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July 6, 2011

Three local swimmers are racing successfully against the world's best competition at the Special Olympics.

Alex Buehlow, Erica Buehlow and Michael Heath are competing in Athens, Greece, the Olympics' birthplace, from June 25 to July 4.

The trip has already been a success. On the first day of competition, Erica earned Canada's first gold medal of the competition in the 800 metre freestyle.

Erica's girls relay team struck gold again, while Michael and Alex's 4×100 relay team came close, but were disqualified in the finals after another team member could not compete. Alex also took silver in the 1,500 metre freestyle.

The swimmers are members of Wilmot's Aquatic Aces swim club and earned a spot in Greece by winning regional, provincial, then national competitions. The qualifying process started four years ago.

"When we started the process a few years back, we said this would be the ultimate goal," said Joni Sanders, who coaches the swimmers with the ACES.

"I think they actually have a really good chance to do really well.

"They're having the time of their lives now."

Michael traveled to Holland last year to swim, while this is the first international competition for the Buehlows.

They have been in Greece since June 17 to train and acclimatize to the new location. The Special Olympics organization is taking care of all swimmers, paying for their travel costs and housing them in an Athletes' Village.

Each competitor is also given a cell phone, Team Canada bags, towels, bathing suits, and track suits.

The local swimmers join 7,500 Special Olympics Athletes from 185 nations are competing in 22 Olympic-type sports.

Keep checking the Independent's website and next week's print issue for more updates on the competition in Athens.