



Our story



Special Olympics

Be a fan.



The Mission of Special Olympics

is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, 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 Through the Years

June 1963

Eunice Kennedy Shriver begins a summer day camp at her home in Maryland for children with intellectual disabilities to realize their capabilities in sports and physical activities.

July 1968

The first International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. A thousand individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

December 1971

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval to use the name "Olympics" in the United States.

February 1977

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

June 1981

The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas, USA, after Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise awareness for Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now the Movement's largest grassroots fundraiser, raising nearly \$40 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 performers is released worldwide. Produced by Jimmy and Vicki Iovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, all proceeds benefit Special Olympics. More than two million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.

February 1988

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs an 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. Athletes with and without intellectual disabilities compete side-by-side in bowling, volleyball and softball.

March 1993

The Fifth Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in the Austrian cities of Salzburg and Schladming, the first World Winter Games held outside North America.

July 1995

A number of new initiatives make their debut at the Ninth Special Olympics World Summer Games in New Haven, Connecticut, including the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes® and Research and Policy Symposia. For the first time, individuals with intellectual disabilities serve as certified sports officials.

July 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 screenings; injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

July 1998

Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of the Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers, 12 athletes who travel the world as spokespeople for the Movement.

December 1998

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary 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 the “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.

May 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.

May 2000

As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” the Special Olympics China Millennium March is launched; the Movement’s most ambitious growth campaign in history. China pledges to increase its current number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

July 2001

The South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City host Special Olympics African Hope. President Nelson Mandela returns to Robben Island with Special Olympics athletes to light the “*Flame of Hope*” and kick off the Law Enforcement Torch Run® through the streets of Cape Town. The event generates awareness of the Movement throughout the continent and launches a major growth initiative to reach 100,000 new athletes in Africa by 2005.

May 2002

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

July 2002

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

June 2003

Ireland hosts the first Special Olympics World Summer Games held outside the United States. With 5,500 athletes participating, it is Ireland’s largest sporting event of the year, capturing the hearts and imaginations of an entire nation.

June 2003

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

October 2004

U.S. President George W. Bush signs the “Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act,” which authorizes \$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 of the bill marks the first time that Special Olympics secures support through legislation.

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 Special Olympics athletes. Its producers collaborated with Special Olympics to challenge destructive stereotypes and negative thinking about people with intellectual disabilities.

December 2005

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

June 2006

In celebration of the 85th birthday of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver, President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush host a tribute dinner at the White House to honor Special Olympics.

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 major milestone in the Movement's history.

May 2009

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

August 2009

The Movement mourns the loss of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver who died surrounded by her family in Massachusetts. Letters and messages celebrating her contribution to humanity pour in from world leaders and everyday people around the world.

November 2009

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

June 2010

The Special Olympics Global Congress is held in Marrakech, Morocco, bringing together hundreds of Movement leaders from countries around the world to chart the next five years of work.

July 2010

Special Olympics athletes from across the globe play alongside football legends and other celebrities in a Unified Football match at the Greene Point Stadium in Cape Town, South Africa, before the FIFA World Cup Quarter Final.

September 2010

The first Eunice Kennedy Shriver Day is held in countries around the world to celebrate the vision of the founder of Special Olympics and to accelerate the momentum of the Special Olympics Movement.

December 2010

Movement leaders release the Special Olympics Strategic Plan 2011-2015, a visionary document that will guide the Movement's growth over the next five years.

January 2011

The Special Olympics Movement mourns the death of Sargent Shriver, husband of late founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Chairman of the Board Emeritus. Shriver served as president of the Movement from 1984 through 1996 and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors from 1990 to 2003.

June-July 2011

The 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games are held in Athens, Greece. 7,000 athletes from around the world gather to compete in the birthplace of the Olympics—demonstrating to the world just how far the Movement has come.



“The work of Special Olympics is very important for people with disabilities, but in reality, it has an important role in the comprehensive development of humanity around the world.”

—Hu Jintao, President of the People’s Republic of China

Our Values

SPORTSMANSHIP WITH JOY

We believe in the transformative power of sports. We embrace the purity of sports at all levels as we witness incredible personal athletic triumphs that shatter stereotypes.

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

We empower athletes to be contributing and respected members of Special Olympics and society. We support athlete-leaders on and off the field.

UNITY

We are united in our commitment to inclusion, respect and dignity. We build communities of acceptance: loving families, inspired employees, coaches, volunteers and fans. We are one Movement, across nearly every community and country.

BRAVERY

We live our athlete oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

PERSEVERANCE

We are capable, tenacious, and resilient. We don't give up on ourselves or each other.

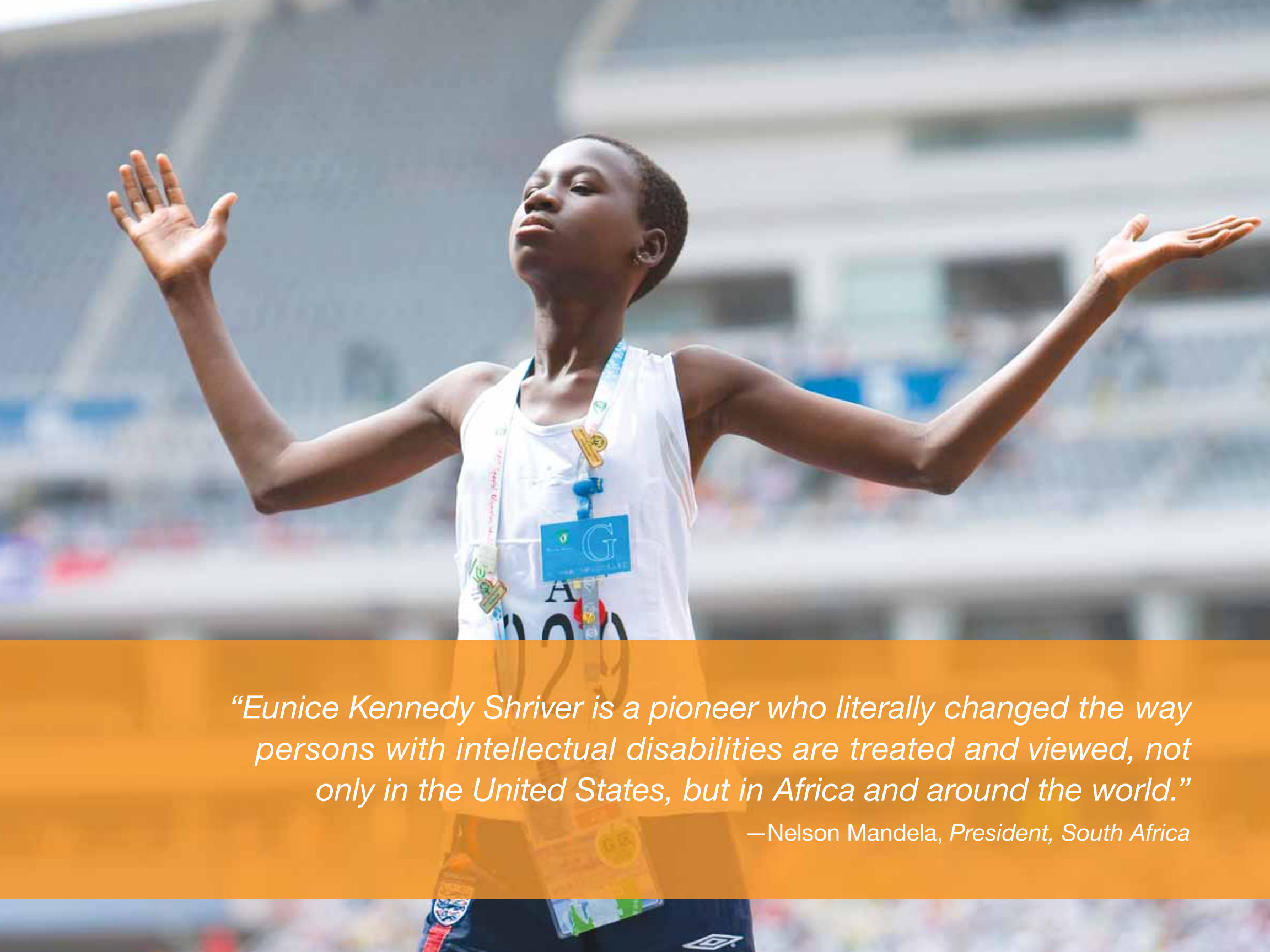




Special Olympics' Impact

With millions of friends, family members, coaches and fans driving the Movement worldwide, **Special Olympics is forever changing the way individuals with intellectual disabilities are perceived and treated.**

- With nearly four million athletes participating worldwide, Special Olympics has created the world's largest sports community for people with intellectual disabilities, helping to improve the health, self-esteem and self-confidence of all who participate.
- Special Olympics is the world's largest public health organization for people with intellectual disabilities, providing access to free health services for a population with many unmet needs. For many athletes in the developing world, Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® screenings are the first time they've ever even seen a doctor.
- By garnering the support of political leaders across the globe, Special Olympics has influenced policies that have resulted in better health, education and employment opportunities for individuals with special needs.
- Special Olympics' educational programming leverages sports as a platform to teach acceptance and inclusion to young people around the world. Young people are now leading the charge to create more accepting and inclusive communities that welcome people with intellectual disabilities.



“Eunice Kennedy Shriver is a pioneer who literally changed the way persons with intellectual disabilities are treated and viewed, not only in the United States, but in Africa and around the world.”

—Nelson Mandela, President, South Africa



“If I can train for 15 weeks for a marathon, I can do just about anything.”

—Billy Quick, Special Olympics athlete

Advancing Sports Excellence For All

The universal power of sports
is at the heart of Special Olympics

Special Olympics provides millions of athletes with intellectual disabilities in more than 170 countries the opportunity to experience the power of sport. Sports are understood and celebrated by all people, regardless of race, nationality, gender, economic level or religion.

Special Olympics offers 32 different sports training and competition opportunities to athletes ranging from eight to over 80 years old. Special Olympics sports bring out pride, courage and joy in athletes—while inviting families and entire communities to join in the celebration.

OFFICIAL SUMMER SPORTS

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

OFFICIAL WINTER SPORTS

Alpine Skiing, Cross-Country Skiing, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey, Short Track Speed Skating, Snowboarding, Snowshoeing

RECOGNIZED SPORTS

Cricket, Floorball, Kayaking, Netball

Additionally, the Special Olympics **MOTOR ACTIVITY TRAINING PROGRAM** is designed for athletes with more profound intellectual disability who are unable to participate in Official Special Olympics sport competitions because of their skill and/or functional abilities.



"I firmly believe that the [2003 World] Games have left an indelible mark, not just on those of us involved, but also on the country as a whole. I am certain they will lead to great developments in the future."

—Brian Crowley, Member of the European Parliament

Advancing Sports Excellence For All

YOUNG ATHLETES™

The Special Olympics Young Athletes™ initiative introduces young children with intellectual disabilities ages two through seven to the world of Special Olympics by engaging them in active play. Teachers and relatives of participating children report gains in children's social and motor skills, adaptive behavior (self care, community, self-sufficiency, etc.), communication and cognitive development.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS®

Unified Sports® places individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) side-by-side on competitive sports teams. As the fastest growing sports initiative within Special Olympics, Unified Sports has been shown to raise the self-esteem of all participating athletes—with and without intellectual disabilities.

REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL GAMES


Special Olympics competitions are played on courts, in fields and inside gymnasiums more than 136 times a day, 365 days a year, in nearly every country in the world. These competitions vary in size from single sports championships hosted by local Programs, to larger Provincial, State, National and Regional Games.

WORLD GAMES

Every two years, the world transcends the boundaries of geography, nationality, political philosophy, culture and religion to come together for the Special Olympics World Games. Alternating between Summer and Winter Games, these are flagship events for the Special Olympics Movement. Featuring more than a week of grueling yet inspiring international competition among thousands of athletes, the World Games are viewed by millions across six continents and more than a half-million spectators including world leaders, celebrities and dignitaries.

Special Olympics World Games have triggered positive changes in the treatment and perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities. For example, the Irish government rewrote its antidiscrimination statutes after the 2003 World Summer Games were held in Dublin. And as a direct result of winning the rights to host the 2007 World Summer Games, Shanghai began operating a network of "Sunshine Homes" that provide vocational training for people with intellectual disabilities.

Whether a country plays host to individual sporting events, State or National, Regional or World Games, each competition gives the athletes involved a chance to share their spirit and skills with the community.

A large, diverse group of people, many with intellectual disabilities, are shown in a crowd, cheering and raising their hands. They are wearing lanyards and some are wearing blue shirts. The background is a red wall with a white sign that says "Unity".

“Because of Special Olympics, I feel my son has every opportunity to improve as a person. Special Olympics has widened the horizon for him and has given me a broader outlook as a mother of a child with intellectual disabilities.”

—Dr. Emma Dira-Mendoza, mother of Special Olympics Philippines athlete Ritchie Mikhail

Building Communities

Special Olympics creates communities
of support everywhere it goes

Through the training and competitions, Special Olympics becomes a vehicle for bringing people together. The Special Olympics Movement creates opportunities for families, community members, local leaders, businesses, law enforcement, celebrities, dignitaries and others to band together to change attitudes and support athletes. **When communities around the world support Special Olympics, it can add up to monumental changes.**

“Every time I come away from a Healthy Athletes event, I am pumped up and ready to change the world. Healthy Athletes helps athletes achieve great things they never thought possible—on and off the playing field.”

—Dr. Matthew Holder, MD, MBA, Executive Director of the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry and Healthy Athletes Global Medical Advisor



Building Communities

PROJECT UNIFY®

Young people are among the most open-minded audiences for social change. Using sports as its platform, Project UNIFY® is a dynamic collaboration between Special Olympics and school communities that engages young people with and without intellectual disabilities to promote attitudes and behaviors of acceptance and inclusion in schools. Project UNIFY builds and strengthens partnerships between local Special Olympics Programs and participating schools to create “Project UNIFY Schools.” Through Project UNIFY, young people with and without intellectual disabilities are truly integrated, playing side-by-side on sports teams and coming together to discuss topics such as reversing negative stereotypes.

HEALTHY ATHLETES®

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® is the world’s largest public health program for people with intellectual disabilities—a population that faces dramatically greater health issues than others, yet frequently receives inadequate care or no care at all. At Healthy Athletes events, volunteer healthcare professionals provide athletes with free screenings and services in seven clinical areas. Active in more than 100 countries, the program conducts nearly 200,000 screenings every year, gives referrals for follow-up care and provides tens of thousands of health-related products like prescription eyewear and hearing aids.

By training more than 16,000 healthcare professionals and students annually on the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities, the impact of Healthy Athletes extends far beyond the athletes seen at events. These volunteers return to their schools and medical practices with the knowledge, experience, and desire to better treat people with intellectual disabilities and become forceful advocates for meeting their needs.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Special Olympics provides a positive venue for families to become part of a caring community, and to become involved in the Movement. Family members recruit new athletes, coach teams, transport athletes, raise funds, officiate games, chaperone events and train other volunteers. They also play the important role of leading Family Support Networks and hosting Family Forums to support families who are new to the organization. In addition, increasingly families are speaking out in the community to raise awareness of the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

RESEARCH AND POLICY

Special Olympics is the leader in cutting-edge research and evaluation to better understand the many challenges faced by people with intellectual disabilities and the significant impact of Special Olympics on their lives. This independent research is also a driving force for realizing improved policies, laws and rights for people with intellectual disabilities around the world. Our health database is the largest in existence that focuses specifically on people with intellectual disabilities and the information is used for critical research into the healthcare needs of this population and informing policy.

Special Olympics experts and consultants speak at international, regional, and local levels all over the world to advise policy makers, testify in hearings, and present scientific and educational materials documenting the needs of people with intellectual disability. This work has resulted in signed Memoranda of Understanding with national governments, brought about improvements in national healthcare policy and secured local government funding for health programs.



“Because of Special Olympics, I am someone. I am a different person. I have a new focus. When I go back to my country, people see me as a great person. Special Olympics has done this.”

—Florence Nabayinda, Special Olympics Athlete and Former Board Member, Uganda

Changing Attitudes

Challenging mindsets
and smashing stereotypes

Perceptions and attitudes matter. That's why Special Olympics is the world's leading voice in elevating awareness of the needs and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. Sports are at the heart of the Special Olympics experience, but our ultimate goal is to use stories of athletes' achievements, skills and challenges to change attitudes. Those who witness the accomplishments of athletes cannot help but think differently about long-held stereotypes and prejudices. **Through Special Olympics, people are reminded that we are all more alike than different.**



“Passing a ball across a court or running down a field side-by-side teaches tolerance and acceptance in a way that is rarely achieved inside a classroom.”

—K. Riordan, Special Olympics Unified Team Coach

Changing Attitudes

“SPREAD THE WORD TO END THE WORD®” CAMPAIGN

The “Spread the Word to End the Word®” Campaign is a grassroots effort to get people around the world, including the entertainment industry, to stop using the “R-word” (“retard” and comparable words in different cultures). The campaign targets students through school events and social networking, inviting them to sign an online pledge and spread the word on their campuses. To date, nearly 250,000 people have taken the online pledge while millions around the world have signed petitions, displayed banners and taken oaths to stop hurtful language and banish prejudices.

<http://r-word.org/>

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Athlete Leadership Programs train Special Olympics athletes to hold meaningful roles as public speakers, board members, sport officials, coaches, photographers and more. By participating in the Special Olympics Movement as leaders, not just recipients of services, athletes help shape the public’s perceptions about what they can do and gain skills that help them excel off the playing field.

http://specialolympics.org/athlete_leadership.aspx

GET INTO IT®

To educate, motivate, and activate all youth to be agents of change, schools in more than 75 countries around the world use the Special Olympics Get Into It® curriculum. Get Into It is a K-12 service-learning curriculum designed to promote acceptance and understanding of people’s differences, motivating them to become advocates for and together with all people. Get Into It has been translated into 23 languages and has reached more than 4.5 million students in general education classrooms. The full curriculum, as well as a variety of interactive web-based components are available for free online.

<https://getintoit.specialolympics.org>



“A rewarding life is full of challenge, so do not pity me. Give me a chance!”

—Thomas Gatu, Special Olympics Kenya Athlete

Our Supporters

LEADING THE CHARGE TO A BETTER WORLD FOR ALL PEOPLE

The values for which Special Olympics stands are universal, cutting across all sectors of society in all cultures. That is how Special Olympics has attracted a diverse community of fans, including political leaders, celebrities, Fortune 500 executives, civic leaders, professional athletes, teachers, law enforcement officers and a legion of committed volunteers.

CORPORATE SUPPORTERS

Corporate partners are essential in helping Special Olympics fulfill its mission. Through their generous contributions of cash, in-kind donations of products and services, volunteers and awareness, we are able to share the power of sport with the world. Our corporate team works with companies of all sizes with a solid history and strong brand image, including The Coca Cola Company, Procter & Gamble, Bank of America, Mattel, Hilton and Safeway among others.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS

Special Olympics has excellent working relationships with governments and governmental agencies around the world. For example, Special Olympics is working with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability to create more employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In Europe, the European Union is supporting the development of Special Olympics Programs across the 27 E.U. Member States.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

Special Olympics has deep relationships in the communities where it works. One of our most cherished partnerships is with 85,000 members of the law enforcement community who participate in grassroots fundraising and awareness events called the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics, which raises nearly \$40 million annually for the Movement. “A Very Special Christmas,” a partnership with the recording industry, has raised nearly \$100 million for the Movement and helped to launch Special Olympics Programs in countries such as Russia, Kenya, and China. Another important partnership is with the Lions Clubs International Foundation, which has raised \$10 million to provide prescription eyewear to more than 200,000 athletes around the world.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

Millions of people across the globe support Special Olympics through donations, volunteerism and advocacy. Whether a monthly pledge donor, a volunteer at a local competition, a teacher promoting tolerance and acceptance in the classroom, or a campus volunteer recruiting fellow students to end the derogatory use of the “R-word,” our individual supporters are critical members of the global Movement. They have taken a stand for dignity and acceptance in an effort to create a better world for us all through promoting understanding and compassion.



Join Us

Be a fan of Special Olympics

As Special Olympics moves into its fifth decade, we are gaining new understandings of the importance of the Movement. In the relationships formed and in the examples set by the athletes, the world sees a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. In the moments of a Special Olympics experience, an athlete is transformed into a champion. In those moments, everyone is changed. We are introduced into a more open, joyful, tolerant, accepting and ultimately peaceful world. The world needs Special Olympics now more than ever. **So please join us in changing lives, and in changing the world.**

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 specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com

“...To say that the lot of people with intellectual disabilities has improved because of Special Olympics would be a gross understatement. This movement did nothing less than release an entire population from a prison of ignorance and misunderstanding. It did something else too—create a cathartic covenant between competitor and fan that is unlike anything else in sport. You watch and what you see is nothing less than a transformation, the passage of someone who has been labeled unfortunate, handicapped, disabled or challenged to something else: athlete.”

—Sports Illustrated, December 2008




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Let me win. But if I cannot win,
let me be brave in the attempt.

Special Olympics athlete oath



Special Olympics

Be a fan.®