

Kym and Simone's experience at the Global Athlete Congress (GAC) held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic November 2018.

Firstly, Kym and Simone were humbled but very proud to represent SONZ, our Region Waikato and our family & friends. The opportunity for us to go was only due to Graeme Porter being unavailable at this time. Kym was very grateful for being given the opportunity and made the most of it.

Inclusion was a key message being pushed throughout the week. The importance of including Special Olympics (SO) athlete alongside non SO athletes. This can be in sport, fun games, lunch time games at school, working environments and any opportunity that would lend for a positive outcome for all involved. It was a great opportunity to talk to Athlete Leaders (AL) from our region Special Olympics Asia Pacific (SOAP) and countries from around the world. The similar challenges that they face and how their governments, communities, and schools have dealt with some of the issues.

Selected Athlete Leaders shared their stories via a presentation which was both informative and gave Kym an incentive to work towards. It highlighted the gap between where she is currently and the new vision she has for herself. Kym came away with new goals as an AL and personal goals for her to strive for. Promoting Special Olympics and her Project from the GAC was to look into the pathway for an athlete to transition to a coach. Having appropriate training and coaching for an athlete to transition to a coaching role? Do we have a framework and pathway already set up? How can we access that information and what support is available to me? Kym's end goal is to assist with running an event within Special O first and then possibly a unified event at a local school.

The experience was at times overwhelming but together we worked through those indifferences to find a solution that suited Kym and in turn some other athletes. For some presenters learning that speed was not always a good thing. Especially when dealing with AL with an intellectual disability (ID) and also for the translators having sufficient time to get the message across to their AL. A great idea that was used at the GAC was trading cards. Each AL was given trading cards with their information about themselves and were encouraged to swap with other AL. The goal was to get them to interact with each other and talk to amongst themselves, along with their mentors.

We witnessed the Opening Ceremony for the SO World Tennis Invitational which was enjoyable along with going on the Old Town tour, dinner at both the Athlete Village and a local restaurant. The hotel staff and SO volunteers were top notch and made us feel safe and very well looked after. A video was brought to the attention of the SO Board Directors of an athlete Brett Corbett, being treated poorly and shared it at the GAC. Some athlete's chose not to watch it but the response was quite overwhelming for both athlete and mentors. The response was a live video link to Facebook lead by Timothy Shriver the Chairman.

<https://www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympics/videos/271880670138666/>. Our Global Athlete Congress & Board Directors responded with a message from the heart. However, what the cameras missed was the raw emotions from some of the athletes who clearly shared the scars of a similar experience. Leaders for Inclusion was the focus of the GAC and how our Athlete Leaders (AL) can make a change. Attached are a few pictures throughout the week in Santo Domingo. We had a ball.

Thanks from Kym O'Grady (Athlete Leader) and Simone Kokaua (Mentor)

## Photos



All the Athlete Leader who represent Special Olympics Asia Pacific. From Left to Right Rimi Ando SO Nippon, Kym O'Grady SO New Zealand, Shrey Kadian SO Bharat, Raphael Otoase SO Papua New Guinea, Stephanie Handojo SO Indonesia, Brina Kei Maxino SO Philippines, Jasmine Sharif SO Pakistan and Ben Haack SO Australia.



Syed Ali Roshan, Jasmine, Board member, Kym, Lynn Tann SOAP Staff

At the opening ceremony for the SO World Tennis Invitational with Simon Koh

And other photos of Kym throughout the week with many different individuals and sessions.





