

Press Release

Leicester Conferences at University of Leicester says farewell to the Special Olympians!

Over 3500 athletes and coaches reach the end of the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games 2009 and make their way home.

The Special Olympics GB National Summer Games 2009 finally comes to the end of its incredible journey as the athletes make their way home.

A closing ceremony was held at Abbey Park, Leicester to mark the end an amazing experience for the City of Leicester and all those who took part in making the games a great success.

The Special Olympics took place between 25th and 31st July in 21 sporting venues throughout Leicestershire making it the largest ever sporting event to be held in the region. The University was a major partner of the games from the outset and organised all accommodation and catering for the 3500 competing athletes and their supporting coaches and carers.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in the UK, the Special Olympics movement was founded in the USA in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of the Late President John F. Kennedy. Officially a global charity and part of the International Olympics Movement, the Special Olympics is a non-elitist sport organisation that provides a free year-round training and competition programme for thousands of people with learning disabilities around the world. In the UK alone there are over 8000 members with work underway to reach a further 10,000 individuals by 2010.

The Residential and Commercial Services operational team at the University was kept very busy preparing all the accommodation at both the Oadby Student Village and City Living areas of Nixon Court and Opal Court. The scale of the event was quite staggering and all staff rose to the challenge of the additional work involved, such as distributing and maintaining 70,000 portions of tea and coffee within the accommodation. Catering staff served over 17,500 breakfasts and evening meals within the Oadby Dining Halls and Charles Wilson Building, City Campus. Lunchtime involved the distribution of over 30,000 individually prepared packed lunches to 21 different sporting venues.

Views and comments of the event captured on the final day:

Matthew Mott, Basketball Team, Scotland West Region (Gilbert Murray-Stamford Hall accommodation)

"It's been absolutely brilliant; the boys have had a fantastic time so far. We're in the finals today so fingers crossed the boys will get gold. The accommodation has been fantastic. We've got four boys on our floor and I'm looking after three of them. It's very easy to keep them under control and find out what they're doing and where they are and the rooms have been excellent. The food's been brilliant. The staff have been fantastic to us, you know, really helpful, really accommodating. We were on the basketball courts and received our packed lunches every day and the volunteers were brilliant. The people here have been very friendly and have treated us real nice."

Susan Banks, Highland Region, Team Manager (John Foster Hall accommodation)

"The games have been very good. The accommodation has been fantastic, we have had everything we need and have been catered for, no problems. The rooms were super. The catering has been fabulous, plenty of choice with good hot meals. The packed lunches were absolutely fabulous, more than enough. You catered for people that don't eat sandwiches and everything you needed was there. The timing was a little difficult but I appreciate that it was a very big job for you to get them distributed. I think everything has worked really well in that respect. The staff here have been fabulous, certainly in reception they couldn't do enough to help us. The volunteers are amazing, can't fault them at all."

Ena Bloksidge, North West Region, Boccia Team Manager (John Foster Hall accommodation)

"The games have been fantastic, the accommodation has been much better than we expected having had a son who's been a student and everybody's been so friendly and the athletes have really enjoyed themselves and nothing's been too much trouble for anybody. We've all been really impressed by the food. When there's been a big queue we've got through really quickly and the food's all been nice and fresh. As far as the packed lunches are concerned, everyone has really enjoyed them and said how much there has been in them. If there was something in the pack they didn't like there has always been something in it they were happy with. The evening entertainment you arranged was fantastic. Some of us went to the disco which was great and we really enjoyed the Karaoke evening."

James Broughton, Hospitality Team, University's Residential and Commercial Services (currently a student in London but back in Leicester for the summer vacation)

"It's really good, there is a great atmosphere and everyone pitches in. I've mainly been a kitchen porter and a waiter and have really enjoyed the last few days with the Special Olympics, such a friendly bunch of people."

Garry Leak, Porter, University's Residential and Commercial Services

"On the whole the experience has been very, very enjoyable. The people have really enjoyed being here and everybody I've spoken to said they received a really nice welcome from the staff and the people of Leicester. I enjoy it when the students are here; they're interesting but these are a different group. You walk round and everybody's shaking your hand telling you I've got this or won this medal – it's great!"

Yvonne Redley, Ann Kennedy and Fran Taboada, Domestic Assistants, University's Residential and Commercial Services

Yvonne comments "I went to the Opening Ceremony and it was really good. I had a great time."

Ann comments "I also went to the Opening Ceremony; it was the first time I have ever been to anything like that and thoroughly enjoyed it. The athletes here at the University have been great, really enthusiastic and friendly."

Fran comments "As far as housekeeping goes they have been brilliant – it's as if they have all been trained! They even make their own beds and leave the place spotless. They are welcome back anytime!"

Sue Burns and Michael Thomas, Community Support Officers with Oadby and Wigston Police Station

Sue Comments "It's been fantastic, the atmosphere from the athletes the carers, all the hard work the volunteers have been putting in – it's just been superb. In fact one of the best weeks I have had working for Oadby and Wigston – wonderful, really enjoyed it. Your staff have been brilliant. There was nothing they could have done more, everything we needed was on hand and everyone has been really helpful."

Michael comments "It's exactly why we joined the job in all honesty. It has been one of the best weeks I have served with the Leicestershire Constabulary. Your staff have been superb and very helpful. All your security has been great in providing us with any information allowing us to communicate with them much easier."

Tim Rodber, Games Volunteer at John Foster Hall

"It's been tiring but pretty rewarding. I've never done anything quite like this before but it's been a really good experience."

Contact Details:

Mr Trevor Miller, Leicester Conferences, University of Leicester Conference Sales and Events Office, Stamford Hall, Stoughton Drive South, Leicester. LE2 2ND

Tel: 0116 271 9933

Fax: 0116 221 2053

Email: conferences@le.ac.uk

Internet: www.leicesterconferences.co.uk