

## Speech lessons gives new Youth MP the edge

Keelan Heesterman credits speech lessons with providing him with key communication skills

*Keelan Heesterman completed his last year of high school in 2021, where he was Head Boy at Karamu High School. He was Chairperson of the Hastings Youth Council and has recently been selected as Youth MP for the Tuketuki Electorate. Keelan has been awarded the Speech NZ ASB in Public Speaking, the Communicating in Leadership Certificate, and the Advanced Certificate in Professional Speaking. He's off to University in 2022, and Emma Carpenter reached out to Keelan to ask him about his experience with Speech NZ, how he got started, what the benefits have been, and if he has any advice for others.*

"I have thoroughly enjoyed the speech curriculum over the four years or so that I've been participating - it has been a great experience and equipped me with skills that will be invaluable in the professional world, where an ability to communicate effectively has to be one of the most important, if not *the* most important skill one can develop."

### What are some of the ways in which Speech lessons have benefited you?

"I've never had any problem talking (just ask my parents) - but speech has taught me how to be discerning, deliberate, and considered in the way I speak. I feel like I now have the discipline and intellectual tools to communicate effectively, assess my audience, and target what I'm saying to connect and build rapport with the audience. In my role as Chairperson of the Youth Council, I've had to give multiple speeches to the Hastings Council... Without speech training, I don't think I would have had the confidence and skills to effectively communicate our views in a way that was respectful and considered.

In other words, speech training has helped me communicate my thoughts effectively, build the confidence to stand up for what I believe, to understand how different audiences react and thus how to really connect with different groups."



### What are the most important skills that are developed through Speech lessons, in your opinion?

"First, the ability to hone in on a topic, cut back the junk and excess, and ruthlessly keep to the topic/key message in order to both maintain the audience's attention, meet a time brief, and ensure the audience goes away with a clear idea of what your message was. I had a tendency to overtalk... and so this skill has been vital in developing my speech skills.

Another important skill is being able to speak in an extemporaneous way without notes. In most jobs and scenarios, you often won't have time to write out a speech in full ... being able to prepare for a speech by simply practising it, understanding your topic deeply, and developing (even in a short space of time for an impromptu topic) a clear sense of what you want to convey - is all hugely valuable in both a social and professional environment."

### What advice would you have to others considering this course or others with Speech NZ?

"Just do it. Even if you aren't a confident speaker or can't see yourself being the next great orator of our time, that doesn't have to be the end goal. Virtually every single job you go into will involve communicating in some form. Whether it's product concepts, marketing ideas, business strategies, or a thank you speech for your departing boss - being a confident speaker will make you stand out."



Keelan Heesterman speaking at the NZIER National Schools Debating Final, in the Legislative Council Chamber at Parliament.

"Speech has allowed me to be a more effective leader in a number of fields, and I owe my success to [my teacher] Mrs [Judith] Bartlett. She has helped shape the communicator I am today, and I couldn't be more grateful."

- Keelan Heesterman

*If you have a success story you would like to share with us, or know of someone who does, please get in touch with the National Office at 04 498 9660 or [info@speechnz.co.nz](mailto:info@speechnz.co.nz)*