



Capitol Hill Day Experience

Chloe Phillips, Lancaster County Global Messenger



I was honored to be selected to represent Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) for Capitol Hill Day. Having just finished my Global Messenger II training, I felt ready to give it my all in speaking to professionals such as, Congressmen and Senators. The first day we spent training, this is where I got an idea of what I would be talking about. Matt Aaron, President & CEO of SOPA was super great, he knew a lot of information. I just had to share what Special Olympics means to me. We met with 8 different representatives from our state, and shared why it is important for continued funding for Special Olympics.

There wasn't much time for sightseeing, but during lunch we managed to take a quick tour of the Capitol Rotunda. I really enjoyed meeting other athletes from around the country and talking to Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics International, was exciting. He's very nice.

The hardest part of the day was walking in high heels all day. I had over 15,000 steps that day on my Fitbit. I shared my plans to help my fellow athletes learn more about healthy eating and healthy lifestyle choices. I learned more about Unified Sports and Interscholastic Unified Schools (IUS), and hope to see both of these programs in my county soon.

Editor's Note: Chloe Phillips is a Global Messenger from Lancaster County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 8 years. Chloe is also one of only 27 athletes to have completed Global Messenger II.

My First Winter Games

Elizabeth Kraft, Beaver County Global Messenger



For two years now, I have been asking our Local Program Manager if I could participate in skiing at Winter Games. The first year, she told me I asked too late; there were already people going and not enough slots for me. This year, I asked again. She said "YES". I was so excited that I was going to get to ski!

I have to tell the truth...I skied when I was younger and I really didn't like it. I didn't like falling and the skis were too hard for me to use. I was pretty nervous when it was the first time to practice this year. Turns out, my coach was very impressed by what I could do the first time I put skis on this winter! She said "Wow". My coach wanted to move me up to the next level, but we decided I should just stay with the beginners. I can't believe all these years later, I ended up loving to ski!

We left Beaver County for Winter Games on a Sunday afternoon. I was really excited even though I thought I was getting sick. I got to Seven Springs and even though I wasn't feeling well, I put on my boots / skis and headed for the slopes. My Local Program Manager encouraged me to stay positive.

Opening Ceremonies was fun and interesting, as I had seen nothing like it before. Seeing the Flame of Hope coming down the hill with the skiers was awesome. I really liked seeing that and hearing my friend and fellow Global Messenger, Jack, emcee Opening Ceremonies! The fireworks at the end of the ceremony were something I had not expected.

Competition was also fun. I won three golds! I was so proud of myself since it was my first time skiing at Winter Games. All of my coaches were impressed! I loved high fiving the officers that were there to help us. The dance was fun, but I decided to go to Athlete Input Council and Healthy Athletes. I had never done those two before, so that was a different experience for me. I recommend that other athletes take part in Athlete Input Councils and Healthy Athletes at state competitions!

Winter Games is so much fun! I'm going back next year!

Editor's Note: Elizabeth Kraft is a Global Messenger from Beaver County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 21 years. In addition to currently being one of only 27 athletes to have completed Global Messenger II, Elizabeth is very proud of her work at the Beaver County Phoenix Center and New Horizon School.

My Special Olympics Story

Troy Jackson, Jr., Bucks County Athlete



My name is Troy Jackson, Jr. and I recently turned 27 years old. I love participating in swimming with Special Olympics Pennsylvania. I have been competing since I was about 14 years old.

I love my coaches, they are really amazing, especially when I go to my swim practices on Wednesday nights. I have always loved swimming. Not only gives me a work out but it also helps my self-esteem as person and an athlete.

Swimming is one of my favorites sports I to do, along with Tennis. Special Olympics Pennsylvania has definitely kept me busy with sports. In the future, I would like to be able to share my knowledge and passion for sports with other athletes by becoming a certified coach.

When I'm not competing in Special Olympics, I keep myself in shape by swimming at the beach, water parks or at my local community pool. I'm happy to have awesome coaches for aquatics at Truman High school. I want to thank my Special Olympics Pennsylvania program in Bucks County for the offering me the opportunity to succeed in sports.

Editor's Note: Troy Jackson, Jr. is an athlete from Bucks County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 13 years.

The Goal of Strengthening Leadership

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



In 2016, Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) completed the first year of its new five year Strategic Plan. I was very proud to have contributed to one of the Goals, “Strengthening Leadership”.

Some examples of “Strengthening Leadership” from this past year were: More Athlete Leaders and Mentors serving as instructors at Athlete Leadership University, Athlete Representatives serving on Games Organizing Committees at each state competition, Athlete Input Surveys were conducted at each state competition, the Regional Input Council (RIC) taking the lead with Athlete Congress, Athlete Leaders co-facilitating sessions at Leadership Conference with SOPA staff, Athlete Leaders promoting healthy lifestyles as Health and Fitness Coordinators within their local program, more athletes becoming certified as coaches and much more.

When it comes to evaluating success within a Strategic Plan, it should not be done just within the walls of SOPA’s offices, but also by our primary consumers, the athletes. Earlier this year, I conducted a self evaluation for each of our athletes that have attended at least one athlete Leadership University course, or had gone through other Athlete Leadership trainings through SOPA or another Special Olympics program. The purpose of this survey was to give our nearly 300 trained Athlete Leaders the opportunity to reflect on their accomplishments, struggles and let us know what support they currently do not have in order to be successful as an Athlete Leader. The results from this survey help us better understand how we can not only better support Athlete Leaders, but also useful when developing our long term vision for Athlete Leadership.

While Athlete Congress is one of the most prestigious parts of Athlete Leadership here in Pennsylvania, I actually look forward to attending Leadership Conference during years we don't host Athlete Congress. The real reason I look forward to Leadership Conference during non-congress years is because it's not just Athlete Representatives I get to interact with the whole time, but all athletes. Like many of you, before being hired by SOPA, Special Olympics was just something I did as an extracurricular activity in my spare time. During the eight years I spent participating in Illinois and my first year here in Pennsylvania, I always wondered what has made Special Olympics the great organization it has been for many years. I have also wondered who would be able to help improve the overall quality of the organization. Soon after, I was able to answer my own question, and I hope many more athletes come to that realization as well. Without giving away too much, this year's Leadership Conference will include four sessions target towards athletes. The themes of these sessions will be: Personal Bests, Networking, Athlete Leadership Updates and Athlete Leadership Celebration of Achievement. Be sure to check your e-mail and the Athlete Leadership Facebook group for more information about Leadership Conference coming soon.

For those that read SOAR on a frequent basis, you may remember me mentioning in another story that SOPA President and CEO, Matt Aaron is the chair of the Special Olympics North America Athlete Leadership Committee. This committee is a group of Athlete and Staff Leaders that develop "Best Practices" for Athlete Leadership in the US, Canada and the Caribbean. Earlier this year, Matt nominated me to be one of the new Athlete Representatives to join the committee and the entire committee unanimously approved my nomination. Not only will I be helping develop "Best Practices" for all North American programs, I will also be supporting the development of the US Athlete Input Council (USAIC). By supporting the USAIC, this will allow me to learn how the RIC here in PA can function better. In turn, by strengthening the leadership of our RIC members, once their term is completed, they will have the experience and skills needed to potentially be elected to represent the Mid-Atlantic region on the USAIC in the future.

By allowing Athlete Leaders to serve on the North American Athlete Leadership Committee and USAIC, we have the opportunity to make a positive impact for all athletes. We have the opportunity to take action by drawing blueprints of ideas that could previously only go as far as one's imagination.

I always like to paraphrase JFK's famous quote and say, "Ask not what Special Olympics can do for you, but what you can do for Special Olympics." Each of you have the ability to share ideas with your coaches to improve your training routine. Each of you have the ability to talk with your Local Program Management Team about adding a new sport. Each of you have the ability to

attend Athlete Input Councils at state competitions and share your event experience with SOPA's competition staff. Each of you have the ability to attend Athlete Leadership University to be trained in different leadership roles. Every athlete in Special Olympics has the ability to lead by example. If we want to accomplish all the goals identified in the Strategic Plan, we all need to work together to accomplish the goal of strengthening each other's leadership skills.

This year's Leadership Conference takes place from Saturday, August 26th-Sunday, August 27th at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center. However, starting on Friday, the 25th, we will be hosting an Athlete Leadership University session where current and future Athlete Leaders can begin their path as a leader, or continue learning new skills to take on more meaningful opportunities, one of them possibly getting to with me at the state office in the near future.

Editor's Note: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for SOPA and has been competing in Special Olympics for 13 years in Pennsylvania and Illinois. Jordan is also a member of the Mid-Atlantic Athlete Input Council, Athlete Representative on the North American Athlete Leadership Committee and graduate of West Chester University in 2015.

2017 Winter Games/State Floor Hockey Tournament Athlete Input Survey & Athlete Input Council Results

2017 Winter Games Athlete Input Survey Results - 141 Surveys Completed

- 1. What sport did you compete in?**
 - Alpine Skiing-56 (40%)
 - Cross Country Skiing-23 (16%)
 - c. Snow Shoeing-60 (43%)**
 - Speed Skating-2 (1%)
- 2. Was this your first time competing at Winter Games?**
 - Yes-35 (25%)
 - b. No- 106 (75%)**
- 3. If you answered “No”, how has this year’s Winter Games compared to previous years?**
 - a. Better-64 (61%)**
 - Same-39 (37%)
 - Needs Improvement-2 (2%)
- 4. If you answered “Needs improvement”, explain why:**
 - Not organized. (Alpine)
 - Did not like how the gates went from double to single. (Alpine)

Competition

- 1. How would you rate the overall quality of competition?**
 - a. Excellent-113 (80 %)**
 - Average-24 (17%)
 - Poor-4 (3%)
- 2. If you answered “Poor”, explain why:**
 - Snow wasn’t packed well. (Snowshoeing)

Extracurricular Activities

- 1. How would you rate the food and beverages provided at the event?**
 - a. Excellent-103 (73%)**
 - Average-33 (23%)
 - Poor-5 (4%)
- 2. If you answered “Poor”, explain why:**
 - Hot food was undercooked.
 - Have hot beverages at competition venue. (Alpine)
 - Healthier choices.
- 3. How would you rate Opening Ceremonies?**
 - a. Excellent- 123 (87%)**
 - Average-12 (9%)
 - Poor-4 (3%)
 - I did not attend Opening Ceremonies-2 (1%)

4. If you answered "Poor", explain why:

- a. More Fireworks.
- b. Too Long.

5. How would you rate Olympic Town?

- a. **Excellent-57 (40%)**
- b. Average-21 (15%)
- c. Poor-6 (5%)
- d. **I did not attend Olympic Town-57 (40%)**

6. If you answered "Poor", explain why:

- a. Too crowded.
- b. Not enough games.
- c. Not enough time to go.

7. Do you have any additional feedback you would like to share?

- a. Liked the medals.
- b. Did not get to stand on the podium for awards. (Snowshoeing)
- c. Extend Winter Games longer.
- d. Seven Springs is better than Hidden Valley.
- e. More diabetic friendly meal choices.
- f. Loved the snow.
- g. All the volunteers were great.
- h. Stage events better. (Alpine)
- i. More stuff to do during downtime.
- j. Awards were well organized. (Speed Skating)

2017 Winter Games Athlete Input Council Results - 22 Athletes Attended

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. Accident on the slope. (Alpine)
- b. Delayed shuttle. (Snowshoeing)
- c. Bibs should be clearly marked for relays. (Snowshoeing)
- d. One hour delay for beginner Alpine.
- e. Have salt trucks on standby.
- f. No medics for Cross Country, have them every half mile?

2. Were there enough healthy food and beverage choices at meals?

- a. Soup was cold.
- b. Instead of buffet, have plated meals.
- c. Have a better variety of deserts at dinner besides from cookies. (i.e.: ice cream, cake, etc.)
- d. Have more fruit at breakfast.
- e. Have different types of salads.
- f. Chicken was bland.

3. What would you like to add/change for next year's Opening Ceremonies and/or extracurricular activities?

- a. Make Opening Ceremonies longer.
- b. Have a social activity after Opening Ceremonies like ice cream sundaes.

- c. Turn off chairlifts during Opening Ceremonies.
- d. Have popcorn machine at Olympic Town.
- e. Have heater system at Opening Ceremonies.
- f. Athletes to carry the torch.

4. What additional comments or concerns do you have about Winter Games?

- a. Extend Winter Games an additional day.
- b. Have two courses set up for Alpine to speed up competition.

2017 State Floor Hockey Tournament Athlete Input Survey Results - 108 Completed

1. What event did you compete in?

- a. **Floor Hockey Team- 102 (94.44%)**
- b. Floor Hockey Skills- 6 (5.56%)

2. Is this your first time competing at the State Floor Hockey Tournament?

- a. Yes- 14 (12.96%)
- b. **No- 94 (87.04%)**

3. If you answered, "No", how has this year's State Floor Hockey Tournament compared to previous years?

- a. **Better- 61 (64.89%)**
- b. Same- 28 (29.79%)
- c. Needs Improvement- 5 (5.32%)

4. If you answered, "Needs Improvement", please explain why.

- a. More seating for parents and better/healthier food choices for athletes
- b. Too much waiting
- c. Extend competition one day
- d. Needs to be on a better time schedule
- e. Not equal competition

5. On a scale of 1-3 (1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest), how would you rate the overall quality of competition?

- a. 1 (Poor)- 5 (4.63%)
- b. 2 (Average)- 22 (20.37%)
- c. **3 (Excellent) - 81 (75%)**

6. If you answered, "1", please explain why.

- a. Teams should be evenly divided by the skill. It seems that we get a team that should be in a higher division that we should be.
- b. Some of the teams did not show good sportsmanship
- c. Bad refs

7. On a scale of 1-3 (1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest), how would you rate the food and beverages provided at this event?

- a. 1 (Poor) - 14 (12.96%)
- b. 2 (Average) - 34 (31.48%)
- c. **3 (Excellent) - 60 (55.56%)**

- 8. If you answered, "1", please explain why.**
- I don't like hoagies
 - I do not like the wheat bread we eat
 - Better beverage selection.
 - Subs, maybe we can try to get salads/wraps
 - I can't eat multi-grain bread
 - Better selection and change from hoagies
- 9. On a scale of 1-3 (1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest), how would you rate Opening Ceremonies?**
- 1 (Poor)- 1 (0.93%)
 - 2 (Average)- 11 (10.19%)
 - 3 (Excellent)- 91 (84.26%)**
 - I did not Attend Opening Ceremonies- 5 (4.63%)
- 10. If you answered, "1", please explain why.**
- It was very loud, but nice!
- 11. When do you believe Opening Ceremonies should take place moving forward at this event?**
- Keep as is, between lunch and the start of competition- 86 (79.63%)**
 - Move to Saturday evening, after competition has concluded- 22 (20.37%)
- 12. If you think Opening Ceremonies should be moved to Saturday evening, following competition, please explain when and where it should take place instead.**
- Can then compete earlier
 - Easy to get out of the way and compete earlier
 - It will give us time to rest
 - No one will have to rush to eat
 - More time to enjoy the band
 - Not in a hurry to play
 - Have it at Bald Eagle Auditorium or Ramada after competition Saturday
 - It should be at the place where dinner is
- 13. On a scale of 1-3 (1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest), how would you rate Olympic Town?**
- 1 (Poor)- 5 (4.63%)
 - 2 (Average)- 8 (7.41%)
 - 3 (Excellent)- 52 (48.15%)**
 - I did not attend Olympic Town- 43 (39.8%)
- 14. If you answered, "1", please explain why.**
- Do not know what Olympic Town is
 - Wasn't enough fun games
 - Need more activities
- 15. Do you have any additional feedback you would like to share?**
- More fruit and water available at games.
 - Like to get gold medals.
 - Good food at the Ramada and good alternative rock band during Opening Ceremonies.

- d. I enjoyed it!
- e. Ice cream at the dance.
- f. There was no water at the games and I want to see more fruit.
- g. For lunch they should have fruits (Apples, oranges, pears) with the sheetz sandwiches and chips. The volunteers and refs did a great job getting the athletes in/out of the gyms but the coaches could have worked better with this process.
- h. Just different food like salad, and wraps.
- i. Nice decorations.
- j. Need more cold water available to athletes to drink and fill bottles and cups.
- k. Great event.
- l. Generous and friendly volunteers.
- m. Nice people.
- n. I love what you are doing and I like to see the people smile.

Editor's Note: Thanks to all the athletes that attend the Athlete Input Councils and completed Athlete Input Surveys at Winter Games and the State Floor Hockey Tournament! If you're unable to attend an Athlete Input Council or complete an Athlete Input Survey at any State or Sectional Competition, but have questions, ideas or concerns to share, please contact Senior Competition Director, Gina Reid at greid@specialolympicspa.org.

Important Notices

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

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 be downloaded and printed via this link:

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

All completed report forms can be sent via:

- E-mail: 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

Deadline to be eligible to graduate in 2017 is Friday, June 30th. Information regarding Athlete Leadership University graduation ceremony will become available soon!

Two Athlete Leadership University sessions have been confirmed for 2017:

- July 8th-9th, Slippery Rock University:
http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/July_2017.pdf
- August 25th-26th, Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center:
http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/August_2017.pdf

2016 Athlete Congress Runner Up Priority Survey:

Between now and Friday, May 26th, all athletes have the opportunity to vote on the Goals and Action Steps from the two Runner Up Priorities from the 2016 Athlete Congress. In addition to voting, athletes also have the opportunity to provide additional feedback.

Voting can be done via this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2016ACRU>

Athlete Leadership Team Reminder

All Athlete Leadership Teams (ALTs) are required to submit their minutes to me following each meeting. Minutes can be sent via:

- E-mail: j Schubert@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

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 j Schubert@specialolympicspa.org.

Share Your Story: If you would like to share a story on Summer Games, World Winter Games, Beaver Stadium Run or Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at j Schubert@specialolympicspa.org by August 31st for a chance to have your story shared in the Summer Edition of SOAR.