

Diversability Award Entrant: Adecco New Zealand

Working hand-in-hand with Paralympics New Zealand, recruitment agency Adecco has helped 10 of our top para-athletes find work in the past two years via a unique programme that provides them with everything they need to be ready to enter the workforce.

The Athletes Careers Programme (ACP) is a global initiative helping active and retired carded athletes transition to work. In 2011, Adecco New Zealand became one of only 15 ACP providers around the world to work with both the Olympic and Paralympic organisations.

A leading recruitment agency, Adecco has 5,200 branches worldwide and more than 32,000 staff. In New Zealand, the company has 17 branches from Whangarei to Dunedin, helps about 300 people find permanent work a year, and has about 2,500 on-hire employees putting their skills to work in businesses all over the country.

CSR Manager Tracy Smith says the ACP programme is not just about finding jobs for athletes - Adecco staff also coach them on how to get work ready, how to prepare a CV and interview skills.

And they don't stop there.

"Years ago it became apparent to Adecco that Paralympics NZ was a small, hard-working team that needs the support of a commercial partner. We decided that we could do more than just assist athletes while training or when they retire. We could use our position, as one of the largest recruiters in New Zealand, and introduce them to our clients," Tracy says.

The company has held several fundraising dinners for Paralympics NZ, each time inviting 50 high-profile business CEOs to hear more about the work the organisation does, and more importantly, hear from the para-athletes.

Adecco frequently uses Paralympians as paid guest speakers at its annual conference and for client conferences and meetings.

The benefits are two-fold - it's paid work for the athlete and it raises awareness that people with disabilities are very capable and skilled, and make amazing employees, says Tracy.

"The impact of having a Paralympian engage with staff and clients is enormous. In the past three years we have seen an increase in the number of athletes, including para-athletes, working for our clients," she says.

"Last year we were able to assist four Paralympians with paid work, from speaking at conferences to working as a hostess on a client's site, to a six-week assignment with a government department."

Tracy says Adecco staff, from executive management through to all the consultants, support the ACP programme, and because the company has branches across New Zealand, and a large client base, covering industrial and commercial sectors, seeking temporary and permanent employees, it can offer the programme to a wide range of athletes.

Adecco's clients benefit from having access to high-calibre candidates and the para-athletes get access to work that fits in with their training schedules. The programme also leaves them better prepared to enter the workforce fulltime when they retire from their sport.

Paralympian Jesse Reynolds, who represented New Zealand in swimming at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, says, "My disability has at times put off potential employers employing me. Participating in the Adecco Athlete Career Programme has given me the opportunity to develop my professional skills to ready myself for the workforce."

Adecco Dunedin Branch Manager Lisa McKellar has been working with Anna Grimaldi, who won Gold in the women's long jump event at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. "The feedback from our client has been extremely positive; Anna picked up the role very quickly and has great customer service skills. The nature of our client's business gave Anna the flexibility to be able to do shifts around her training regime as well as get exposure in different divisions of their business. It has been a great experience for Anna, Adecco and our client. And it has been a privilege for the customers Anna has dealt with, as it's not often you get to interact with a Gold medallist and all-round amazing young lady," she says.

Adecco's association with Paralympics New Zealand and the Athlete Career Programme has had a huge impact not only on staff within Adecco but also on how the company views candidates and promotes them to clients, Tracy Smith says.

"We look beyond someone's ability or disability and look at the skills, attitude and who fits the client's profile best. Adecco permanent staff loving working with the athletes, as all of them have empowering stories that make us want to be better and to do the best we can for them. They enrich our culture as a company and there has only ever been a positive outcome for both us and the para athletes."

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229799311>