



## Image gallery

Special Olympics New Zealand has a new image gallery online. Check out photos from the National Summer Games 2013 in Dunedin, latest ribbon days around the regions, and other sporting events on our [Flickr page](#). ■

## In the news

Special Olympics New Zealand's athletes and volunteers continue to garner media attention for their sporting success around the country. Keep an eye out on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for latest news stories. ■

## From the CEO's desk

While we continue to offer year-round sports training and competitions for our athlete community, we have an opportunity immediately following our National Summer Games where we do not have any significant events. This gives us scope to work on our business to position ourselves for future growth. We need to be mindful that we are in a changing environment whether we like it or not. As we look out to 2020, we project that athlete numbers will grow from 6,500 to 8,500+. We are continuously drawing on best practice to look at improvements in our systems and processes to increase our service delivery. Last month, at the invitation of our volunteers in the Upper North Island, which represent 40 percent of our community, we held a Resourcing Forum to look for ways to improve the services that we provide (see [page two](#) for more). With such a large and diverse population in the great Auckland region, it is likely that a considerable proportion of our future growth will come from this community. There were a number of valuable ideas that flowed from this workshop and there are some exciting innovations that Special Olympics will be picking up as a result. Watch this space!

I was thrilled to see some of our Clubs picking up the opportunity to travel to new communities to take part in competition with Clubs outside their region. A big high five to the teams from Tauranga, Thames Valley, Waikato and Hutt Valley in this respect!

*Kathy Gibson, Chief Executive Officer* ■

## Kudos for Cash: North Taranaki's first athletics day

Special Olympics North Taranaki held its first athletics ribbon day in more than seven years recently. It was a momentous day for the Club and its athletes, and brought together more than 50 athletes from North Taranaki, Manawatu, Hutt Valley, Wellington, and Waikato to compete.

What made the event even more unique was that it was organised by one of Special Olympics New Zealand's former athletes (now coach) Nigel Cash.

"Special Olympics North Taranaki has been training athletes in athletics for years but we always had to travel for events. I'd offer suggestions for improvements to organisers of other events and they [politely] recommended we put them in place and host our own event. So we did," says Nigel.

"It was 'down to the wire' planning. I did the networking and organising and [fellow coach] Max Brooking did the paperwork, because I'm no good at that. I emailed a few organisations and secured the TET Stadium in Inglewood, which has an all weather running track. Taranaki Athletics came on board and supplied 15 officials and photo finish equipment, which had a real impact on results. At the recent National Summer Games 2013 we had photo finishes and it is fairly standard practice in mainstream



sports. It's generally not used in Tier One events but it really does make a difference. If we didn't have it [at the recent North Taranaki event] one race would have ended very differently," he says.

"We also had 20 other volunteers come and support including family members and Club Committee members. I also got in touch with my local bakery here in Waitara and got them to supply lunch at a really good price, rolls, slices, muesli bars. Everyone was really impressed. We've set a new standard in athletics events and catering!"

Nigel says the Club now plans to host an annual event.

"I've got a taste for it now so it'll be a yearly thing. I know what I'm doing in terms of planning, and the community has been very supportive.

Thank you everyone who helped out and made the 2014 event such a success." ■



Mayoral support for Special Olympics North Taranaki



Q&A with Nigel



## Supply and demand in the future

Special Olympics New Zealand is always looking for ways to improve the way we manage our business. Over the next six years the number of athletes the organisation trains is expected to grow to 8,800, which means increased demand on volunteer resources, equipment, and administration.

Accordingly Special Olympics New Zealand has initiated a review of its resource needs so it can ensure supply meets demand and that the high quality level of service delivery can be maintained. Special Olympics has 44 Clubs around New Zealand. Of our 6,500 current athletes, around 2,600 (40 percent) are based in our 13 Upper North Island Clubs (from Bay of Islands down to Counties). With a growing population base in the greater Auckland region, we expect significant future demand in this region.

Last month the organisation held its first Resource Forum inviting volunteers from around the Upper North Island to share their ideas about what resource improvements Special Olympics New Zealand needed to make.

"This was the first time a forum of this type has been held that canvassed the ideas of volunteers. We had 36 people attend the forum with volunteers being able to share their ideas with each other and directly with Kathy Gibson, Special Olympics New Zealand's Chief Executive Officer, and Cassandra Hancock, Business Development Manager. There were many great ideas that were shared," says John Borkin, Coordinator of Special Olympics Tamaki and Chair of the Special Olympics New Zealand Upper North Island Regional Council.

"We had some excellent feedback from the volunteers. While we get together a lot it is normally in a sport or event environment where our attention is on the athletes. The forum was an opportunity to get together in a focused environment, and look objectively at Special Olympics. It was a great start to the resource review process."

The review is expected to take most of this year, with new initiatives being rolled out towards the end of 2014. ■



## Hurrah for Healthy Athletes

During the Special Olympics New Zealand National Summer Games 2013, more than 1000 athletes received health screening as part of the Healthy Athlete Screening Programme. Many of them were referred on for specialist review and follow-up care on return to their hometowns.

*Fanletter* was pleased to hear about a success story from the Games' screening that highlighted the importance of following up athletes' referrals and healthcare. One of Special Olympics Wellington's athletes was referred on for urgent further investigation after the Special Smiles dental team expressed concern about a white patch in his mouth. His proactive bocce coach Gitika Mangar passed the information to the athlete's home support worker who immediately took the athlete to see the GP. The GP referred him to a dental specialist at Wellington Hospital where a biopsy of his mouth was taken and a small lesion removed. Fortunately no further treatment was required.

"As a Club we send all health reports off to the coaches to distribute to the athletes/caregivers/family. It was great to hear about this positive outcome. People at every stage did their job. The Healthy Athletes team saw the lesion and informed the Coach, who then did her job and informed the athlete's caregiver and support care worker. They in turn picked up the baton and followed up with the GP and specialists at Wellington Hospital," says Christine Richardson, Chair of Special Olympics Wellington.

"Grateful thanks to everyone involved: the dental volunteers in Dunedin who picked this up, and of course hats off to Gitika for her care and concern for the athlete in following up and going the extra mile to ensure he received the healthcare he needed." ■



## New rules for aquatics

**Aquatic coaches:** jump online and check out the new **FINA 2013-2017 competition rules** (take note of the new rules around 'legal touch finishes').

Plus remember the new Special Olympics International Sports Rules are now online. These come into effect across all sports on 1 May this year. ■



[Click here for more information](#)





Special Olympics North Taranaki athletes with Mayor Andrew Judd

## Mayoral support for athletes

Special Olympics North Taranaki's athletes joined New Plymouth Mayor Andrew Judd, councillors and local sports officials last month to celebrate their achievements at the Special Olympics New Zealand National Summer Games 2013.

More than 50 people including 30 athletes packed into the Mayoral Chambers in New Plymouth in late January. It was a chance for the athletes to network with some of Taranaki's community leaders and share their experiences about Special Olympics New Zealand and to thank the community for its financial and emotional support. TSB Bank, in particular, provided \$30,000 towards the team's events costs.

"It was the best turnout of councillors they have had. They went out of their way to attend (and it was in their own time, not work time). The athletes got up and spoke about the Games to the crowd, and had a chance to mingle. The Mayor and councillors voiced their surprise about the level of athletic talent in their community. Until the ceremony they had not had any connection with Special Olympics. We're now certainly on their radar and the Mayor opened one of our sports events recently," says Special Olympics North Taranaki Coordinator Ian Mischefski. ■

Athletes with Howie Tamati (City Councillor and also CEO of Sport Taranaki)



## Upcoming events

The Special Olympics New Zealand sports events programme is now well underway. There are 33 different sports events in March including aquatics, athletics, bocce, equestrian, golf, tenpin bowling.



Check out the full calendar.

**2014 AGM:** Special Olympics New Zealand has set a date for its 2014 Annual General Meeting—Monday 12 May, 12.00pm at Tahuna Function Centre in Nelson (70 Beach Road, Tahuna, Nelson). Please RSVP by 30 April to **Cassandra Hancock** ■



## National Coaching Forum date set

Lock in the date: Special Olympics New Zealand's highly successful National Coaching Forum is being held from 20–21 September in Wellington and will cover athletics, basketball, bocce, bowling, football, and table tennis.

"This year's forum will feature some very interesting guest speakers, and offer coaches more specific sports information. This was one of the requests that came out of last year's forum so we will be allocating a lot of time to this, as well as covering generic coach materials and resources," says Mike Ryan, National Sports and Coaching Director.

Clubs will be sent more information about the National Sports Forum over the coming months. ■



# OUR PEOPLE



## Q&A with... athlete Nigel Cash

**What is your favorite thing about being a Special Olympics New Zealand coach?**

Watching the achievements of the athletes, regardless of how well they do, their timing or placing. Just seeing the smiles at the end of the day, it makes all the hard work training worthwhile.

**Tell us one trick for making training easier?**

Make sure you listen to your coach!

**What is your favourite food?**

It's a tie between a cooked roast dinner, and fresh fish (straight from the ocean to the plate)

**What is your favourite place in New Zealand?**

My hometown Waitara in Taranaki. Can't beat it!

**What's song has you singing along at the top of your lungs?**

"Two out of three ain't bad," by Meatloaf.

**Cat or dog? What's your preference?**

Birds. I have aviaries full of birds.

**What was the last book you read?**

The Special Olympics New Zealand Track and Field Rule Book! I'm not a big reader of books but tend to read the New Zealand Fire Service magazine to keep up to date with the service. (Nigel has been involved in the volunteer fire service for more than 17 years.)

**What's the best piece of advice you have been given?**

Don't go down the wrong road.

**To date, what was the best year of your life?**

2010, when my daughter was born.

**What's your goal for 2014?**

I've already achieved it! It was to organise and host a Tier One athletics meet in Taranaki.

## Special Olympics Wellington run the bays

It was a Club effort for Wellington's AMI Round the Bays Fun Run on 23 February. Special Olympics Wellington was well represented with athletes, coaches, and family members participating in the event's 21km half marathon, 10km and 6.5km fun run/walk. Well done! ■



PIC: SIMON WATTS

## More on superstar swimmer Sam

Special Olympics Counties athlete Sam Muir-James is continuing his winning streak in the sea. In the recent ACM Rangitoto Harbour Swim ocean swim on 18 February, Sam won his age group (25-29 years) and was eighth out of the water overall (in a time of 46 minutes, 30 seconds).

He had to contend with 35-plus knot winds and chose not to wear a wetsuit for speed. ■

Watch an interview with Nigel ■



# OUR PEOPLE



## Volunteer Brent Kemp: Antarctica to Rangiora...to LA?

"I have been coaching Special Olympics North Canterbury aquatics for the past two years. I am a swim instructor at the Rangiora Pool. Special Olympics North Canterbury hired some of our lanes and took on the coaching role. They hadn't had any swim programme for quite some time due to the earthquakes and personnel changes so we started from scratch. Now we have a squad of around 17-22 athletes who train each week.

I run two sessions a week. The first session is for athletes who are developing their swimming skills. We tend to focus on kickboard activities and basic swim techniques. My second session is split into an intermediate group and a senior group. We work on refining their techniques, swimming lengths, and diving. We'll probably add tumble-turns to their skill-set this year. They're all progressing really well.

I took a team of eight to the Upper South Island Regional Games in Nelson earlier last year, and another team of five to the National Summer Games in Dunedin. The athletes handled the travel and competition really well.

The National Summer Games was the best event I have been to in a very long time. I have to admit I shed a lot of tears at the pool watching my athletes compete. You always have some form of expectation before an event but my athletes completely exceeded my expectations. We had lots of personal bests and the five athletes came home with 13 medals between them across gold, silver, and bronze.

My daughter was a competitive swimmer, which is how I got into swim training. I used to take her to the pool and ended up coaching a junior group.

I use the same style of coaching Special Olympics athletes as I do with mainstream swimmers, but modify techniques and skills to suit each athlete. I'm quite lucky in terms of support. The mainstream club finishes its training as we start ours so we get a lot of the mainstream athletes staying on to help mentor our athletes, and the Head Coach gives me a lot of pointers. Our athletes' parents are also hugely supportive.

I've had many jobs over my lifetime including an amazing stint catering in Antarctica (I was one of the first Kiwis to winter over in a US base and spent three summers and two winters on the continent); but I have to say Special Olympics has bitten me really good. Coaching the athletes and seeing them achieve is the most rewarding role I've ever had. I'd really like to do more with Special Olympics New Zealand. I've put my hand up as a volunteer coach for the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles. We'll have to wait and see." ■

## Our people around the world

Globally Special Olympics has 4.2 million athletes. In this new section of Fanletter we share what other Special Olympics athletes and volunteers are up to around the world.

This month we put the spotlight on Special Olympics Malawi in Southeast Africa (population: around 16.7 million people). *The Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson recently travelled to a Special Olympics Malawi local sports event with Special Olympics President Timothy Shriver. In his column Gerson highlights the work of Special Olympics in countering stigma attached to intellectual disabilities, and discusses some difficult issues impacting upon the athletes including poverty, health, and cultural beliefs. "The remarkable transformation that Special Olympics has brought to [athletes]... seeing it at work in Malawi was far better than Sochi".

- [Read the full article](#)
- [and separate blog](#)

