

4th November 2014

A fistful of medals as Gerflor supports Irish Special Olympics effort

In September 2014, 46 athletes from Special Olympics Ireland competed in the European Summer Games in Belgium, across seven sports representing all five regions of the Emerald Isle.

The Irish squad competed in Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Bocce, Football, Gymnastics and Table-Tennis. And on the 21st of September the Irish Team returned home to a hero's welcome as they had scooped 57 medals (the Aquatics Team alone winning one gold, five silver and three bronze) and 30 placement ribbons, as well as many personal bests.

These incredible athletes experienced amazing success in their sporting endeavours, representing their clubs and counties to the highest level and international flooring and interiors specialist Gerflor had a presence in this success too.

Odran Cafferkey a Sales and Specification Executive with Gerflor has had involvement with a local Special Olympic team from the early days. His daughter Niamh was born with Down's syndrome, so a move towards the Special Olympics Team was a natural choice. Odran comments, "I started coaching with the Cork Special Olympic Swimming Club after attending the 2013 World Games in Dublin as part of my role with Gerflor who supplied sports flooring for many of the sports halls they had used. My daughter represented Munster at the 2010 Ireland Games and I attended these games as a Coach/Chaperone with the Munster swim team".

Odran is clearly passionate about the sport and the opportunities it gives the competitors. He went on to say, "I got involved because I've always enjoyed swimming and have coached a mainstream swimming group since 1999, so Special Olympics seemed like a natural progression after Niamh was born". He also went on to comment, "I had immense pride in all the Aquatics Team who swam personal bests over the course of the Summer Games swimming gala. It was extremely emotional to see people on the podium with their medals or ribbons. They had all worked so hard at the games and in the months leading up to the competition".

Balancing time between work and sport or hobbies is never easy for any of us and Odran goes on to further comment, "Gerflor were absolutely fantastic when it came to me, giving me the time to support this community event. They generously allocated me five days special leave alongside my own holidays in order for me to attend the games. They were flexible in allowing me to attend some of the training sessions which started on Friday afternoons. Gerflor were extremely supportive in my role and saw it as an important personal development project".

On arriving back on Irish soil the team got a wonderful reception from friends and family at Dublin Airport. They had formed many new friendships for life. Odran finally adds, "we've all got wonderful memories of our time in Belgium and the welcome we received there. A big reunion is planned for mid-November for all the coaches and team. It's now time to work on the legacy of the 2014 Summer Games, increase the awareness of the achievements of this Special Olympics Team and improve the awareness of Special Olympics in general in order that more people get involved as athletes, coaches or volunteers".

On a final note, Aquatics Head Coach, Aideen Dowling commented, "I would like to thank all of the team for their dedication, hard work and help that everyone contributed to the Aquatics Team. Each athlete is a testament to all the support provided from both coaches and family members in the run up to the games over the last number of years. I was honoured to be able to partake in such a special journey with athletes and fellow coaches".

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