



*“I love that I have a significant opportunity to make a difference in a child’s life and that it’s central to what I do.” - Alison Prskawetz, Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington.*

Sixteen year old Thomas is living proof that with the right support and help, kids with special education needs can aim for the stars.

Thomas has a significant visual impairment, as well as a range of other physical needs.

He’s in the A-band class at a mainstream school and uses a range of technology and support to help him learn.

There’s his laptop that reads to him for starters with refreshable Braille display. He’s also got an adapted CCTV screen that zooms in on the whiteboard.

Meanwhile, he’s supported by a top notch support team that includes, mum, a resource teacher of vision, a teacher aide, occupational therapist and a resource teacher of the Deaf.

Recently he spent six months doing a crash course in Braille to improve his reading speed. The result: a big jump in his achievement results across the board.

#### Nature of Work

Resource teachers of vision work closely with parents, caregivers, teachers and other specialists to help children and young people with vision needs learn and develop.

It’s an important role that involves helping children and young people who are blind or vision impaired (and their families) prepare for and start and settle into an early childhood education service or school.

Resource teachers of vision also support students through school and make the transition to life after school.

*“As resource teachers of vision we follow a child’s journey through life. We’re very privileged in that way.” – Alison Prskawetz (Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington)*

Resource teachers of vision work with and support children and young people who are referred to their service by early intervention teachers, parents or health specialists.

They talk to adults in a child or young person's life and observe an individual's overall development and behaviour to find out what that child or young person's needs are. The process can occur at a child or young person's home or in an early childhood education or school setting, wherever is most appropriate.

As a resource teacher of vision, you'll adapt the way you work to suit the individual needs of the child or young person and tailor your approaches to suit the context in which an individual lives and learns.

Resource teachers of vision work with colleagues and other agencies for extra support with behaviour, communication, hearing and other special education needs. As a result, they develop close working relationships with a range of education, health and community professionals.

*"All our children are assessed by our national assessment team every three years. It's a week-long assessment involving an optometrist, a functional vision assessor, a physio, an occupational therapist, orientation and mobility specialists, music therapists, psychologists and others too."* – Alison Prskawetz (Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington)

Preparing education programmes and identifying and accessing the right technology are also central to a resource teacher's role. Programmes become part of a child or young person's individual education plan (a plan can be made up of several programmes each tailored to meet an individual's different needs). Over time, programme strategies and technologies are implemented, monitored, reviewed and adapted by a child or young person's support team.

*"The trick for us is to synchronise all the technology and set it up so it works well. He is using a TV screen, with an attachment, to zoom in and see the whiteboard. It's taken a lot of troubleshooting."* – Alison Prskawetz (Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington)

As a resource teacher of vision, you'll also have the opportunity to share your knowledge and experience by developing programmes and providing training to early childhood education services, schools and community groups.

### **Main Employers**

Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ) is one of the country's most significant employers of resource teachers of vision.

BLENNZ has offices throughout New Zealand where staff aim to provide access to education and learning to New Zealand children and young people.



*"Dealing with students in early childhood and all stages of primary, intermediate and secondary schooling"*

Working as a resource teacher of vision, you'll help people see that children and young people who are blind or vision impaired are more than their disability, and with the right support, can participate, learn, achieve and contribute.

*"He's very good at both the maths and English side of things. University is definitely our team's shared expectation."* – Alison Prskawetz (Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington)

Still at school or studying at university? In a related career but feel like a change? Regardless of your situation, now is a good time to think about career opportunities with an organisation like BLENNZ.

### **Where can I go in my career?**

Becoming a resource teacher of vision will give you the rewards and challenges of the job itself, as well as opportunities to develop your career.

You'll be supported and supervised by experienced professionals. Keeping up to date with the latest research evidence, taking part in ongoing training and mixing with a wide range of highly skilled and talented professionals will keep you challenged and stimulated.

Other career opportunities include management, getting involved in special projects and offering and receiving supervision.

### **What qualifications and experience do I need?**

You will need a teaching qualification, teaching experience and additional training to teach children and young people who are blind or vision impaired.

# Meet Alison Prskawetz, a *Resource Teacher of Vision* in Wellington



9AM TUESDAY MORNING: Alison uses specialist equipment to teach her students to write braille.

*“As resource teachers of vision we follow a child’s journey through life. We’re very privileged in that way.”*

**HER BACKGROUND:** Alison Prskawetz is a Resource Teacher of Vision and centre manager based in Wellington at the Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ). She has a teaching diploma, a teaching degree and a post-graduate diploma.

After six years as a primary teacher, Alison decided to switch careers. She took up a role with BLENNZ and began teaching children and young people who are blind or have low vision. Centre management is also part of her role nowadays.

“I always loved being a classroom teacher. But I also liked the idea of developing a long term relationship with a child and their family, which is very difficult when you’ve got a class of 25.”

**HER STORY:** Alison’s main aim is to improve access to learning. At times, that involves working closely with teachers to adapt the way they teach and identify and set up the technology and equipment to make the classroom work well.

At other times, it involves planning and liaising with the range of specialists such as an orientation and mobility instructor to help a young person navigate their way around school property.

Resource Teachers of Vision also work closely with families and with children and young people one-on-one to support their learning and teach them Braille.

“As Resource Teachers of Vision we follow a child’s journey through life. We’re very privileged in that way.”

**THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES:** Developing strong teams who support a child is one of the big rewards of the job, says Alison.

Right now, she’s part of an outstanding team, comprising mum, teacher of the deaf and a teacher aide. Together they’re really making a difference, she says.

“Our mum always wants what’s best for her son. And she’s confident and adventurous in the way she supports her child. Meanwhile, our teacher aide is absolute gold. We’re really a tight team.”

Alison says one of the job’s challenges is to change people’s perceptions of what blind and low vision children can do.

“Plenty of our students have really bright futures ahead of them. I keep telling one of my students that he’s going to be a taxpayer. That’s the aim for all our students really, to be part of society and independent.”

**HER FUTURE ASPIRATIONS:** For now, Alison’s enjoying the challenge of combining management and case work.

“I love that I have a significant opportunity to make a difference in a child’s life and that it’s central to what I do.”

Want to speak to someone like Alison about a career as a Resource Teacher of the Vision? Give us a call or drop us an email.

If you're still at school, you'll need a tertiary training entrance qualification to go to university. Research and plan for your career by checking out the [Career Services](#) website. Useful subjects include biology, and English.

Nearly all wānanga and universities offer undergraduate degrees relevant to teaching and special education. These qualifications suit school leavers or people new to tertiary education.

The Ministry of Education offers study awards for the [Graduate Diploma in Special Education \(Vision Impairment\)](#). This course is available through the [University of Auckland](#). The course is aimed at people with relevant undergraduate degree and teaching experience.

Ready to go? Now's a great time to start a rewarding and dynamic career as an resource teacher of vision.

### **What skills and knowledge do resource teacher of vision have?**

- ▶ knowledge of normal and delayed child development
- ▶ knowledge of blindness and vision impairment
- ▶ skill in managing blindness and vision needs in a variety of settings
- ▶ knowledge of psychology and education theory and child development
- ▶ knowledge of community and family support services
- ▶ excellent communication, teaching, research, planning and administration skills.

### **What about my personal qualities?**

You'll spend lots of time with people from a range of ages, cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles. So, you will need to listen, build trust and inspire confidence.

*"I communicate with some parents every week – sometimes just by text. In fact, there is a lot of communication going on all the time. I don't think we could do without it. We're always sharing information, planning things and so on."* – Alison Prskawetz (Resource Teacher of Vision, Wellington)

Being understanding, patient, supportive, creative and practical are all great personal qualities for a resource teacher of vision.

Having a strong interest in team work and collaborating with other professionals is also important

### **What salary and other benefits can I expect?**

Salaries for resource teachers of vision vary between \$40,000 and \$70,000 per year, depending on skill and experience.

[BLENNZ](#) offers plenty of professional development opportunities and flexible working conditions, so you can balance work with child care, travel and training commitments.

### **Where can I find out more?**

Speak to a resource teacher of vision or check out the websites below :

Blind and Low Vision Education New Zealand  
▶ [www.inclusive.org.nz/blennz/](http://www.inclusive.org.nz/blennz/)

Careers information  
▶ [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz)

Special education careers, professional development, scholarships and study awards  
▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/SpecialEducation.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/SpecialEducation.aspx)

▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/sestudyawards](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/sestudyawards)

TeachNZ  
▶ [www.teachnz.govt.nz](http://www.teachnz.govt.nz)

Special education services and funding  
▶ [www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/SpecialEducation/ServicesAndFunding.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/SpecialEducation/ServicesAndFunding.aspx)

Auckland University  
▶ [www.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.auckland.ac.nz)