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SPECIAL OLYMPICS BERMUDA APPOINTS DISABILITY ADVOCATE AMONG NEW BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Bermuda registered charity, Special Olympics Bermuda (SOBda),#972, recently made significant changes to the Board of Directors including the appointment of a new Board Chair, Directors and roles at their Annual General Meeting. The newly appointed Board, which includes seven incumbents and four new Directors, is now under the guidance and leadership of former SOBda Secretary, Sacha Richardson who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in disability rights and advocacy, strategic planning, and administrative and operational management of non-profit organizations and small-to-medium enterprises. In addition to her new role as Board Chair, Richardson also remains responsible for marketing, communications, and high-level administration, while co-leading the Fundraising and Events and Volunteer Committees and sitting on all committees.

Special Olympics is a global organization that provides sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. It aims to promote inclusion, acceptance, and respect for people with intellectual disabilities through the power of sports. The organization offers a wide range of Olympic-type sports, giving individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community. Special Olympics events and programs are held at local, national, and international levels, fostering an environment of sportsmanship, teamwork, and empowerment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The diverse range of skills and expertise brought by the new Board members reflects their collective commitment to serving people with Intellectual Disabilities not only through Sports but also holistically. Through their collective leadership, Special Olympics Bermuda aims to further strengthen its ability to make a lasting impact in the lives of those they serve. Having people with professional and personal connections is important for several reasons including that these individuals bring a deep passion and emotional investment to the cause, which can be a powerful motivator for driving positive change and their personal experiences can provide valuable insights and perspectives and fosters a sense of authenticity, empathy, and commitment within the board, leading to more effective and meaningful contributions and outcomes.

National Director, Karen Woollery shares, “As a working Board, Special Olympics Bermuda Directors perform strategic and fiduciary duties as well as participate in the organization's day-to-day functions in a volunteer capacity. In keeping with SO International mandates and governing bye laws, the Board must comprise of specific key personnel including experts in Sports and Finance as well as representation of athletes and families. As one of the smaller accredited programs of SO International, SO Bda faces several challenges due to our small population, location and human and financial resources needed to implement the many programs available to us. But we have, and continue to do, all we possibly can to serve people with IDs”.

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Sacha adds, “This year and beyond, my hope is that we continuously strive for improvement and success in serving our athletes and the community as a whole. As we look ahead, identifying areas where we can do better, whether it be in our athlete development programs, community engagement initiatives, or organizational practices must remain at the forefront understanding the importance of continual growth and determination to make the necessary changes to further enhance our impact. Likewise, we will diligently continue to build on the areas where we have already achieved success and are eager to embark on new initiatives by fostering collaboration and innovation, pooling our talents and resources and partnering with stakeholders. I’m excited for yet another opportunity to advocate for a this population of deserving and inspiring people and humbled that my experience and past contributions is seen and valued as a positive attribute to lead and work alongside this equally amazing team. Through this I’m confident that we can make a positive and lasting impact in the years to come.”

Incumbent Board Members

Karen Woollery is an essential figure in the Special Olympics Bermuda (SOBda) organization, holding the esteemed position of National Director (ND) and serving as an ex officio member of the Board of Directors. With extensive experience and dedication to the cause, Karen's role encompasses a wide array of responsibilities crucial to the success of the SOBda program. As ND, Karen is entrusted with the pivotal task of providing strategic leadership and overall managerial responsibility for the local program. This includes ensuring that the standards, policies, and procedures set forth by Special Olympics International are rigorously adhered to. Furthermore, Karen shoulders the significant responsibility of preparing and submitting annual accreditation documentation, a task that demands precision and attention to detail. Her leadership is not limited to administrative duties, as Karen has also taken on the role of Head of Delegation for SOBda at the Berlin and Dubai World Games. Additionally, she has represented the organization at numerous international program conferences and training events, demonstrating a commitment to continuously improving and expanding the reach and impact of Special Olympics in Bermuda. Karen is also the mother of an athlete.

Sacha Richardson has dedicated her life to advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. As a mother to a special needs adult daughter and a member of the disabled population herself, Sacha brings a unique perspective to her work. Since being diagnosed with an illness in 2005, she has been classified as having an invisible disability, which has further fueled her passion for disability advocacy. Sacha currently holds the position of Chair of the Disability Advisory Council and serves as a board member for several disability-related charities and non-profits. In addition to her involvement in these organizations, Sacha also runs businesses that, in part, provide services specifically tailored to persons with disabilities. Her advocacy work is primarily focused on Disability and Employment, where she works tirelessly to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities. Furthermore, Sacha’s professional background in high-level administration, strategic planning, business process analysis, marketing, and graphic design has been instrumental in advancing the entities she works with. Her extensive experience in various areas of disability, from patient and parent support group member to collaborator, presenter, and disability legislation research and drafting, has equipped her with the knowledge and expertise needed to effect change in this important field.

Chandra-Lee Bascome, SO Bda Treasurer, is a highly accomplished finance and compliance expert with a passion for serving her community. In addition to her fiscal responsibilities, she has also provided extensive support to local vulnerable populations and is the coach of the Bowling Program. With overall responsibility for all financial matters for SO Bda, Chandra-Lee oversees budgeting and forecasting, sourcing and allocation of grants, reporting, and funding for events. Her meticulous attention to detail and strategic approach to financial management have been essential in ensuring the organization's fiscal stability and growth. Additionally, her expertise in administration of travel needs for international competitions and conferences has been invaluable to the organization. As a Business Manager for the Salvation Army, Chandra-Lee has demonstrated her extensive knowledge in Human Resources and Social Care, providing valuable insight and guidance to the Board on numerous occasions.

Juanita Easton is a dedicated and influential figure within the organization. In her various roles as athlete leader mentor, Co-Chair of the Fundraising and Events and Volunteer Committees, and Mid Atlantic Wellness Institute Liason (MWI), Juanita plays a pivotal role in supporting and advocating for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

In her capacity as a Recreational Aide at MWI, Juanita has established strong and meaningful relationships with clients, many who are also Special Olympics athletes. Her rapport with these individuals has proven integral in tending to their needs and providing logistical coordination for their attendance at training and events. By leveraging her connections, Juanita has facilitated numerous opportunities for athletes to engage in activities they may not have otherwise had access to. As the Athlete Leader Mentor, Juanita takes on the responsibility of guiding and advising athlete leaders, preparing them for local and overseas events and conferences. Her leadership and mentorship have been crucial in empowering athletes to develop their leadership skills and become advocates for themselves and their peers within the community.

Cyrelah Raynor is at the forefront of the Unified Champion Schools Program, a groundbreaking initiative for Special Olympics Bermuda (SO Bda) designed to foster social inclusion through purposefully planned and executed activities. In her role as program lead, she takes on the critical task of engaging with community stakeholders to bring this visionary program to fruition. Cyrelah was also the family liaison and Leadership Program head. One of the most distinctive qualities that Cyrelah brings to her leadership role is her perspective as both a parent of a Special Olympics athlete and a mental health professional. With firsthand experience in these areas, she is able to provide invaluable direction and insight that informs the development and implementation of the Charity. In addition to her work with SOBda, Cyrelah serves as a Clinical Case Manager at HOME.

Quennel 'Coach Q' Robinson has dedicated much of his career to the development and promotion of sports. As the Sports Director, Coach Q is responsible for overseeing the development and monitoring of all sports programs. This includes sourcing local and overseas opportunities for competition, ensuring athletes are prepared for overseas competitions, and ensuring coaches and athletes are aware of expected standards, rules, and regulations. As an Adaptive Physical Education teacher for the Public School System (West) he ensures athletes of all abilities have the opportunity to participate and compete at all levels. He has been instrumental in creating adaptive sports programs, providing students with the tools and support they need to excel in their chosen sport. Coach Q has represented Bermuda in numerous sports over the years and is deeply passionate about creating opportunities for athletes of all abilities.

Solay Thomas, an athlete and athlete leader for Special Olympics Bermuda and a shining example of excellence both on and off the field. Participating in the Kayaking and Shot Put programs, she has proudly represented Bermuda in numerous overseas competitions and conferences, bringing home medals and accolades for her outstanding performance and congeniality. In addition to her athletic achievements, Solay's role on the Board ensures that the voices of her peers are heard and represented. She sits on fundraising and events committee and is a member of the Carribean Council, a collective group of Carribean based SO Programs. Solay is a member of the National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Implementation Team, where she contributes her insights to help shape policies and resources for individuals with intellectual disabilities. She also sits on the Advocacy and Communication sub-committee, headed SO Chair Richardson.

New Directors

Christopher Cunningham is a highly qualified professional with a wealth of experience in the healthcare and sports coaching fields. As the Director of Medical and Health Programs, he is responsible for overseeing the implementation and progress of various related programs. His extensive background in clinical and operational management allows him to effectively ensure that standards, policies, and procedures are adhered to. In addition to his role as Director, Chris also serves as the Head Coach of the Swim Program, His academic credentials include a Master's in Public Health and Bachelor's degrees in Nursing and Sports Coaching, reflecting his passion for both healthcare and sports. Chris brings a unique perspective to his role, having serving as the Clinical Manager of the Bermuda Hospitals Board Community Intellectual Disability Team (CIDT) program and specialist residential services for individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. His involvement in the creation of various programs and initiatives, as well as his membership on the National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Implementation Team, further underscores his commitment to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Shawnette Easton is a dedicated member of the Fundraising and Events committee and Volunteer teams, where she has been a long-serving and committed member. Shawnette consistently provides valuable ideas and support behind the scenes of events, offering up her ideas, connections, and time to assist in any capacity needed. Her professional background as a Nurse Assistant and Activities Coordinator at Summerhaven further strengthens the experience of the team. Shawnette's passion for serving her community and making a positive impact is evident in her willingness to contribute her time and expertise to ensure the smooth execution of each initiative. In addition to her professional skills, Shawnette's compassionate and dedicated nature, often going above and beyond, ensures that the organization's events are successful and impactful. Shawnette is also represents Nursing Assistants on the Bermuda Nurses Council and is an Emergency Medical Responder with St. John's Ambulance.

Serving in the newly formed role of Family Coordinator, **Jennifer Howard**, or 'Jen' as she is popularly known, will be responsible for facilitating effective communication between families and the board. In her current capacity as Administrator of the K Margaret Carter Center, Jen has exhibited exemplary leadership and dedication. She has also been an integral member of the National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Implementation Team, where she has played a pivotal role in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. Jen holds a Master's of Psychology and Science in Analysis and Intervention in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Her expertise in this field is further evident through her contributions as a lecturer for the ID Certificate Program at the Bermuda

College and other esteemed institutions. Jen has also supported the Equestrian Program as the Berlin World Games Equestrian Coach.

As Secretary (Recording), **Tanika Rayner** plays a crucial role in ensuring the the timely calling of Board Meetings and the meticulous record keeping of the proceedings. In addition to her administrative duties, Tanika is also an integral part of our Track Program, serving as the Coach and actively participating in the implementation of Unified Champion Schools Program. Despite being one of the newer members of the organization, Tanika has quickly established herself as a dedicated and invaluable asset, particularly during the preparation of the Track Team’s participation at the Berlin World Games. Her expertise as an Occupational Therapist has proven to be immensely beneficial to the overall wellbeing and success of the athletes, as she has extensive experience working with children and adults in various settings, both locally and overseas, spanning a career of approximately 20 years.