

**Media release**

**Volunteers flock from all corners to Special Olympics National Summer Games**

Dianne and Blair Payne are excited to be among the 600 volunteers who will support nearly 2000 athletes and coaches to participate in the Freemasons New Zealand Special Olympics National Summer Games in Hamilton.

The Queenstown couple both have a background as paramedics and will be among the numerous professionals giving up their time from December 8-12 to enable athletes with intellectual disabilities to go for gold.

“I can’t wait. I don’t know what to expect, but it will be so much fun,” says Dianne.

National Summer Games Volunteer Manager Nikki Cameron says the Games would not be possible without the volunteers and wants to celebrate the huge value they add to the event.

“This week is National Volunteer Week, so it very appropriate to thank those who will help us out in Hamilton, but also those hundreds of volunteers who work in our clubs all over the country,” says Nikki.

The Volunteer Manager had expected most of the volunteers would come from the Waikato area but says she was pleasantly surprised that volunteers are travelling from all over the country, like Dianne.

Dianne has worked as a St Johns emergency paramedic for over 30 years, and in recent years the couple had been looking to combine volunteering opportunities with their appetite for travel.

Most recently, she volunteered at a large public hospital in Zanzibar, an island off the coast of Tanzania, where she ended up teaching many of the staff how to use their equipment.

“The hospital had 700 beds but 1400 patients, so it was incredibly challenging, humbling but also satisfying,” says Dianne.

Instead of another exotic destination, the Paynes this year will be travelling to Hamilton for their next volunteering adventure.

“Blair saw an advert and signed us up, so it was a bit of a surprise,” says Dianne.

“We don’t have a personal connection with Special Olympics and don’t know what we are going to do, but we don’t care.  We are happy to clean toilets if that’s what they need.

Whatever we do, it will just be great to be involved,” says Dianne, who has been doing some research and can’t wait to experience the opening and closing ceremonies.

Nikki Cameron says that the Games will need to fill a wide range of volunteer, some related to specific sports, as well as data entry for scoring, transport, accommodation, runners, marshals and volunteers organising medal ceremonies.

“We have just started our recruiting drive and have had a terrific response, but we’ve still got plenty of openings,” says Nikki, who explains that the volunteers so far range from students to business owners, medical professionals, Freemasons, Lions and Rotary members.

“So if you want to be part of Hamilton’s the biggest party of the year, go to our website to sign up.” <https://nsg2021.specialolympics.org.nz/>

***Caption 1:*** ***Dianne Payne with one of the babies she delivered in Zanzibar in her previous volunteering adventur***e.

***Caption 2: Dianne and Blair Payne***.



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