



*Why I Became a Global Messenger*

Winnie Downey, Delaware County Global Messenger



This past summer, I decided to become a Global Messenger because it has been a dream of mine for many years. I, along with two of my nephews, have an intellectual disability. I wanted to spread the word about Special Olympics.

While Special Olympics has been around for almost 50 years, there are still many people that don't know it exists. As a Global Messenger, I want to be an ambassador for the movement and advocate for athletes that cannot advocate for themselves. I enjoy going out and giving speeches and sharing my Special Olympics story.

I learned a lot becoming a Global Messenger and it has helped open the door to many great opportunities for me. I am proud to be a Global Messenger because I am playing a big role in helping spread the word about Special Olympics to potential athletes, volunteers and donors.

*Editor's Note: Winnie Downey is a Global Messenger from Delaware County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 15 years. When not competing at local or state events, Winnie enjoys volunteering and helping in any way possible.*

## *My Journey as an Athlete Leader*

Lisa Barbour, Southeast Regional Input Council (RIC) Representative



My name is Lisa Barbour and I am from Philadelphia. I have been in Special Olympics 28 years and have been an Athlete Leader for 6 years. I think being an Athlete Leader is important, because you are helping your fellow athletes have a voice and making sure that they are heard.

During last year's Athlete Congress, I ran for the Southeastern Athlete Representative position on the Regional Input Council (RIC), because I have gotten to know the athletes from different counties. Each county is different. A lot of athletes have different ideas. I want to bring those ideas together. I want to always be there for my fellow athletes, no matter what county they are from.

When I heard my name called for Southeastern Athlete Representative, I was surprised, excited and happy. I'm so for the opportunity! As a member of the RIC, I want to help create more Athlete Leader opportunities. I look forward to working with RIC and am eager to represent Southeast, Pennsylvania.

All athletes should share their ideas with RIC, because we are there for them. It opens up a new line of communication between the athletes and the SOPA Board of Directors. Special Olympics is for us, the athletes. By athletes sharing their ideas with RIC, we all benefit! We must share ideas to help to make Special Olympics even better!

*Editor's Note: Lisa Barbour is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Philadelphia and has been competing in Special Olympics for 28 years. Lisa also served on the Fall Festival Committee and has attended three of SOPA's Athlete Congresses.*

## *US Health Meeting Experience*

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



When I was 10 years old, I participated in my very first Special Olympics competition. Each year since, my participation in Special Olympics has given me more confidence to succeed in life. It has helped me make many friends from around the world, motivate me to study hard to get good grades, pursue a meaningful career within the organization and keep me physically and mentally active.

One thing that makes us unique from other sports organizations is that there is no age limit in how long you can participate. However, as each athlete continues to age, health issues may prevent them from participating in Special Olympics which then leads to further health issues.

I recently read a disturbing report saying that people with intellectual disabilities on average die 16 years earlier than people without intellectual disabilities. What's more disturbing is that this statistic has nothing to do with a person's intellectual disability, rather the health care services that they receive, or lack thereof. Unfortunately, medical professionals do not have the education and/or training on how to screen someone with an intellectual disability.

Back in December, I, along with other Athlete Leaders from the US and Canada, were invited to Special Olympics North America's (SONA's) US Health Meeting in Washington, DC. Before the start of the actual meeting, members of Special Olympics International's (SOI's) health team led a training session on a variety of health related subjects. These topics ranged from speaking with our state's representatives about improving health care for people not just with intellectual disabilities, but all disabilities, how to provide healthier food and beverage options at

competitions, how we can advocate healthier lifestyles for our fellow athletes, how to overcome roadblocks that prevent athletes from living a healthy lifestyle and much more. During the training, we also had a chance to meet SOI CEO, Mary Davis. Each athlete had the opportunity to explain to Mary why health is important to them and why athletes should be the primary advocates of health within the Special Olympics movement.

After the training concluded, the US Health Meeting began and there were a lot of Special Olympics staff in attendance that had some role in managing Healthy Athletes in their program. One of the first sessions I was part of, I actually got to co-facilitate with three other Athlete Leaders. During that session, we shared how we as Athlete Leaders can best advocate health for our fellow athletes, as well as how we can help them live a healthier lifestyle inside and outside of Special Olympics.

While the main purpose of me attending the US Health Meeting was for me to become a better advocate for health and help SOPA find ways to motivate more athletes, volunteers and family members to maintain a healthier lifestyle, I also got a lot out of the meeting to help me with my personal health goals.

It all started last year when I started playing floor hockey as I was also training for basketball during the season. Having two days of sports training, plus going to the gym at least once a week, kept me better conditioned. I also am making healthier food choices. I cut a lot of beef and pork out of my diet and started eating more chicken and fish. When I was in college, I would drink two-three 20 oz regular sodas a day. Now, I limit my consumption to one-two 12 oz diet sodas a day.

I believe the key to living a healthier lifestyle is not becoming overly obsessed with what you eat and how often you exercise. The key is setting reasonable goals and slowly expanding them.

*Editor's Note: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for SOPA and is an athlete in Chester and Montgomery County. Jordan has been competing in Special Olympics for 13 years in Pennsylvania and Illinois and graduated from West Chester University in 2015.*

## *2016 Athlete Congress Recap*

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



2016 was SOPA's third bi-ennial Athlete Congress to have taken place in conjunction with SOPA's Leadership Conference. 34 Athlete Representatives from around the state were in attendance. The 2016 Athlete Congress was chaired by Ernie Roundtree from Monroe County who was supported by the Regional Input Council (RIC):

- Tim Spence, Butler County, Southwest Representative.
- Mary Nigro, Mercer County, Northwest Representative.
- Mike Baker, Tioga County, North Central Representative.
- Mike Stephens, Blair County, South Central Representative.
- Josh Stranix, Schuylkill County, Southeast Representative.
- Nina Kaneriya, Columbia/Montour County, Northeast Representative.
- Melissa Woerner, Bucks County, RIC Chair and SOPA Board Member.

Two other Athlete Representatives in attendance to support Athlete Congress were:

- Johanna Schoeneck, Lycoming County, SOPA Board Member.
- Loretta Claiborne, York County, Chief Inspiration Officer on the Special Olympics International Board of Directors.

Prior to the start of Athlete Congress, each athlete had the opportunity to vote on which topic should be the priority at Athlete Congress. Here are the five topics from the Athlete Congress priority survey based on the results:

1. Increase Athlete Participation at Competitions

2. Improve National and World Games Selection Process Policy
3. Recruitment of Athletes and Volunteers
4. Transportation to and from Practices and Competitions
5. Increase Family Involvement

As a result of receiving the popular vote, Increase Athlete Participation at Competitions was selected as the priority. Athlete Representatives created and voted upon Goals and Action Steps to be brought to the attention of the SOPA Board of Directors in 2017. Goals and Action Steps for the 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> place topics were also created during Athlete Congress and in the spring of 2017, all athletes will have the opportunity to vote and suggest any necessary additions or subtractions.

On the following pages are the official Goals and Action Steps reported out by the Athlete Congress Chair and RIC during Closing Session of Leadership Conference:

### **Priority: Increase Athlete Participation at Competitions**

**Goal 1:** Get more volunteers, coaches and facilitates to host local level competitions.

#### **Action Steps:**

- Use professional sports teams.
- Go to local high schools and local colleges/universities to recruit help.
- "Pool" resources with other counties.
- Use social media to put the word out.
- Make fliers, use videos, for high schools, colleges and businesses.
- Athlete Representatives go out to recruit help.
- Athlete Representatives go to local management team meetings with ideas.
- Use free advertising and public service announcements.

**Goal 2:** More invitationals led by the state.

#### **Action Steps:**

- Recruit certified coaches.
- Recruit volunteers to help.
- More allocations of athletes.
- Find venues.
- Get more sponsors.
- Get celebrities to help.

- Get corporations to help fund.

### **Runner Up Priority 1: Improve National and World Games Selection Process**

**Goal 1:** Receive a clear explanation of the selection process.

**Action Steps:**

- The Athlete Congress requested a SOPA representative to explain the process.
- Make SOI Article I more accessible to everyone.

**Goal 2:** Having athletes, volunteers and family members become more proactive in letting others know about the Special Olympics International selection process policy.

**Action Steps:**

- Use social media.
- Share information at practices.
- E-mail the selection process policy.
- Facebook messages.
- County/Area website.
- Newsletters.

### **Runner Up Priority 2: Recruitment of Athletes and Volunteers**

**Goal 1:** Speak to a life skills class.

**Action Steps:**

- Send Global Messengers to speak to class.
- Call superintendent of the school district.
- Call teachers to speak to the class.
- Talk to school board about Special Olympics.

**Goal 2:** Going to high schools and colleges to recruit volunteers.

**Action Steps:**

- Advertise on social media.
- Talk with guidance councilors.
- Have athlete meet and greet.
- Speak to classes, teachers and student council.

During the 2016 Athlete Congress, four Athlete Representatives were elected into positions of office:

- Zachary Williams, Fayette County, Southwest RIC Representative.

- Roger Turner, Lycoming County, North Central RIC Representative.
- Lisa Barbour, Philadelphia County, Southeast RIC Representative.
- Michael Silvis, Adams County, 2018 Athlete Congress Chair.

*Editor's Note: Thanks to all the Athlete Representatives and Athlete Representative Mentors that were part of the 2016 Athlete Congress. If you are currently not a trained Athlete Representative, but would like to attend the 2018 Athlete Congress, please contact Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) and your local program manager/director.*

## 2016 Fall Festival Athlete Input Survey & Athlete Input Council Results

### 149-Athlete Input Survey

### 20-Athlete Input Council

#### Athlete Input Survey:

1. **What sport did you compete in?**

- a. Bocce-35 (23%)
- b. LDR/LDW-14 (9%)
- c. Powerlifting-4 (3%)
- d. Soccer 5 v 5-13 (9%)
- e. **Soccer 7 v 7-36 (24%)**
- f. Soccer 11 v 11-12 (8%)
- g. Soccer Skills-3 (2%)
- h. Roller Skating Artistic-2 (1%)
- i. Roller Skating Speed-1 (1%)
- j. Volleyball-27 (18%)
- k. Volleyball Skills-2 (1%)

2. **Was this your first time competing at Fall Fest?**

- a. Yes-26 (17%)
- b. **No-123 (83%)**

3. **If you answered "No", how has this year's Fall Festival compared to previous years?**

- a. **Better-61 (50%)**
- b. Needs improvement-8 (7%)
- c. Same-54 (44%)

4. **If you answered "Needs improvement", explain why:**

- a. Lighting at Opening Ceremonies gave me a seizure.
- b. More time for Healthy Athletes.
- c. Opening Ceremonies are the same every year.
- d. Only had water to drink during lunch.
- e. Someone was in our spot at Opening Ceremonies.

#### Competition

1. **How would you rate the overall quality of competition?**

- a. **Excellent-117 (79%)**
- b. Average-29 (20%)
- c. Poor-2 (1%)

2. **If you answered "Poor", explain why:**

- a. Division I needs to be called better (Volleyball)

#### Extracurricular Activities

1. **How would you rate the food and beverages provided at the event?**

- a. **Excellent-101 (70%)**
- b. Average-35 (24%)
- c. Poor-9 (6%)

2. **If you answered “Poor”, explain why:**
  - a. Food was undercooked.
  - b. No juice or iced tea for lunch on Saturday.
  
3. **How would you rate Opening Ceremonies?**
  - a. **Excellent-120 (81%)**
  - b. Average-16 (11%)
  - c. Poor-5 (3%)
  - d. I did not attend Opening Ceremonies-8 (5%)
  
4. **If you answered “Poor”, explain why:**
  - a. Same routine.
  - b. Too many speeches.
  - c. Do not like sitting for a long period of time.
  
5. **How would you rate Olympic Town?**
  - a. **Excellent-81 (54%)**
  - b. Average-10 (7%)
  - c. I did not attend Olympic Town-58 (39%)
  
6. **Do you have any additional feedback you would like to share?**
  - a. Liked the Villanova students.
  - b. Like the Villanova campus.
  - c. Enjoyed new vegetarian options.
  - d. Dance at the pavilion should have a DJ.
  - e. Had a really good time.
  - f. Have more Villanova athletes on campus.
  - g. Can’t wait until next year.
  - h. Loved the volunteers.
  - i. SOPA staff and Villanova students were helpful.
  - j. Enjoyed Opening Ceremonies and the Dance.
  - k. Healthy Athletes was great. Great job Chelsea.
  - l. Overcrowding in the cafeteria.
  - m. Loved the LPHs.
  - n. Better divisioning (Volleyball).
  - o. Medical staff took great care of me (Soccer 7 v 7).

#### **Athlete Input Council:**

1. **Did you have any delays in your competition schedule and if so, what were the causes and how could they have been prevented?**
  - a. Volleyball was too ahead of schedule.
  
2. **Were there enough healthy food and beverage choices at meals?**
  - a. Mashed potatoes were dry.
  - b. Juice was on in downstairs cafeteria, but not in upstairs cafeteria.
  - c. Roast beef at downstairs cafeteria wasn’t fully cooked.
  - d. Green beans were dry.
  - e. No milk at breakfast.
  - f. Have flavored water and/or Gatorade at competition venues.
  - g. Breakfast in downstairs cafeteria was cold.

- 3. What would you like to add/change for next year's Opening Ceremonies and/or extracurricular activities?**
- a. Have a brief shout-out to Healthy Athletes Clinical Directors during Opening Ceremonies.
  - b. Routine of Opening Ceremonies has been the same three years in a row.
  - c. I don't like sitting around for an hour and a half.
  - d. Everything with Opening Ceremonies went well.
  - e. Have a "Parade of Athletes" for Opening Ceremonies like at Summer Games and have LPHs lead each delegation.
- 4. What additional comments or concerns do you have about Fall Festival?**
- a. More zumba at Olympic Town.
  - b. More time for Healthy Athletes.
  - c. Fire alarm went off at Double Tree, no one knew protocol.
  - d. Dining hall was too cramped.
  - e. Athletes should be allowed to talk with officials on rules.
  - f. Have team captains meet with officials to review rules before each game.

*Editor's Note: Thanks to all the athletes that completed an Athlete Input Survey and attended the Athlete Input Council. Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at each sectional and state competition and Athlete Input Councils are hosted at each state competition.*

## *Important Notices*

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

### **2018 USA Games Update:**

As a result of being a topic of discussion at Athlete Congress, SOPA has placed all information regarding the 2018 USA Games taking place in Seattle, WA on its website, which can be viewed via this link: <http://specialolympicspa.org/sports-competitions/competitions/usa-games>

This link contains:

- Number of sports and athletes being allocated.
- How athletes are selected to compete at USA Games.
- Requirements for athletes that are selected to compete at USA Games.
- State competitions in 2017 that will serve as qualifying events.
- Timeline of events to taking place between now and the start of USA Games.

Please share this link with your teammates and coaches. If you, your teammates and/or coaches have any questions regarding USA Games, please contact:

- Michelle Boone, Senior Sports Director: [mboone@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:mboone@specialolympicspa.org)
- Gina Reid, Senior Competition Director: [greid@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:greid@specialolympicspa.org)

### **Athlete Leadership Self Assessment Survey:**

With almost 300 trained Athlete Leaders throughout the state, SOPA wants to be able to find out:

- Which Athlete Leaders have taken which training sessions either through SOPA or another Special Olympics program.
- How active each Athlete Leader is.
- What roadblocks each Athlete Leader is facing.
- Develop solutions to overcome roadblocks with the help of the local program and SOPA.

Survey can be taken via this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AthleteLeadershipSelfEvaluation>

This survey is open between now and Friday, March 10<sup>th</sup>. If you do not have internet access at home, please work with your mentor or local program manager/director.

### **Athlete Leadership University Update:**

Any athlete that has completed their Athlete Representative II, Global Messenger II, Athletes as Coaches and/or Healthy Lifestyles practicum is eligible to receive a degree in their respective major(s) in a graduation ceremony.

Practicum requirements and report forms can found be downloaded via this link:

<http://specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/athlete-leadership>.

All completed report forms can be sent via:

- E-mail: [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org)

OR

- Mail: Attn: Jordan Schubert, 2570 Blvd. of the Generals Suite 124, Norristown, PA 19403

OR

- Fax: Attn : Jordan Schubert, 610-630-9456

Information regarding Athlete Leadership University graduation ceremony will become available soon!

### **Spread the Word to End the Word Rally:**

The Arc of Fayette County will be attending a Spread the Word to End the Word Rally at the state capitol in Harrisburg on Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. If you live in or near Fayette County and would like to be part of the event, please contact:

- Brenda Fike: [Brenda.fike@arcfayette.org](mailto:Brenda.fike@arcfayette.org)
- Dana Zinck: [dana.zinc@arcfayette.org](mailto:dana.zinc@arcfayette.org)

### **Athlete Leadership Facebook Group:**

Are you on Facebook and want to communicate more with your fellow athletes? Send a friend request to Jelsea Schrob (a combined name for myself, Jordan Schubert and Director of Programming Projects, Chelsea Drob) to be added to SOPA's Athlete Leadership Facebook group. This group is a great way to interact with athletes, as well as receive the most up to date Athlete Leadership information. If you're not on Facebook, creating an account is quick, easy and free!

**Email Address Update:** I would like to be able to reach as many athletes as possible. If you haven't received any emails from me, or your email address has changed in the last year, please email me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org).

**Share Your Story:** If you would like to share a story on Winter Games, State Floor Hockey, Polar Plunge, Spread the Word to End the Word or any other Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) by March 31<sup>st</sup> for a chance to have your story shared in the Winter Edition of SOAR.