

## Alum helps transplant patients be competitors

August 18, 2014 8:45 AM Joseph Halm

jhalm@tulane.edu



Kim Black, co-manager of Team Louisiana, encourages Smith McRae, 5, a liver transplant recipient, at the 2014 Transplant Games of America. (Photo from Kim Black)

One could say that Kim Black was a natural fit to become the co-captain of the 24-member Louisiana team at the 2014 [Transplant Games of America](#), held in Houston in July. Black, who received her Master of Social Work and a Master of Public Health with a focus on international health from Tulane University, is a heart transplant social worker at Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans. She was a 2000 Olympic Gold Medalist in the 4x200 freestyle swimming relay.

While at the University of Georgia, Black helped bring home three SEC and NCAA Championship swimming titles, and she was named NCAA Woman of the Year in 2001. So she knows a little something about athletic competition as well as about a very specialized field of social work.

Black said preparing the team's athletes, ranging in age from 5 to 68, was very rewarding.

“As a former swimmer, I know what it's like to be an underdog,” she said. “When I started swimming, I never thought I would make the Olympic team. As a social worker, some of my patients were so sick prior to transplant that they thought they are going to die, and now post-transplant, they're strong enough to be able to compete in an athletic event. It's really miraculous.”

Black also works with liver, lung, kidney and pancreas transplant patients at Ochsner. About 120,000 people are waiting on the national donor list, and 18 of those die every day.

“I've been at the bedside of patients who died waiting for an organ, because there just wasn't one available,” she said. “I'm passionate about spreading awareness about [organ donation](#) ? one organ, tissue and eye donor can save nine lives and affect the quality of life of up to 50 people.

“I know what it is to defy the odds and persevere when people think that something is impossible. To empower my patients to believe in themselves and to help their families believe in them is awesome.”

*Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.*