

LifeChanger Brings Mental Fitness to the Zespri AIMS Games

Athletes Erikana Pedersen and Mike den Heijer join forces to inspire thousands of young competitors in Tauranga

Young athletes at this year's Zespri AIMS Games won't just be chasing medals – they'll also be taking part in one of the country's largest youth wellbeing initiatives, with LifeChanger Foundation bringing hands-on mental fitness workshops to Tauranga.

Founded by former AFL player and coach Scott Watters, LifeChanger expanded to Aotearoa in 2022 and has since worked with thousands of rangatahi across schools, sports clubs and communities. Its programs, led by high-profile athletes and trained facilitators, focus on building resilience, confidence and purpose.

From 1-5 September, LifeChanger will host a dedicated hub at Gordon Spratt Reserve, offering interactive sessions throughout the Games. The initiative represents LifeChanger's biggest platform yet in New Zealand, placing mental wellbeing alongside sporting performance for the next generation of athletes.

Among those leading the sessions are Erikana Pedersen, Mainland Tactix captain and ANZ Premiership champion, and Mike den Heijer, Auckland City FC midfielder who has represented New Zealand on the global stage including at the FIFA Club World Cup.

For Erikana, returning to the AIMS Games has a personal significance. "I actually played at AIMS when I was at Glen Eden Intermediate," she said. "It was such a big deal, the nerves, the excitement, the energy. Coming back now, not as a player, but as someone who can give back to those same-age kids, that's a full-circle moment for me."

Mike says his role with LifeChanger gives him purpose beyond the pitch. "Sport taught me resilience, teamwork and mindset. But it's the moments off the pitch, when a young person says, 'I didn't think I could do this until now,' that hit the hardest."

Together with the LifeChanger team, Erikana and Mike will deliver workshops designed to help athletes strengthen self-belief, explore identity, and set goals – lessons that go well beyond sport. LifeChanger programs in Aotearoa are grounded in positive psychology and strengths-based mentoring, creating safe spaces for rangatahi to share, connect and learn from role models who "walk the talk."

"We're not there to give a motivational speech and leave," Erikana explained. "We're there to connect, to share our own challenges, and to show them they're already more capable than they know."

With youth mental health and wellbeing continuing to be a national priority, LifeChanger's growing footprint in Aotearoa offers a hopeful path forward. And at this year's Zespri AIMS Games, the message is clear: thriving on the field begins with thriving within.

For more information visit, www.lifechanger.com.au
<https://www.nzaimsgames.co.nz/fairplay/lifechanger-1>

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Scott Watters, CEO and Founder of LifeChanger and former AFL coach and player

Erikana Pedersen, Mainland Tactix captain and ANZ Premiership champion

Mike den Heijer, Auckland City FC, FIFA Club World Cup player

High-res images available: As attached

About Lifechanger

LifeChanger Foundation is a preventative youth mental health and wellbeing non-profit that empowers young people to thrive by developing their social, emotional and resilience skills for life. LifeChanger is at the forefront of mental health prevention, supporting young people with critical foundation skills and tools they need to successfully navigate life, overcome challenges and pursue their unlimited potential. In 2024 alone, LifeChanger positively impacted more than 140,000 young people across 600+ schools in Australia and New Zealand. This was achieved through practical, evidence-based workshops, digital resources for educators, and a scalable delivery model that trains and engages community mentors to support the program. Visit <https://www.lifechanger.org.au/>

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