

Diversability Award Entrant: Pickled Possum Productions

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/141145501>

Trilingual show brings multicultural message to children's TV. New Zealand has three official languages – English, Te Reo Maori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). Although English is the most widely spoken, particularly in the media, Te Reo and NZSL are unique to this country and are incredibly important to our culture and identity. Pickled Possum Productions understands the importance of these languages and has decided to use the influence of the popular children's show, Sticky TV, to encourage young people to learn all three.

Sticky TV is a New Zealand children's programme that has been running since 2002 and is all about inspiring kiwi kids into action once the TV is turned off. It prides itself on being inclusive of its audience and providing a fun and educational show for anyone who watches.

Three years ago Pickled Possum Productions recognised a need for more NZSL to be seen on local television shows and began their relationship with Deaf Aotearoa. More recently, the three presenters of Sticky TV, Leanna, Jahmaine and Walter, have started on the journey to becoming fluent signers. The show firmly believes that you shouldn't just save NZSL for New Zealand Sign Language Week, or even Te Reo Maori for Maori Language Week.

Pickled Possum Productions provides the presenters with fortnightly lessons in both languages so they can share what they learn with the viewers. The NZSL lessons started off with basic words, letters and greetings. As the presenters have become more confident, they have begun to learn phrases and vocabulary that are relevant to them and their youth audience. The presenters truly enjoy their lessons and thrive on being able to seamlessly weave the three official languages into the show.

It is important for everyone involved that the language they are sharing with viewers is accurate. For Te Reo that means using the correct pronunciation, and it is just as important for NZSL that the signs are correct and the meaning is accurately conveyed. For this reason footage from the shows is sent to tutors and feedback is given to the presenters.

This year, Sticky TV was awarded a Deaf Aotearoa Media award for leading the way in New Zealand programming with the use of NZSL. The presenters attended the Award ceremony in May and were moved by how their efforts had been received.

"Going to the Deaf Aotearoa Awards was eye opening. What an amazing community to be part of and to know that what we do on the show makes a difference to so many people," says presenter Walter Neilands.

"New Zealand Sign Language and Maori make up an important part of this country's identity and culture so it is a privilege to have the opportunity to represent that on Sticky TV".

Indeed Sticky TV viewers have been delighted by the increased use of sign and Te Reo within the show and have sent in their appreciation. Joy is one such viewer.

“My Aunty and Uncle are Deaf and my mum teaches sign language, and is an interpreter. My sister is hard of hearing and we love signing to each other. I am round deaf all the time and I just really want to thank you for including sign this week, I have seen nothing else about it”, she says.

The influence of Sticky’s emphasis on NZSL goes further than just the show. They are encouraging viewers to try out ‘Sign Ninja’, an app game to help them practice NZSL at home. Viewer Aimee Johnston was excited by her high score on the game, saying “learning heaps. Such a good app to have”.

All three presenters started with little or no knowledge of NZSL or Te Reo Maori and are now confident using both languages accurately. Not only have they developed themselves personally, they have also passed on their enthusiasm to their young viewers, influencing a generation of future communicators.

As one of the only mainstream shows to utilise Maori and New Zealand Sign Languages, Sticky TV are setting a benchmark for other local television shows and not only those aimed at young audiences. This is a new standard they hope other shows will strive towards and something that audiences should come to expect.