



13 August 2020



Dear 

Thank you for your email of 28 June 2020 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

"... a copy of the last 3 service reports from Deaf Aotearoa First Signs contract."

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Further to our email of 3 August 2020, please now find attached copies of the last 3 service reports arising from the Deaf Aotearoa First Signs contract, attached as **Appendix A, B and C**. Some information has been withheld under the following sections of the Act:

- 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of natural persons; and
- 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expressions of opinions by members of an organisation in the course of their duty.

We acknowledge receipt of your email of 5 August 2020 in which you raised concerns about our decision to withhold certain information under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act. We have considered the points raised in your email; however, we remain of the view that it is necessary to withhold this information.

As required under section 9(1) of the Act, I have identified no public interest considerations sufficient to outweigh the need to withhold this information.

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes Official Information Act responses on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your emails. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely



Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support

OLA 1233727

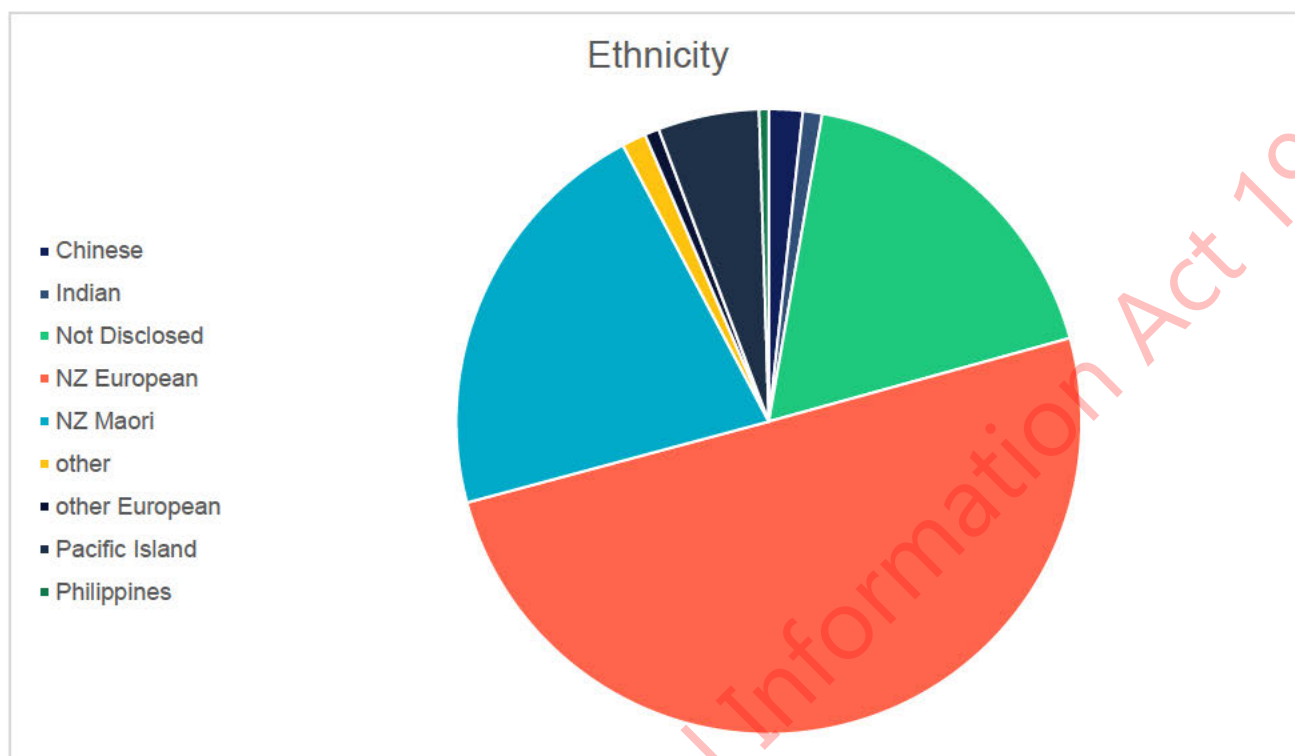
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PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140. Phone: +64 4 463 8000 Fax: +64 4 463 8001

First Signs Milestone Report – June 2019

Current service users: **187**

	May 2018	December 2018	May 2019
Northland	2	4	6
Auckland	45	41	42
Waikato	14	13	11
Bay of Plenty	17	17	19
Taranaki	7	8	10
Hawkes Bay	9	9	13
Manuwatu	14	8	7
Wellington/Wairarapa	21	18	17
Nelson/Marlborough	2	1	1
West Coast	0	2	3
Canterbury	29	30	33
Otago/Southland	22	20	25
ON HOLD			0
TOTAL	182	169	187





Ethnicity:

NZ European	201
NZ Maori	86
Not Disclosed	72
Pacific Islands	21
Chinese	7
Other	5
Indian	4
Other European	3
Philippines	2

Service users Starting school	Current service users
2019	27
2020	40
2021	42
2022	50



How many children currently receiving First Signs support have NZSL as their first / dominant language?

This is a difficult question to answer. There are many factors that are involved in first language acquisition. For the majority of families in the service, we are their only interaction with NZSL. Our staff are working hard to support families to feel confident interacting with their Deaf children in NZSL and within the wider Deaf community.

The conditions needed for first language acquisition cannot be met through First Signs visits alone. We are a part of the bigger puzzle. We are a service that is reliant on the AODC's introducing us to the families, on the CI programmes being open to NZSL and supportive of the families walking a bilingual path.

At the recent NZDSN conference a presentation by Merge was along similar lines to their presentation at the AUT 'Signs of Professionalism' conference. 9(2)(g)(i)

Currently in NZ we do not have a standardised assessment for early years NZSL development. We have worked with a number of international examples and we have tried to pull together a draft checklist that the family can complete alongside the professionals. However, this is not published or standardised.

Therefore, we are working from a position of all children benefitting from engaging with NZSL and the wider Deaf community. We have seen some families who may not have taken to signing in all domains throughout their day, however their engagement with our service has opened the door for them and the children have come to NZSL at a later date.

We are not sure which families are receiving NZSL@School once the children exit our service. This would be interesting to be able to track the families and see where they are using the language in their everyday life and within the education of their children.

We are looking at the assessment of the children's NZSL development. Again this is an unfair assessment in the current situation as the children have not had optimal access to NZSL and a variety of users of the language to enable them to acquire the language fully. We are learning from families that they are struggling to maintain what they are learning. They are finding it difficult to continue signing when they exit our service.

**AODC:**

Is it possible to have an update from the AODC team to know who the staff are in each area/ there seems to be some staff changes and we don't find out until later?

Evaluation:

There has been a lot of work gone into the evaluation data gathering prior to the survey being sent out to the families. We have been asked by parents, if there is also currently an evaluation of the NZSL@School programme. We would be interested to know if the Ministry is conducting an independent review of NZSL@School at some stage also?

Pre-school support:

We have not progressed the pre-school support programme, this is the next piece of work that we will be focussing on developing, along with the production of resources.

The resources from the Deaf Education Centres are well liked and our staff are encouraging families to make use of them.

International exposure and recognition

s 9(2)(a) and s 9(2)(a) are presenting at the World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Paris 25th July. This is a presentation looking back over the past five years of First Signs service.

Family Centred Early Intervention: s 9(2)(a) has been invited to be in the Family Centred Early Intervention Advisory Committee. s 9(2)(a) and s 9(2)(a) are also members of the newly established DLIA – Deaf Leadership International Alliance. This group is tasked with revising the FCEI Principles and ensuring that Deaf adults are clearly included throughout the document.

These will be presented at the next FCEI 2020 in Austria.

Appendix B

First Signs Milestone Report – October 2019

Current service

There are currently **171** service users receiving the First Signs service.

	December 2018	May 2019	September 2019
Northland	4	6	9
Auckland	41	42	37
Waikato	13	11	12
Bay of Plenty	17	19	15
Taranaki	8	10	9
Hawkes Bay	9	13	12
Manuwatu	8	7	10
Wellington/Wairarapa	18	17	15
Nelson/Marlborough	1	1	1
West Coast	2	3	0
Canterbury	30	33	28
Otago/South and	20	25	23
ON HOLD		0	
TOTAL	169	187	171





Ethnicity Data:

NZ European	63
NZ Maori	40
Pacific Islands	8
Indian	1
Chinese	3
Phillipines	1
Other	4
Other European	1
Not Disclosed	50

Number of children in First Signs who will start school:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023-24
Current active service users	3	43	35	53	42

Number of Deaf children with NZSL as their primary language:

As we stated in our June 2019 report, this is a difficult question to answer. There are many factors that are involved in first language acquisition. For the majority of families in the service, we are their only interaction with NZSL. Our staff are working hard to support families to feel confident interacting with their Deaf children in NZSL and within the wider Deaf community, this is the precursor to children developing NZSL as a primary language.

The conditions needed for first language acquisition cannot be met through First Signs visits alone. We are a part of the bigger puzzle. We are a service that is reliant on the AODC's introducing us to the families, and on there being options for education in NZSL to continue the whanau's language development. We are still meeting families where the parents have not been told about our service. We are also challenged by the extremely limited options for socialisation in a NZSL/Deaf space in the pre-school and school years. This week we have found out that Kelston Deaf Education Centre is establishing a new entrant class for 2020, however we have not received any information about this (seen through social media). We have families that want this option in other cities, it would be helpful if we are able to understand the proposed model for the Deaf Education Centres. Will these options be rolled out throughout the country?



We are learning from families that they are struggling to maintain NZSL and continue to develop when they exit our service. We are not sure which families are receiving NZSL@School once the children exit our service.

A recent survey was sent to parents of Deaf children from MergeNZ asking about their access to NZSL@School and the reasons that their child did or did not meet the criteria. It was said that they are seeking funding to provide free NZSL lessons to families – is the Ministry of Education aware of this?

Evaluation report:

According to the evaluation report there are around 800 children on the AODC caseloads and we are currently only working with 17% of the deaf and hard of hearing children aged 0-5 years. There is still clarity needed regarding the NZSL@School service from the Deaf Education Centres – families are asking questions of our service that we are unable to answer for example: “what is the likelihood of my child receiving NZSL@school?”

9(2)(a)

Our resources are stretched in the southern region. We are unsure what the ongoing support for these family will be? We are currently working on a case by case basis for these referrals.

Throughout the evaluation it was suggested that the service would be improved by creating “more service, more frequency, more opportunities, more training..” .

Language Assessments: we have started this term to use the NZSL Assessment Toolkit to assess the Receptive Skills of children, ie assessing the NZSL that the children understand. We are only assessing the children in our service who are 3-5 years old and have had at least 6 months of support from us. This will be combined with the data that the Deaf Education Centres are also gathering in their assessments of children 4 – 11 years who are supported through their services. Our team leaders are working in each area to support the local Facilitator in their testing of the children.

Presentations:

FCEI and DLIA:

s 9(2)(a) and s 9(2)(a) are continuing to work as part of the Family Centred Early Intervention congress Deaf leadership group. We are working with experts in the field to update the FCEI Position statement to ensure that Deaf adults are embedded throughout the document. We have submitted an abstract to present at the FCEI 2020 congress.

WFD 2019 – Paris:

The presentation by s 9(2)(a) and s 9(2)(a) was very well received. We were able to highlight the learnings from the past five years and celebrate the wins that we have achieved.

AODC Hui:

s 9(2)(a) and s 9(2)(a) have been meeting with s 9(2)(a) and his team of AODCs at the regional meetings, these have been an excellent opportunity to update the AODCs and to answer any questions they have had.



Staff training:

We are creating a training opportunity for our facilitators – this will be in the next 3-4 months. The training will be delivered in NZSL and will be focussing on upskilling our team in the area of language development, and use of assessment tools and developmental checklists.

Five of our frontline Deaf staff have been accepted to study the Deaf Studies Certificate at Victoria University in 2020.

Gatherings:

We co-ordinated gatherings around the country to celebrate First Signs' 5th birthday. These were well attended by families.

Feedback following in-home visits:

"We have been working with s 9(2)(a) over the last year on the first signs program. I just want to say a huge Thank you to s 9(2)(a) who has been a wonderful resource for the family teaching us sign language (first signs) and being instrumental in [our son's] development. s 9(2)(a) goes above and beyond and would like to keep using this resource as long as possible. Please pass on my thanks to s 9(2)(a) and hopefully your organisation appreciates what a special resource you have. I would like s 9(2)(a) to be acknowledged in some way."

"Excellent - I am very happy with the support availability and the flexibility of appointments, Much Appreciated."

"Excellent - s 9(2)(a) is wonderful, we looked so forward to her visits. We as a family learnt a lot of signs and enjoying incorporating NZSL into our everyday lives."

Appendix C



First Signs Milestone Report – May 2020

Current service -

There are currently 192 service users receiving the First Signs service. We have 33 active service users who are turning 5 in 2020.



COVID-19

During the lockdown we worked with 194 families. Our staff are continuing to work hard while at home. We have created videos to support families to continue to develop NZSL and they are well received. We are engaging with families on a variety of online platforms. Some families have also taken up the offer of Zoom sessions. A full list of video resources we have created while working from home is attached to this report.

Our First Signs Facebook page has a reach of 15 725 people in the last 28 days.

An example of the First Signs videos made by our staff during the lockdown:

<https://youtu.be/eDjVTHfhEak> - Coronavirus video with First Signs facilitators

- Wash your hands at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH8I6_znAV0&feature=youtu.be
- Covid- mask craft with Rodney - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFpbWZmFzwc&t=5s>

Home Learning TV:

It is disappointing that the Home Learning TV is not accessible to deaf children and families. One of the programmes 'Karen's House' did approach us and ask for help with incorporating NZSL into a couple of episodes, but other than that the channel is not accessible. We advised the Deaf Education Centre staff to connect with Kordia TV and stream the TuriTV content. We have contacted all families in our service to make them aware of this, we also share the programme schedules on our social media channels.

Ministry of Education website also has very good information for parents however it is not accessible to Deaf parents for example: <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/pastoral-care-and-wellbeing/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-coronavirus/>





Staff training

We applied for a grant from Te Pou to bring our staff together for three days of professional development.

We had planned to do this training at the end of 2019 but this was not possible and therefore was moved to Jan 2020. The need for staff training is ongoing and the ability to release our staff for the three days to learn together and support each other in the role that they carry out.

We invited three outside speakers to come and present to the team and this make a significant impact on the staff.

The presenters were:

s 9(2)(a) – this was sharing with the staff the evaluation document. s 9(2)(a) walked the staff through the process of the evaluation and the findings.

Mark Douglas – Mark was able to share with the team the role of the AODC and how we can better work together in ensure a smooth service for families.

Claire Raisin – Claire was a very valuable part of the training. As a Deaf professional she was able to present to the group directly without interpreters and was able to share with the team what her day to day work is like as an AODC. Claire also presented a session on 'Theory of Mind' this is a difficult topic and one that is critical in the work we do with families. This presentation was informative and practical and left the team with a lot to think about and try with the families they are working with.

In the preparation for the training, I made contact with the local Ministry of Education leadership for permission for Claire to present at the training, unfortunately the Ministry of Education was not able to contribute to the travel cost of Claire joining us so we funded this.

Staff feedback after the training:

"Claire, s 9(2)(a) and Mark were all my favourite parts. Gave me a deeper insight and perspective, helped me to see the bigger picture. The feedback from the survey was fantastic knowledge."

"I really enjoyed the camaraderie of the First Signs team, sharing our thoughts, struggles, feedback etc. I also enjoyed the practical parts, like story-telling and Visual Vernacular. It felt very Deaf-centric. The training felt very positive overall."

"They were all brilliant! Claire Raisin is very interesting covering Theory of Mind and other information. And it was great she is Deaf and a NZSL user :)"

The need for training was highlighted in the First Signs Evaluation. And this would not have been possible with the support from Te Pou.

We currently have four Facilitators from the First Signs team in the Deaf Studies Certificate. A new group of staff will begin the CareerForce Level three Health and Wellbeing certificate this year.

Language Assessment:

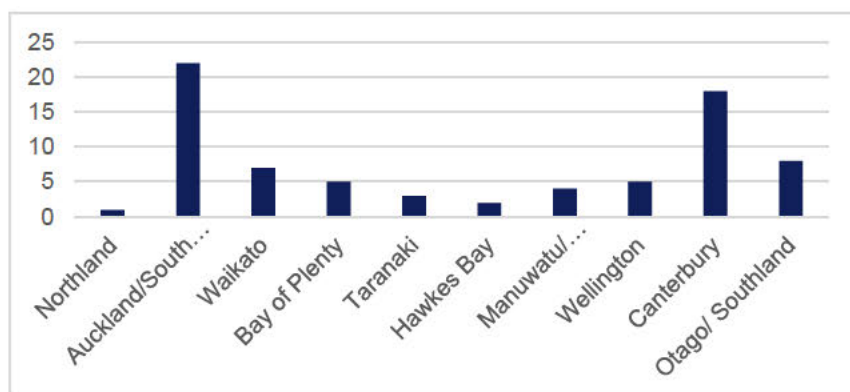
This is the first time that we have completed the NZSL assessment with children in First Signs. The assessments were carried out in collaboration with the staff at Deaf Education Centres. 75 families were given the opportunity to participate. 55 families agreed and 20 declined for personal reasons. The criteria

www.deaf.org.nz

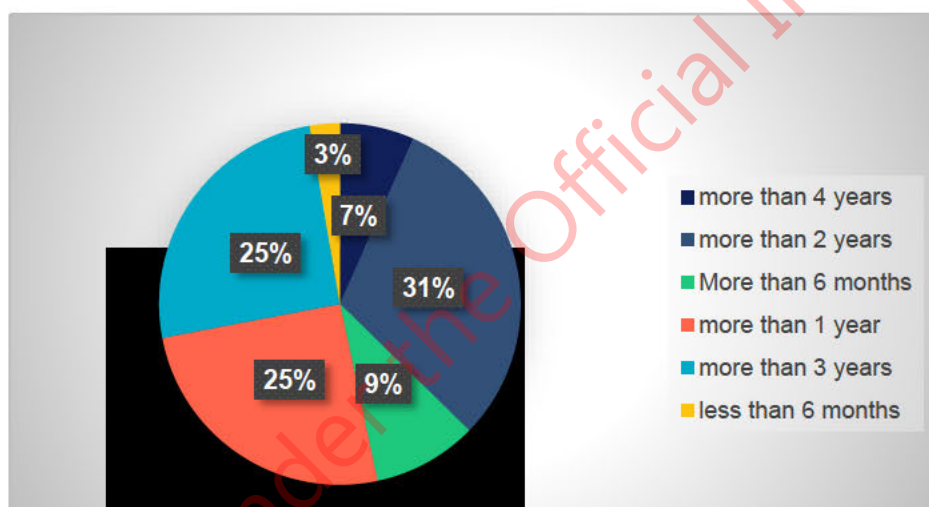


for assessment is that the child is at least 3 years old and has been in First Signs for at least 6 months. Children who are attending the pre school or the Early Intervention Centre at KDEC and VADEC were assessed by the staff at the Deaf Education Centres.

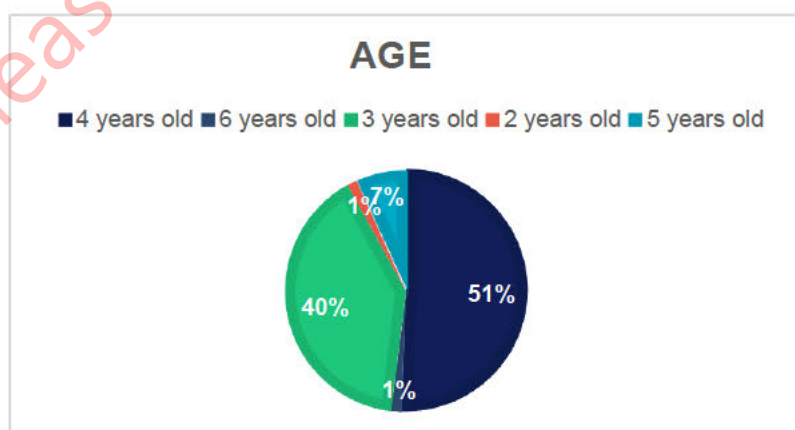
These are the areas where the families are who were offered the opportunity to have their child's receptive language skills assessed.



We were careful to only assess children who had been in our service for a minimum of six months. The range of the children who were assessed was from 6 months through to more than 4 years.

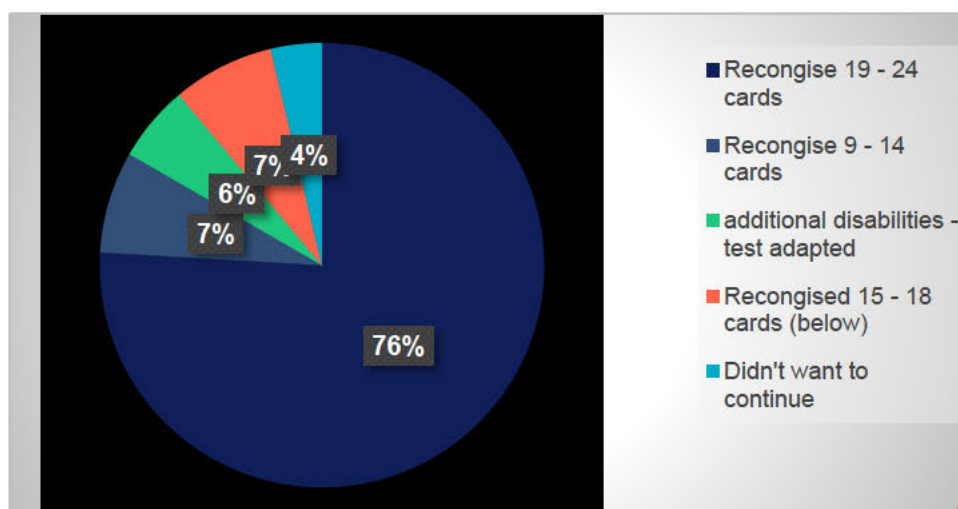


The test is not compulsory however we encouraged families to take the opportunity.





Results:



76% of the children were able to recognise the majority of the signs and complete the action asked of them. Our staff were able to adapt the test for the 3 children who benefitted from the adaptation.

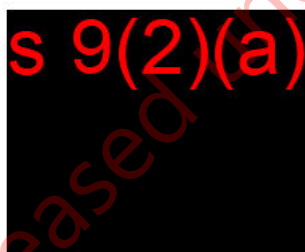
45% (25/55) of our First Signs learners are within the Standard scale score for their age.

21% (12/55) of our First Signs learners are below at Standard scale score for their age-appropriate levels.

33% (18/55) Receptive Skills Test discontinue after Vocab check or stopped if the learner fails 4 consecutive test.

1/55 was a graduate of First Signs who is now at school. This child has a younger sibling who is also Deaf and currently receiving First Signs service. The older child is not receiving 'NZSL@School' support so was not able to be assessed via DEC staff. The family requested the older child be assessed alongside the young sibling who is a current First Signs service user.

Service User feedback:



Prior to COVID-19 lockdown this family saw a group of our Facilitators in Wellington waterfront and approached them. The parents and child were very proud to be able to communicate with them and that they were affiliated to First Signs service. This is great to see and something that we are striving for, to see families proud to be acquiring NZSL through First Signs.

Feedback received during the lockdown:

"T is getting really good with the signs you have taught us. She is identifying colours in sign and Māori now."

"Thank you so much for your hard work and so sorry I've not been in touch - things have actually been super busy with 3 kids here - trying to help N with his school work and potty train A! :D S has been loving your videos - here's a video of him signing along with you. Maybe we could try a Skype sometime next week? Hope you and your family are well."



"Thank you for your emails! Although we have not officially met you in person, it is nice to see you through the screen :) My husband and I are fairly new members of First Signs and we are yet to begin a first face to face class with a facilitator. However, the videos sent through have been helpful especially this ABC one given that we are just beginning to learn so learning the alphabet is a good starting point for us."

Concerns/Risks:

Families are not feeling supported once they exit First Signs and begin primary education. There are families who acquired NZSL via First Signs in the preschool years, however they are no longer using the language on a daily basis due to not meeting the criteria for service through NZSL@School. The Wellington situation for children exiting First Signs continues to be unclear.

Resources created while working from home:

Here are links to some of the video resources we have created while in lockdown and distributed directly to families in our service

The NZSL version of 'Kiwi Sign trilingual' book was shared 38 times from our page.

The YouTube channel had 3376 views April 7th – May 4th A total of 59.4 hours of watch time in the same period

The team created 12 vocab posters on a variety of themes and sent these directly to the families on their caseloads, along with a video resource supporting the families through the production and use of the signs. A total of 119 video clips have been sent to the current caseload of families in the service.

We have hosted two Zoom gatherings, one in Wellington and the other in Northland. Both were well attended and the families enjoyed them.

First Signs Video made by all facilitators during Covid-19

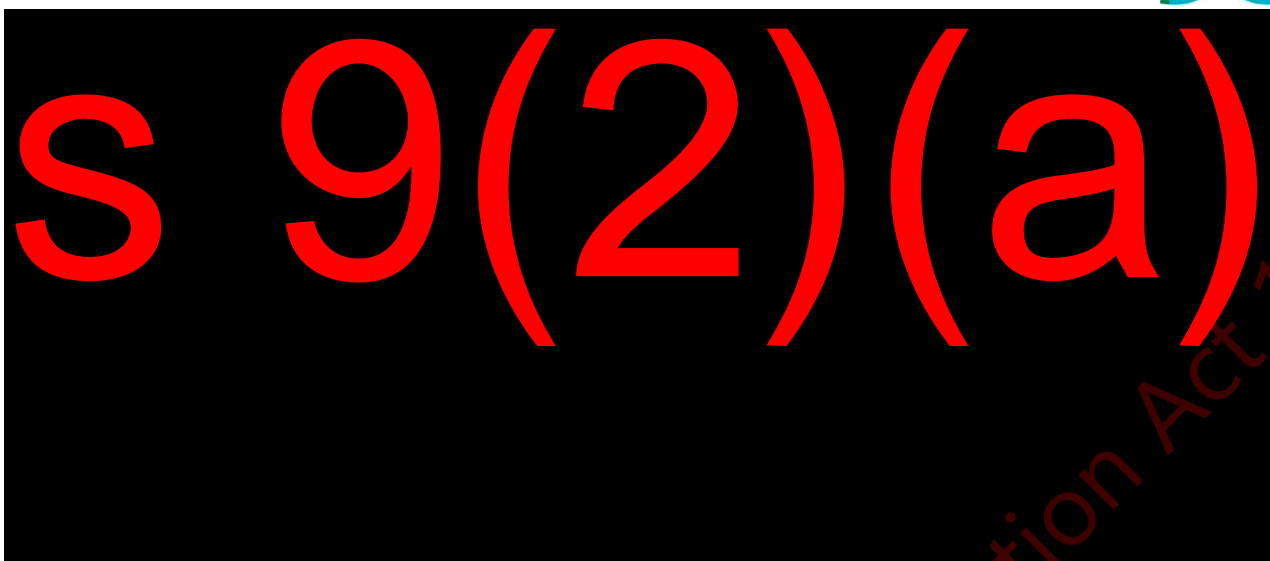
<https://youtu.be/eDjVTHfEak> - Coronavirus video with First Signs facilitators

[https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-](https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf)

[3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf](https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf) Attached for the Coronavirus video.

- Wash your hands at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rH8I6_znAV0&feature=youtu.be
- Covid- mask craft with Rodney - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFpbWZmFzwc&t=5s>

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