

# Hearing matters

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## OUR WORK IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Achieving our mission



### SINA'S STORY

How a simple hearing check changed a life

### LAURA'S JOURNEY

Overcoming hearing loss with the help of the Hearing Aid Fund

### BRIDGING THE SILENCE

Our outreach work in Retirement Villages

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## Kia ora

Welcome to the latest edition of *Hearing Matters* magazine.

It's certainly been a busy year so far for the team at the NFDHH, and I'm delighted to share some highlights of our recent efforts and achievements.

Our Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe Programme continues to expand across New Zealand secondary schools, providing vital hearing checks and support for Kiwi students. In fact, this year alone, we're on track to deliver this programme to 65 schools and around 10,000 Year 9 students! This is only made possible because of the wonderful support we receive from our donors, so a huge and heartfelt thank you to you all for enabling this important programme to continue. Looking ahead, we aim to extend the programme with a goal of reaching 85 secondary schools in 2025.

Our retirement village outreach programme also continues to grow, with more and more residents benefitting from onsite assessments and support with hearing aids. Here's a startling fact: around 95% of residents who request an NFDHH hearing test fail their initial screening and need to be referred for more comprehensive diagnostic services. Many of these residents have then been found to require hearing aids and we are so pleased we've been able to support them.

It just goes to show that the work we're doing is very much needed in the community.

Inclusivity has been a big focus of the NFDHH recently. In addition to extending our reach in high schools and retirement villages, we've also been working hard to get Kiwi businesses more involved, offering a range of services and workshops aimed at promoting inclusive environments for clients and employees and providing tools

for creating workplaces that truly support diversity.

While economic challenges continue to put pressure on our community and families, with the help of our amazing partners and supporters we have been able to support our Deaf and hard of hearing community with a range of initiatives.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to everyone who has taken the step to include NFDHH in their wills. Your bequests will enable us to continue growing our programmes and services, ensuring more individuals and communities can access the support they need to live life to the fullest.

From all of us at NFDHH, we hope you enjoy this edition of *Hearing Matters*. Happy reading!



*Natasha Gallardo*  
Natasha Gallardo,  
Chief Executive

# Hearing matters

The National Foundation for  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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UPDATE

# OUR WORK IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

EDUCATING  
TEENS ON BETTER  
HEARING HEALTH

2024 HEARING MATTERS





Above and below right:  
The NFDHH team in action  
at Manurewa High School.



**E**ven a mild hearing issue may be detrimental to learning and educational outcomes.

The challenges young people face with hearing problems can extend beyond having an impact on their education. Hearing issues contribute to feelings of isolation, can adversely affect one's mental health, and have implications around social and overall well-being.

With the rate of youth hearing loss on the rise globally, NFDHH established the Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe Programme in 2019, aimed at identifying hearing issues in young Kiwis as they begin their high school journey.

Our mission is simple: Firstly, we aim to help young people with undiagnosed hearing issues or hearing loss access the services they need in order to minimise any damaging impact on their educational outcomes.

Secondly, we work to educate young people about how to protect their hearing from noise and unsafe listening habits, to preserve their hearing for the future.

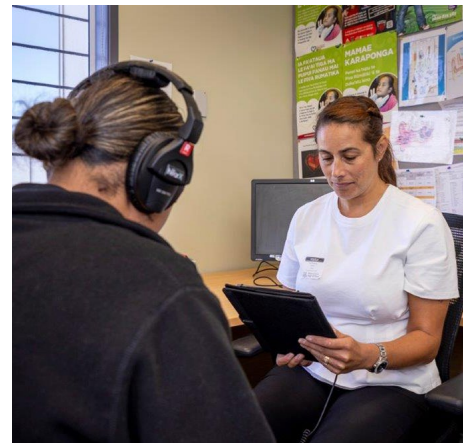
The NFDHH prioritises its support—where possible—to schools with high Māori/Pasifika populations, as research highlights that these ethnic groups have a disproportionately higher rate of hearing disability and



associated issues, than any other ethnic groups in Aotearoa.

In 2023, we checked the hearing of 7,855 Year 9 students at 43 secondary schools across Aotearoa. We found that a concerning 23% of those students tested reported ringing in the ears (otherwise known as tinnitus, which if permanent can lead to hearing loss) and 37% of students were practicing unsafe listening habits.

Currently in New Zealand there are two screening programmes in place for newborns and before children start school. But with skyrocketing numbers of youth globally with hearing loss, it is hoped that the data collected as part of NFDHH's Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe Programme may help to provide a case for an adolescent screening programme to be introduced by the New Zealand government in the future.



**Donate to this programme and help us reach 85 secondary schools in 2025.**

# THE HEARING SCREENING AND MAKE LISTENING SAFE PROGRAMME: SINA'S STORY



NFDHH's programme transformed Sina's life by identifying her hearing loss and providing life-changing hearing aids.

**In 2023, the NFDHH screened the hearing of 7,855 students across schools in New Zealand as part of its HearX Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe programme.**

The aim was to provide on-site hearing screening for year nine secondary students in Aotearoa, and, if required, to provide students with access to the treatment and support they needed to reach their education goals and maintain their overall wellbeing.

We asked Sina and her mum, Punipua, about the impact the HearX Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe programme has had on Sina's life.

Sina's family had been noticing hearing difficulties for a while and were increasingly troubled by why she so often failed to

respond after having her name called. Still, the results of the hearing assessment came as a little bit of a shock.

"We were very surprised to find out that Sina's loss of hearing was very serious, and we are grateful to NFDHH for identifying this and referring Sina for a full hearing assessment."

When asked how they had found the process—from that initial hearing screening, through to Sina being fitted with hearing aids—they shared their gratitude for the prompt and ongoing attention she received.

"When finding out that Sina has confirmed hearing loss, the process from fitting to receiving the hearing aids was very quick," says Punipua.

"Sina received the hearing aids at the end of 2023 and has already had a follow-up appointment this year. We have been told that Sina will be continuously monitored."

"We are truly grateful for this programme. If it wasn't for the programme, Sina would have gone through her school years without being able to hear which would have affected her education and most probably her future."

"She is excited that she can hear her teachers, her classmates, and her family. Having hearing aids has changed Sina's life and our family. We were told that the hearing aids are expensive and for Sina to be able to have them at no cost is a blessing to her and to our family."

"Thank you to NFDHH for the wonderful programme that they are doing. We believe this is a very important programme for our children."

"Children need to hear to be able to live and learn."

***We're delighted that the HearX Hearing Screening and Make Listening Safe Programme has been so valuable to Sina and her family.***

***And the good work continues! This year, our programme will take place at 65 secondary schools across the country, with the goal of reaching 85 New Zealand high schools in 2025.***



**Donate to this vital programme and help more students like Sina.**

**L**aura shares her story with us today, from her initial experience with hearing loss to the way her life has been transformed with hearing aids and the help of the NFDHH Hearing Aid Fund.

Laura's story began in 2021 when she was diagnosed, at age 62, with a rare neurological condition. This condition, along with other factors, led to a gradual deterioration of her hearing. As a result, Laura was facing difficulties in her daily life, both at home and work.

In social settings, she would often miss parts of conversations with others. Her job as a receptionist, involving communicating with the public in person and over the phone, also became challenging due to her hearing issues.

As a result, Laura found herself struggling to adapt to her changing circumstances.

"I found myself often having to ask colleagues at work to repeat themselves," she says. "In social situations, like restaurants, I was resigning myself to missing half of every conversation and just nodding and smiling."

"My husband was getting increasingly annoyed at having to repeat himself, and often, wouldn't bother to say something the second or third time."

After being tested, Laura learned that a large part of her difficulty hearing was that she couldn't hear the consonants at the beginning and end of words—a key factor in speech recognition.

This was going to require some sort of intervention she knew, but with hearing aids prohibitively expensive—especially for someone with

# OVERCOMING HEARING LOSS WITH THE HELP OF THE NFDHH HEARING AID FUND: LAURA'S JOURNEY

mortgage repayments and day-to-day living expenses to meet—it was hard to tell when she would be able to afford the devices that could help restore her ability to communicate and participate fully in daily life.

It wasn't until a visit with her audiologist at Bay Audiology that she learned of the NFDHH Hearing Aid Fund.

Laura reached out to the NFDHH, and her application was accepted.

Upon receiving her brand new hearing aids, the transformation was immediate. Now she could engage in conversations again, she could participate more fully in social situations, and, best of all, her husband no longer had to repeat himself!

"My husband is happier," says Laura. "Shortly after I got the aids, we went road-tripping down the South Island with our

dog. Whenever we pulled over for a stretch in the beautiful countryside I was dumbstruck by the bird noise. I didn't know they were so loud. Or the wind in trees, waves at the beach, cicadas in my own backyard. It was like a new world opened before my ears."

Laura is now part of the conversation and more confident than ever at work.

"It was a godsend," she says. "As it is, I had to purchase my aids on credit which will take me about 6 months to pay off. With the fund, it would have been more like nine months."

"It's a comfort to know that, as you are ageing and facing all kinds of physical deterioration, someone is there to help you. Watching my own grandmother age, being able to hear or not was the difference between

*Continued on page 15*



Laura says that receiving a grant from the NFDHH Hearing Aid Fund has been "a godsend".

## LEARN ABOUT OUR GRANTS

**Donate to the Hearing Aid fund so more people like Laura can benefit from better hearing. Visit [nfdhh.org.nz](https://nfdhh.org.nz) to find out more.**



Since 2019, the Great Big Hearing Check has empowered over 30,000 Kiwis to prioritise their hearing health. Thousands of generous donations have made a real impact: we've helped National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing screen over 10,000 students nationwide. This means children with hearing challenges are receiving the support they need to thrive.

This year, we emphasised how better hearing benefits everyone around us. "After getting my hearing checked, I feel so much more connected to my grandkids," says Sarah from Wellington. "It's the best thing I've done for myself in years!" Your support made a difference: generous Kiwis entered our prize draw offering \$10,000 in prizes, and Triton Hearing proudly donated \$1 for every hearing check – that's over \$5,000 directly supporting the School Screening Programme!

## CHANGING LIVES BY RAISING AWARENESS

# THE GREAT BIG HEARING CHECK



2024 HEARING MATTERS

**P**icture a child struggling to follow lessons, feeling isolated because they can't hear clearly. Now, imagine the difference early detection and support could make in their life.

Did you know that almost 500,000 of New Zealanders are currently experiencing the challenges of untreated hearing loss? As a nation, we need to do better. That's why Triton Hearing launched the Great Big Hearing Check, an annual initiative tied to New Zealand Hearing Awareness Day. Our goal is simple yet powerful: to change lives by raising awareness, providing easy access to hearing checks, and supporting those who need it most and crucially, supporting children through the National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing's School Screening Programme.

We couldn't do it alone! Thanks to our incredible partners: Unichem and Life Pharmacies, Farmlands Co-operative, Waikato Tainui, the MTA Association, our media partners and of course National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, we're reaching Kiwis from all walks of life. Our mobile hearing clinics bring accessible hearing checks directly to communities throughout the country.

In 2024, we took our message everywhere: from appearances on TVNZ's Breakfast Show to discussions with experts on Newstalk Health Hub, from features in the Sunday Star-Times and NZ Herald to ads on over 200 radio stations. Even magazines like Radiator, Active Retirees, and Grey Power got involved, ensuring we reached Kiwis of all ages and stages.

**Be a Voice for Better Hearing:** You know the difference a hearing check can make. Share your experience, and gently encourage your friends and family, especially those you might suspect are struggling, to prioritise their hearing health. Visit our website or give us a call for helpful resources and information to share with those you care about.



**Give it a go! Book your free hearing check today:**  
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**[tritonhearing.co.nz](http://tritonhearing.co.nz)**



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**TRITON**  
HEARING

*Give it  
a go!*



**BRIDGING  
THE SILENCE:**

# OUR OUTREACH WORK IN RETIREMENT VILLAGES

**H**earing loss, whether due to occupational or age-related factors, can profoundly affect our lives, impeding communication and social interaction, and potentially hastening the development of dementia and associated ailments.

This connection between hearing loss and dementia is significant, especially given that, over the next 30 years, dementia will be one of the largest global health issues we face. It's estimated that rates of *dementia mate wareware*—the term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect

a person's brain function, such as their memory, thinking, and social skills—will increase by a staggering 240% in New Zealand.

This is one of the reasons NFDHH is committed to working with New Zealand's elderly community and helping them maintain their sense of connectedness, community, and participation in daily life.

In 2023 we conducted 24 Hearing Health workshops at retirement villages across Auckland to discover what issues residents might be experiencing.

From the more than 500 responses we received, we found that:

- 72% of residents said they found it difficult to hear in noisy situations
- 30% of residents said they don't participate in communal activities due to difficulty hearing
- 53% of residents stated they felt that retirement village staff needed a better understanding of their hearing loss needs
- 61% of residents said that they required more help with their hearing health and hearing aids

We continue to see these patterns in 2024, especially around hearing loss, with around 95% of residents who request an NFDHH hearing

check failing their initial screening and needing to be referred for more comprehensive diagnostic services.

NFDHH's Retirement Village Outreach program aims to support residents experiencing hearing loss and raise awareness about the issues they face. It provides on-site hearing checks, education about the dementia risk, and speedy referral pathways for residents to get fitted for hearing aids, as well as options around financial assistance if needed.

The feedback we've received confirms that the programme is already having a positive impact on residents.

"Yay, I can hear properly again! Thanks for being here today as it is

not easy for me to go to the clinic."  
– A happy resident from Remuera Gardens Retirement Village

"Thank you so much for coming today, it made me feel included. I know this will help the staff and my friends to have a better understanding of what it is like to have hearing loss in a hearing world and maybe they will try to learn some sign language to communicate with me." – Mary, resident at Logan Campbell Retirement Village

"After listening to the workshop you presented this morning, it encouraged my husband to test his hearing today. My family and I have been asking him to do this for years." – A resident from Grace Joel Retirement Village



**Support our work in Retirement Villages – donate today to help us reach 100 villages in 2025.**

## FINDING CONNECTION: PAULINE'S HEARING LOSS CHALLENGE

**L**ady Allum resident, Pauline, navigates her days with a friendly smile and a bright spirit—despite her hearing challenges.

Unable to use hearing aids or cochlear implants, she relies on lipreading and written communication. Although some residents struggle to understand her needs, Pauline finds solace in the kindness of her friends and the efforts of village staff.

Despite the communication hurdles, Pauline finds joy in her passions. She revels in her role as a trained florist, tending to the village's outdoor pots with love. Her weekly flower purchases



Pauline doesn't let communication challenges dampen her positive outlook and resilient spirit.

brighten the reception area, spreading joy to all.

Staff at Lady Allum offer support: the village is currently reviewing

alternative fire alarm systems for profoundly Deaf residents.

Encouraged by the village manager, Pauline has been making a point of venturing out on new adventures. Despite her initial hesitance, she has recently been enjoying Devonport ferry excursions and visits to museums, the latter an activity she says helps her bridge the gap between her past and present.

Movies with subtitles and crafting sessions are favourite other pastimes, but her greatest comfort is Posy, her beloved cat.

Pauline's resilience and positivity continue to shine through, inspiring those around her to embrace life's challenges with grace and a smile.



## HEARING HEALTH AND COGNITIVE DECLINE: UNDERSTANDING THE LINK

**I**n 2023, the *Lancet*, a peer-reviewed general medical journal based in London, published an investigation into the connections between hearing loss and dementia\*.

The study—which was the largest of its kind ever conducted—found that elderly people with hearing loss who do not wear (or do not have access to) hearing aids have a 48% greater risk of cognitive decline or dementia. This study lists other risk factors that contribute to this higher risk such as aging, diabetes, other health conditions, nevertheless it is alarming.

This is a very concerning statistic for New Zealand,

especially considering how many elderly people are living with undiagnosed hearing loss. Recent research from our Hearing Health workshops found that 95% of residents who requested a hearing check did not pass and had to be referred for further audiological evaluation.

Additionally, many people who have been diagnosed still don't use—or even own—a properly fitted hearing aid. We found that while 70% of village residents reported hearing loss, just 41% actually wore hearing aids.

With the numbers of our ageing population set to climb in the coming years, we should all be taking proactive measures to

ensure that everyone has the support and resources they need to maintain their hearing health as they age.

And fortunately, early interventions can significantly mitigate this risk. According to the *Lancet* study, the utilisation of hearing aids can significantly decelerate hearing-related decline in cognitive functions and memory by almost 50% within three years among elderly individuals who face an elevated risk of cognitive impairment.

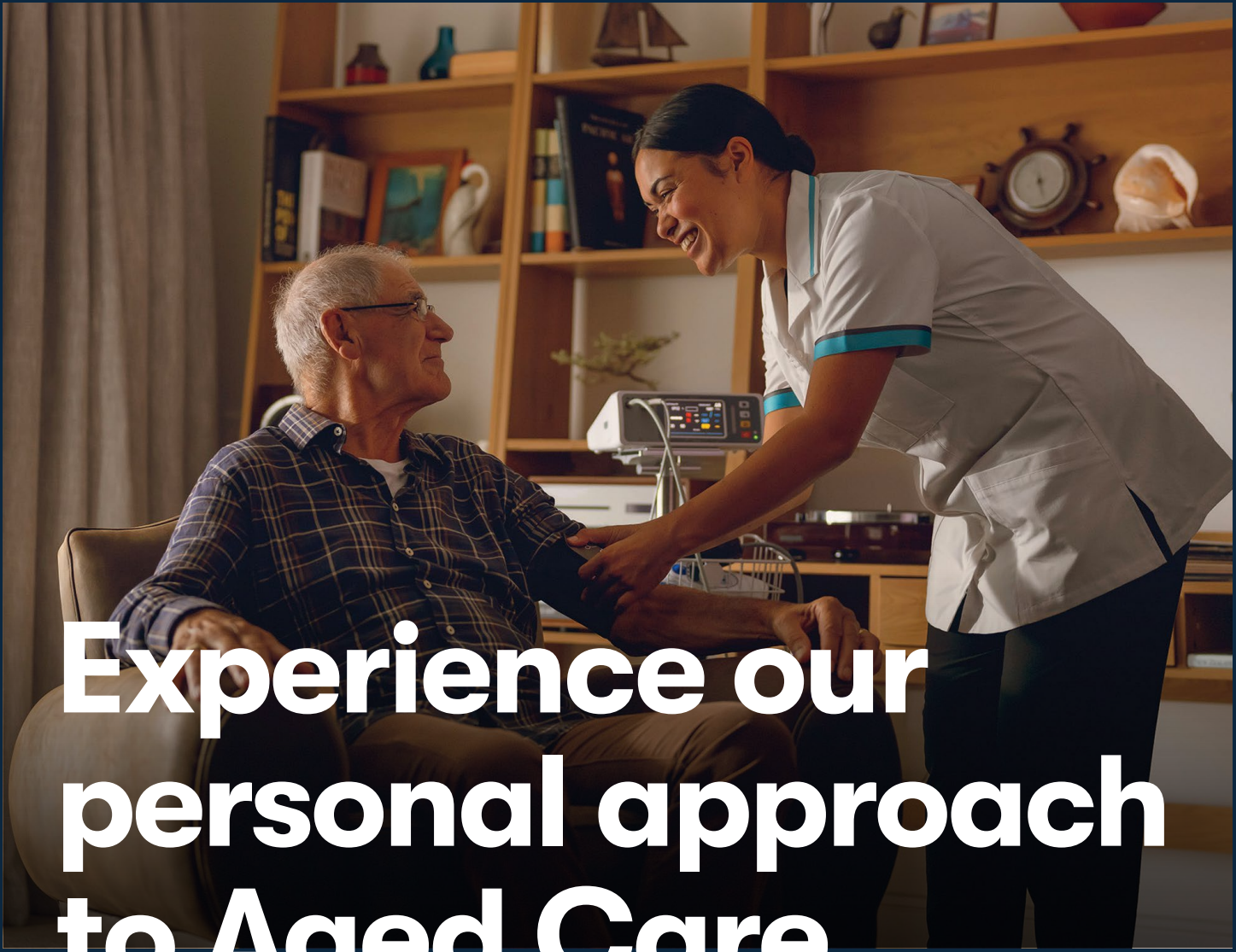
This is one of the reasons the NFDHH Retirement Village Outreach programme is focused on educating residents on the risk of hearing-related dementia, providing quick referral pathways to hearing aids, and offering support for elderly people to maintain their social connections and ability to communicate.

So far, our Retirement Village Outreach program has been very successful, and we're delighted to report that this year we have extended our programme to Christchurch and Rotorua/Bay of Plenty, enabling us to visit 80 retirement villages this year.

By taking proactive measures to manage hearing issues, we can potentially enhance the overall well-being of our aged citizens, promoting healthier ageing and thereby safeguarding their cognitive health.



**To find out more, contact  
the NFDHH at [nfdhh.org.nz](http://nfdhh.org.nz)**



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# MARATHON JOURNEY TO HELP YOUNG KIWIS

**A** huge congratulations to our very own Briana Valgre is in order!

Bri is our Programme and Communications Coordinator and is deeply passionate about the work NFDHH is doing in the community.

After months of training, on June 23, Briana, along with her friend Erin, took part in the 21km Wellington Half Marathon.

Briana's goal was clear: to support young Kiwi children's hearing health. As you may know, last year NFDHH visited 43 schools

across New Zealand to provide hearing assessments and access to help where needed. Bri's mission was to raise funds that would be directed towards giving a further 65 schools access to our programme.

We're delighted to announce that Bri's fundraising efforts garnered an impressive \$1020! That's definitely an achievement to be celebrated!

Thank you, Bri, for your effort. Every step brought us closer to achieving our goals.

You and Erin are legends, and we

are eternally grateful for your passion and drive to support our organisation and the services we provide.

Nāu anō i mahi - You did it!



Briana Valgre (left) and friend, Erin MacLean.

## Bay Audiology are proud to support the NFDHH Hearing Aid Fund.

Supporting hard of hearing New Zealanders facing financial hardship to purchase new hearing aids.



[bayaudiology.co.nz](http://bayaudiology.co.nz)



# EMERGING TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Here and across the globe, exciting work is underway aiming to improve the lives of individuals living with hearing health issues. Here, we spotlight two of the most exciting developments.

Link to study: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38012676/>

## AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY WORKING WITH SHEEP TO STUDY HEARING LOSS

**A**t the Faculty of Medical and Health Science (FMHS), Auckland University, researchers are devising new methods to deliver medication to repair the cochlea, the inner ear organ responsible for transmitting sound signals.

Their focus lies in developing a medical device capable of

accessing the inner ear through the ear canal, so that vital information can be extracted.

Initial experimentation involves animals, particularly sheep from Ngapouri Research Farm, chosen for their similarity to human ears in skull structure and ear canal size. Sheep offer an ideal model for longitudinal studies, providing

insight into the long-term safety of the FMHS team's medical device.

Ensuring the welfare of the experimental subjects is important too, so the researchers are prioritising natural life on the paddock, intervening in the sheep's day-to-day activities only when necessary.

And because sheep live to about 12 years of age, they are excellent test subjects for longitudinal studies examining the long-term safety of the team's medical device.

Link to study: <https://www.clinicaltrials.gov/study/NCT05788536>

## UK TRIALS IN GENE THERAPY FOR CHILDREN

**B**ritish toddler Opal Sandy became the first in the world to undergo pioneering gene therapy, restoring her hearing.

Born with auditory neuropathy, Opal received a 16-minute surgery infusing a functional gene copy, enabling near-perfect hearing and joyful play.

The trial, named Chord, conducted at Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge, aims to recruit Deaf children globally for a five-year follow-up.

Prof Manohar Bance, leading the trial, expressed optimism in the research, noting Opal's remarkable results and potential for a cure.

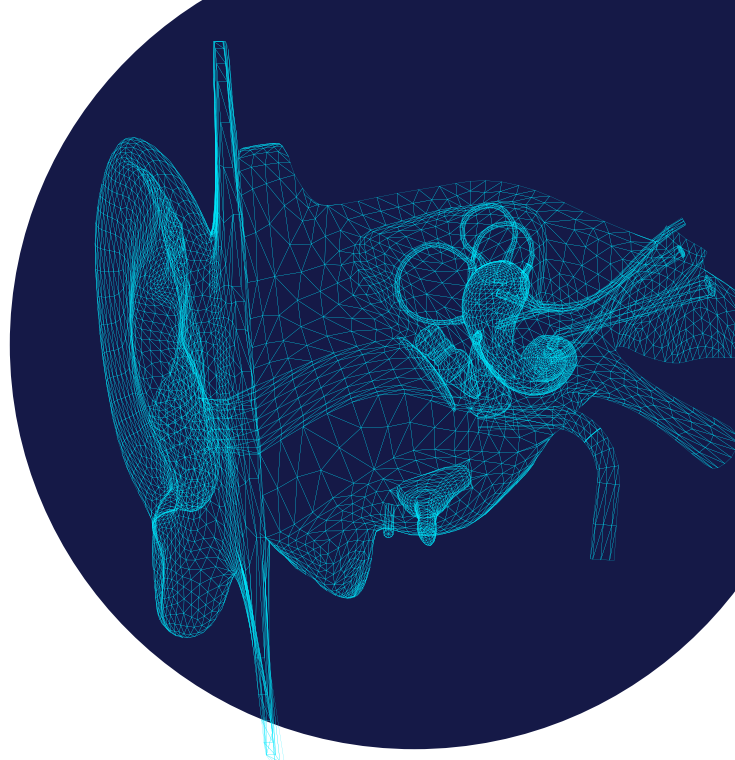
The therapy, developed by biotech firm Regeneron, sends a functional OTOF gene to the ear, addressing the fault-causing auditory neuropathy.

Opal's case represents a milestone

in gene therapy for OTOF mutations, heralding a new era in deafness treatment.



**Found an exciting new piece of research or tech we should know about? Drop us a line at [enquiries@nfdhh.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@nfdhh.org.nz) to let us know!**





Evie's confidence in the pool is thanks to her great support network and a grant from the Noonan Bequest Fund.



**The NFD Trust offers grants and scholarships to New Zealanders who are Deaf or hard of hearing across many areas including education, social activities, health, employment and services. This has only been possible due to generous people leaving bequests to the Foundation that have been carefully invested and then distributed back into the community.**

## FROM THE SIDELINES TO SWIMMING STAR: EVIE'S STORY



**W**e speak to Debbie Ford about how the Noonan Bequest Fund has helped her four-year-old daughter Evie find her confidence in the water.

For young Evie Ford, swimming was always a bit of an intimidating prospect. While her siblings certainly enjoyed swimming lessons and splashing at the local pool, four-year-old Evie wasn't so sure, usually opting to stay on the sidelines.

"Evie was born with bilateral sensorineural hearing loss and has had hearing aids since she was 14 months old," explains Evie's mum, Debbie.

"I really wanted Evie to be able to have swimming lessons like her siblings, but she'd always been a sideline watcher."

When they did go swimming as a family, Evie, without her familiar hearing aids, could be overwhelmed by the situation and was hesitant to step into the pool and learn to swim.

"Due to her hearing loss, we needed a swimming instructor who could sign, because Evie found it hard in situations where she wasn't able to wear her hearing aids. She was really reliant on them, and she doesn't like to take them out."

So, Debbie started searching for a solution and learned about the NFD Trust Noonan Bequest for families in Canterbury.

Debbie applied, requesting a

grant to cover swimming lessons and a signing instructor, and was delighted when she was notified that Evie would be a recipient of a grant.

After some calling around, Debbie connected with the nearby Selwyn Swim School. And the rest is history.

"They were really helpful, and they wanted to support Evie in her swimming journey," she says.

"When I talked about who Evie was and about her lack of confidence in situations where she didn't have her hearing aids, the teachers were really passionate to learn and use sign language, which was awesome."

Evie's apprehension soon melted away.

"She started with Lisa, who didn't have any signing background at all, but was keen to learn," Debbie explains. "And then we moved on to Sam, who has a background in New Zealand sign language, so she's been great too."

For a little girl who once feared the water, Evie now embraces it wholeheartedly.

"At the end of her lesson, when Sam says the lesson has finished, Evie shakes her head and then starts doing her own thing, hoping she'll get a bit longer," says Debbie.

"She absolutely loves swimming with her instructor, Sam. She





always has the biggest smile on her face. She can't wait to see her each week," her mum beamed.

Evie rapidly progressed from nervous strokes to kicking confidently through hoops and attempting diving.

"She's getting pretty good. Being a four-year-old, she's got a mind of her own. She's never ready to get out of the pool," Debbie says.

Her instructors have been so impressed with how far Evie has come that she was recently awarded the prestigious Star of the Week Award at the swim school, an honour reserved for only 'the most fantastic, hard-working swimmers'.

"Her confidence has just come such a long way. It's just been amazing to watch her progress."

For families in similar circumstances, Debbie wholeheartedly recommends seeking out assistance. "I just would encourage other families to apply for funding," she urged.

"For a Deaf child to be able to participate, those extracurricular activities are just so beneficial for them. And when you see their growth and the enjoyment and just how proud they are to be doing the same things as their siblings, it's just really amazing."

"We've applied for funding again, so hopefully we're successful recipients again."



**To learn more about how you could apply for a grant or scholarship visit [nfdhh.org.nz/grants-and-scholarships](https://nfdhh.org.nz/grants-and-scholarships). Contact Lisa Talbot at [lisa.talbot@nfdhh.org.nz](mailto:lisa.talbot@nfdhh.org.nz) if you would like to find out more about leaving a bequest to the Foundation.**

## OVERCOMING HEARING LOSS WITH THE HELP OF THE NFDHH HEARING AID FUND:

# LAURA'S JOURNEY

*Continued from page 5*

staying socially involved or becoming isolated. It is so important to stay involved."

The Hearing Aid Fund has been made possible by generous donors from around New Zealand. To them, Laura extends a heartfelt thank you.

"As a believer in altruism myself, volunteering my time and energy when I can, I know this world goes better with donors like yours who can make this real difference in someone's life by their acts of kindness and generosity."

"Thank you! I'm pleased as punch to have them and happy to show them off."

And Laura has a message for those self-conscious about their own hearing devices.

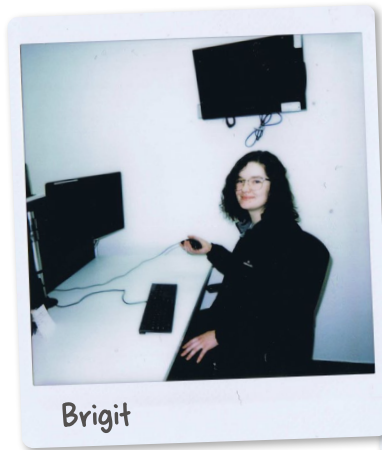
"It seems that family, friends and colleagues notice [my hearing aids] but don't say anything, perhaps out of politeness."

But there's no need to tread lightly, she says.

"I wear glasses to see better. I always get comments when I get new glasses. I wear aids to hear better. What's the difference?"

"This is a great fund and a great thing to build awareness and understanding about. My opinion is that hearing loss should not be a barrier to a happy life!"

# MEET THE CAPTIONERS



Brigit



Jason

**E**ver wondered how the captions on your television get made? Well, you may be surprised to know it's not just magicked up by AI software. In fact, there are over 20 captioners squirrelled away in an Auckland office who make media accessible every day, 365 days a year (even on Christmas!). These humans watch a lot of television – possibly more than anyone in the country.

**And who do they work for?**  
Well, Able is a not-for-profit organisation that captions and audio describes shows for local channels like TVNZ 1 and 2, Duke, Three and Sky Open. We even caption some things live, like the news and sport events.

**Get to know a couple of our captioners.**



**Find out more about Able, how to turn captions on your television, and sign up to WatchAble, our weekly newsletter which highlights all the best in accessible television, at [able.co.nz](http://able.co.nz)**

**Kia ora, Brigit!**

**What brought you to Able?**

My sister has worked here for a long time, and whenever she worked from home, I'd look over her shoulder as she showed me funny captions. My sister and I have similar skill sets – literacy, English and grammar. Plus, I'm also an actor, and that is not always financially viable.

**An actor! Anything we'd know?**

I was in the Halloween episode of *Brokenwood Mysteries* that came out in July – she was a fun goth girl character. I also played a goth girl in *Duckrockers*, and a pregnant woman in *Shortland St!* I'm also creating a webseries with my flatmate, where we're package thieves.

**What do you like about Able?**

It's so lovely here! There's tasks to do, and you're just trusted to do it. I also love the privacy you get with wearing your headphones all the time – I'm quite introverted and love my own space.

**What's your favourite thing about captioning?**

I find respeaking really fun. [Respeaking is how we caption live content, where we use voice recognition software to repeat what the person on television says. It can be hard to keep up!] Your brain has to be engaged, and at the beginning I was making a lot of mistakes.

**Hey, Jason!**

**How are you finding Able?**

It's very wholesome vibes in the office! The work is fun and super interesting. Take for example *Once a Warrior* [a series about rugby league]. I don't care about sport at all, but it was fascinating! You get to learn so much just by watching television. I also really like captioning the news. It suspends the flow of time.

**Why did you apply?**

Well, I'd just graduated from South Seas, where I studied post-production. But the more I learnt about Able during the interview process, the more I hoped I'd get it. I used to do work with my mum's charitable trust, and one time I got to help an older volunteer who'd never used a computer before and taught her how to over a couple weeks. That was so satisfying on a personal level. And I realised – I actually do care about this, you know, being able to make a difference to people's lives.

**That's so important, eh!**

**The meaningful mahi.**

Yes, definitely.

*Making media accessible.*

*Kia wātea ake te ao pāpāho ki te tokomaha.*

**able**®

Making media accessible



**In March we celebrated Hearing Awareness Month. It was great to connect with so many people from the communities we support!**

From our programme in secondary schools to our outreach efforts in retirement homes to our workplace workshops, we were super busy ‘bridging the gap’ so to speak, and helping our community get involved in some amazing, life-changing opportunities. It was a whirlwind month—we assessed the hearing of more than 450 students, visited eight retirement villages, completed eight workshops, and screened the hearing of 407 staff at businesses we work with. Phew!

Deaf Aotearoa’s New Zealand Sign Language Week (May 6-12) was a great opportunity to lend our support to raising awareness of sign language, and to get more people involved in New Zealand’s vibrant Deaf community.

This year’s theme—*An Aotearoa where anyone can sign anywhere*—provided a fantastic opportunity to engage people from all walks of life.

As part of the festivities, Deaf Aotearoa introduced three challenges for businesses to participate in:

- **Seven Minutes of Signing:** This challenge encouraged employees to come together and practice signing some common phrases.
- **Sign-a-Day Challenge:** Invited leaders to learn one sign each day throughout the week.
- **Learning Pepeha:** Workplaces could take on the challenge of learning Pepeha (introducing oneself), guided by one of New Zealand’s favourite bands, Six60.

New Zealand Sign Language Week was also a great opportunity to get more businesses to participate in our Lunch and Learn workshops. Over the week, we held nine workshops with fantastic businesses from New Zealand. AgResearch, AUT, Tompkins Wake, CentrePort, Health New Zealand, Heartland Bank, and Minter Ellison all took significant steps in their sign

language journeys, embracing the chance to support more inclusive environments for their employees and clients.

Hearing Awareness Month and New Zealand Sign Language Week once again demonstrated the power of community and an opportunity for unity and collective growth. Together, we can create a more inclusive and supportive world for everyone.



During Hearing Awareness Month and NZSL Week, we champion hearing health and inclusivity with comprehensive hearing screenings.

# HEARING AWARENESS MONTH AND NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE WEEK 2024

## THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

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**D**eafness doesn't discriminate. With more than 880,000 Kiwis experiencing some form of deafness or hearing difficulty, it's safe to say that you probably know someone with hearing loss—or you are one.

Statistically, the numbers suggest that if you have a team of ten people, one of them is likely to be Deaf or hard of hearing. And given that these numbers are set to double over the next 30 years, we must provide an inclusive community for all people, starting now.

Hearing issues can be isolating. But it doesn't have to be this way. There are a few simple measures we can all take to ensure the needs of all people are met.

The NFDHH offers a range of workshops for businesses across New Zealand to help them make their interactions with employees and clients more successful and inclusive.

So, what's available?

*The Hearing Awareness Journey* workshop helps participants understand the impact of hearing loss and dispels common misconceptions. It covers the anatomy of hearing and environmental risks and emphasises making hearing health a priority in the workplace. Participants learn practical steps to accommodate Deaf and hard of hearing employees and customers.

NFDHH's *Deaf Awareness and NZSL* workshop introduces participants to Deaf culture, which includes the social beliefs, behaviours, history, and values shared by Deaf communities that use sign language. The

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: ACCESSIBILITY WORKSHOPS FOR KIWI BUSINESSES



The NFDHH offers diverse workshops to empower Kiwi businesses in creating inclusive environments for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, fostering understanding and accessibility.

workshop also teaches some essential signs in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).

The *Accessibility for Deaf and hard of hearing Employees* workshop focuses on fostering inclusivity for Deaf and hard of hearing employees by teaching hearing-aware communication in typical workplace scenarios. Participants learn the basics of NZSL, such as fingerspelling, self-introduction, and useful everyday phrases.

Our *Supporting Deaf and hard of hearing Customers* workshop

identifies common barriers faced by Deaf and hard of hearing customers. Participants learn basic NZSL, including fingerspelling, introductions, and everyday phrases. Each workshop lasts one hour and is delivered either in person or virtually by NFDHH and partners.

The *Customised NZSL Workshop* teaches participants up to 15 new signs or phrases specifically tailored to their industry. By providing the desired vocabulary in advance, the workshop delivers a bespoke NZSL lesson

suiting to the participants' needs. The *Tailored Awareness Workshops* offer a customised one-hour session designed in collaboration with organisations to meet their unique requirements. These workshops focus on empowering employees and customers who are Deaf and hard of hearing by prioritising accessibility within the organisation.

And when organisations are ready to take things to the next level, we encourage them to join our *Hearing Accredited Workplace Programme*, which helps organisations increase hearing awareness and support Deaf and hard of hearing team members in the workplace.

Many Kiwi companies have already completed accreditation,

including WSP, Treescape, Health New Zealand, AUT, Heartland Bank, Oceania, Auckland Transport and Westpac.

“WSP New Zealand is proud to have committed to becoming a Hearing Accredited Workplace,” says a representative from the engineering, architecture, and property consultancy firm.

“One of our core focus areas is taking steps to create a positive and inclusive workplace for employees, suppliers, and clients with hearing loss. We will also be doing our part to prevent noise-induced hearing loss by identifying, continuing to educate, and proactively managing harmful noise in the workplace.”



**Visit the NFDHH website to find out more. Together we can support a more diverse and inclusive society, where being Deaf or hard of hearing isn't a barrier to success.**

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## CASE STUDY WSP

“WSP in New Zealand is proud to have committed to becoming a Hearing Accredited Workplace. One of our core focus areas is taking steps to create a positive and inclusive environment for employees, suppliers, and clients with hearing loss. We will also be doing our part to prevent noise-induced hearing loss by identifying, continuing to educate and pro-actively managing harmful noise in the workplace.”

Rosalie McKnight, Health, Safety Environment Advisor, WSP

WSP is a leading engineering and environmental consultancy firm in Aotearoa, New Zealand, specialising in property and buildings, transport, water, power, environment, project delivery and strategic consulting. With over 2400 employees, they're passionately committed to their local communities and employees. So, when the opportunity arose to join HAWP, WSP jumped at the chance to strengthen this commitment.

By embracing the Hearing Accredited Workplace programme, WSP has implemented some excellent





## OUR RENOVATION PLANS FOR THE FUTURE INCLUDE TELEPHONE BOOTHS AND WELLNESS ROOMS THAT WILL SERVE THE DUAL FUNCTION OF QUIET ZONES FOR THOSE WHO MAY NEED THEM.



practical solutions to break down barriers for Deaf and hard of hearing team members and customers.

### Looking toward a future where everyone counts

As a prominent figure in Aotearoa, New Zealand’s engineering sector, WSP knows all too well the risks involved in this work. The learnings they’ve acquired through becoming a Hearing Accredited Workplace have propelled them into action to improve accessibility and hearing awareness across every aspect of their business.

WSP has implemented some incredible functions in everyday business and aspires to extend this change to include structural workplace improvements in future renovation projects.

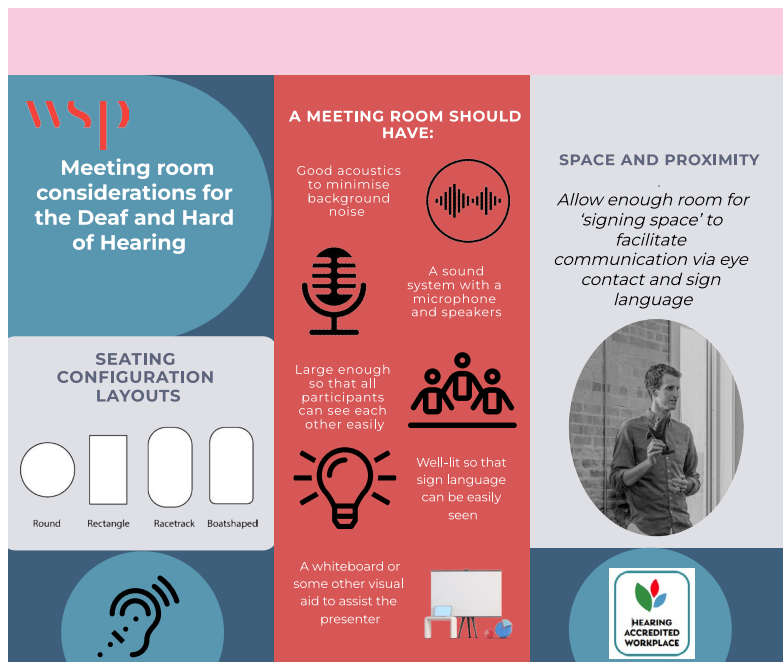
“Our renovation plans for the future include telephone booths and wellness rooms that will serve the dual function of quiet zones for those who may need them. Our hope is to create as many of these spaces as possible, but building size will be a determining factor. Some offices may have one or both of these features.”

WSP thoroughly reviewed their evacuation procedures and established a process for identifying people who may need assistance. Each office has a register of people who will require assistance in an emergency; this includes those with a permanent or temporary need.

A long-term goal is also looking into installing flashing lights as an indicator of an emergency for Deaf and hard of hearing.

### Elevating everyday workplace experiences

Hearing-aware meetings are one immediate action they implemented, ensuring their people are mindful and capable of creating meeting spaces that cater to everyone’s needs. WSP designed a hearing-aware poster for their meeting rooms that has been distributed to their business support team and is an excellent resource.



Transcripts for all recorded team meetings are readily available, and closed captions are in use at all Town Hall meetings and transcripts. WSP has also installed software that facilitates closed captions for their hard of hearing team members.

### An inclusive recruitment process sets a gold standard.

With virtual interviews being the standard these days, WSP has taken measures to ensure they present interviewees with meeting options that suit their needs; this ensures everyone has a fair chance to present themselves in their best light and sends a clear message that WSP is a company committed to creating equal opportunities for all.

### Establishing a hearing-aware culture.

WSP delivered Accessibility and Hearing Awareness workshops to employees and offered free hearing checks for staff in conjunction with NFDHH. Both screenings and workshops were embraced by employees, with many eager to learn more about the importance of protecting their hearing and how to be more inclusive to those with hearing loss.



**Rosalie McKnight**

Health Safety Environment Advisor, WSP

# LIVING WITH TINNITUS:

## CAUSES, TREATMENTS, AND WHEN TO SEE A GP



**T**o one degree or another, nearly everyone experiences tinnitus at some point in their lives. It could be a persistent ringing, buzzing, or clicking in your ears. More often than not, it doesn't last for extended periods and is quite sporadic. It may trouble you at night while you are trying to sleep, or perhaps when you are attempting to concentrate on something.

Regardless of where or when it occurs, it can be a very debilitating and stressful condition and could be accompanied by feelings of anxiety or depression.

There are also an unlucky few—15 to 20% of people—for whom this annoyance is permanent. Whilst tinnitus is not necessarily an indicator that you are going Deaf, it can in fact be a symptom of hearing loss, and as such, should be taken seriously.

So, what are the causes of a persistent ringing in the ears?

There are several reasons one may suffer from tinnitus, with ageing or exposure to loud noise the most common. Whiplash, or some other injury to your head and neck, can also cause symptoms, while ear infections, stress, high blood pressure, or inner ear pressure may also be responsible. Even excessive

buildup of earwax can, in certain cases, bring on the tell-tale ringing in the ears.

What are some effective forms of relief for tinnitus?

There are several tools you can use to aid in the self-management of this condition. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and listening to peaceful sounds are great ways to destress. You can also try counselling with an audiologist, hearing therapist, or other trained specialist, who may be able to help soften the impact of tinnitus. (Your GP can assist in connecting you with the appropriate therapist).

Another way of approaching the symptoms of tinnitus is auditory habituation therapy. This is where a neutral sound is used to make the tinnitus less noticeable. Certain devices can be quite effective in relieving tinnitus symptoms, such as sound-producing machines (similar to hearing aids) that produce static or white noise. Since tinnitus often occurs at night, it may be helpful to have a radio or stereo set to play white noise or other

comforting sounds like oceans or rainfall.

And finally—believe it or not—your diet can influence symptoms of tinnitus. A good place to start is by limiting drinks and foods high in caffeine and salt content.

Regardless of the reasons behind it, if you're experiencing symptoms, your first port of call should be checking in with your GP. They can refer you to on to the appropriate specialist.

Although tinnitus is seldom cured completely, it can be effectively managed with the guidance of a trained professional who can help you develop an informed strategy.



**Regardless of the reasons behind it, if you're experiencing symptoms, your first port of call should be checking in with your GP. They can refer you on to the appropriate specialist.**



## THE GIFT OF HEARING: BEQUESTS TO NFDHH



**T**he National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NFDHH) was established in 1978 and has been making a monumental difference to the lives of New Zealanders who are Deaf or hard of hearing ever since.

Relying solely on community support, NFDHH maintains programmes across New Zealand. With the number of Kiwis affected by hearing loss expected to double in 30 years, the need for NFDHH's services is growing.

Leaving a bequest in your will

to NFDHH helps maintain these vital services long-term, so we've partnered with Gathered Here to offer a free online will service.

Isobel Hollick, diagnosed with hearing loss at 55, began supporting NFDHH after experiencing their invaluable assistance. She decided to leave a bequest to the Foundation.

On the receiving end of donations like Isobel's is Glenn, who received a hearing aid grant earlier this year. After losing his job due to COVID-19, he knew it was time

to address his hearing health to improve his employment prospects. Through the hearing aid grant and Job Seeker funding, he finally got the hearing aids he needed at 55.

“Getting hearing aids at 55 was like being a newborn. There were so many sounds to learn!

I could finally understand people. I had missed so much...”

*If you'd like to leave a bequest to the NFDHH, or receive more information about our current programmes and the work we do in the community, please contact Lisa at [lisa.talbot@nfdhh.org.nz](mailto:lisa.talbot@nfdhh.org.nz) or call 09 307 2922.*

**E**arlier this year we had two posts go viral on our social media. You might have seen them.

The first was a beautiful moment captured on film—Tallulah, an eight-year-old girl, using sign language to greet delivery driver Tim with 'Good morning, have a good day' as he delivered parcels to their home during the COVID lockdowns in Britain.

The clip of the heartwarming interaction has spread like wildfire on the internet, and the now internet-famous Tim says he hopes the video will encourage more people to learn sign language to help bring people together.

The second was footage of Taylor Swift's incredible Australian Sign Language interpreter in full flight at one of Taylor's Australian shows. The viral video is the perfect demonstration of how sign language can help bring the magic and excitement of music to everyone, regardless of hearing ability.

Sign language plays a vital role in

## VIRAL INSPIRATION: CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE AOTEAROA



creating a more inclusive society by bridging the communication gap between the Deaf community and the hearing world.

In the performing arts, the presence of sign language interpreters ensures that individuals who are Deaf can fully enjoy and engage with live performances, concerts, and theatrical productions. Similarly, in industry, provisions to accommodate Deaf people—such as sign language training for staff—demonstrate a real commitment to accessibility and inclusivity for all passengers.

Initiatives like Deaf Aotearoa's New Zealand Sign Language Week are instrumental in raising awareness and encouraging businesses, organisations, and individuals

across Aotearoa to participate in this collective effort. The week serves as a powerful platform to spread knowledge, celebrate the rich culture of the Deaf community, and promote the widespread adoption of sign language in everyday interactions.

Our ultimate goal should be to create a society where being Deaf or hard of hearing is not a barrier to communication, participation, or opportunity.

By embracing sign language and promoting inclusivity, we break down barriers, foster understanding, and ensure that every individual feels valued and connected.

# MEET THE TEAM

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE NFDHH'S IMPACTFUL WORK



The NFDHH is driven by a dedicated team supporting the Deaf and hard of hearing community in New Zealand. From outreach to administration, each member contributes to advancing the Foundation's mission. Let's meet the people behind the NFDHH's impactful work.



### LINDA

#### Community and Corporate Partnerships Manager

With a partner diagnosed with hearing issues, Linda understands the personal impact of deafness. Seeking more fulfilment than her corporate role provided, she joined the NFDHH, driven by its support for 880,000 New Zealanders with hearing loss and a passion for the Foundation's programs.

#### What's your favourite part of your role?

I enjoy working with organisations eager to become more accessible to the Deaf and hard of hearing community. Securing sponsorships for our

school screening program and seeing the positive impact on Kiwi kids is immensely satisfying. Visiting retirement villages and observing the difference our outreach program makes in residents' lives is also very rewarding.

#### Are organisations enthusiastic to work with the NFDHH?

Despite the financial strain from the cost-of-living crisis, many organisations are still enthusiastic about partnering with us. This year, we've welcomed several new partners who are eager to make a positive impact for the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

#### Could you share a memorable success story from your work?

Funding for the hearing screening program allowed Sina [See our story on page 4] to have her hearing tested at school last year. Without this program, Sina might have continued her schooling with undiagnosed hearing loss, which could have significantly impacted her education.

#### What advice would you give to someone interested in creating meaningful partnerships to support social causes?

Partnerships can bring together diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise. They are essential for charities like NFDHH to develop and implement effective

programs. Your support can make a tangible difference in your community.



### LISA

#### Donor Relations Manager

As Donor Relations Manager, Lisa sees the profound impact of the NFDHH's grants and programs on people's lives. She finds great fulfilment in her role, knowing that the Foundation's work transforms lives and provides crucial support.

#### What motivates you?

I'm motivated by the knowledge that we are making a real difference for the Deaf and hard of hearing community. Working with a team that shares our charity's mission and goals is incredibly rewarding.

#### What has been your greatest success as Donor Relations Manager?

Over the years, I've had wonderful conversations with our donors. Their support is vital since we don't receive



government funding. I value their stories and honesty, which reflect their rich experiences and dedication to our cause.

**What should potential donors know about the NFDHH?**

Every donation makes a significant difference and transforms lives. Bequests we receive are crucial for future planning and help us continue our important work.



**JENNY**

**Administration Support**

Jenny ensures smooth operations, supporting fundraising and educational initiatives crucial for the NFDHH’s work with the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

**What’s your favourite thing about working with the Foundation?**

I enjoy interacting with kind and compassionate people, both within the team and our donors. Working with a passionate and efficient team at NFDHH is highly rewarding, as is connecting with donors who enable us to run impactful programs.

**What positive impact have you witnessed in the NFDHH?**

A recent recipient of our Hearing Aid fund was thrilled to receive a \$500 grant, which greatly improved her ability to hear and

communicate effectively in her daily life. Seeing the relief and happiness this grant brought her was incredibly fulfilling.

**What are things like behind-the-scenes at NFDHH?**

Behind the scenes, we have a hardworking and friendly team committed to supporting the hard of hearing community. My role involves various tasks, including working with the Donor Relations team, visiting retirement villages, and assisting with financial reporting and analysis.

**Do you have a message for donors to the NFDHH?**

Thank you for your generous donations! Your support is vital for running our programs and making a profound difference in the lives of many people.



**CHARLEY**

**Community Partnerships Administrator**

Charley finds purpose in her role, impacting students across the country and advancing the NFDHH’s mission.

**What does a typical day look like for a Community Partnership Administrator with the Foundation?**

My days involve testing students’ hearing, preparing for upcoming schools, inviting new schools,

and educating the public on hearing health and NZSL. The role’s diversity and flexibility are aspects I truly enjoy.

**What are the most rewarding aspects of working with schools?**

Hearing from students whose quality of life and learning have improved after addressing their hearing difficulties is incredibly rewarding. Being part of a team that makes such a positive difference is fulfilling.

**Can you share a memorable experience or success story from your work with the school screenings?**

One memorable experience was helping a student with low attendance due to caring for his newborn sister. We were able to provide support and implement a plan for him and his family, which was a heartwarming and impactful moment.

**What would you like people to know about the NFDHH and school screenings?**

I encourage schools to join our Hearing Screening Programme. Regular hearing checks are crucial as undiagnosed hearing issues can affect a student’s education and overall quality of life. Ensuring students have their hearing checked can make a significant difference both now and in their future.





# WRAPPING UP 2024



OVER 10,000 HEARING CHECKS AT



**80**  
RETIREMENT VILLAGE VISITS



**24**  
DEAF ACCESSIBILITY WORKSHOPS



**37**  
GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED



**193**  
SOUND MONKEYS IN PRESCHOOLS



**8**  
NZSL WEEK WORKSHOPS



**19** WORKPLACE HEARING SCREENINGS

HEARING AWARENESS Month 2024



NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR Deaf & Hard of Hearing