

Meet Séanín!

Health Promotion Facilitator with Special Olympics Ulster

Why did you decide to volunteer as a Health Promotion Facilitator with Special Olympics?

I have a real passion for nutrition, I have a degree in Human Nutrition and am currently completing my Masters in Dietetics. I love helping others and have previously volunteered for the REACH programme and as a meal time support volunteer on the Stroke ward. When I saw this role advertised I jumped at the chance as it encompasses both my passions- nutrition and sport.



How have you found the experience of volunteering, has it been what you expected?



I thought the experience may have been challenging and the athletes may have found it hard to learn about healthy eating but I was wrong! I was able to adapt my knowledge and the athletes were amazing. The athletes made my experience fun and really enjoyable. They learnt so much and made massive health changes! We had a Health Promotion What's App group which really helped the athletes motivate each other, especially encouraging their competitive side in the Step by Step Programme*. The group let me give tips every day so that the knowledge from each workshop could be reinforced in everyday life.

What changes have you seen in yourself since volunteering?

I feel that I am able to adapt my communication skills to suit different needs and suit the various athletes in my club. I have grown in confidence and my style of facilitation has changed, I use more visual aids, games and practical taster sessions. These techniques have been really beneficial as the athletes have really understood why a healthy diet is important and made lots of positive changes to their diets.



What difference has your volunteer role made to the athletes you are volunteering with?

I feel that the athletes now understand the important role of food in our health and their sports performance. All of the athletes were willing to do different health tasks every month as well as increase their physical activity. The athletes have made huge differences to their diet which they have now integrated into everyday life. It was great to be able to monitor their progress using smart phones as the athletes were taking photos of their meals/dinner plates and sending them into our WhatsApp group. All of the athletes who needed to lose weight have lost weight, with the weight loss ranging from 2 stone 4 lbs to 9 lbs. Those athletes needing to maintain their weight did so. That said, our primary focus was on improving healthy

*Step by Step Programme – athletes were given a pedometer and asked to track their average weekly steps. The club put up a £50 sports shop voucher as the prize for the athlete who achieved the most steps over a six month period.



eating for sports performance and I'm delighted to say all of the athletes now understand the concept of a balanced plate and have a balanced and varied diet which will help with their training.

What has been your best memory or greatest achievement during your volunteering journey?

I loved getting videos from my athletes in the Health Promotion WhatsApp group. Whether it was them out walking, uploading recipes or cooking videos, it always put a smile on my face! The videos played a key role in motivating and encouraging the other athletes to keep going. I couldn't believe the amount of weight lost also and was so proud each session when the athletes could recap what we chatted about before and how they got on with their health tasks. It made me so happy!

What would you say to someone considering volunteering in Health Promotion with Special Olympics?

I would say do it! I loved my experience so much! The athletes make your experience! They make your day and put a smile on your face! It's the first time no one asked me why I wear a neck brace or look at me weird, my group of athletes made me feel welcome from day one and made the journey so fun and worthwhile!



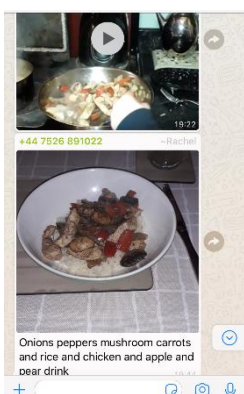
What did the athletes think of the Programme?

"I enjoyed the programme, as a chef in the past I have found it difficult to keep my weight healthy and have tried lots of diets but doing this programme has really helped with my weight (I've lost 2stone 4lb) and have made lots of sugar swaps like swapping sweets for dried mango. I have also changed from white bread to brown bread and am now eating more salads." Patrick Kelly

"I have cut down on my portions of pizza, I no long eat a whole pizza but just have a few slices with salad. I have also started to exercise at home and have been going on walks in between training." Matthew Collins

"I really enjoyed the programme, since I have reduced the amount of sugary drinks and have swapped my carbohydrates to the high fibre options." Rachel Crossey

WhatsApp Update Examples – include cooking and exercise videos, step counts, meal ideas & shopping tips.



Friday Steps Done

