

NEWSLETTER

TORBAY

more than a place - a lifestyle

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Deep Creek Working Bee

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LET'S NORMALISE *New Zealand Sign Language*

Merge NZ, a locally owned company, is on a mission to normalise New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). This Deaf-led company is celebrating NZSL Week (7th - 13th May) by teaching NZSL at schools, public libraries, businesses/organisations and community groups.

12 years ago, in 2006, the NZSL Act was passed in New Zealand and NZSL became an official language of our country. NZSL Week was also established at this time and continues to run each year in the first week of May.

"We have had a big increase in awareness and acceptance of NZSL since the Act was passed, but there is still work to be done." Victoria Lessing (Deaf) Co-director and qualified NZSL tutor of Merge NZ says.

Recently, Glamorgan School had Merge NZ visit every class in the school to teach NZSL. They also have a lunchtime signing club in term two and an after-school NZSL class planned in term three.

"Kids respond so well to NZSL, it is also a great way to help them develop empathy, of course, it helps that it's a really fun language to learn." Jaime Brown, also a qualified NZSL tutor and Co-director of Merge NZ, explains. Glamorgan School has embraced NZSL and Merge NZ is the only qualified Company in NZ offering professional development training for NZSL tutors. They are contracted to the New Zealand Sign Language Teacher's association and only use trained tutors in their team.

"Being trained on how to teach our language is really important as NZSL is more than just learning signs and vocabulary. As more hearing people learn NZSL there is always the risk that they will start to teach NZSL themselves without proper training, and

while the exposure of the language is great, being trained and respecting the professional organisations in place is essential. The Deaf community has spent years advocating for these systems." Victoria explains. Merge NZ teaches in several schools in the Auckland region, as well as having NZSL courses for adults.

Merge NZ offers training programme for NZSL tutors and Deaf culture training as well which they say are essential for all frontline staff. These workshops help organisations, teachers and the community understand how best to communicate with Deaf people and what Deaf culture is. Culture is a part of the language and the two cannot be separated.

To learn more about Merge NZ or to express interest in one of their courses or workshops email info@mergenz.co.nz or check out Merge's website at www.mergenzt.co.nz



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