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For immediate release

Feilding woman mucks in to support Special Olympics

Yesterday was no ordinary day for Manawatu's Arianna Ashworth. She traded her office job for the morning to join volunteers from across the district supporting the Special Olympics New Zealand National Summer Games.

The Games, being held across 10 venues in Wellington and Manawatu this week, are supported by more than 600 volunteers like Ms Ashworth. She has been supporting the equestrian competition taking place at Manfeild Park in Feilding this week.

"It was really nice to be able to give back and be involved. It's something I haven't done before and I was keen to help out and find out more about the Special Olympics and what it means to the athletes and their families."

Ms Ashworth is a rural consultant with FMG Insurance, which has helped out with 63 employees volunteering and is also the principal partner for the equestrian competition. The insurer provides its staff with an annual 'give back day' to use to support the community and Ms Ashworth decided to use hers in support of Special Olympics New Zealand.

"My young daughter is a keen horse rider and I like horses so the equine side of things was quite appealing," she said.

Her role at Manfeild was in the stables, mucking out, grooming the horses and walking them to the outdoor arena to assist some of the 39 Special Olympics equestrians competing at the event.

Ms Ashworth said there had been "a lot of hype and excitement" about the games from employees in FMG's Feilding and Palmerston North offices, and it was great to see so many of her colleagues involved.

Special Olympics chief executive Kathy Gibson said the support of volunteers like Ms Ashworth vastly improved the experience of the athletes, families and supporters involved in the Games and made the whole event possible.

"Without the generous support of passionate volunteers like Arianna the Games just wouldn't be possible," she said.

Held every four years, the Special Olympics New Zealand National Summer Games is the largest event in New Zealand for athletes with intellectual disabilities. More than 1,250 athletes are participating in this year's Games, in swimming, athletics, basketball, bocce, bowling, equestrian, football, golf, indoor bowls, table tennis and powerlifting.

The equestrian competition is continuing at Manfeild Park until the end of today. The National Summer Games will wrap up tomorrow with a Closing Ceremony at Te Rauparaha Arena in Porirua.

Special Olympics New Zealand

PO Box 38344, Wellington Mail Centre, Lower Hutt 5045, New Zealand **Tel** +64 4 560 0360 **Fax** +64 4 560 0400

www.specialolympics.org.nz **Email** info@specialolympics.org.nz

Facebook www.facebook.com/specialolympicsnz **Twitter** @SpecOlympicsNZ

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Photo caption: Volunteer Arianna Ashworth with 25-year-old horse Rustee at Manfield Park.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Arianna Ashworth, please contact James Heffield by phone on 021 211 2362 or email james@lastwordwriting.co.nz.

Editor's notes

About Special Olympics New Zealand

Special Olympics New Zealand is a year-round programme of sports training and competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. More than 7,000 athletes throughout the country train and compete in 13 different Olympic-type summer and winter sports.

Special Olympics New Zealand also offers athletes leadership development through its Athlete Leadership Programme, health screening via Healthy Athletes[®], and encourages social inclusion through Unified Sports[®], where intellectually disabled athletes are combined in teams with unified partners (without intellectual disabilities).

Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics provides athletes continuing opportunities to develop fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy as they participate in the sharing of gifts and friendship with other athletes, their families and the community.

Special Olympics New Zealand – www.specialolympics.org.nz

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