



## Deaf Aotearoa

### DIVERSE TALENT

#### SMALL-MEDIUM ORGANISATION WINNER

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### THE STORY

Deaf Aotearoa is a not-for-profit organisation providing advocacy and services for Deaf people and the Deaf community across New Zealand. It has 14 offices located from Invercargill to Whangarei and currently employs 31 Deaf staff across a wide age range. One of Deaf Aotearoa's goals is to help Deaf people in New Zealand achieve their potential in the workplace and be represented at all levels, including in leadership.

When the organisation recruited for a new Chief Executive in 2012, more than 50 people applied for the role, but only a small number of the applicants were Deaf. It was clear not enough had been done to develop Deaf leaders within Deaf Aotearoa, or within the country generally.

It spurred the newly appointed Chief Executive to commit to establishing roles for Deaf leaders within the organisation to ensure as many Deaf people as possible were being groomed to be the next Chief Executive.

Deaf Aotearoa Chief Executive Lachlan Keating says that Deaf people want work that matches their skills, experience and qualifications. But they are constrained by barriers such as English being a second or third language, lack of awareness and fear-based social stigmas.

“We see individuals every day battling the same systemic problems: poor education, ignorance, under-employment and unemployment.”

Deaf Aotearoa has fought for 45 years to combat these discriminatory challenges and provide more opportunities for this under-represented group to succeed in their careers.

Within its own organisation it ensures Deaf people achieve their potential by providing opportunities at every stage of the employment pathway.

This includes attracting Deaf people to work at all levels of Deaf Aotearoa, designing roles that are best suited to be performed by Deaf individuals, supporting Deaf staff to study or take on professional development opportunities and identifying Deaf staff members with leadership potential and promoting them at the earliest opportunity.

Deaf staff are 'at the table' when decisions are made, providing advice and feedback and Deaf staff are encouraged to take on senior leadership roles outside of Deaf Aotearoa.

It has required change throughout the employee life cycle. The organisation's recruitment process has been redesigned to give Deaf applicants the best possible experience. This includes having Deaf people on all interview panels and involved in recruiting decisions. Any Deaf person who applies for a role is given the opportunity to interview, and sufficient time is allowed to interpret from New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) into English and from English into NZSL.

"When given the chance to communicate in NZSL, Deaf individuals are far more likely to succeed and demonstrate their wealth of skills," Lachlan says.

Deaf Aotearoa also focuses on creating roles and internal processes more suited to skills that Deaf people have, such as NZSL, cultural sensitivity, empathy, and social connection. "We've carved out leadership roles that exemplify these qualities, including: NZSL Week Coordinator, First Signs Facilitators, Youth Internships, Māori Deaf Development Officer, and Māori Advisory Group members."

The organisation strives to educate both Deaf staff and hearing staff to make their workplace as Deaf-friendly as possible.

"Most of our employees have knowledge of NZSL, and our leadership team has both hearing and Deaf representatives. This ensures a Deaf perspective is included with every facet of our operations, advocacy, outreach, hiring process, and development decisions." The success of these initiatives is reflected in the numbers – in 2005, 33 per cent of the organisation's staff were Deaf. This increased to 54 per cent in 2021.

Deaf representation on the Leadership Team has doubled and there have been several internal promotions.

"These roles are not tokenistic – the people who hold them are high-performing individuals with high expectations of themselves and others. They challenge us all to continually develop our systems and processes to deliver better outcomes for our staff and community."

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## **THE AIM**

Deaf Aotearoa wanted to ensure as many of its Deaf staff as possible were being groomed to be the next Chief Executive as part of its mission to help Deaf individuals achieve their potential in the workplace.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Create a welcoming and safe space for the Deaf community to work in to attract talented Deaf people to all levels of the organisation
- Design roles which are best suited to be performed by Deaf people
- Support Deaf staff to study and take on professional development opportunities
- Identify Deaf people with leadership potential, and promote them into leadership roles at their earliest opportunity
- Push Deaf staff and leaders out of their comfort zone by giving them challenges they wouldn't face in other organisations
- Ensure Deaf staff are 'at the table' when decisions are being made and listen to their feedback
- Encourage and support Deaf staff to take on senior roles outside Deaf Aotearoa



## RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Since 2015, 28 Deaf staff have completed the Careerforce Level 3 Certificate in Health and Wellbeing (Social Work) and more than a dozen have completed the Deaf Studies Certificate at Victoria University
- The percentage of Deaf staff in the organisation has increased from 33% in 2005 to 54% in 2021
- The number of Deaf people on the leadership team has doubled from five during the period from 1980 to 2011 to 10 during the period from 2012 to 2021.
- Several staff have received internal promotions to leadership roles
- Many of the organisation's Deaf staff have moved to senior roles in other workplaces

## KEY LEARNING

Reviewing every aspect of the employment pathway is key to ensuring people from disadvantaged groups can achieve their full potential in the workplace.