

## Welcome to the October 2006 issue of Networker.

In my experience, parents of children with disabilities have similar dreams and aspirations as other parents and recognize that involvement in recreation activity will benefit their child in the same way as it does non-disabled kids. While the approach to meeting these needs might look a little different and it may require a lot more time, energy and perseverance on the part of us as parents it is important to encourage our children to get involved in some form of active physical recreation. Believe me it is well worth the effort. Recreation is a great tool for building self-esteem, confidence and everyday life skills. It also helps to develop friendships and an acceptance of each other's talents and abilities.

If I could offer some tips for parents they would be:

- Encourage your children to give things a go
- Allow them to take risks
- Focus on ability
- Celebrate every 'little' success and bigger things will follow
- Remember it may not happen overnight but it WILL happen

If you need information or advice on accessing sport or recreation then contact PFRC.

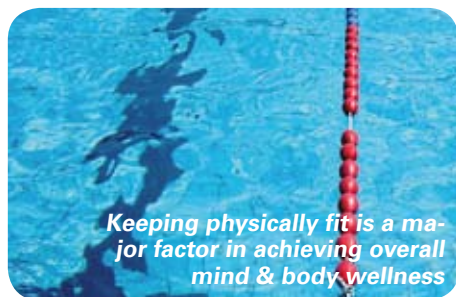
**Karen Nicol**  
Community Advisor



Celebrate  
every  
'little'  
success

## Chairperson's CORNER

"I'm a bowler not a rower."



*Keeping physically fit is a major factor in achieving overall mind & body wellness*

I well remember the day a few years ago when I asked Travers if he would like to come with us to Karapiro to see his younger brother compete at rowing.

Without hesitation Travers replied, 'I am a bowler not a rower!' And that he is, along with being a competitive swimmer and a walker. As the second child in a family of four it was a challenge from time to time to find sports where Travers could participate. The

local swimming club was a real find. All our children went there and had a great time. Like his brother Jordan, Travers prefers activities where he can 'do his own thing' and as he has grown older he has found his niche in Special Olympics.

Today we have come home from a meet on the North Shore and Trav has a clutch of ribbons and texts from his siblings congratulating him on his successes. He is off out for dinner tonight with Barry - I am off to Wellington and they will celebrate his achievements just like we have always done for all the kids in the family.

It is thanks to the dedication of many parents and volunteers that sport flourishes in this country. Today was no exception. But we are on the look out for a gym coach - Trav quite fancies weight lifting!

**Colleen Brown**  
Chairperson, Parent & Family Resource Centre

## UP COMING EVENTS

### ONE DAY WORKSHOP

How do you make the system work for you?

How do families get to have 'say so' over their lives & the services they & their children receive?

Workshop presented by **Eddie Bartnik** from the Disability Services Commission of the Western Australia Government who has extensive experience across Australia & overseas.

**Monday 4 December**  
Details to be confirmed

### ROCKET DAY 2006

A day of Celebration for families.

Rocket Park Mt Albert

**Sunday November 26**

11 am - 2.30 pm

Fun for all the family

**Diarize now!**

“Our young people are overweight!” shout the headlines, triggering a nationwide rethink on the contribution of physical activity to our lives. However for young people with a disability, physical recreation is generally less about a solution to obesity, as another means of participation and inclusion, gaining a positive self-concept, and an environment to be “able”.

## GETTING INTO PHYSICAL RECREATION – PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND SOCIALLY

As well as being touted as the cure for our “obesity epidemic”, the most obvious benefit of physical recreation is increased fitness. Research into Special Olympics athletes has found “increased sport fitness, improved skills, greater co-ordination, better cardiovascular fitness and endurance”.

Physical recreation is also a pathway to achieving mental fitness. At it’s toughest it’s about confronting extreme adversity, persevering and winning. The Special Olympics Athlete’s Oath is:

**“Let me win but if I cannot win let me be brave in the attempt”**

One person with a physical disability who had experienced Outward Bound describes the cathartic physical and emotional highs: “I kept pushing my personal limits and boundaries to points that I would not have believed possible”.

Such mental fortitude is more important to have at an elite sporting level, rather than a junior level, suggests Grant Sharman, new President of the soon-to-be revamped Parafed Auckland. Motivation, goal-setting and personal responsibility are the first qualities developed through physical recreation. But it all begins with participation.

Participation involves social interaction and “promotes understanding, respect and acceptance in the wider community” according to Special Olympics. On a more personal level physical recreation develops teamwork skills and expands social networks. For young people with disabilities, physical achievements can be particularly morale-boosting. “Everyone celebrates and supports others’ successes” says Christina Hunt, Programme Coordinator for Recreate Auckland Trust.

In Auckland there is a wide range of physical recreation opportunities available for young people with disabilities. Grant Sharman believes elite level sport and physical recreation for young people with intellectual disabilities are well-catered for, but less so for young people with a physical disability. He is leading Parafed Auckland into a makeover that will provide a “cohesive pathway for young people with physical disabilities”.

## TAKING THE SOCIAL RISK

Participating in any team or individual physical recreation activity involves social risk.

Social risk is the chance people take to overcome social barriers and constraints – taking them out of their emotional, psychological and social comfort zone.

For many young people with a disability there is the worry of a lack of or conditional acceptance, rejection, over protection, fear, social isolation or partial inclusion.

Both inclusive and exclusive physical recreation environments can be socially daunting for young people with or without disabilities. Supporting meaningful social interaction, challenging overt or latent stereotypes, and valuing differences begins with changing attitudes and preconceptions.

## PHYSICAL RECREATION AFFECTS OUR SOCIAL REALITY

Experiences in physical recreation contribute to our understanding of who we are, and how we fit into the world – our social reality. In particular, the emotionally-charged experience of active participation and such outcomes of winning or losing, achievement or failure, can hothouse the formation and revision of our self-concept.

A key issue for many is whether physical recreation environments exclusive to young people with a disability are more socially comfortable. Young people, their parents, and recreation providers comment that

such environments remove the pressure of the effort to present themselves at their best. “The pressure to be ‘cool, normal’ is removed and relieves tension,” observes Christina Hunt.

A chief concern is that executing recreation skills differently from peers can be a source of discomfort and an indication of limited social acceptance. Acceptance of difference is further complicated by latent beliefs and prejudices towards those with a disability.

**Critical to social acceptance is the acceptance of difference.....**

which can lead to positive physical recreation experiences for everyone. For now, living in a society that claims an overarching aim to better value difference and diversity, there needs to be a collective responsibility – recreation leaders, disabled and non-disabled - for creating an environment conducive to social acceptance.

## JUST FOR THOSE WITH A DISABILITY

Recreate Auckland Trust “comes from the perspective that in most contexts people with a disability have to join others’ groups. We are a group with disabilities; others have to join us” says Christina Hunt.

Most young people at Recreate are at a regular High School but in a Special Unit - “They feel that difference every day. At camp they’re relaxed, well-adjusted, having a lot of fun” Christina enthuses.

**“Everybody’s different so nobody’s different”**

Socially, Christina Hunt is continually amazed at how accepting the young people are of difference, particularly behavioural differences: “They work as a team”.

Special Olympics New Zealand acknowledges, “Not every athlete sees community inclusion as a desirable goal.



# ment to be able

Some athletes view Special Olympics as their 'safe place' where they don't have to worry about being 'different' as they have in some integrated settings, they find their friends in Special Olympics" For this reason they add, "It is important to be aware of athlete's goals related to integration"

Christina Hunt has a similar view. "We don't feel pressure to [focus on inclusive programmes] because what we are providing is so wanted. Parents see we understand the needs of their children and treat them with respect. It's about a balance of inclusive and exclusive"

Helena Mathieson, National Volunteer Coordinator at Special Olympics, is proud of what Special Olympics offers young people and consistently gets positive feedback from parents. At the same time, "we don't see ourselves as every family's choice," says Helena. "It's important to try mainstreaming first."

Grant Sharman of Parafed Auckland reiterates the popular opinion that there are benefits in participating in mainstream and segregated recreation activities, and that many young people will be involved in both. "They're complementary; they draw strength from each other"

## FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT OF CHOICE

"Integration into inclusive activities is of primary importance," for the Halberg Trust Sport Opportunity Programme. Jo O'Callaghan, Regional Sports Advisor, says that Halberg helps individuals who want to be involved in inclusive physical recreation (including help with funding), helps clubs and groups develop inclusive programming (such as modifying sports and games), and also works with schools: "There's a lot of choice out there."

If the contemporary aim is to make every physical recreation programme inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities, there is a long way to go. Part of the problem is financial – it costs money to develop programmes, provide or adapt equipment, and train staff to meet very diverse needs.

*Continued overleaf*



## BALANCING PHYSICAL RECREATION AS A FAMILY



Waiting for her son's plane to arrive, Sarah\* finally saw Andrew\* (18) coming through Arrivals, "walking really sort of staunch". Andrew had just completed an 8 day Horizon Course through Outward Bound for young people with an intellectual disability. The family had been "looking for ways to expand his horizons and give him challenges, physically and independence-wise" says Sarah.

Based on past experiences, Sarah was glad the course was exclusive to those with an intellectual disability: "I didn't want Andrew to meet 'nice' people to use as a crutch," she laughs. Proof there was a lack of "nice" people on the course came in the reek of Andrew's feet after a week in the same socks and the loss of all his underwear!

Andrew's early experiences with physical recreation were largely in the mainstream, including playing soccer at the local club. The philosophy of inclusion was of great comfort to Sarah in the early years: "It gave us something solid to hang on to". As the years passed Sarah's view relaxed as she realised that, "we're all individuals, we all have our own world view. I became more laidback".

Moving into the High School years, Sarah found that mainstream sport became too competitive – particularly disheartening was the unsupportive attitudes of many parents at Andrew's soccer games. The family also decided that physical recreation "was all about balance; as long as Andrew

is happy I don't see the need to make him into a star" explains Sarah.

Now Andrew plays basketball for the Special Olympics (recently going to Christchurch for the National Championships) and attends camps run by Recreate, giving Andrew "more of a sense of achievement because he's not lagging behind" says Sarah. At Recreate camps, "they're young people who are kind of cool and create activities where they can all work together". Andrew also goes to the gym independently once or twice a week.

Benefits for Andrew have been increased fitness, having a routine, and improved independence. Together with the other parts of Andrew's life, physical recreation is another thing "chipping away at the block" says Sarah. She's hopeful the history and routine of physical recreation may contribute in motivating Andrew to eventually get and keep a job.

Sarah describes her changing attitude towards Andrew's physical recreation: "It's a bit more of a holistic priority – he is part of a family, and like families are, he is not always going to get everything that's best for him".

But for now it's snowboarding season, and much effort has been put into including Andrew in this family activity. Having bought Andrew a snowboard and paid for lessons Andrew is now "starting to get a bit of control" says Sarah proudly, and really enjoying their winter "family thing".

\* Names changed





# SWIMMING into new challenges

**ONE AND A HALF HOURS A DAY, 5 KILOMETRES, FOUR DAYS A WEEK,** Stephanie Hartley (17) is swimming at the Manurewa Club. After sitting in a wheelchair all day “the most exciting part of my day is being in the water,” says Stephanie.

Having swum practically her entire life, swimming now “practically is my life,” says Stephanie with enthusiasm. Stephanie, who has Spina bifida, recalls her early competition experiences: “When I was

first up against able-bodied people and not doing the same times it was a bit disheartening. It was a difficult time. I had to figure it out for myself. I learnt they were good times for me.”


Stephanie credits her family with bringing her up well and helping her “get over judgemental stuff.” Swimming has also helped her emotionally: “I swim it out if I’ve got something on my mind.”

Adversity, Stephanie believes, “makes people with a disability a better person. You learn not to judge people, you learn to take time to know people. It’s a good skill to have.”

Although she “felt different at first, a bit shy” Stephanie now feels socially comfortable in inclusive environments and “loves the sports atmosphere.” So much so that she plans to study Sport and Recreation next year with the aim of becoming a swimming coach.

Stephanie believes people with a disability tend to be more supportive of each other than able-bodied people. “We’re all in the same boat, had the same experiences...” she struggles to find the best words to describe the integrity of this support. “Intense, true... We see a different view of the world”.

All going to plan, Stephanie’s big ‘view’ next year will be the waves of the Cook Strait as she attempts to swim across. Well aware of the magnitude of such a feat, Stephanie is keen to extend her training hours and train in the sea. “I want to show people that people with disabilities can do something extreme,” she says earnestly.

Switching her mood from advocate-of-disabled-achievement to teenage-girlishness, Stephanie laughs, “I think I’m most worried about swimming in cloudy water and the possibility of encountering whales!” 

## Continued from page 3

Also problematic is that meaningful inclusion goes beyond ‘accessibility’. It requires an attitudinal shift – transcending disability rather than compensating for the lack of ability.

The Disability Strategy is the foundation for the No Exceptions strategies led by SPARC in conjunction with other agencies such as Halberg Trust. The ten No Exceptions strategies are quite simply about getting more people involved in recreation and sport.

Led by the New Zealand Disability Strategy Objective: “Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society,” No Exceptions promotes right of choice as one of its strategies: “Advocate recreation and sport for all, including promoting the rights, choices and achievements of disabled people to participate in physical recreation and sport.”

### BEST PRACTICE FOR INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL RECREATION

To achieve such outcomes requires conceptualising inclusion as a philosophy rather than simply an accessible building, programme or service.

**Difference in ability needs to be valued in people with and without a disability.**


This means challenging a culture of aiming

to an identical execution of a skill, with a culture that values executing skills to the best of your ability. This can be facilitated through planning physical recreation programmes that maximise the abilities of all participants, and through better education of the capabilities of people with disabilities.

One view is that adaptations to equipment or game rules should be made on an individual basis and only as necessary. Adaptations exist to bridge the gap between the abilities of the participant and the demands of the activity. Depending on the activity, where possible resources should be provided so that the young person with the disability can manage their own experience.

Better collaboration between and within agencies, schools and athletes would do much to further an inclusive philosophy. If everyone knows what each other is doing, gaps are highlighted. Grant Sharman of Parafed Auckland believes: “We don’t have the elite leaders rubbing shoulders with the young players. This is what’s needed”.

Underlying every policy and programme is the inevitable realisation that meaningful inclusion in physical recreation requires an attitude shift in everyone. Latent or overt, with or without a disability, everyone holds preconceptions that need to be recognised, understood and confronted as we move towards a culture where all participants are equally valued.

Each individual is different in their motivation to participate in physical recreation. However it seems clear that physically, mentally and socially, physical recreation offers more ways and more scope of personal achievements to young people with disabilities than their able-bodied peers can even imagine. 

## SOME RECREATION PROVIDERS

Activ8	0800 210 019
Bright Sparks	027 542 0548
Janet McVeagh Recreation	625 9534
Outward Bound	0800 65 44 22
Parafed Auckland	270 2503
Paralympics	526 0760
Recreate Auckland	636 0351
Sailability	520 7432
Special Olympics	630 8062
Halberg Trust (Sport facilitators)	579 9931
Ring the Parent and Family Resource Centre for more information on recreation opportunities	