

The strong man

Rewarding the difference, through a grant from DCH

Meeting Samuel Solomi is something of a revelation. In a society when youth – young men in particular – are apparently running rampant, and we're all getting lazier and more overweight, it's difficult to reconcile a 20 stone, 19-year-old with more discipline and dedication than most people twice his age. He doesn't smoke, drinks one, maybe two pints only after competitions, doesn't eat chocolate or junk food and trains five times a week.

In case you're wondering, Samuel is training to be a strongman with aspirations to become the world's strongest man and with a British record for a left-handed gripper close, and support from Devon & Cornwall Housing Trust's grants programme, which helps support excellence, you wouldn't want to bet against him. And it's his grip that is his speciality; he can pinch grip 105kgs, or in other words, if a 16.5 stone person was hanging over a cliff, Samuel could hold on to them, he can also bend metal with his bare hands



It started at school with a desire to get bigger and stronger and become a body builder, but within a short space of time he met someone competing at strongman events and Samuel was hooked, entering his first competition at only 16 years of age. Even though he had never trained on the sort of equipment they use at these specialist competitions, he still managed to come 4th.

So, for the last four years, Samuel has trained (latterly in his own small gym, jointly run by Samuel and three other friends) five times a week doing squats, yoke walk, calf work, dead lifts, pressing, farmers walk and gripping. He and his friends all work full time jobs Samuel doing nights – just to support their aspirations to become strong men.

One of their biggest achievements so far, is the gym. It's fair to say, it's not what you would expect from a high street fitness centre, but then with some conventional clubs not having the right equipment and having rules such as no chalk (which people use to lift weights) and even no grunting, the friends decided to set up and develop a gym that genuinely supports, encourages and trains people interested in strong man.

It's not just about exercise either; the food he eats plays a huge part, and if you think it's just about eating huge quantities of food – any food – you'd be wrong. Samuel needs to eat approximately 7000 calories a day but he also needs to make sure the food he eats supports his intensive training and that he doesn't put on too much body fat.

So, on an average day he will eat and drink: 5 protein shakes, 10 eggs, 2 cans of tuna, 3 or 4 sandwiches (containing chicken or bacon) and large quantities of pasta, rice, couscous, oats and barley. He makes up his shakes – which aren't likely to be anything you'll find on Ready, Steady, Cook – his fat shake consists of oats, barley, protein powder, milk, eggs, peanut butter and chocolate powder, which Samuel claims is a good breakfast drink! Or to make sure he's eating enough tuna, how about a can of tuna, some squash and a bit of plain yoghurt blended to make another shake?

England rugby player Phil Vickery believes that if he leaves the field with any energy, he hasn't played to his potential. He wants to leave exhausted and know there was physically nothing more he could give and Samuel readily agrees, there's only one rule in this gym, and that's train hard. There are two types of motivation, negative and positive and you've got to be able to use both. You might have had a lousy day but instead of taking it out on other people, I come here and take out my aggression on the equipment and really push myself until I'm exhausted, that's negative motivation. Positive is when you come in thinking there's nothing you can't achieve, maybe because you did well at something, or have just had a good day. So you put all that positivity into doing even better in training than you did the day before.

Clearly to be able to succeed in this relatively unknown sporting discipline, (despite increasing worldwide TV coverage); you need to be able to use any mood and any motivation to always do your best.

Last year, Samuel was successful in applying for a grant from DCH to get him to Germany to take part in the world grip championship's where he came 4th; and the goal this year is to win the championship (this time held in Gloucester). The support I've received from DCH made a big difference. I want to be a British champion but equipment and travel all costs money. I use my experience and knowledge to help out other people who want to train and get fit as well because I believe if someone helps you, you've got to help others.

His mother wasn't at all surprised at his career choice, she cites his focus and determination as key reasons why he keeps doing so well.

The plans for the future include developing the gym, winning more competitions, becoming stronger and raising his profile and Samuel hopes to be doing some training soon with Terry Hollands, perhaps Britain's best known strong man.

It's undoubtedly a unique aspiration but what is also unique is the people who choose this sport: one that requires physical and mental toughness of a kind not usually associated with teenagers, which is essentially what Samuel still is.

Julie West who runs the Awards and Grants scheme said, The awards are about supporting people to excel. It doesn't have to be as dramatic as being able to bench-press 140 kgs! But as long as you can demonstrate that this will help you develop and achieve, then we want to receive your applications. It's also nice that in Samuel's case, he's blowing away a few stereotypes about young people not having any ambitions or motivation. We're really pleased that we've been able to support him and that he continues to make progress.

Each year Devon & Cornwall Housing Trust awards up to 10,000 to PHA & DCHA local groups and residents where financial assistance will help meet their aspirations and objectives, to find out more about the Community Investment Scheme contact your local housing officer or email the Resident Involvement Coordinator [Julie West](#) or call on 01752 229395