**Media release**

**Trailblazing first West Coast Special Olympics team heading for National Games**

A small, dedicated band of West Coast volunteers are working their socks off to take the first ever team from the Coast to the Special Olympics National Summer Games this year.

The National Summer Games in Hamilton, from December 8-12, are the four-year pinnacle event for athletes with an intellectual disability, and Jenny Green and her team of coaches are determined that 21 swimmers and basketball players from all over the Coast will be part of this celebration of sport.

Nearly 2000 athletes and coaches will compete across 11 sports and 8 venues and volunteer Jenny Green says taking the first-ever West Coast team to a National Summer Games is a huge financial undertaking for an isolated community with a small population base.

“The National Games experience is a huge experience for many of them as some have never been on a plane, visited the North Island or even stayed away from home for more than a day or two," says Green.

She explains that the West Coast team is a relatively new club that has only been active for five years and that the cost of sending one athlete will be around $1300.

“As many athletes are on a disability benefit, we are trying to keep costs as low as possible, so no athlete will be financially disadvantaged by attending,” says Green.

To help the Special Olympics West Coast team fundraise, Sport NZ selected the club to trial a new boosted sports crowdfundraising platform, not unlike a sporting version of Givealittle.

Green says the team had a goal of $1000, which would almost send one athlete to the National Games, but the page soon went vira after its went live in early May, through community noticeboards and Facebook groups all over the West Coast.

The team soon smashed their fundraising goal and has already raised over $3000.

"We are blown away by the support from our community. They have supported our cause with such generosity. It is very humbling,” says Green.

“The athletes appreciate the financial support immensely as it enables them to concentrate on training, keeping up their fitness and engage in local events.”

Green explains that Special Olympics is more than just a sports club and for many athletes is life-changing.

"Belonging to Special Olympics is not just about keeping fit, competing in a sport, but it is a positive, social occasion where there is a real belonging and inclusion in our local community.

“Everyone wins!!"

***For more information please contact Media manager Coen Lammers on 021-730239***