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REALTOR® Helps People Reach for Their Dreams

Richmond, BC – When Izabela Wasiela first met Michael, the non-verbal autistic boy was frustrated that he could not speak or run and play like other children. Now after a decade of effort, Michael can use simple language and has greater confidence and physical strength. The difference in his life is dramatic. His happy story is just one of the reasons that Izabela volunteers each Saturday with Special Olympics BC Vancouver. In 2010, she began coaching swimmers and weight trainers with special needs. This REALTOR® is uniquely qualified for the demands of this work.

"I studied at UBC and completed a Bachelor of Human Kinetics majoring in Physical Education with a minor in Family Studies and Social work," says Izabela. "In my third year, I was required to do some volunteer work involving people with disabilities and physical activity. I volunteered at the Kitsilano Community Center in their TLC life skills program for special needs teens and was hooked! I found it so incredibly rewarding and felt I had something I could add to the program with my education and background as an athlete."

Izabela enjoyed the work so much that 10 years later she is still working part-time in the same program at the Kitsilano Community and Trout Lake Community centers. That program only allows teens to participate until 18 years of age. One day, a parent approached Izabela and asked if she would be willing to spend time once a week with her special needs daughter. At the time, Jassie was in her mid-20s. (*Pictured above: Jassie Chan with permission and Izabela Wasiela)*

"It was through Jassie that I got involved in the Special Olympics. I'd take her out on a Saturday to go for lunch then to her swimming and soccer practices. As I sat watching, I knew I wanted to become a coach. I immediately asked about how I could get started." She now coaches Special Olympians of all ages. The youngest she has worked with was 12-years-old and the oldest was 50.

"It is rewarding to know that despite being disabled in some way people can still participate in sports and there are no limits. We have a young man who can swim very well having the use of only one arm. Seeing them progress and meet their goals and improve just melts my heart. I am so proud when someone learns a new skill or someone overcomes their fears."

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