# LOWERING BARRIERS

**Achilles International (New Zealand) is a chapter of a worldwide organisation represented in over 70 countries, whose mission is to enable people with all types of disabilities to – participate in mainstream sporting and recreational events; promote personal achievement; enhance self esteem; and, lower barriers.**

Held each June in Central Park, New York, the Achilles International Hope and Possibility 5 Mile Race is an opportunity for people with and without disabilities, at all levels of fitness, to compete together in a mainstream event. Participants range from Paralympics hopefuls, to recently wounded veterans from Walter Reed Army Medical Centre, to severely disabled individuals taking part in their first athletic endeavour.

Achilles athletes have disabilities including amputations, paralysis, traumatic brain injuries, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and visual impairment. Each has the opportunity to be active and achieve – consistent with Achilles' mission that athletic success leads to increased aspiration in all areas of life.

The Hope and Possibility event in New York attracts 5,500 participants; upwards of 3,000 spectators; hundreds of volunteers and high profile celebrity guests. In 2010, Prince Harry was in attendance.

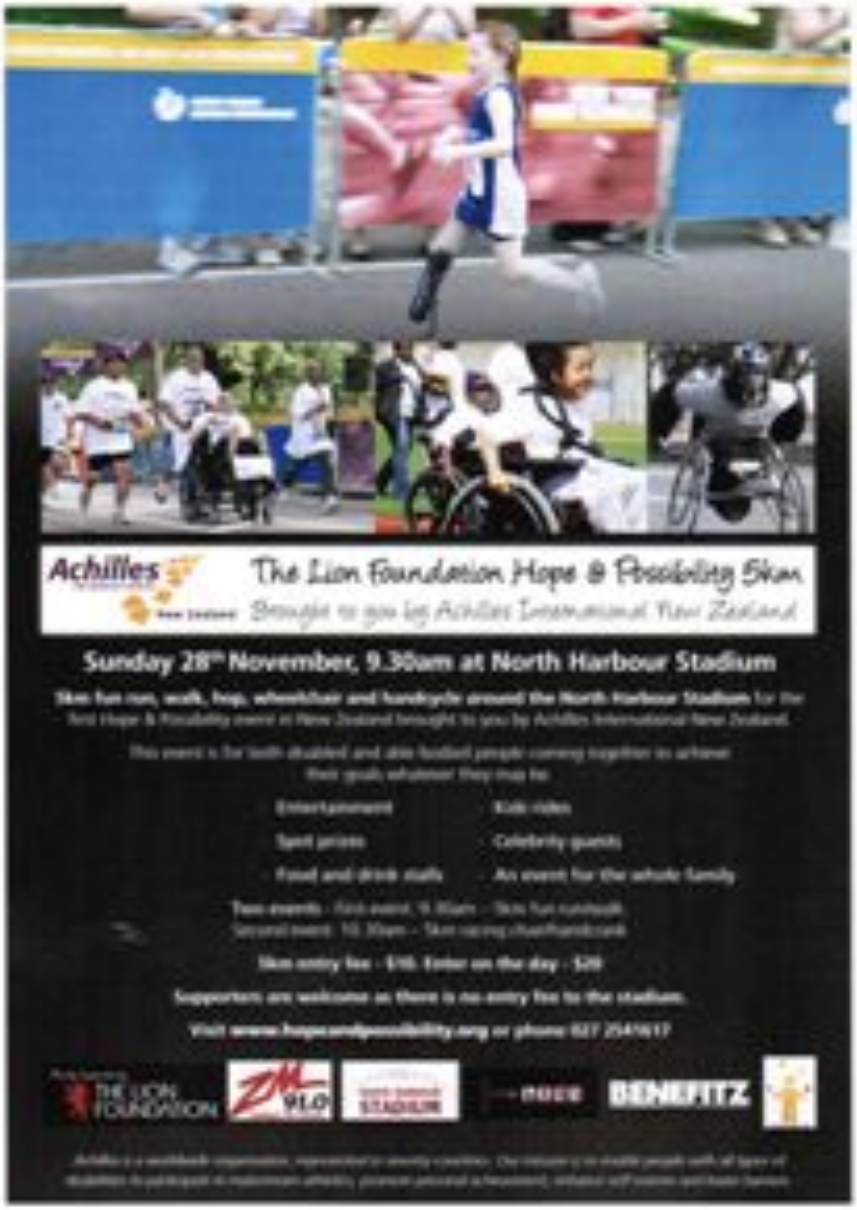
Inspired by Trisha Meili's best-selling memoir – *I Am The Central Park Jogger: A Story of Hope & Possibility* – the race has an inspirational message that appeals to a wide demographic. The first Hope and Possibility was held in 2002. There is also a Hope and Possibility in Madison, Wisconsin, and now the first ever International Hope and Possibility is being held right here at Albany Stadium on Sunday November 28th.

To coincide with Achilles New York, we are looking to create a Hope and Possibility fun run that can become a symbolic and festive closure to the completion of students' time in our Achilles Kids program.

The first Achilles Kids pilot program is running at Orewa College. We have the ability to focus on their strength, empower and motivate them to live life to the max! We believe (that when run successfully) Hope and Possibility and Achilles Kids programs can result in significant attitudinal changes towards people with disabilities. With the New Zealand census identifying that one in five New Zealanders are living with disability, any events that bridge the gaps of diversity have got to make the world a better place.

Achilles New Zealand is excited about our future and the change than can occur through the implementation of Hope and Possibility and Achilles Kids. Through seeing people with disabilities make tremendous gains physically, intellectually and socially through physical activities we want to see more people pushing their barriers, enjoying the outdoors and increasing their ability. Hope and Possibility and Achilles kids gives us the means to promote our vision and get more people partaking in our events and more people familiar with Achilles International.

Every time a person with a disability is recognised in the mainstream world as a full human being, that is a victory for humanity. And that is what Achilles is all about.

– Peter Luft,
Chairperson, Achilles International (New Zealand)
www.hopeandpossibility.org

*And another thing.... Trisha Meili, the Central Park Jogger who was raped, beaten and left for dead 20 years ago, initiated the 'Hope and Possibility' Fun Runs. Visit: http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/20/central-park-jogger-still-running-20-years-later/ »*