



Amanda Fowler pictured competing for Australia in the 100 metre breaststroke event during the Oceania Paralympic Championships at the 2011 Arafura Games in Darwin. Image: Sport the library/Jeff Crow

## Amanda Fowler overcomes life's obstacles for London Paralympics

Amanda Fowler has been swimming since she was five and with just 10 years under her belt she is now heading for Paralympic glory after being named in the Australian Paralympic squad on Tuesday.

While Amanda has been intellectually disabled from birth, she hasn't let anything slow her down and gold at the 2012 London Paralympics is her next goal.

"It is an awesome thing that I am going there," Amanda said. "I've been swimming since I was five. I'm hoping to achieve a gold."

But while she does have gold in her sights, she does know how big an ask that will be. "I'll be shocked if I do get it," she said.

Regardless of whether she comes home sparkling with bling, 15 year old Amanda, who is descended from the Wemba Wemba and Guring-gai people of New South Wales, still has plenty of goals in her young life.

"I want to go all the way to Rio, the next Paralympics," Amanda said.

There are plenty of athletes in plenty of sports who are role models for young kids and Amanda sees herself as

By National Indigenous Times reporter Geoff Bagnall



a role model for children living with a disability.

"Definitely. I can tell them about my experience and what paths there are for being a Paralympian," she said.

Abled or disabled, many athletes will be competing in London with their families cheering from the stands but this may well not be the case for this young Aboriginal disabled swimmer.

Mother, Kate Fowler would love to get to London to see her daughter compete in her first Paralympics but being a fulltime student and now a single mother means she doesn't have the money to get there.

"I have to try and borrow the money to get there. It would be nice if local businesses or someone could get behind us and help me get there," she said.

"I am the only parent not going among the female swimmers and that will put a lot more pressure on Amanda to not have any family support there. They're going to be away for 34 days."

It's a long time for any 15 year old to be away at a competition and Kate

would love to be in London to support her daughter and cheer her on.

Despite that, Kate knows Amanda has achieved a lot and learned a fair bit of independence in the last couple of years.

"Last year she swam in Italy. This year alone she went to the Institute of Sport by herself, she went to Melbourne to compete in School Nationals, she went to Adelaide for the Paralympic trials, she went to the Oceania Paralympics. She has gained independence and social skills," Kate said.

"To see her get to this level is a huge achievement."

And it has been a huge achievement given the obstacles disabled people face in everyday life.

"Before a child with disabilities even gets to this level there are huge obstacles and barriers she has to overcome," Kate said. "They've got to learn how to swim to start with, you've got to get a coach, a swimming club, all these things that have to accept you, there are huge hurdles to get to this level."

"Going back a few years ago, she really struggled to learn to swim. It is a huge reward for sticking in there," Kate Fowler said.