bookings and do pro bono work.

My primary role is to facilitate communication between hearing and Deaf clients, but there is also an awareness element to the role. Many people have never had contact with a Deaf person, let alone an interpreter, so the simple act of being ‘seen’ is an effective way of spreading awareness in a range of settings. I consider this just as important as ensuring accurate and effective communication.

I don’t specialise in any one field. One day I could work six hours with a Deaf person employed in a fabrication business; the next day I could work with four different Deaf people in four different settings, including doctors’ appointments, parent-teacher interviews, job interviews and physio appointments.

At the moment I have the pleasure and privilege of working at a tertiary institution. I also interpret at regular health appointments and Board of Trustee meetings. There are so many settings which may require an interpreter; the possibilities are limitless.

I am free to choose my hours of work and I’m not tied to a desk doing a 9-5 job which is liberating.

I have two Deaf cousins who I grew up with and learned sign language from. Later in life I worked as a teacher aide for four years and that re-ignited the passion I’d had for sign. Then, after much prodding from colleagues and family, I finally took the leap and enrolled onto the NZSL interpreting course at AUT. My only regret is not doing it earlier.”

Rosita Rapihana
Self-employed NZSL Interpreter
BA in NZ Sign Language – English Interpreting
USEFUL WEBSITES

Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand
www.deaf.org.nz

Sign Language Interpreting Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ)
www.slianz.org.nz

For the most up-to-date retail information visit our website: www.aut.ac.nz/sign-language

You can also contact the AUT Student Centre team for help and advice:

0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)
email: studentcentre@aut.ac.nz

CITY CAMPUS
55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

NORTH SHORE CAMPUS
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

SOUTH CAMPUS
640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

AUT MILLENIUM
17 Antares Place, Mairangi Bay, Auckland

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The information contained in this career sheet was correct at time of print, November 2014