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For immediate release

Media release

Special Olympics New Zealand selects eight new ambassadors

Eight New Zealanders with intellectual disabilities from across the country have been selected to participate in Special Olympics New Zealand's national Athlete Leadership Programme, over the coming year.

Special Olympics New Zealand offers year-round sports training and competition for people with intellectual disabilities in the community, and at secondary school. More than 7000 athletes train with the organisation in 13 Olympic-style sports and compete locally, nationally, and internationally.

As athletes grow in skills and confidence, some seek to explore opportunities outside of sport. Others discover a passion for the organisation and want to spread the word, the Athlete Leadership Programme (ALPs) offers this. ALPs encourages and supports athletes to channel their confidence through public speaking, community engagement, working on committees and acting as ambassadors.

To date 55 athletes have graduated as Global Messengers and have gone on to represent Special Olympics around New Zealand and abroad since the programme launched in 2010.

The 2016 Class of Global Messengers are Daniel Casbolt (Special Olympics North Harbour), James Bott (Special Olympics North Harbour), Lisa Donald (Special Olympics Nelson), Mohit Chand (Special Olympics Papakura), James Farrell (Special Olympics Hawkes Bay), Rochelle Waters (Special Olympics Canterbury), Michael Banner (Special Olympics Kapiti), and Alex Johnsen (Special Olympics Waikato).

The group will begin their Athlete Leadership training early next year at the first of four workshops. These sessions will teach public speaking, media liaison, presentation skills, speech writing, goal setting, and leadership. They are supported during their training by a mentor to make the most of their experience.

"Our national Athlete Leadership Programme is one of our most important initiatives in my view. Giving our athletes their own voice is vital. To see the confidence and skills our athlete leaders develop as they progress through the training is truly inspirational and I look forward to watching our newest leaders grow and become ambassadors for our organisation," says Kathy Gibson, Chief Executive Officer of Special Olympics New Zealand.

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