**Media release**

**June 2**

**Freemasons New Zealand put their weight behind Special Olympics athletes**

A unique partnership between Special Olympics New Zealand and Freemasons New Zealand will support thousands of athletes with intellectual disabilities to compete at the National Summer Games from December 8-12.

Special Olympics New Zealand CEO, Carolyn Young says that the confirmation of Freemasons New Zealand as the naming-rights partner for the National Summer Games in Hamilton is another huge milestone as the games reaches it six-month countdown mark.

“We are all about participation and giving our athletes and our clubs the best games experience, so we are extremely grateful to have Freemasons New Zealand on board to support us to do that.”

The National Summer Games is the pinnacle event that athletes with intellectual disabilities work towards every four years. Hamilton can expect over 1,750 athletes and coaches, who will compete in 11 sports across eight venues, supported by many more family and friends.

Freemasons New Zealand Grand Master Graham Wrigley said the sponsorship reflects the organisation’s long-held commitment to supporting community-focussed events and initiatives, especially those that involve or benefit groups like Special Olympics athletes.

“Freemasons is, first and foremost, a charitable organisation and our key values are all around helping local communities. Through our charity we fund a variety of organisations to the tune of around five million dollars a year.

“But our Brethren also want to get hands-on, and we enjoy supporting organisations and initiatives by actively working alongside them and participating with them to help them achieve their goals.

“In supporting Special Olympics New Zealand and the 2021 National Summer Games, we get the best of both worlds, and we hope everyone involved in the games, from the coaches, to the athletes and the administrators and volunteers and family supporters, will derive some benefit from what our Brethren can offer,” says Mr Wrigley.

Carolyn Young says that Special Olympics New Zealand and Freemasons New Zealand share many common values around inclusion, respect, courage, are both underpinned by local clubs and lodges working at a grassroots level and both want to improve local communities and the people in those communities.

“We are incredibly grateful for the financial support from Freemasons New Zealand to help us stage the National Summer Games, but we are just as excited by the prospects and opportunities of a long-term partnership.

“Both organisations have active groups in every corner of New Zealand, and we hope to create a long-term relationship in which Special Olympics clubs might tap into the expertise their local Freemason lodges may have for fundraising, administration or organisational skills to help out the mum and dads who are too busy with coaching and running events,” says Ms Young.

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**Editors’ note:**An event to launch this sponsorship will be held on June 2, starting at 12 noon at Strike Ten Pin Bowling, Lower Hutt. The Grand Master of Freemasons New Zealand, Graham Wrigley, and other senior Brethren will compete against a team of Special Olympics athletes in games of Ten Pin bowling. Media are welcome to attend and conduct interviews.

**Background information for media**

**Special Olympics**

* Special Olympics New Zealand (SONZ) provides sports training and competition for people with Intellectual Disabilities, creating opportunities for athletes to develop physical fitness, grow their confidence and experience the joy of sport. SONZ has 44 grassroots clubs and 1,587 volunteers, supporting over 5,000 athletes of all ages across the country across 13 sports disciplines.
* The four-yearly National Summer Games is SONZ’s largest national event and one of New Zealand’s largest multi-sport events, this year hosted by Hamilton from 8 to 12 of December 2021.
* Over 1,750 athletes and coaches will be competing across 8 venues in 11 sports: athletics, basketball, bocce, ten pin bowling, equestrian, football, golf, indoor bowls, powerlifting, swimming and table tennis.
* Up to 600 volunteers will include general event volunteers, sports officials, marshalls, health professionals, IT management and many more.
* During the 2021 National Summer Games SONZ are looking to provide over 5000 basic health screenings for the athletes for Dental, Optometry, Audio, Health Promotion and Podiatry. The clinicians in the Healthy Athletes Programme are trained specifically to work with people with intellectual disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities are one of the most medically underserved populations due to a number of reasons including.

**Freemasons New Zealand**

* Freemasonry came to New Zealand with the early settlers, the first Lodge formed in 1842, and most towns soon had a Lodge. The Grand Lodge of New Zealand, also known as Freemasons New Zealand, formed in 1890.
* The early 1970s saw the peak of New Zealand membership, attributed to an influx of ex-servicemen after World War Two. Today there are 5,518 Freemasons in 203 Lodges in New Zealand.
* A Lodge is a group of Freemasons, usually between 30 and 80. Lodge meetings are usually held monthly.
* The most senior position in the Lodge is the Master who is supported by a group of Officers in running the Lodge and conducting the ceremonies.
* Freemasonry is not a secret society, nor is it a religion or sect. Men of all faiths are welcome to join.
* The organisation also has a registered charity that does significant charitable work in the community.

Visit [here](https://freemasonsnz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-redrafted-Simple-Answers-Current.pdf) for more information about Freemasonry.