



AWARENESS WEEK 16-22 SEPTEMBER 2018

Silence isn't golden for 400,000 Kiwis

The important role of Speech-language Therapists is being highlighted with a week-long campaign, Giving Voice Aotearoa 2018, to raise awareness of communication disabilities nationwide.

400,000 Kiwis have a communication disability, including an inability to speak and be heard easily, processing spoken and written language, and reading and following signs.

Giving Voice Aotearoa 2018 is being run by the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) and aims to make New Zealand more communication accessible by helping organisations understand how they can include all Kiwis in everyday communication.

The New Zealand Speech Language Therapists Association NZSTA, represents the profession of Speech-language Therapy in Aotearoa, as well as providing awareness and advocacy for those affected by communication and related swallowing conditions.

Philippa Friary, President of NZSTA, says the ability and right to communicate is taken for granted as a skill but for many it's a struggle in a culture where being able to communicate well is increasingly important:

"Unlike a physical disability, if someone has an issue with communication it often goes unnoticed, or it's hidden, and becomes a silent disability - those affected often become isolated and disempowered," she says.

"It often results in child behavioural challenges, impacts learning, getting a job, building relationships, and is more likely to lead to living in poverty, and is common among young offenders and with inmates. If unaddressed it can cause long term issues from failure and disengagement at school to an inability to transition to the workforce, living life to the full and being productive - so it has social and economic implications."

Giving Voice Aotearoa 2018 is modeled on a successful UK campaign that has grown awareness about communication disability among public and private organisations, including schools, hospitals, workplaces and shops so they can improve communication access.

Some people have challenges with communication from birth while in others it's the result of an accident or illness.

A representative for NZSTA is Geneva Hakaraia-Tino, who was born with athetoid cerebral palsy, which is characterised by speech difficulties and uncontrollable movement. But this hasn't stopped her graduating as a Bachelor of Communication Studies from AUT and fronting a campaign to develop a Te Reo voice for communication devices.

Rangitikei man Aidan Terpstra is another success story who beat odds to get his voice back after months of rehabilitation as a result of a punch during a roadside confrontation that left him unconscious for months due to a brain injury.

At the time, two years ago, doctors didn't rate Aidan's chances for a full recovery but now able to walk, eat without a feeding tube and talk, he's beginning to get back to doing the things he loves, including running his Firewood Business.

Judge Andrew Becroft, Patron of the NZSTA, says both Geneva and Aidan are two of the many examples of people who have been supported by Speech Language Therapists so they can achieve and succeed.

"Neuro-disabilities, including speech language communication disorders are one of the real focal points of our office. Many of New Zealand's 1.1 million children struggle with communication difficulties. I did myself as a child who began stuttering at the age of 2 and a half and it has been a lifelong issue," he explains.

"Now thankfully under control due to the fantastic help provided by a 3 week residential course by a speech language therapist. My heart goes out to those children in particular who struggle to communicate," he adds.

"My plea is that we provide real help and assistance; especially speech and language therapy for all children and young people who are struggling with what can be a debilitating disorder that blights young people's wellbeing"

Becroft comments: "in one sense this isn't a high profile disability and is only obvious when it comes to communication and talking. Many New Zealanders aren't as aware of this issue as they could be."

Speech-language Therapists work with people everyday who experience communication difficulties, they share their frustrations, their pain, their social isolation and their fears, and they work hard to provide them with a voice, involving regaining their own or supplementing with other forms of communication.

Background information and statistics:

- Literacy and learning:
 - 1 in 10 children have speech language problems
 - Two thirds of students with low literacy at 16 had low literacy at the age of 8 (ref 1)
 - About 20% of young people drop out of school with no qualifications (ref 1)
 - About ½ of Auckland’s annual 21,000 new school entrants don’t have the oral language and early literacy to learn and read easily (ref 1)

- Lack of communication skills in young offenders and the prison community:
 - Early intervention for literacy, speech and language for children in our schools may prevent them heading down the path of criminal activity
 - Introducing speech and language therapy for young offenders would reduce re-offending and help them back into employment on release ([The Guardian](#))
 - Communications Assistants are a growing feature of the [NZ justice system](#)

- Illness and its effects on communication:
 - Communication disabilities span a very large group of people who live with conditions including: tourettes, shyness, stuttering, Parkinson’s, dementia, Alzheimer’s, mutism, to name a few
 - 16,000 people in New Zealand have aphasia, the inability (or impaired ability) to understand or produce speech, as a result of brain damage or stroke (ref 2)
 - Around 9,000 people suffer a stroke each year in New Zealand and 30% will result in aphasia (ref 3)
 - 10,000 people in New Zealand have Parkinson’s and one of the most common symptoms is speech and swallowing difficulties (ref 4)

References:

1. <http://learningauckland.org.nz/talking-matters>
 - a. <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/14667>
2. <http://www.aphasia.org.nz/public/about/public-about/>
3. <http://www.brnz.ac.nz/your-brain-health/stroke>
4. <http://bit.ly/2w0Bkym>



New Zealand
Speech-language
Therapists' Association

Te Kāhui Kaiwhakatikatika Reo Kōrero o Aotearoa