

Aspirations for speech-language therapy services provided to Māori following stroke

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E ai ō harirau, hei rere mai
You have the wings to fly here

This is a mihi to acknowledge speech-language therapists (SLTs) and the work that is being done to move our profession in a direction that is culturally competent and supportive for Māori. It is encouraging to sense the desire and enthusiasm for change.

The most recent NZSTA symposium warmed my heart. I have seen the word biculturalism everywhere over the last few years—in university lectures, research articles, and job descriptions. To really feel it in a room full of SLTs was uplifting. We sang waiata, connected with each other (with lots of laughter) and

openly talked about Māori and tauwiwi/non-Māori supporting each other.

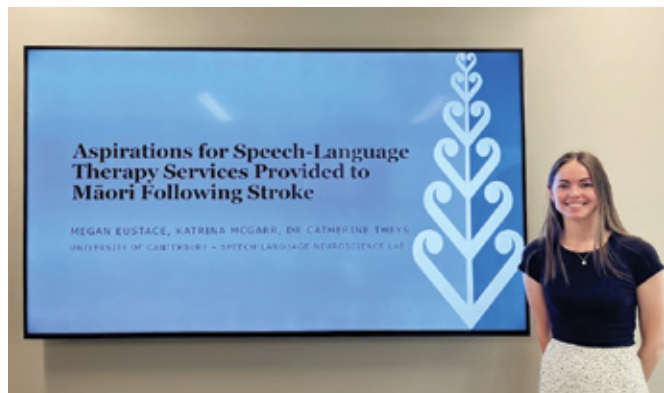
At the symposium I gave a presentation about the way forward for our profession in supporting Māori post-stroke. My presentation focused a lot on the ways our profession can improve, and how we can do better for Māori. Māori face a long history of colonisation, and it is clear that we have not yet overcome the resulting consequences. However, an area I think deserves more attention is the positive impact of speech-language therapy in post-stroke care.

In the course of my research, I noticed an interesting contrast between the perspectives of stroke survivors and SLTs. SLTs acknowledged their good intentions

to support Māori but tended to stop there, not recognising the benefits of these intentions. Yet, almost all stroke survivors and whānau had something positive to say about how speech-language therapy had helped them after their stroke. For many, speech-language therapy had achieved more than getting words out. It supported self-expression and reinstated freedom. That's huge.

One SLT quote from my research really stands out: "I want that fire and that change to keep going". To me this quote acknowledges the positive change happening in our profession and at the same time expresses a need for further improvement, a need to keep that fire burning.

Nō reira, ngā mihi nunui ki a koutou katoa. I've seen and heard SLTs doing great things—changing the way they work, pushing back against rigid systems, and embracing opportunities to learn about colonisation, racism, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These things really do make a difference when we are working with tangata whenua. Let us acknowledge our progress and use it as the wings to help us fly. ●



Left: Megan was awarded the Marion Saunders Trust Award for her project presented at the NZSTA Symposium.