

Growing Resilience Beyond the Scoreboard: LifeChanger Foundation Heads to Zespri AIMS Games

As thousands of young athletes prepare to compete at the Zespri AIMS Games in Tauranga this September, LifeChanger Foundation is bringing an important message to the sidelines: building mental fitness is just as important as physical performance.

Through its partnership with the Auckland FC Foundation, LifeChanger Foundation will be at Gordon Spratt Reserve throughout the Games, giving young athletes, teachers and whānau practical tools to build resilience, confidence, connection and wellbeing.

Leading the LifeChanger team will be **Mike den Heijer**, LifeChanger Foundation's New Zealand Program Manager and an OFC Pro League winner, who has experienced first-hand the highs, pressures and setbacks that come with elite sport.

For den Heijer, the opportunity to connect with young athletes at AIMS is about helping them understand that success extends well beyond the scoreboard.

“Winning championships is special, but helping a young person believe in themselves can have an impact that lasts a lifetime,” says den Heijer.

“Sport teaches us a lot about handling pressure, overcoming setbacks and backing yourself when things get tough. Those skills matter long after the final whistle, and that’s what we want to share with young people at AIMS.”

Building mental fitness alongside physical performance

LifeChanger's interactive marquee at Gordon Spratt Reserve will provide a space for young athletes to take a break from competition, connect with others and explore practical strategies for managing challenges both on and off the field.

Throughout the week, visitors can take part in fun activities, view AFC A-League and Oceania championship trophies, meet the LifeChanger team and hear insights drawn from sporting experiences and LifeChanger's youth wellbeing program.

With thousands of intermediate aged athletes attending the Zespri AIMS Games from across New Zealand, the event provides a unique opportunity to reach young people during an important stage of their development.

“Sport provides an incredible platform to teach young people about resilience, teamwork, confidence and purpose,” says den Heijer. “We want young people to leave AIMS not just with

memories of their competition, but with tools they can take back to school, home and their everyday lives.”

A growing movement for youth wellbeing

LifeChanger Foundation was founded in Australia in 2017 by former AFL player and coach Scott Watters, following his experience of seeing the growing need for preventative mental wellbeing support for young people.

Since expanding into New Zealand in 2022, LifeChanger has delivered wellbeing programmes to **more than 40,000 young people**, equipping rangatahi with practical skills to navigate challenges, build resilience and strengthen their connections.

“Our vision has always been to help young people realise their potential before they reach crisis point,” says Watters.

The partnership with Auckland FC Foundation reflects a shared commitment to using the influence and reach of sport to create positive change in the lives of young people.

Visit LifeChanger at AIMS

The LifeChanger Foundation team will be based at **Gordon Spratt Reserve, Papamoa, from 7–10 September**, throughout the Zespri AIMS Games.

Young athletes, teachers and whānau are invited to visit the LifeChanger marquee, take part in activities and discover practical ways to build mental fitness alongside physical performance.

Catch the LifeChanger team in action at the Zespri AIMS Games, 7–10 September at Gordon Spratt Reserve, Papamoa.

About LifeChanger Foundation

LifeChanger Foundation is a youth wellbeing organisation that empowers young people through strengths-based programmes focused on resilience, connection, self-belief and purpose. Founded in Australia by former AFL player and coach Scott Watters, LifeChanger has been operating in New Zealand since 2022.

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