Down Syndrome Swimming Australia

By Suzanne Lawrence

Suzanne Lawrence’s son, James, is a champion swimmer and thanks to Suzanne we will learn a little more about Down Syndrome Swimming Australia (DSSA) and get to meet some of our champion swimmers.

DSSA was established to encourage people with Down syndrome at all levels of competency to actively participate in the great sport of swimming and to provide swimming pathways at local, national and international levels.

DSSA has grown since forming in 2005 and in 2014, a team of 24 swimmers represented Australia in Morelia in Mexico. Australia has proven to be very successful at the international level: crowned World Champions at the last four World Championships and both the male and female champions each time. All funds are raised by the organisation and swimmers to send a team to the World Championships. The athletes benefit greatly from participating in the championships, especially in terms of their self-esteem, and they are always very proud to represent their country.

Swimmers at all levels receive plenty of encouragement with their training, including helping them maintain a healthy lifestyle and learning to be fantastic ambassadors for their country.

September 2015 will see athletes competing in our third National Championships in Sydney at Knox Grammar School and if anyone wants to come and observe these amazing swimmers, please go to our Down Syndrome Swimming Australia website to look for dates and times.


I hope you enjoy reading what some athletes from the Australian swim team have to say about their swimming.

Q. Do you do any extra exercise to help you with your swimming?
A. I do some gym exercises and I do 2 dance classes each week.

Q. Before a competition is there anything you do for motivation?
A. Mum tells me to swim fast and to have fun. I do my stretches as well.

Q. What do you love most about swimming and what don’t you like about swimming?
• My friends are great and swimming is fun. I want to go to Italy and I know I have to train hard.
• I don’t like getting out of bed early in the morning.

Caitlin Kerby
20
Queensland

Q. How long have you been swimming competitively and how did you get started?
A. 2004. The inaugural Junior Special Olympics was held in Launceston in 2004.

Q. Can you tell us please what makes you want to dive into the pool to compete?
A. I like to do my best.

Q. Do you do any extra exercise to help you with your swimming?
A. Yes, I go to the gym. I do chin-ups in the door way every time I go into the lounge room and push-ups as well.

Aran Miller
21
Tasmania

Winning Relay Team - Mexico2014 Colin Marks, Aran Miller, Stephen Donovan, Michael Cox
James Byron Lawrence
25
New South Wales

Q. How long have you been swimming competitively and how did you get started?
A. I started competing when I was 9 years old. I swam because my brothers swam competitively and I had to learn to swim because we had a swimming pool.

Q. Do you have a special diet to help you with the demands of swimming?
A. Yes I have a healthy diet and no sweets, sugar drinks and fruits and salads.

Q. Before a competition is there anything you do for motivation?
A. I try to do what my coach says and to swim personal best times

Catherine (Katie) Senior
25
Australian Capital Territory

Q. Can you tell us please what makes you want to dive into the pool to compete?
A. I often think about showing medals to my friends and I love being part of a swimming team and helping that team win the competition.

Q. Do you do any extra exercise to help you with your swimming?
A. I love dancing and do 4 dance classes a week and also go to the gym and do warm-ups at my drama rehearsals.

Q. Before a competition is there anything you do for motivation?
A. After leaving the marshalling area I do arm and leg stretches and exercises, this helps me to stop worrying and focus on swimming a good race.

Phoebe Mitchell
23
Victoria

Q. Can you tell us please what makes you want to dive into the pool to compete?
A. The starter gun goes off and I love racing because it is fun and then seeing if I am getting faster and doing personal bests (PBs).

Q. Do you have a special diet to help you with the demands of swimming?
A. Yes I do really. I always try to eat very healthily and not too much at a time. I only have junk food every now and then. I have fruit salad every morning and a kale and other vegetable shake every day too. Sometimes I put apple, celery, carrot, cucumber, and berries in it all juiced up with coconut water. Mum gives me broccoli every night too which I love.

Q. What do you love most about swimming and what don’t you like about swimming?
A. I love getting up in the mornings and I feel good after training. I feel healthy and fresh. I also meet new friends and we chat. I also get lots of new togs and bikinis for training. There is nothing I don’t like about swimming.

Q. And lastly what have been your biggest achievements in the swimming pool?
A. I have got lots of medals and I hold 14 World Records. I was the Top Female Swimmer in Taiwan in 2010, Italy in 2012 and Mexico in 2014.
We also had a chat to Swimming Australia’s Michael Woods, who is the Inclusion and Paralympic Pathways Co-Ordinator. Michael had seen Leticia Keighley’s blog on Wade’s amazing swimming school, including how they had found true inclusion, so he contacted her wanting to use her blog on Swimming Australia’s website. I am sure you will all enjoy reading it so here is the link:

themighty.com/2015/07/when-my-son-with-down-syndrome-found-true-inclusion-at-a-swim-class/

Michael kindly also wrote a little piece for us:-

Swimming Australia is the national sporting organisation responsible for the growth and development of the sport of swimming in Australia. It is also home to the Australian Dolphins Swim Team. Swimming Australia is committed to a philosophy of ‘swimming for all’ and incorporates inclusion strategies in all aspects of the sport, creating opportunities for all Australian’s to participate.

When it comes to competition, swimmers with intellectual impairment may participate in standard competition as well as Multi Class competition. Multi Class (MC) events use modified rules so that swimmers with a range of disabilities can compete fairly in the same race. In order to compete in MC competition swimmers must have an eligible classification. Event results are determined using the Multi Class Point Score system. Swimmers race against the world’s best time in that event for their classification. The winner of the race is not always the person who touches the wall first, but the swimmer who posts the highest point score (i.e. a time closest to the world’s best time for their classification). Swimmers may be granted certain exceptions to the normal swimming rules in order to compete fairly. This allows for meaningful and fair competition for all swimmers. Swimming Australia works closely with disability sport partners including the Australian Paralympic Committee, AUSRAPID and Down Syndrome Swimming Australia, to provide competitive opportunities for people with intellectual impairment, from club level through to representing Australia.

Whether you choose to swim for fun and enjoyment, health and fitness, aspire to be a world champion, or choose to be involved in a non-swimming role as a coach, official or volunteer, swimming provides many opportunities.

www.swimming.org.au/multi-class-swimming

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**Stephen Donovan**

25

Western Australia

**Q.** Do you have a special diet to help you with the demands of swimming?

**A.** I make my shakes every day (banana, milk and vita brits). I try to make healthy choices and have a healthy balance. I try not to choose junk food or sugary drinks. But I still love a beer and fish and chips on Friday nights!

**Q.** Do you do any extra exercise to help you with your swimming?

**A.** Yes lots! I do gym, crossfit, boxing, yoga/pilates and swimming 6 times each week. I play football and train every week. I do ballroom dancing and I’m doing a drama and dance project.

**Q.** And lastly what has been your biggest achievement in the swimming pool?

**A.** My biggest achievement was being part of Team Australia and swimming for my country at World Down Syndrome Championships in Ireland, Portugal, Taiwan, Italy and Mexico. I was proud to win medals and break lots of world records for my country and be a Team Leader in Mexico and to hold the Australian flag.

Ladies Winning relay team - Taylor Anderton, Phoebe Mitchell, Lucy Dumitrescu and Katie Senior