

Local athletes bound for Special Olympics

JROTC raising funds for trip to summer games

By Max Sullivan

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EXETER — Two local athletes are bound for the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games this summer, and Winnacunnet High School JROTC cadets are raising money to pay their way.

Kora Kalfaoglu, 24, of Exeter, and Bayzil Moreau, 17, of Stratham, will compete in track events at the summer games in Seattle, set for July 1-6. Both have won gold medals at the state level summer Special Olympics held each year at the University of New Hampshire, and they will return to the state games in Durham this year as well.

WHS's Marine Corps JROTC cadets have since adopted the two athletes, meaning they have taken on the task of raising \$2,000 for each athlete to cover their travel expenses to Seattle. The cadets will hold a Walk for a Cause walkathon June 9 at WHS to help raise the funds, and they also hope to hold two dinner events at local restaurants.

Kalfaoglu and Moreau said they appreciate the support they are receiving from the WHS JROTC, and the cadets said they feel happy to connect with the athletes and help them on their journey.

"It makes you feel good to help other people," said Jesse James,

a junior JROTC cadet. "I've learned that."

More than 4,000 athletes and coaches from around the country go to the national games every four years, according to the Special Olympics USA Games website. The games showcase the abilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Kalfaoglu, an Exeter High School alum, has been running in the Special Olympics for the last 10 years. She has been given the nickname "Run like the Wind," saying her coach tells her to run like the wind when she competes. Last year, she took home gold medals in the 100-meter and 50-meter runs at

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the state Special Olympics at the University of New Hampshire.

"I am happy," said Kalfaoglu. "I feel lucky."

Moreau, a junior at EHS, started running last year and won gold in the 100-meter run at the 2017 state Special Olympics at UNH. He said he was inspired to run by Usain Bolt, the world record holder in multiple running events. He plans to try out for the EHS Blue Hawks track team next school year.

"I wanted to practice like him and try and get a lot of firsts," said Moreau, who goes by "Bolt" on his team.

Moreau said he likes running

because he loves "getting the arms going and the breeze of the wind."

He said the Special Olympics have helped him feel inspired in winning gold, as well as by becoming closer with others.

"I've overcome a lot of obstacles," said Moreau.

WHS JROTC has worked to raise money for the New Hampshire Special Olympics in the past, participating in the Penguin Plunge each winter. This year, JROTC instructor Lt. Col. Michael Antonio said his group was asked to help raise money for the summer games, and that led to a discussion about adopting Kalfaoglu and Moreau.

Some of the WHS cadets are familiar with the Special Olympics through their own personal experience.

Cadet Matt Pandt, 15, is preparing for the 100-meter dash, the softball throw, the 50-meter sprint and the standing broad jump in the state Special Olympics. He won a gold medal in figure skating in the state winter games. Tuesday, he was working with fellow cadet Jason Ramos, his peer trainer.

"It's made me stronger," said Pandt of the Special Olympics. "To be an athlete, to be strong when you compete, it kind of feels like you're being a part of something special."





The Winnacunnet MCJROTC has adopted two Special Olympians from New Hampshire, Bayzil “Bolt” Moreau, 17, of Stratham, second from left, and Kora “Runs like the Wind” Kalfaogln, 24, of Exeter, at far right, and are holding a Walk for a Cause Walkathon on June 9. Winnacunnet MCJROTC cadets include: Celeste Stanwood, left, Dascha Piotrowski, Jesse James, and Chloe Swanton. [RICH BEAUCHESNE/SEACOASTONLINE]