



Rotorua athlete bowling for medals and friendship at National Summer Games

Where it all started

Few people can claim veteran status at the age of 22 but Krystal McLeod from Rotorua has probably earned it. She has been training with Special Olympics since she was five years old, starting with athletics. At the time she started, Special Olympics was allowing children to start at a very young age, to encourage participation; the usual minimum age is eight years old.

Krystal, who has Down syndrome, currently takes part in five sports: indoor bowls, tenpin bowling, basketball, soccer and swimming. In 2013, she attended her first Special Olympics National Summer Games as a tenpin bowler, and this year she will be competing in indoor bowls. Her family are all actively involved in Special Olympics sport. Krystal's 27-year-old sister Maureen, who also has Down syndrome, joined Special Olympics when she was eight years old and has competed at two National Summer Games. Krystal's mother is involved in Special Olympics in Rotorua, as a sports coordinator, and her father used to coach basketball.

The difference sport makes

Krystal says Special Olympics gives her a chance to travel, something she enjoys, and to spend time with other people her age. She is not athletic, nor interested in watching sports on TV, but really enjoys the social opportunities afforded by taking part in sport. One highlight Krystal is really looking forward to, is the disco that takes place at the end of the Nationals.

She says she enjoys indoor bowls and tenpin bowling most, and that competing and participating in sport has helped her develop her ball skills and taught her to swim.

Aiming high at the National Summer Games

The Special Olympics National Summer Games includes competition at all levels and Krystal competes in the lower grades. That doesn't prevent her from giving it her best: she loves competing, and says she's aiming to take home a medal at the Nationals.

Her advice? Give Special Olympics a go!

While winning medals is great, enjoyment is what it's all about, Krystal says. Her message to others with an intellectual disability? You don't have to be athletic to try out a sport. The main thing is to get involved and have fun. "Special Olympics is inclusive of everyone regardless of sporting ability."

“Special Olympics is inclusive of everyone regardless of sporting ability.”

