

First event exceeds expectations

By LIZ WILLIS

New Zealand's first Lion Foundation Hope & Possibility event has lived up to its name.

Organisers are buoyed by the turnout of 224 entrants to the North Harbour Stadium event on Sunday that gave people with a disability the chance to take part in a mainstream event.

At the first New York Hope & Possibility event 10 years ago 200 people took part.

Peter Loft, the president of organisers Achilles Track Club New Zealand, is proud even more people took part in this country's inaugural event.

The similar New York event now attracts 5000 and Mr Loft hopes the North Harbour Stadium event will reach that figure in less than 10 years.

The event promotes personal achievement and brings able bodied and disabled athletes together.

"It's about breaking down barriers. Once you take the time to get to know people

you don't see the disability. You don't see the wheelchair, you don't see the white cane," Mr Loft says.

It is also based on the ethos that where there's hope, no matter what your ability, there's possibility.

Entrants in the 5km event ranged from age four to 82. They came from all over Auckland and as far away as Whangarei and Hamilton and took part on bikes, in wheelchairs or running and walking.

For their efforts they were rewarded with a special medal.

Windy Ridge School won a prize of a camcorder for the most entrants taking part.

A crowd of about 100 watched the event and about 50 people gave support to the entrants, providing encouragement and a helping hand when needed.

Organisers are already planning for next year's event.

■ View more photos from Hope & Possibility at www.northshore.times.co.nz.



On your marks: Competitors set off at The Lion Foundation Hope.