

CONNECT

spring edition 2017



**Special
Olympics**
Ireland



Matt English CEO Welcome



Welcome to the Spring edition of Connect magazine!

2017 is proving to be very busy for everyone involved in Special Olympics Ireland. In the second year of our four year competition cycle, there is a major focus on regional advancement competitions across all sports in all five regions. Many events have already taken place, but I would look forward to seeing you at a number of Regional events as the year unfolds. If I don't get the chance to meet you in person, I'd like to use this opportunity to thank all of our inspirational athletes, volunteers and family members for their unwavering support to Special Olympics.

We are also thrilled to send our largest ever delegation to the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games which Austria host this year with six alpine skiers and two floorball squads. Team Ireland has 38 members in total and I'm confident they will make the whole country proud.

Preparation for the World Winter Games takes a very holistic approach. As well as intensive training in the rink or on the slopes, Team Ireland undertake training around nutrition for competition while the Strong Body Strong Minds discipline helps to ensure our athletes are prepared for the pressure of international competition. I would encourage you to read more about our work through the Health and Wellbeing programme in this issue.

Our new offices were officially opened in October 2016 and we are settled in alongside our fellow National Governing Bodies at the Sport Ireland, National Sports Campus in Dublin. This was much more than a bricks and mortar move - the rollout of eir's Next Generation Network and upgrade of datalinks have given us the platform to bring our five regions closer together. Our staff have the connectivity to work faster, more securely and with greater flexibility.

As the work of Special Olympics Ireland develops, the challenge increases to raise funds to meet the needs of the organisation. Our biggest annual fundraiser, Collection Day, has been confirmed for Friday May 5th and I hope I can count on your support to lend a hand in whatever way you can.

We have come through a difficult time for the organisation and the charity sector, but now is the time to work towards our vision as laid out in the Special Olympics Ireland Strategic Plan 2016-2020:

To drive and support a quality year-round sports programme that is embedded in local communities, resourced by vibrant and strong leaders, and offers health and wellbeing opportunities to athletes with an intellectual disability from 4 years of age upwards.

Best wishes
Matt English

FOCUS ON: HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Regional Advancement competition events in all five regions this spring will see our Special Olympics athletes representing their clubs in the hope of selection for the Ireland Games in Dublin in 2018. If you're lucky enough to attend an event, you may also see a number of initiatives which focus on the overall health and wellbeing of athletes away from their sporting field.

In this issue of Connect, Special Olympics Ireland Health & Wellbeing Coordinator, Cáit Donnelly chats to us with a focus on the Healthy Athletes Programme and the Health Promotion Programme and where athletes can gain access to these resources in your region.

Cáit - The Health Promotion Programme, tell us more:

To put it simply, the Health Promotion Programme was put in place to help Special Olympics athletes become healthier. It was designed with and for athletes to give them the knowledge and the tools to make healthier choices and improve wellbeing in their daily lives.

We train volunteers in clubs and provide them with toolkits and resources to run health promotion workshops. Over the course of a year, a club would run at least 10 of these workshops. It's a great way to increase physical activity levels and improve diet for all club members.

It also offers variety in a club's overall activity and the benefits can be seen not just in sporting performance, but in everyday life as well.

If people want to know more about getting involved what can they do?

It's easy to get in touch with us and we're happy to help. It's also worth chatting about it with club management teams, athletes and families. We've seen this initiative transform clubs, but it works best when everyone is on board.

The Healthy Athlete Programme is another resource we're going to see a lot more of in 2017. What does it entail?

The Healthy Athletes programme goes one step further by bringing healthcare professionals and students to key Special Olympics events, where they provide free health screenings and education to our athletes.

It focuses on six key areas that can be of real benefit to our Special Olympics athletes.

At our **Health Promotion** discipline we encourage healthy behaviours and healthy food choices which helps improve sports performance and continues to promote self-efficacy among athletes.

Almost half of all Special Olympics athletes will experience one or more preventable or treatable foot condition. That can obviously affect sports participation so **Fit Feet** gives volunteer podiatrists an opportunity to work with our athletes and evaluate problems of the feet, ankles and lower extremities.

Proper shoe and sock gear comes into it as well to help with sports performance as much as mobility.



Opening Eyes provides free eye assessments and access to prescription eyewear, sunglasses and sports goggles for our athletes.

Healthy Hearing provides on-site hearing examinations but also looks at how potential problems can be identified in the long term. Athletes, their coaches, families and care givers can all help to detect possible issues and ensure regular screenings.

Special Smiles is another discipline where we can educate as well as assess. Free dental screenings are available to all athletes while there's also plenty of help, advice and instruction around oral care and teeth brushing.

Volunteers who work or study in the field of physical therapy deliver our **FUNfitness** discipline.

We look at mobility, flexibility, balance and functional strength. It's another area that improves both daily life and sports performance but also helps with risk reduction and lengthening the sporting career of our athletes.

To find out which disciplines of the Healthy Athlete Programme are coming soon to your region, or to learn more about the Health and Wellbeing Programme, email Cait Donnelly at cait.donnelly@specialolympics.ie or Special Olympics Ulster Health and Education Office, Amy McCabe at amy.mccabe@specialolympics.ie.

KEY DATES

March 4th - Healthy Athlete
NUI Galway Kingfisher
Connaught

March 11th - Health Promotion
UL Arena, Limerick
Munster

April 1st - Healthy Athlete
Gormanston College
Eastern

April 1st - Healthy Athlete
Antrim Forum
Ulster

May 12th - Health Promotion
Watershed, Kilkenny
Leinster

ATHLETE STORY: STEPHEN LEE

23 year old athlete Stephen Lee has been involved in Special Olympics for almost half his life. In March, he will be part of a delegation of 26 athletes representing Ireland at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games. It's a first for the man from the Navan Road area of North Dublin who already leads a busy life working in retail in Blanchardstown and spending his free time playing sport with Cabra Lions and Sportsclub 15 Special Olympics clubs and Coolmine Rugby Club.

He's also an avid Leinster rugby fan, but while his rugby heroes focus on representing their province, Stephen is preparing to don the green of Ireland and do his country proud with the floorball squad in Graz, Austria. A number of residential training camps have helped him get better acquainted with his teammates.

"I like doing basketball, football, floorball and tag rugby," he said. "I didn't know all my team mates before Team Ireland. They are really, really good. We went on a training camp - working on fitness and drills and stuff."

Clubmate and fellow Eastern Region athlete LJ Byrne, has also been selected for the floorball squad. "He's good fun," says Stephen.

With so much preparation done, the focus is now starting to switch to 'just getting there' and 'just trying our best.' The excitement is shared by the family and his Mum, Dad, Brothers, Sister, Aunties and godson are all flying out to

bolster the travelling support. Stephen insists there are no nerves either.

Away from the sporting arena, Stephen is also progressing well in Athlete Leadership. Having his sister Jennifer as a mentor is a major help and he's currently working towards his Bronze award.

Six alpine skiers and two floorball squads comprise the 26 athletes who will represent Ireland at the Special Olympics World Winter Games. The team is as follows:

Athletes:

Connaught: John Paul Shaw, Raymond McClearn

Eastern: Thomas Caulfield, Lorcan Byrne, Patrick Tunstead, Niall Flynn, Stephen Lee, Laoise Kenny, Lorraine Whelan, LJ Byrne, Anthony Murray, Matthew Colgan

Munster: Brian McDonnell, Roy Saville, James Healy, Joe McCarthy, Michael Minogue, Thomas O'Herlihy, George Fitzgerald, Clive Healy, James Upton, Willie McGrath, Richard Moran.

Ulster: Sean McCartan, Cyril Walker, Caolan McConville



COACH PROFILE: MICHAEL LYNCH

Tell us a bit about yourself:

I'm from Athlone. I was born in Bastille St on the Westmeath side. I joined the Army in 1977 and I stayed with them for 36 years. What got me involved in Special Olympics was 2003. I was an FAI referee and I refereed at the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games. I just wanted to give something back. I started with the basketball. I love the buzz. We're just after winning the Connaught League in Athlone IT. I love the buzz of working with athletes and heading to competition with them.

How did you get into floorball?

I played hockey for Athlone years ago and I had an interest in floorball because the two are something similar to each other. I ended up going to a coaching seminar in Austria in 2014 and working with coaches from around the world.

As Floorball Head Coach for Team Ireland, how are preparations going for the 2017 World Winter Games:

We've had some time together to prepare over the winter but I've also given programmes to the athletes' clubs and they've been fantastic. The clubs are helping the athletes to follow their programmes and work on the fitness side of things. If an athlete needs to work on a technical element of the game, they can work on that too.

What is your standout memory from Special Olympics?

I've had fantastic times with the club. It brings a tear to my eye when you see someone who is told they can't bounce a ball and they end up throwing three-pointers. At the Ireland Games in 2014, we were losing by a point and with a minute to go and I just said to one of the lads: 'I know you're tired. Just go in and do whatever you can. Do your thing.' When he got the ball he threw up this three-pointer. The crowd just went crazy. The team went wild.



2017 Calendar of Events

MARCH: Polar Plunge Donegal

Get Freezin' For A Reason in Rathmullan

Donegal's participation in the annual event switches to Saturday 4th March when the average water temperature is actually at its coldest! Getting Chilly in Lough Swilly is all about taking part in one of the most unique fundraising events in the country.

More at www.specialolympics.ie/polarplunge



MARCH: Special Olympics World Winter Games

Team Ireland Take On the World In Austria

Six alpine skiers and two floorball squads fly out to Austria for a week of intense competition against the finest Special Olympics athletes in the world. It's our largest ever delegation and after some intense preparation, hopes are high that Ireland will do themselves proud.

More at www.austria2017.org



MAY: Five Peaks Challenge **Conquer Connaught For A Great Cause**

Discover the peaks of Truskmore, Benbulbin, Nephin, Diamond and Croagh Patrick in an epic weekend challenge. Overnight accommodation, transport and food are all included in this challenging and hugely rewarding event.



MAY: Collection Day

It's all hands on deck for Special Olympics Ireland's biggest annual fundraiser - Collection Day. All five regions get behind us for one day as over 3,000 volunteers take to the streets and help raise vital funds.



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