

General Orientation

Official Logo

The five figures represent Special Olympics' global presence...reaching and involving people around the world.



Special Olympics Inc.

Special Olympics Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for persons eight years of age and older with intellectual disability, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

Special Olympics Philosophy

Special Olympics is founded on the belief that people with learning disabilities can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy, and benefit from participation in individual and team sports. These must be adapted only as necessary to meet the needs of those with mental and physical limitations.

Special Olympics believes that consistent training is indispensable to the development of an individual's sports skills. In addition, competition among those of equal abilities is the most appropriate means of testing these skills, measuring progress, and providing incentives for personal growth.

Special Olympics Vision

The vision of Special Olympics is to help bring Special Olympics athletes into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected and given the chance to become useful and productive citizens.

Special Olympics Athlete's Oath

"Let me win; but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Biography

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, 1921-2009

As founder and honorary chairperson of Special Olympics and executive vice president of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Eunice Kennedy Shriver was a leader in the worldwide struggle to improve and enhance the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities for more than three decades.

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, the fifth of nine children of Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Eunice Mary Kennedy received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

Following graduation, she worked for the U.S. State Department in the Special War Problems Division. In 1950, she became a social worker at the Penitentiary for Women in Alderson, West Virginia, and the following year she moved to Chicago to work with the House of the Good Shepherd and the Chicago Juvenile Court. In 1957, Shriver took over the direction of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation.

The Foundation, established in 1946 as a memorial to Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.--the family's eldest son, who was killed in World War II--has two major objectives: to seek the prevention of intellectual disabilities by identifying its causes, and to improve the means by which society deals with citizens who have intellectual disabilities.

Under Shriver's leadership, the Foundation has helped achieve many significant advances, including the establishment by President Kennedy of The President's Committee on Mental Retardation in 1961, development of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development in 1962, the establishment of a network of university-affiliated facilities and mental retardation research centers at major medical schools across the United States in 1967, the establishment of Special Olympics in 1968, the creation of major centers for the study of medical ethics at Harvard and Georgetown Universities in 1971, the creation of the "Community of Caring" concept for the reduction of intellectual disabilities among babies of teenagers in 1981, the institution of 16 "Community of Caring" Model Centers in 1982, and the establishment of "Community of Caring" programs in 1200 public and private schools from 1990-2006.

Recognized throughout the world for her efforts on behalf of persons with intellectual disabilities, Shriver received many honors and awards, including: the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Legion of Honor, the Priz de la Couronne Francaise, the Mary Lasker Award, the Philip Murray-William Green Award (presented to Eunice and Sargent Shriver by the AFL-CIO), the AAMD Humanitarian Award, the NRPAS National Volunteer Service Award, the Laetare Medal of the University of Notre Dame, the Order of the Smile of Polish Children, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Freedom from Want Award, The National Women's Hall of Fame, the Laureus Sports Award, the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Theodore Roosevelt Award, and the International Olympic Committee Award.

Her honorary degrees included: Yale University, the College of the Holy Cross, Princeton University, Regis College, Manhattanville College, Newton College, Brescia College, Central Michigan University, Loyola College, University of Vermont, Albertus Magnus College, Cardinal Strich University, Georgetown University and Marymount University

On 24 March 1984, U.S. President Reagan awarded Shriver the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, for her work on behalf of persons with intellectual disabilities, and in,

2005 she was honored for her work with Special Olympics as one of the first recipients of a sidewalk medallion on The Extra Mile Point of Light Pathway in Washington D.C.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver died on Aug. 11, 2009. She is survived by her husband, Sargent Shriver, and five children: Robert Sargent Shriver III, Maria Owings Shriver Schwarzenegger, Timothy Perry Shriver, Mark Kennedy Shriver and Anthony Paul Kennedy Shriver.

In her opening address to the 4,000 athletes assembled at the opening ceremonies of the 1987 International Summer Special Olympics Games, Mrs. Shriver captured the meaning of Special Olympics when she said:

“You are the stars and the world is watching you. By your presence you send a message to every village, every city, every nation. A message of hope. A message of victory.

The right to play on any playing field? You have earned it.

The right to study in any school? You have earned it.

The right to hold a job? You have earned it.

The right to be anyone’s neighbor? You have earned it.”

History of Special Olympics

From a backyard summer camp for people with intellectual disabilities to a global movement, Special Olympics has been changing lives and attitudes for more than 40 years.

First Steps. Eunice Kennedy Shriver guided children with intellectual disabilities into sports at her Camp Shriver events, which were the predecessor to Special Olympics.

June 1962

Eunice Kennedy Shriver starts a summer day camp for children and adults with intellectual disabilities at her home in Maryland to explore their capabilities in a variety of sports and physical activities.

19-20 July 1968

The 1st International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. 1,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 U.S. states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

December 1971

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized to use the name “Olympics” in the United States.

5-11 February 1977

Steamboat Springs, Colorado, hosts the 1st International Special Olympics Winter Games with more than 500 athletes competing in skiing and skating events. CBS, ABC and NBC television networks cover the Games.

1981

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas (USA), where Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise funds for and increase awareness of Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now the movement's largest grassroots fundraiser, raising \$30 million annually.

September 1986

The United Nations in New York City launches the International Year of Special Olympics under the banner “Special Olympics—Uniting the World.”

October 1987

“A Very Special Christmas,” a benefit album featuring holiday music by top rock & roll performers, is released worldwide. Produced by Jimmy and Vicki Iovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, all proceeds benefit Special Olympics. More than 2 million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.

February 1988

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs a historic agreement with Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, in which the IOC officially endorses and recognizes Special Olympics.

July 1988

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is launched at the annual Special Olympics Conference in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. Bowling, volleyball and softball are the first sports to be included.

20-27 March 1993

The 5th Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in the beautiful Austrian cities of Salzburg and Schladming. These are the first World Winter Games held outside North America.

1-9 July 1995

A number of new initiatives make their debut at the 9th Special Olympics World Summer Games, including the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes® and Research and Policy Symposia, and, for the first time, people with intellectual disabilities serve as certified officials.

January 1997

Healthy Athletes becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health-care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screening, injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

20 July 1998

Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of 12 30th Anniversary Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers who travel the world as spokespeople for the movement for the next two years.

17 December 1998

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas from Washington D.C.”—marking the first time that the White House hosts a Special Olympics gala and the first time that artists from “A Very Special Christmas” album series gather together to perform. In 2000, President and Mrs. Clinton host “A very Special Christmas” for the second time.

2000

The “Campaign for Special Olympics” sets unprecedented goals to increase athlete participation by 1 million and to raise more than \$120 million over the course of the next five years, changing the face of the movement.

18-22 May 2000

As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” Arnold Schwarzenegger joins Special Olympics athletes to light the “Flame of Hope” at the Great Wall of China and launch the Special Olympics China Millennium March, kicking off the most ambitious growth campaign in the movement’s history. China pledges to increase its current number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

12-14 July 2001

Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City South Africa, host Special Olympics African Hope. Former President Nelson Mandela, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Special Olympics athletes gather to light the “Flame of Hope” and kick off the largest Law Enforcement Torch Run through the streets of Cape Town. The event generates awareness of the movement throughout the continent and marks the launch of a major growth initiative to reach 100,000 new athletes in Africa by 2005.

October 2001

Special Olympics develops and distributes SO Get Into It™ kits for students with and without disabilities to schools and teachers worldwide at no cost. The kit teaches young people about intellectual disabilities while empowering them to “be the difference” by learning values of inclusion, acceptance and respect.

19-20 July 2002

The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund partners with Special Olympics to host an annual birthday celebration for its founder and chairperson, former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and helps Special Olympics launch its Unified Sports® program.

21-29 June 2003

Ireland hosts the first Special Olympics World Summer Games to be held outside the United States. 5,500 athletes participate in this landmark event. It is the largest sporting event in 2003, capturing the hearts and imaginations of the Irish people.

20 June 2003

“The Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities” reports on how people across the world view the roles and capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities in the workplace, classroom and daily social life. The study is the most comprehensive ever conducted on this subject.

30 October 2004

U.S. President George W. Bush signs the “Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act,” which appropriates \$15 million per year over five years to fund the growth of Special Olympics and support initiatives that foster greater respect and understanding for people with intellectual disabilities. The signing marks the first time that Special Olympics secures support through legislation.

23 December 2005

“The Ringer,” a Farrelly Brothers film starring Johnny Knoxville, opens in theaters throughout Canada and the United States. The film includes appearances from more than 150 athletes. Its producers collaborate with Special Olympics to challenge destructive stereotypes and negative thinking about people with intellectual disabilities.

2006

Special Olympics surpasses its goal of doubling the number of athletes that participate worldwide to 2.5 million participants. With sports at the core, the movement stands as a leader in advancing rights and opportunities and policy change for its athletes in 165 countries worldwide.

10 June 2006

President and Mrs. George W. Bush host a tribute dinner at the White House to honor Special Olympics for its unprecedented growth over the past five years on the birthday of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

October 2007

The city of Shanghai, China, hosts the 12th Special Olympics World Summer Games, which are broadcast internationally on an unprecedented scale. These Games, with more than 7,500 athletes from 164 countries participating, are a historic moment in the movement’s history.

July 2008

Special Olympics celebrates its 40th anniversary as a true global movement, with almost 3 million athletes in more than 180 countries around the world.

February 2009

The Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, USA, draws nearly 2,000 athletes from close to 100 countries. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden visited and declared special needs advocacy “a civil rights movement.”

May 2009

The U.S. National Portrait Gallery unveils a historic portrait of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of Special Olympics. This historic painting is the first portrait the Gallery has ever commissioned of an individual who has not served as a U.S. President or First Lady.

11 August 2009

The founder of Special Olympics, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, dies at her family home in Massachusetts. Letters and messages celebrating her contribution to humanity poured in from world leaders and ordinary people around the world.

November 2009

“A Very Special Christmas 7” is released, infusing the Christmas record series with the energy and talent of a new generation of music stars.

History of Athlete Participation

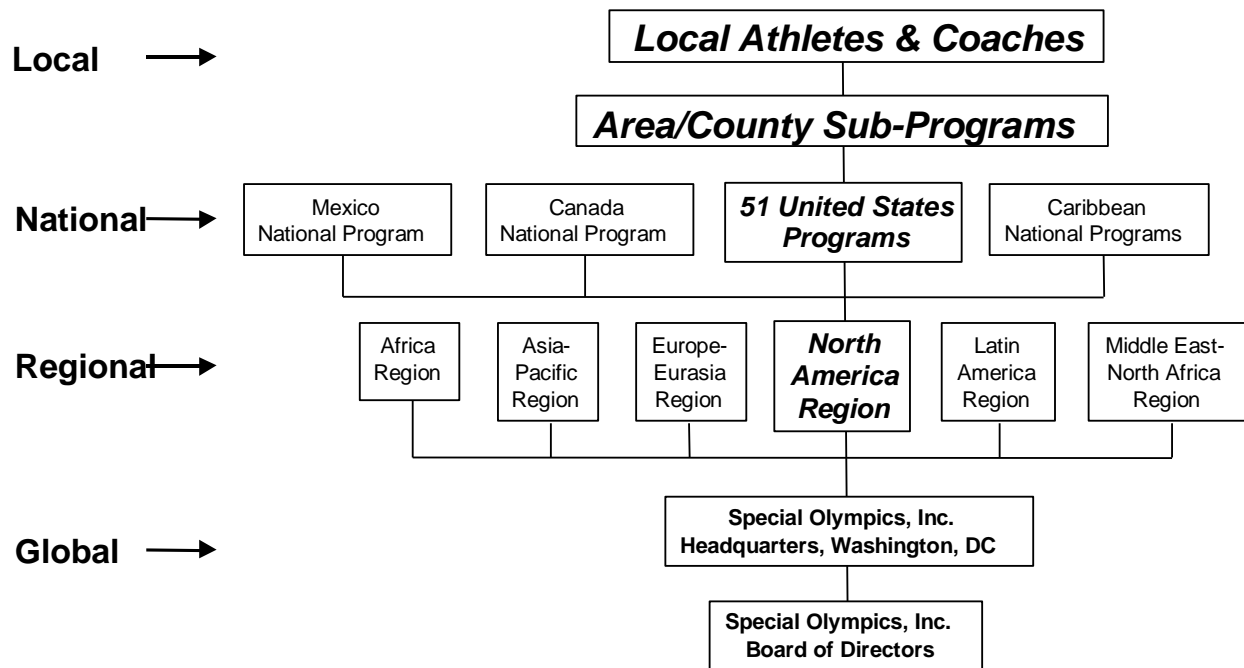
Special Olympics

2008	Over 3.2 million from over 170 countries, representing every continent
2000	About 1.2 million from over 156 countries
1990	750,000
1988	588,500
1968	1,000

Special Olympics Structure

Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI) is the world governing body of Special Olympics and is based in Washington, DC, USA.

SOI is responsible for accrediting Programs, worldwide, to conduct Special Olympics activities and programs. It also oversees the management of all World and Multi-National Games and coaching education. In addition, SOI provides support and collaboration in the development of materials, international conferences, and regional train-the-trainer seminars.



Roles for the Special Olympics Volunteer

Since Special Olympics is a sports organization, there are many opportunities and roles for a Special Olympics volunteer. For example, employees of a company can come as a team of volunteers with a local Special Olympics Program.

According to Points of Light Foundation, “Corporate volunteer programs advance strategic business goals, and, according to executives, significantly increase their company’s overall competitiveness in the global marketplace. Successful employee volunteer programs also motivate and provide training/skill building for their employees.”



Special Olympics Participants

Eligible to Participate in Special Olympics

Under the “Eligibility” section of the Official Special Olympics General Rules (Section 6.01), it states the following regarding “Eligibility for Participation in Special Olympics”:

- (a) **General Statement of Eligibility.**
Every person with an intellectual disability who is at least eight years of age is eligible to participate (train and compete) in Special Olympics.
- (b) **Age Requirements.**
There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age. An Accredited Program may permit children who are at least six years old to participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs offered by that Accredited Program, or in specific (and age-appropriate) cultural or social activities offered during the course of a Special Olympics event. Such children may be recognized for their participation in such training or other non-competition activities through certificates of participation, or through other types of recognition approved by SOI which are not associated with participation in Special Olympics competition. However, no child may participate in a Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday.
- (c) **Degree of Disability.**
Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities who meet the age requirements of this Section 6.01, regardless of the level or degree of that person’s disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities, so long as that person registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by these General Rules.
- (d) **Identifying Persons with Intellectual Disabilities.** A person is considered to have an intellectual disability for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any one of the following requirements:
 - (1) The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having an intellectual disability as determined by their localities; or
 - (2) The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or “IQ” testing or other measures which are generally accepted within the professional community in that Accredited Program’s nation as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay; or
 - (3) The person has a closely related developmental disability. A “closely related developmental disability” means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care). However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes, but may be eligible to volunteer for Special Olympics.
- (e) **Preserving Flexibility in Identifying Eligible Athletes.** An Accredited Program may request limited permission from SOI to depart from the eligibility requirements identified in subsection (d) above if the Accredited Program believes that there are exceptional circumstances which warrant such a departure, and so notifies SOI in writing. SOI will consider such requests promptly, but shall have the final authority in determining whether any departure or exception is appropriate.

Simply, the eligibility statement provides **access** to individuals with intellectual or closely related developmental disability or cognitive delay (about 2 years behind in school) to the program.

NOTE: Many Departments of Education no longer report students by level or intensity of service. They recognize 13 categories of disability of which intellectual disability/developmental disability is one; however, the state is non-categorical in its service delivery system.

There is *no maximum age limitation for participation* in Special Olympics. The *minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age*. Children 3-5 and 6-7 years of age may participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs such as Young Athletes Program, but may not participate in Special Olympics competition or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition. Such children may be recognized for their participation through certificates of participation.

All persons who are eligible to participate in Special Olympics training and/or competition programs must register to participate with their local Accredited Program.

Intellectual Disability*

What is intellectual disability / developmental disability?

How is intellectual disability / developmental disability expressed? What are some of the characteristics?

Individuals with a slower rate of learning and a limited capacity to learn (typically scoring lower than 80 on a standardized IQ test) are identified as having intellectual disability. Generally, they have a cognitive delay of two or more years. They may also walk and talk later, tend to be slightly shorter, and tend to be more susceptible to physical problems and illnesses.

In addition, such individuals may have difficulty managing the ordinary activities of daily living, understanding the behavior of others, and determining their own appropriate social responses. While having the same ranges of social behavior and emotion, they tend to have more frequent inappropriate responses to social and/or emotional situations due to difficulty generalizing information, difficulty in learning from past experiences, not fully comprehending what is expected of them, and lack of exposure to situations.

Intellectual disability is more common than most people think. On average, three percent of the population may have intellectual disability. However, only 1-2% of the population is actually receiving special services because of having intellectual disability.

- ◆ Of the population with intellectual disability, approximately 90% have mild disabilities and 10% have severe disabilities. Those with mild limitations may have a learning rate 40-70% of those without intellectual disability.
- ◆ Those with severe limitations may lag four or more years behind their peers on physical and motor test. In addition, they are usually are incapable of traditional schooling. They need to master basic life skills and communication skills.

* In different parts of the world, intellectual disability is referred to people who have:

- Mental handicap
- Mental impairment
- Developmental disability
- Mental retardation (“Spread the Word to End the Word”)

Participation of Persons with Down Syndrome and Atlanto-Axial Instability

There is evidence from medical research that up to 10% of individuals with Down syndrome have a malalignment of the cervical vertebrae C-1 and C-2 in the neck. This condition called *atlanto-axial instability* exposes individuals with Down syndrome to the possibility of injury if they participate in activities that hyper-extend or radically flex the neck or upper spine.

Special Olympics headquarters requires temporary restriction of athletes with Down syndrome who have *atlanto-axial instability* from participating in certain activities.

Prohibited activities include: butterfly stroke and diving starts in swimming, diving, pentathlon, high jump, squat lifts, equestrian sports, artistic gymnastics, football (soccer), alpine skiing, and any warm-up exercise placing undue stress on the head and neck.

Athletes with Down syndrome may be able to participate in the above sports if the athlete is examined (including full x-ray views of full extension and flexion of the neck) by a physician. This physician must have been briefed on the nature of the atlanto-axial instability condition and has determined (based on the examination) that the athlete does not have an *atlanto-axial instability* condition.

An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed by a physician as having an atlanto-axial instability condition may nevertheless participate in the sports identified above if:

- ✓ The athlete (or the parent if the athlete is a minor) confirms in writing his or her decision to proceed with these activities notwithstanding the risks created by the *atlanto-axial instability*;
- ✓ Two licensed medical professionals certify in writing that they have explained these risks to the athlete and his/her parent or guardian and that the athlete's condition does not, in their judgement, preclude the athlete from participating in Special Olympics;
- ✓ The statements and certifications are documented and provided to Accredited Programs using the standardized form approved by Special Olympics headquarters entitled "Special Release for Athletes with *Atlanto-axial Instability*" and any revisions of that form, approved by Special Olympics headquarters ("Special Release Concerning Atlanto-axial Instability").

Participation by Persons who Are Blood-Borne Contagious Infection Carriers

No Accredited Program or Games Organizing Committee may exclude, isolate, or discriminate from participation in any Special Olympics training or competition any athlete who is known to be a carrier of a blood-borne contagious infection or virus.

In view of the risk that one or more Special Olympics athletes may have a blood-borne contagious infection or virus, Accredited Programs and Games Organizing Committees shall follow the "Universal Blood and Body Fluid Precautions" for every exposure to any person's blood, saliva, or other bodily fluid during training and competition.

Facts about Intellectual Disability

Incidence

- Over 300 million worldwide
- 7.5 million in the United States

Prevalence

- 7 times more prevalent than deafness
- 9 times more prevalent than cerebral palsy
- 15 times more prevalent than total blindness
- 35 times more prevalent than muscular dystrophy

Classification of Limitations: Environmental Expression and Learning Characteristics

Mild (90%)

- Learn more slowly than peers
- Walk and talk later
- Generally slightly shorter
- More susceptible to illnesses
- More difficulties in appropriate behavior

Severe (10%)

- Usually incapable of traditional schooling
- Need to master life skills and communication skills

Causes of Intellectual Disability:

- Over 500 known causes
- Half have more than one causal factor
- Most prevalent known causes are fetal alcohol syndrome and iodine deficiency
- Most prevalent genetic cause is X-linked disorder
- Disorder can be biomedical, social, behavioral or educational

Sport Training and Competition

Uniqueness from Other Sports Organizations

Special Olympics is more similar than different from other sports organizations. However, it is important to identify the five areas that make Special Olympics unique. Per Official Special Olympics General Rules:

1. A variety of sports opportunities are provided for all ability levels.
2. Ability groupings are created through a process called divisioning to provide equitable competition (evenness) for all athletes within each ability grouping (division).
3. Awards are provided to all participants who compete.
4. The established criteria for athlete advancement to higher levels of competition is based on order of finish for each division and random draw.
5. Special Olympics does not charge a fee to athletes (or their families) to train or compete.

Official and Recognized Sports

Official Summer Sports (21)

Aquatics	Cycling	Roller Skating
Athletics	Equestrian	Sailing
Artistic Gymnastics	Football (Soccer)	Softball
Basketball	Golf	Table Tennis
Badminton	Judo	Team Handball
Bocce	Rhythmic Gymnastics	Tennis
Bowling	Powerlifting	Volleyball

Official Winter Sports (7)

Alpine Skiing	Figure Skating	Snowboarding	Speed Skating
Cross Country Skiing	Floor Hockey	Snowshoeing	

Recognized Sports (4)

Cricket	Netball
Kayaking	Floorball (Winter)

Special Olympics Competition Opportunities for Athletes of All Abilities

Special Olympics aims to provide a variety of competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities by offering official events of various degrees of difficulty and challenge.

The lowest ability athletes can participate in specially modified events such as the 25m Assisted Walk (athletics) or the 15m Flotation Race (aquatics). There are also events for athletes who use wheelchairs. The Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) provides participation for individuals with intellectual disability and disabilities requiring the greatest assistance and support.

In team sports, lower-ability athletes who are not yet ready for team play, can participate in Individual Skills Contests. For example, in football (soccer), athletes can earn medals for performing the skills of Dribbling, Shooting, and a Run-and-Kick event. Lower ability athletes may also participate in modified team events such as 3-on-3 basketball or 5-a-side football (soccer).

Most Special Olympics events have few differences from the sport played by individuals without disabilities. Higher ability athletes are now participating in events like the marathon, or in Unified Sports® events alongside athletes without disabilities.

Sports Rules

All Special Olympics competitions follow the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules. These rules have been adapted from official rules of the National Governing Body or International Federation of each sport. In addition, the Special Olympics Sports Rules Committee approves the rules. After approval, the rules are set forth in the Official Special Olympics Rules books (Summer and Winter).

Rules are based upon existing governing body and community sports organization rules in order to facilitate athletes' transition into the community or school sports activities.

Special Olympics Games and Competitions at All Levels

The Special Olympics Winter and Summer World Games, organized with assistance from Special Olympics, Inc. headquarters, provide an international showcase for Special Olympics athletes of all abilities. In addition, Accredited Programs will conduct State Games at least every two years. The true strength of the Special Olympics movement, however, is found at the local level where hundreds of thousands of athletes benefit every week from the challenge of high-quality competition.

Special Olympics Divisioning

Special Olympics organizes its competition so that, whenever possible, athletes compete against others of similar ability. This process is called divisioning.

Athletes or teams are divisioned (grouped) using the following basic procedure:

1. Divide by Gender: Male, Female or Combined (under some circumstances)

2. Divide by Age:	Individual Sports	Team Sports
	8-11	15 and under
	12-15	16-21
	16-21	22 and over
	22-29	30 and over
	30 and over	

3. Divide by Ability:

- ✓ Pre-competition information and scores are used to place individuals or teams into preliminary divisions.

- ✓ On-site preliminary events (timed heats or team observations) are conducted to verify or modify divisions for the final competition.
- ✓ In individual sports, the suggested is that the difference between the best time/score and the worst time/score within a final division should not vary by more than 10-15%.

4. Combining Groups:

- ✓ Age groups and/or males and females may be combined if this achieves a closer matching of ability.
- ✓ The minimum number of athletes or teams in a division is 3. The maximum is 8.

In many Accredited Programs, the numbers of participants are so low that divisioning becomes a tremendous challenge. In all instances, competition management personnel are charged with providing competition among those of equal abilities. Thus, ability is the overriding factor as long as there is no health or safety risk to athletes.

Honest Effort

According to the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules, “athletes are to participate honestly and with maximum effort in all preliminary trials and/or finals. The Sports Rules Committee at the competition shall disqualify athletes, who fail to do so from all remaining events.”

Criteria for Athlete Advancement to Higher Level Competition

The following describes how athletes can advance to the next level of Special Olympics competition (that is, from local Games all the way to Special Olympics World Games).

1. Athletes must have completed the minimum training requirements (including 10 hours within two months prior to a culminating competition) and competition experiences with a certified Special Olympics coach.
2. Training and competition experience must be in the same sport in which the athlete will be competing.
3. If quotas are limited, priority is given to first place finishers from all divisions of the sport/event based on eligibility requirements. If the number of first place finishers exceeds the quota, athletes are selected to advance by random draw.
4. If there are not enough first place finishers to meet the quota, all first place finishers advance. The remainder of the quota shall be met by random draw of the second place finishers. If the quota has still not been met, the process is repeated, adding each place of finish as necessary, until the quota is met.
5. An athlete shall not be barred from advancement due to prior competition experience. For example, an athlete shall not be prohibited from advancing to World Games solely on the basis that he or she competed in previous World Games.
6. Accredited Programs may establish additional criteria for advancement to higher-level competition based on behavior, medical, or judicial considerations. They may deviate from these

advancement procedures due to the size or nature of their Programs. Requests to deviate from the established procedures must be submitted in writing as follows:

- For advancement to Multi-National and World Games, Special Olympics headquarters will consider and approve or disapprove all requests.
- For advancement to competitions up to the National or Accredited Program level, the Accredited Program will consider and approve or disapprove all requests.

Proven Benefits of Special Olympics

Participation in sports brings significant benefits to people with intellectual disability and developmental disabilities of all ages and abilities. The following benefits also reflect benefits of sports for everyone.

Physical: Physical fitness along with increased coordination, cardiovascular fitness, and endurance.

Mental: Knowledge of rules and strategy along with increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and pride.

Social: Teamwork, interaction with peers and people without intellectual disability, opportunity to travel and learn about other places and interests, family pride, and increased community awareness and acceptance.

Dr. Elisabeth Dykens and Dr. Donald Cohen recently verified the above benefits in their study entitled “Effects of Special Olympics International on Social Competence in Persons with Mental Retardation.” In February 1996, this study was published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (Volume 35, Number 2). However, other studies dating back to the middle 1960s also verified the above benefits.

The results for the athlete included:

- A richer, more rewarding life
- Improved skills and confidence that apply to school, work, home and social life, and
- Leadership opportunities

These are the reasons why Special Olympics puts so much emphasis on *consistent training, fair competition, and the importance of the coach.*

In addition, Special Olympics enhances school and community involvement. Such involvement includes:

- Interaction with others through a common interest in sports
- Development of lifetime sports and skills
- Participation in community-based facilities
- Information and awareness through public education
- Media exposure
- Opportunities to be involved in leadership roles such as speakers, coaches, competition management personnel, Board Members, etc. (Athlete Leadership Programs)
- Development of Young Athletes Program
- Development of Healthy Athletes Program

Challenges and Opportunities for Special Olympics

2010 marks the 42nd Anniversary of the Special Olympics Movement. The organization has more than four decades of remarkable successes behind it but still has many challenges ahead.

Goals for the Special Olympics program worldwide include the following:

1. Strengthen Special Olympics at the local and national levels, both programmatically and financially.
2. Expand the number of athletes participating in the program at all levels.
3. Develop the quality of sports expertise involved in the management of Special Olympics at all levels.
4. Enhance the quality of coaching education by improving materials and training programs.
5. Offer additional training opportunities for athletes through camps, home training programs, Partners Clubs® and other training initiatives.
6. Enhance the quality of competitions within an Accredited Program, particularly at the local level.
7. Expand Special Olympics Unified Sports® participation and competitive opportunities.
8. Expand the Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) to bring Special Olympics opportunities to more athletes with the severest disabilities.
9. Explore the possibilities for additional competition opportunities above the national level.
10. Continue the active participation of Special Olympics Accredited Programs in the growth and development of the worldwide family of Special Olympics.
11. Expand the number of trained volunteers at the local level and the number of family members supporting their athlete.
12. Activate youth to be involved and to drive advocacy as well as participation in Unified Sports® and inclusive experiences.

Athlete Protective Behavior

Protecting Special Olympics Athletes

To achieve the mission of Special Olympics, those responsible for supervising Special Olympics athletes in both training and competition must take positive steps to protect athletes as well as other participants.

Screening of staff and volunteers is but one part of our responsibility to protect Special Olympics athletes. Screening is never 100% reliable, therefore, we need to institute additional measures designed to protect athletes while they are in our care.

Below are suggestions for strategies to protect athletes when participating in Special Olympics activities. These procedures are founded in common sense. You will also note that in most respects they reflect the same precautions that would need to be taken to protect any group of vulnerable individuals irrespective of whether they have developmental disabilities.

Preventing Physical Abuse

- Corporal punishment including spanking, hitting, slapping, or other forms of physical disciplining will not be used by Special Olympics staff or volunteers.
- When assisting athletes with bathing or showers, volunteers and/or staff will check the temperature of the water to ensure that it is not too hot.
- Coaches and volunteers will not withhold water or food from athletes as a form of punishment. Water should be available for athletes during strenuous practice sessions and during competitions to avoid dehydration.
- Only medications that have been prescribed by an athlete's physician will be dispensed to that athlete as indicated on his or her consent form signed by either a parent or legal custodian.

Preventing Emotional Abuse

- At no time will coaches or other volunteers use profanity or otherwise curse at athletes for their performance or behavior during competition or practices.
- Special Olympics staff and volunteers will treat all athletes with courtesy and respect. It is not in keeping with the purposes of Special Olympics to use denigrating or demeaning nicknames for athletes or to permit their use by others.
- Special Olympics athletes will not be threatened or intimidated for any purpose including attempts at improving athletic performance or for controlling behavior. Discipline techniques will be constructive and positive.

Preventing Sexual Abuse

- Whenever possible, in order to protect both athletes and volunteers, there should be at least two adult volunteers present to supervise activities such as changing into team uniforms, showering, and toileting. When it is necessary for a staff member or volunteer to speak privately to an athlete, they should find a place out of earshot, but within sight of others for their conference.

- Physical contact is important for normal human development. Hugs can be especially important to reinforce the positive nature of athletic competition for those who come in first as well as last. Hugs between Special Olympics athletes and volunteers should be open (not secretive) and respect the limits set by the athlete. The staff and volunteers must respect any resistance by the athlete to physical contact.
- Remember that hugging is an activity involving more than one person and respect for boundaries must be mutual for all parties. There may be times that volunteers or staff feel uncomfortable with physical contact with an athlete. Often, this discomfort has nothing to do with the athlete but more to do with the amount of physical contact and expressions of affection to which the individual is accustomed and comfortable.
- Special Olympics staff members and volunteers should avoid touching areas normally covered by swimming suits: breasts, buttocks and groin. Kissing on the lips and seductive massaging is not permitted (massaging pursuant to an injury or strain is permitted, but should be subject to observation by others).
- Special Olympics staff and volunteers should be positive role models and help Special Olympics athletes develop appropriate boundaries for physical contact. There may be times that an athlete will attempt inappropriate physical contact with a volunteer, staff member or another athlete. In such cases, the volunteer or staff member should identify the objectionable behavior, explaining that it makes the volunteer feel uncomfortable and that a better way would be to shake hands, do “high five,” or use some other more socially acceptable form of expression.
- Staff and volunteers need to be very specific about both the behavior that is troublesome as well as alternate ways to express the emotions that the athlete feels.
- When Special Olympics events require athletes to stay overnight, sleeping arrangements should take into consideration the gender and developmental levels of the athletes. Male and female athletes require separate accommodations. Athletes should also be assigned sleeping rooms with athletes of similar size and intellectual functioning.
- In Partners Clubs® and Unified Sports® Programs, athletes normally are assigned to share sleeping quarters with their partners or counterparts. To compensate for the increased opportunities for inappropriate conduct, Special Olympics suggests that all athletes in these situations be educated about inappropriate physical contact and whom to inform if infractions occur.
- In order to monitor Special Olympics athletes anytime they are in their quarters, hall monitors should be assigned on a rotating basis. They are responsible for keeping athletes in their own rooms, addressing needs of athletes that may arise and keeping unauthorized individuals out of athletes’ sleeping quarters. Room checks should be on a random basis so that Special Olympics athletes will not recognize a pattern.
- Consideration should be given to assigning teams consisting of male and female staff or volunteers as hall monitors, with men responsible for checking the rooms of male athletes and women responsible for the female athletes. Each team should work for an hour or two before being relieved by the next team.
- Special Olympics staff, with the assistance of volunteers, should know where athletes are at all times while the athletes are in the care and custody of Special Olympics.

- Special Olympics personnel should clearly explain the rules of behavior to the athletes before each road trip. Language used should be simple but explicit.

Responding to Signs / Allegations of Abuse

Legal

1. *Report* any reasonable suspicion (one based upon observation or disclosure) of any form of abuse or neglect must be *immediately to Special Olympics Program's Executive Director or representative*.
2. Many states have *an immunity provision* for people who report suspected abuse which is based upon observation or disclosure.

Special Olympics Program

1. You will be asked to *complete a Special Olympics Incident Report* as soon as possible. Special Olympics Program staff will contact the police and/or Child/Adult Protective Services.
2. Special Olympics Program will *immediately suspend the alleged abuser's contact and involvement in all Special Olympics activities* until the allegations are investigated.
3. In addition, Special Olympics staff will contact the *appropriate protective services agency*.
4. If the media contacts you, refer them to the Special Olympics Program Executive Director. Do not comment to the media or anyone else about the alleged incident. The *Special Olympics representative* will be the **only** spokesperson to the media.