

# Challenges overcome by winners

Two of the most talked about United States athletes at the 2008 Olympics were swimmers Michael Phelps, winner of eight gold medals, seven World Records and one Olympic Record, and 41-year-old Dara Torres, winner of two silver medals and one American Record.

Their accomplishments in swimming were inspiring, as are the personal challenges that both had to overcome. Phelps suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder as a child and Dara Torres struggled with bulimia, an eating disorder, in her early years as a college student and competitive swimmer.

Attention deficit disorder is one of the most common mental disorders in children and adolescents, most often diagnosed before the age of seven. The disorder is characterized by a child's difficulty in attention, concentration and impulsivity. If left untreated, children are at risk of academic failure in school and being ostracized or teased by their



## high plains mental health

• plain sense

classmates. According to ADDitude Magazine (April/May 2007), Phelps was diagnosed at age nine. His mother said an inability to concentrate was his biggest challenge and that he would often impulsively grab other students' papers.

He did not enjoy reading and math did not sustain his attention. In fact, he did not like swimming at first because he "hated getting his face wet." Swimming eventually became his motivation for success, as it provided consistent structure for his busy days, an important component for a young person with the disorder.

With the support of his family and their ability to understand the

disorder and its treatment, Phelps was able to move beyond his behavior disorder and ultimately obtained his unprecedented success at the Olympics.

According to an article in the New York Times Magazine, June 29, 2008, Torres became bulimic during her college days at the University of Florida.

Bulimia is an eating disorder that is marked by episodes of binge eating, which is the consumption of large amounts of food during a short period of time, followed by inappropriate compensatory behaviors including purging the food by making oneself throw up or by abusing laxatives.

When left untreated, Bulimia frequently includes physical complications that negatively affect the heart, muscles and nerve functioning. Tor-

res describes purging as a method she used for keeping her weight down for competitive swimming. This eventually resulted in Poor health, fatigue and loss of strength, which affected her performance at the 1988 Olympics. She recognized her problem by then and comments that it took her five years, until 1992, to overcome the purging behaviors. Since then she has experienced success in athletics, as well as in her personal life as the mother of a two-year-old daughter.

Both Phelps and Torres have shown that a mental illness can be successfully overcome and that it does not have to define a person or limit their ability to succeed.

*Contributed by Ken Loos, MS, LMLP, LCP Prevention, Education and Outreach Department of High Plains Mental Health Center.*

*The views expressed here are those of the individual writer and should not be considered a replacement for seeking professional help.*

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## club news

### Sunflower 4-H June

The Parents meeting of the Sunflower 4-H Club was held at the United Methodist Church on Monday, June 16

The meeting was called to order by president Ginger Chadwick by saying the Flag salute and 4-H pledge. Eight members and five parents answered roll call of "What is your Favorite Movie." Keri Whittington led the club in singing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

After a brief business meeting, the parents presented the program. A project talk "How does your Garden Grow" was given by Connie Jo

Johnson.

The meeting adjourned by saying the club motto; our next meeting will be the club tour.

Refreshments were served by the Johnson Family.

### Club Tour

The Sunflower 4-H Club held its annual club tour on Tuesday, August 5th, at the fair grounds. The meeting came to order at 7 am with a roll call of "What is your Favorite Ride at the fair" answered by 15 members several parents, and one leader. Our club was in charge of the Flag Ceremony at the fair grounds.

During the walking tour, mem-

bers showed and told about their projects. Our club members won many ribbons and awards. Our club booth won Grand Champion.

Our next meeting will be Monday, August 18 at the United Methodist Church.

*Submitted by Jessica Johnson, reporter*

### August

The regular monthly meeting of the Sunflower 4-H club was held at United Methodist Church on Monday, August 18.

Roll call of "What grade are you in?" was answered by 11 members, 10 parents, one leader and two guests.

President Dusti Chadwick led the club in the Flag salute and the 4-H pledge.

Kinsey Volk led the club in singing "Home on the Range".

After a short business meeting, Kendra Promise gave a project talk on puppy care and Christopher Berls gave a project talk titled "Get ready to Ride" about the horseless horse project.

A brief recess was called while Sarah Johnson led the club in a fun game of "Simon Says".

Delicious refreshments were served by club leader Cris.

Submitted by Jessica Johnson, reporter

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