

## Briefing

Date:	11 December 2024
For:	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues
File reference:	REP/WHK/24/12/193
Security level:	In Confidence

# New Zealand Sign Language Board Annual Report 2023/24

## Purpose

This briefing provides you with a copy of the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board Annual Report for 2023/24, for your information.

## Executive summary

The NZSL Board is required to report to the Minister for Disability Issues annually on matters relating to NZSL, and otherwise as required [SOC (14) 57 refers]. This Annual Report outlines the Board's:

- establishment, purpose, functions and membership, and
- the programmes and projects led or supported by the Board in the 2023-2024 financial year to progress the NZSL Strategy 2018-2023.

The Board generally has between six and eight members. Refer to the appendix for a brief overview of the current Board members.

Key achievements for the 2023/24 year include: running a successful Community Grants round and issuing \$250,000 to community initiatives relating to the promotion and maintenance of NZSL; working with Te Rōpū Kaitiaki to develop an Action Plan focused on enabling Turi Māori access to te ao Māori through NZSL; continuing to deliver key projects through contracts with Deaf Aotearoa and Victoria University to raise the status and awareness of NZSL; continuing to work with the Ministry of Education advocating for systemic change to the education of Deaf students; and, building its own governance capability. The Board successfully transitioned to new leadership, with the appointment of a new Chair in May and new Deputy Chairs in August 2024.

In 2024/25 the Board is focused on renewing the NZSL Strategy to support the promotion and maintenance of NZSL for the next five years. The Board has gathered information from engagement across government agencies, Deaf organisations, Deaf youth, and Te Rōpū Kaitiaki to inform the proposed Strategy refresh. In November, a draft of the proposed framework for the next NZSL Strategy was provided to you for feedback (WHK/24/11/186).

The Ministry for Disabled People – Whaikaha (the Ministry) will support the Board to work alongside government agencies to develop and progress the Strategy outcomes. The NZSL Board is available to meet with you in early 2025 when you have an opportunity to do so, to discuss the proposed new NZSL Strategy.

In early 2025 the Ministry will run a recruitment process for the Board and Te Rōpū Kaitiaki, as several members have terms expiring in June 2025. As Minister, you will be required to take a paper to the Appointments and Honours Committee in April or May, to appoint new members.

A list of the current NZSL Board members can be found in the **Appendix** to this briefing.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** the information contained in the Annual Report 2023/24, for your information only. **Noted**
- b) **Note** this Annual Report will be published on the Ministry's website in early 2025. **Noted**
- c) **Note** you will be required to seek Cabinet approval to appoint new Board members in April or May 2025. **Noted**
- d) **Indicate** if you would like to meet with the New Zealand Sign Language Board in early 2025 to discuss the proposed new NZSL Strategy. **Yes / No**



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Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Disability Issues

Date 2025 02 17



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Sheryl Pinckney

Group Manager, Partnerships and Stewardship




Date: 11/12/24

Prepared by: Amanda Stone, Advisor NZSL Team

Responsible manager: Sheryl Pinckney, Group Manager, Partnerships and Stewardship

**Actions for private secretaries:**

## Appendix: Current Board members

	<p>Catherine has a wealth of experience across the Deaf and hearing communities in both paid and voluntary roles, with a history of participation in a range of organisations, including Auckland Deaf Society and early childhood providers for her children. She is currently completing her Masters in Language &amp; Culture at AUT University. Catherine brings a strong knowledge of the challenges children face accessing and learning NZSL, linguistics, language planning and policies.</p> <p>(Appointment effective from 8 May 2024 for a one-year term)</p>
	<p>Joanne has a broad knowledge of how government operates due to being a public servant. She has been involved in the Deaf community for many years including committee work for different groups. As a Board member she has a great understanding of issues and barriers the Deaf community face to support NZSL Board decisions.</p> <p>(Appointment effective from 1 July 2022 for a three-year term)</p>
	<p>Jaime is hearing and brings both personal and professional experience from the Deaf Community. With ten years' experience as a NZSL teacher and now a qualified NZSL interpreter. She previously owned a business that provided NZSL teaching services and demonstrates strong partnership and collaboration with Deaf people/organisations. Jaime has a strong focus and drive to make information and services accessible in NZSL.</p> <p>(Appointment effective from 1 July 2022 for a three-year term)</p>



**David McKee**

Dr McKee is a recognised expert in NZSL and worked as the Research Director of the Deaf Studies Research Unit at Victoria University of Wellington until his recent retirement. He has extensive governance experience, including serving on the combined Board of the Deaf Education Centres and as chairperson of Deaf Aotearoa Holdings Limited. He was nominated by Deaf Aotearoa to be on the NZSL Board.

(Reappointment effective from 8 May 2024 to 30 June 2025)



**Erica Dawson**

Erica holds a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology, a Certificate in Deaf Studies from Victoria University of Wellington and is the Deaf Cultural Lead at Deaf Aotearoa. She joins the board with 15 years of experience working in Deaf organisations across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, including nine years of involvement supporting the delivery of NZSL Week.

Erica believes that fostering relationships and collaboration with "hearing allies" is crucial for the Deaf community's advancement and is passionate about NZSL.

(Appointment effective from 8 May 2024 to 30 June 2027)



**Monica Leach**

Originally from the UK, Monica lives in West Auckland with her family, including two teenage CODAs (Child/ren of Deaf Adult/s) and is an active member within Deaf and NZSL communities with 10+ years' experience as a qualified NZSL teacher.

Alongside teaching, she holds other contracted roles to support Deaf, NZSL and projects focused on supporting people with disabilities. As a board member, she brings a wealth of experience and knowledge of Deaf people who face barriers and issues. She is passionate about making improvements to accessible spaces.

(Appointment effective from 8 May 2024 to 30 June 2026)





**Kim Robinson**

Kim is an active member of the Deaf Community and is currently living in Te Tai Tokerau. He is an advocate for Deaf rights and is passionate about breaking down barriers holding Deaf people back from being able to fully participate in society.

A trip to the United States in 1990 provided Kim with extra motivation to seek out improved access options for the Deaf community in New Zealand. His commitment to ensuring Deaf people are heard and their needs met has seen him made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in 2019 for services to the Deaf community.

Kim brings extensive governance and administration experience to the Board and is committed to the promotion and maintenance of NZSL.

(Appointment effective from 8 May 2024 to 30 June 2026)

## Current Rōpū Kaitiaki Members



**Rāhera Turner**

Rāhera (Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Mahuta, Te Patupō, and Ngāti Tūwharetoa) has been a member of Te Rōpū Kaitiaki since 2022, and prior to this she was a member of the Board. Rāhera has over 30 years of experience as a NZSL teacher. She previously managed the Equal Voices Arts initiative and is currently engaged with Arts Access Aotearoa and the Creative NZ Deaf and Disabled Advisory Group.

(Appointment effective from 3 July 2024)

**Stevie Aiono**

Stevie (Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa) has been a member of Te Rōpū Kaitiaki since its establishment in 2022. She brings her involvement in the Turi Māori community and knowledge of te ao Māori to this role. Stevie is also Samoan and is well involved in the Samoan culture.

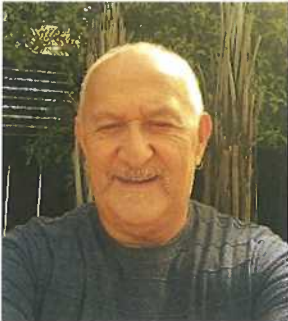
(Appointment effective from 29 May 2022 to 29 May 2025)



**Eric Matthews**

Eric (Te Rarawa) has been a member of Te Rōpū Kaitiaki since May 2022. He works for Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education as a youth support worker at their residence and has a strong interest in Turi Māori rangatahi (youth) accessing te ao Māori via NZSL. Eric also aspires to see turi Māori rangatahi achieve leadership roles.

(Appointment effective from 2 November 2022 to 10 November 2025)



**Haamiora  
Samuel Te Maari**

Haamiora (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Ngāi Tahu, and Ngāti Raukawa) has had a strong involvement in the Turi Māori community since the first National Hui for Māori Deaf in 1993. Haamiora has organised many workshops to upskill turi Māori and is the current Chair of Tū Tāngata Turi, a Turi Māori Board.

(Appointment effective from 29 May 2022 to 29 May 2025)



**Mita Moses**

Mita (Ngapuhi, Ngati Wai, and Ngāti Hine) has been involved in many Turi Māori Boards and has a passion for teaching NZSL and working with the local community in Northland.

(Appointment effective from 29 May 2022 to 29 May 2025)



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New Zealand Sign  
Language Board

2023 - 2024 Annual Report



## Background

### **The NZSL Board was established in 2014 to provide expert advice on NZSL matters<sup>1</sup>**

- 1 The purpose of the NZSL Board (the Board), as set out in its Terms of Reference (ToR), is to:
  - Maintain and promote the use of NZSL by ensuring development, preservation, and acquisition of the language.
  - Provide expert advice on NZSL to government and the community.
  - Ensure the rights of Deaf NZSL users as outlined in:
    - the NZSL Act 2006
    - the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
    - other national and relevant international legislation.
- 2 The Board works towards a vision, as outlined in the ToR, where:
  - NZSL is a strong, vibrant language, recognised and embraced by New Zealand society.
  - The right to use NZSL as a first or preferred language is acknowledged.
  - There are sufficient opportunities and resources for Deaf people, their families and whānau, and other NZSL users to acquire and use NZSL.
  - NZSL is accessible and available to all NZSL users.
- 3 The Board generally operates with six to eight members appointed by the Minister for Disability Issues. All members are NZSL users, and a majority of members are Deaf NZSL users. The ToR specifies that a minimum of two Board members must identify as Māori. At the time of this Annual Report, the Board has seven members, none of whom are Māori. This year, the Board welcomed three new members and an existing Board member as the new Board Chair.
- 4 Since its establishment, the Board has developed a national NZSL language strategy, progressed engagement on options for accrediting NZSL interpreters, supported the development of the NZSL Dictionary, and established Te Rōpū Kaitiaki to provide guidance and advice to the Board on matters important to Turi Māori. These projects are expanded on below.
- 5 The Ministry of Disability Issues – Whaikaha (the Ministry), has an NZSL team that provides support for the Board.

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<sup>1</sup> SOC (14) 57

## **Te Rōpū Kaitiaki – the Board’s Māori advisory group**

- 6 Te Rōpū Kaitiaki is a Turi (Deaf) Māori-led advisory group, appointed by the Board.
- 7 The aims of Te Rōpū Kaitiaki are to provide advice and a Turi Māori perspective to the Board on initiatives relating to NZSL, and to progress a workplan to improve NZSL outcomes for Turi Māori.
- 8 The workplan includes improving access to te ao Māori through NZSL for Turi Māori, uplifting the leadership capability of Turi Māori, and growing the number of trilingual interpreters.
- 9 Two representatives from Te Rōpū Kaitiaki attend NZSL Board meetings to provide Turi Māori perspective to the discussions.

## **The Board and the Ministry work together to administer funding that supports the Board to undertake its activities**

- 10 The Board and the Ministry together administer \$1.94 million per year:
  - \$1.69 million supports the functioning of the Board, Te Rōpū Kaitiaki and the team within the Ministry, and the provision of contracts (e.g. the development of the NZSL Dictionary).
  - Up to \$250,000 as grants for community-led initiatives to promote and maintain NZSL.
- 11 The grant funding round opens in February each year and decisions are made and announced by the middle of each year.
- 12 A summary of the allocated funding is attached as an appendix to this report.

## **The Board’s work programme sits within NZSL Strategy 2018-2023**

- 13 The Board developed the NZSL Strategy 2018 – 2023, to drive a work programme that promotes and maintains NZSL as an official language of NZ. This Annual Report covers the final year of this Strategy – the period July 2023 to June 2024.
- 14 The Board has been undertaking a refresh of the Strategy in 2024, which will include an Action Plan detailing how the Strategy will be implemented.
- 15 The current strategy is centred around five language planning priorities. These language priorities form the strategy’s strategic priorities, set out below:

### *Acquisition - the learning of language*

- Deaf children and young people become fully proficient in NZSL.
- The Deaf community and other members of society can learn NZSL.

#### *Use/Access - the ability to use language*

- Enable NZSL to be used in all domains of society.
- Promote social equality for Deaf NZSL users by ensuring they have access to information and services through NZSL.

#### *Attitude - beliefs and opinions towards the language*

- The Deaf community has a critical awareness and appreciation of NZSL as a valid language and believes that NZSL is recognised and valued by New Zealanders.
- Families and whānau of deaf children, and the professionals who work with them, recognise and value NZSL and understand the benefits of using NZSL early with deaf children.
- Government agencies, Crown entities and New Zealanders recognise NZSL as a language and demonstrate inclusive attitudes and practices towards NZSL users, including recognising the importance and value of NZSL to the Deaf community.

#### *Documentation - systematic recording of language use for research and reference*

- Development and maintenance of comprehensive records of NZSL that enable current and future use, promote understanding and enable further analysis of the language.

#### *Status - how a language is regarded by its users and others*

- Development of a positive environment for the use of NZSL, including determining what rights are given to NZSL users through legislation, policy and practice and the position of NZSL in society – enhancing how NZSL is viewed and used.

16 Projects and activities undertaken under each of these strategic priorities are summarised below.

### **Priority 1: Acquisition**

Projects that were progressed and/or received funding to promote the acquisition of NZSL are outlined below.

#### **Supporting infrastructure and leadership capability for the NZSL teaching profession**

17 The Board provided funding of \$160,000 over two years (2023 - 2025) to support and strengthen the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA). Funding enables NZSLTA to employ staff to manage its strategic planning, secretariat function and operations (resources, professional development, and registration), with the goal of delivering quality teaching and learning across New Zealand.

### **Development and maintenance of NZSLTA TeachSign website**

18 The Board is providing funding of \$50,100 over three years (2023 – 2026) to support NZSLTA to hold committee meetings and maintain the TeachSign website - a central repository of information and resources for teachers, tutors, and students of NZSL, and to update the Registration Advisory Panel certification process for NZSL tutors.

### **Supporting an NZSL youth development programme**

19 The Board provided funding of \$19,141 for Wellington Deaf Society to bring Deaf youth and others who use NZSL together for events and activities to develop NZSL skills, competency, and confidence. 9 events were held, with between 30 and 120 people attending each event.

### **Supporting the NZSL Proficiency Interview (NZSLPI) service**

20 The Board supported the NZSL Proficiency Interview (NZSLPI) service, an evidence-based language assessment tool used by trained assessors to determine an individual's proficiency in NZSL.

21 The NZSLPI tool provided assessments for educators to understand and improve their levels of NZSL. In late 2023, this was extended so that others who were not teachers could make use of the assessments.<sup>2</sup>

### **Supporting the delivery of free NZSL learning opportunities for Deaf children and their families**

22 The Board provided funding of \$20,000 for Deaf Children NZ to deliver subsidised NZSL learning opportunities across New Zealand. Deaf Children NZ had to close applications for this subsidy fund early, as there was such high demand.

### **Supporting professional learning development for NZSL Tutors**

23 The Board provided funding of \$35,000 to deliver Professional Learning Development workshops nationally to NZSL Tutors who are at an advanced level and above, noting that PLD is essential for raising and accelerating tutor achievements.

## **Priority 2: Use/Access**

The projects and programmes supported by the Board to promote the access and use of NZSL are outlined below.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that, for the 2024/25 year the Board and the Ministry will not be providing this service. The Board and the Ministry have refocused its resources to delivering on strategic projects, such as the NZSL Strategy.



### **Supporting Turi (Deaf) Māori to access te reo**

- 24 The Board set aside funding of \$150,000 per year to support Te Rōpū Kaitiaki to provide advice to the Board to address barriers Turi (Deaf) Māori experience in accessing te ao Māori.
- 25 This year, Te Rōpū Kaitiaki updated its Terms of Reference. It also developed a Turi Māori Action Plan for accessing te ao Māori through NZSL. Work will continue in the 2024/25 financial year on the implementation of the Action Plan.
- 26 The Action Plan includes developing Turi Māori leadership through wānanga and other initiatives, increasing the number of trilingual interpreters, increasing access to and knowledge of te ao Māori through education, and the development of te ao Māori concept signs in NZSL.

### **Supporting the community to access community grants**

- 27 The Board undertook a review of the community grants process. The Board took steps to improve the accessibility of the process and to ensure grants are allocated equitably, especially for Turi Māori. Improvements have also been made to increase clarity and simplify the application process, enhance the visibility of project eligibility criteria, and streamline reporting requirements. Te Rōpū Kaitiaki will be involved in reviewing applications for projects that will benefit Turi Māori in future.

### **Developing a high-quality interpreter workforce**

- 28 The Board led consultation and engagement with NZSL interpreters and stakeholders around the country, to seek feedback on the adoption of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI<sup>3</sup>) as the potential new registration system for NZSL interpreters.
- 29 The Ministry has collated previous research, data, and policy advice on other options for interpreter registration. Engagement with stakeholders has been undertaken, including discussions with NAATI and Auckland University of Technology, the provider of NZSL interpreter training.
- 30 The Board will progress to a decision on whether to adopt NAATI as the NZSL interpreter registration system, or to progress an alternative option, as part of its work on the refreshed NZSL Strategy. The Strategy will also look to address other workforce matters, such as qualification attainment and access to ongoing professional development.

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<sup>3</sup> NAATI is an Australian system of national standards and certification for translators and interpreters. The system aims to raise the standard of people working as translators and interpreters. The New Zealand Government decided to adopt NAATI in NZ in 2017 for all spoken languages and has been working on its implementation, so that people can effectively interact with government services.

- 31 The Board has recognised the importance of trilingual interpreters to increase access for Turi Māori and worked with Te Rōpū Kaitiaki on potential options to strengthen the trilingual interpreter workforce.

### **Providing access to Māori legends in NZSL**

- 32 The Board provided funding to JPF Films Limited, a Turi Māori led organisation, to create an NZSL retelling of a Māori legend in NZSL using an avatar character in VR360. This is accessible to the public and will be used by Ko Taku Reo – Deaf Education NZ.

### **Supporting the Deaf community to access the arts**

- 33 The Board provided funding of \$16,100 to Merge NZ to develop theatre workshops for the Deaf community, including children. The project has been extended into the 2024/25 financial year, and participants will have the opportunity to learn skills such as miming, poetry, storytelling, and songs through NZSL.

### **Providing access to mental health resources in NZSL**

- 34 The Board provided funding of \$50,000 to Changing Minds, who created a series of NZSL videos to break down stigma around mental health and promote more open conversations on this topic.

## **Priority 3: Attitude**

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

### **Promoting NZSL nationally across the country**

- 35 Deaf Aotearoa is being funded \$660,000 over three years (2023 to 2026) to promote NZSL nationally. Promotion activity includes signing challenges for prominent leaders, media training, podcasts, and engaging influencers and content creators using social media. Deaf Aotearoa will work with Turi Māori and Deaf Pacific people to create booklets in NZSL incorporating Māori and Pacific concepts.
- 36 So far, this funding has resulted in media articles relating to NZSL, media training for the Deaf community, and engagement with organisations including Te Papa, Air NZ, Garage Project, Te Taura Whiri i te reo Māori - the Māori Language Commission, and NZ Cancer Society. This contract also includes a funding contribution for NZSL Week, which in 2024 involved the delivery of the NZSL Awards and many national leaders participating in the NZSL leader's challenge by posting a video of them signing online.

### **Supporting Deaf young people to attend World Federation of the Deaf Youth Camp**

- 37 The Board provided funding of \$6,000 for Deaf youth from New Zealand to attend the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section's international camp in South Korea in July 2023. This camp provided an opportunity for young

people to make connections internationally and represent the New Zealand Deaf community.

## **Priority 4: Documentation**

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

### **Supporting the development of the online NZSL Dictionary**

38 The Board is providing funding of \$601,013 from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026 to the Deaf Studies Research Unit at the Research Trust of Victoria University for ongoing development of the online NZSL Dictionary. Ackama NZ is also receiving \$268,987 over 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026 to host and maintain the web application.

39 The dictionary allows users to search for NZSL vocabulary through either English or te reo words or by the visual features of signs themselves. For the period 1 June 2023 to 28 May 2024, the dictionary received 1.6 million page views.

### **Digitisation of Deaf Club history**

40 The Board provided \$50,000 to Auckland Deaf Society so that it could digitise its 90 years of history as a club. This included photographing physical records and interviewing senior members of the club.

## **Priority 5: Status**

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

### **NZSL Strategy refresh**

41 The Board has been focused on refreshing the NZSL Strategy, which expired in 2023. In the 2023/24 financial year, the Ministry undertook targeted engagement with Deaf organisations, government agencies, Deaf youth, and Te Rōpū Kaitiaki, to inform the development of the new strategy. A new strategy is key in lifting the status of NZSL in the eyes of Deaf people, government, and all New Zealanders.

### **Ombudsman's report on Deaf education**

42 The Board has advocated for many years for improved acquisition and use of NZSL by deaf students and teachers. The Ombudsman released an opinion in December 2023 that was critical of the Ministry of Education's (MoE) implementation of the 'Development Map for NZSL in Education'. The opinion found that MoE "unreasonably omitted" a number of steps, including setting appropriate timeframes and targets and taking steps to advise on the need to secure funding.

43 The Board wrote to the Minister of Education to advocate for an NZSL-first, linguistic and cultural approach to educating deaf children, amongst other

short-term changes that would improve education outcomes for deaf children.

- 44 Throughout 2024 the Ministry has participated in MoE's Sector Advisory Group (SAG), on behalf of the Board, to drive improvements to the Development Map. This participation is continuing into the 2024/25 financial year.
- 45 The Board had a representative on the Ko Taku Reo advisory group in the first half of this year, to advocate for a Deaf community-centred approach to the formation of the school's new leadership, including the Principal and Board of Trustees.



## Appendix 1: Summary of NZSL allocated funding

Strategic Priority	Description of Investment	Funded Amount in 2023/24
Acquisition – learning the language	<b>Contracts</b>	
	Supporting infrastructure and leadership capability - strengthening the NZSL Teachers Association to enable it to employ staff to strengthen the delivery of quality NZSL teaching and learning.	\$80,000
	Supporting the NZSL Proficiency Interview service -an assessment tool to determine an individual's proficiency in NZSL. Funding is also provided for training and developing assessors.	\$80,000
	Supporting professional learning development for NZSL Tutors across New Zealand.	\$35,000
	<b>Community Grants</b>	
	Supporting an NZSL youth development programme to bring Deaf youth and others who use NZSL together for events and activities.	\$19,141
	Development and maintenance of NZSL Teachers Association TeachSign website – ensuring a central repository of information and resources for NZSL teachers, tutors, and students, and updating the Registration Advisory Panel certification process for NZSL tutors.	\$16,700
Use/Access – ability to use the language	<b>Contracts</b>	
	Supporting Turi (Deaf) Māori to access te reo – supporting advisory group te rōpū Kaitiaki to develop a plan to address barriers Turi Māori experience in accessing te ao Māori. Providing non-contestable, multi-year funding that can be accessed to support activities developed by Turi Māori for Turi Māori.	\$150,000
	<b>Community Grants</b>	
	Providing access to Māori legends in NZSL by creating an NZSL retelling of a Māori legend in NZSL using an avatar character in VR360, to be used in Deaf education.	\$20,000
	Supporting the Deaf community to access the arts by funding Merge NZ to develop theatre workshops for the Deaf community, including children.	\$16,100
	Providing access to mental health resources in NZSL with a series of NZSL videos to break down stigma around mental health and promote more open conversations on this topic.	\$50,000
Attitude – beliefs, opinions to, and visibility and awareness of the language	<b>Contracts</b>	
	Promoting NZSL nationally across the country - promotion activity developed and delivered by Deaf Aotearoa across the year, including NZSL Week, to raise visibility and awareness of NZSL.	\$220,000
	Supporting Deaf young people to attend World Federation of the Deaf Youth Camp	\$6,000
Documentation – recording and capture of the language	<b>Contracts</b>	
	Supporting the development of the online NZSL Dictionary - Victoria University and Ackama NZ working together to develop the online NZ Sign Language Dictionary.	\$290,000
	<b>Community Grants</b>	
	Digitisation of Deaf club history – supporting Auckland Deaf Society to record its 90 years of history.	\$50,000