



2018 Capitol Hill Day Experience

Winnie Downey, Delaware County Athlete Leader



Every year, Special Olympics Pennsylvania selects one Athlete Leader to serve as a representative for Special Olympics North America's Capitol Hill Day. After being one of three Athlete Leaders nominated, I got picked to represent Pennsylvania for Capitol Hill Day! I went to Washington DC with my mentor, Kathy and Dr. Bressler, a Philadelphia area dentist that's also a Clinical Director for Healthy Athletes and Matt Aaron, the CEO of Special Olympics Pennsylvania.

Each year, Athlete Leaders from all over the US meet with their state's representatives to educate them on Special Olympics' Health Programs and Unified Sports. It's important to explain to them how these programs impact us as athletes and why their support is necessary.

When we got there, we met Nora who works for Special Olympics North America. Some of the highlights of my trip were that we got to meet Pat Toomey's staff member and Bob Casey's staff member. We also went to the House of Representatives and met with several PA State Representatives. However, probably the biggest highlight of my trip, I would have to say was meeting Stephen Colbert, where I got to share my story with him as well. In the short amount of time I have been an Athlete Leader, this was one of the greatest experiences I had and I hope to do more things like this in the future.

Winnie Downey is an Athlete Representative, Global Messenger and Health and Fitness Coordinator from Delaware County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 17 years. Winnie will also receive a degree in communications during the Athlete Leadership University Graduation Ceremony for completing all Global Messenger trainings and practicum.

Special Olympics Pennsylvania: Always Full of Surprises

Elizabeth Porter, Bradford/Sullivan Counties Athlete Leader



In July, 2017, I received a phone call from Brian Covey, my program manager. He said, “Elizabeth, I have good news. YOU have been selected to go to USA Games 2018, in Seattle, Washington!” I was so excited! I could not believe it! I even watched and kept replaying Sue Paterno picking my name from the container on Facebook Live. I wanted to be sure.

Now, I am sure! I am an athlete on Team PA, USA Games 2018. Wow! I will be swimming in Seattle, Washington. I will be representing Special Olympics Pennsylvania July 1st through July 6th. What an honor! In August, I met my head swim coach, Fred Knauss, and my assistant swim coach, Stacy Banyas, at Leadership Conference. They are really supportive. The beginning of April, 2018, I met my swim teammates at the Team PA Training Camp. We practiced our starts, turns, strokes, and finishes. We had a lot of fun working out together. I keep training hard at home and am getting psyched about swimming the 100m Butterfly, the 400m Freestyle, the 100m Backstroke.

My next big surprise was a phone call from Chelsea Drob from the Special Olympics Pennsylvania Office. She asked me if I would like to become a Health Messenger for Team PA and attend training in Indianapolis, Indiana. My work as a Health and Fitness Coordinator with Special Olympics Pennsylvania gave me the confidence to take on another “I can’t believe it!” moment.

In January, 2018, I had an amazing flight to Indianapolis with great views of the sky and the land from my window seat. At the training, I worked with Athlete Leaders from across the USA:

Washington – North Dakota – Indiana – New Hampshire – New York – Virginia – Florida. We learned about Fit 5, a plan to help athletes become healthy and fit through physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. The Fit 5 goals include exercising 5 days a week, eating 5 total fruits and vegetables every day, and drinking 5 water bottles every day.

As a Health Messenger for Team PA, I have been posting on the Team PA Facebook page every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday since January 31, 2018. I will continue to post until June 30, 2018. Check out my posting schedule:

Monday's Post – The Fitness Challenge: Each member of Team PA uses a Movband, similar to a Nike Fit Bit. We track our steps every day as part of the Fitness Challenge for USA Games 2018. As the Health Messenger, I post ideas that get Team PA pumped about taking 7,000 steps every day with a goal of reaching 1 million steps by June 30, 2018. Many on Team PA are taking more than 7,000 steps every day. It's incredible! Go, Team PA!

Wednesday's Post – #WellnessWednesday: I post a tip about physical activity, nutrition, or hydration. As an example, every third Wednesday, I create a YouTube video where I demonstrate one type of Fit Five exercise: endurance, strength, flexibility, or balance. It's a lot of fun! I always end the post with #WellnessWednesday.

Friday's Post – #FeelGoodFriday: I post pictures, sayings, posters, and even YouTube videos to encourage my teammates to feel good about being healthy and fit. Topics include taking steps, exercising, eating healthy foods, and hydrating. The beginning of February, I posted a fun YouTube video of Gentoo penguins taking steps in Antarctica! What a hoot! I end each post with #FeelGoodFriday.

Even if you're not a Health and Fitness Coordinator or Health Messenger, you can still post content like this to both your own Social Media accounts and any Special Olympics groups you are a part of. This is a great opportunity to not only share how you're staying healthy, but inspire your fellow athletes, friends and family to set goals to live a healthier lifestyle.

I can't wait to get to Seattle! I am training hard to swim fast. I hope my teammates and I do well and have fun at USA Games. I am looking forward to meeting new people and connecting with athletes

and staff that I worked with at the Special Olympics Health Messenger Training in Indianapolis.
More surprises to come!

Elizabeth Porter is an Athlete Representative, Global Messenger and Health and Fitness Coordinator from Bradford/Sullivan Counties and has been participating in Special Olympics for 14 years. Elizabeth is one of fifty athletes that are part of the Pennsylvania delegation for the 2018 USA Games in Seattle. In addition to her athletic accomplishments, Elizabeth has many academic and professional accomplishments inside and outside of Special Olympics she is proud of, including a communications degree from Athlete Leadership University in 2017.

Why I love Surveys

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



For those of you that read SOAR on a consistent basis, right after my story, you always see data from the most recent Athlete Input Councils and Athlete Input Surveys. You may also receive e-mails and Facebook posts from me periodically with links for surveys regarding Athlete Input for an event, the Athlete Leadership Self Evaluation, Athlete Congress Priority and other surveys Special Olympics Pennsylvania staff ask me to share with you, my fellow athletes. One question I've received over and over from countless athletes is, "What do you do with the data from these surveys?"

To start off this story, a survey is one of the reasons why I have a job. Prior to the 2012 Athlete Congress, each Athlete Representative was asked how Special Olympics Pennsylvania could take Athlete Leadership to a new level. One of the popular topics that received a large amount of votes was having a staff person manage all things to do with Athlete Leadership and serve as an ally for all Athlete Leaders. A year later, the Athlete Representatives got what they wanted.

Another reason why surveys are important to me is because it always provides every athlete, volunteer, staff and family member a chance to freely express themselves on the direction Special Olympics Pennsylvania is going. I first learned that in the Summer of 2015, when Special Olympics Pennsylvania President and CEO, Matt Aaron, conducted a survey for everyone involved with the program to share what direction they would like the organization to head going into the new Strategic Plan that began in 2016. Back when I was in school, math and science were my least favorite subjects (which is ironic because my dad has a PhD in analytical chemistry). However, I quickly became fascinated looking through all the data and I started analyzing each trend. During

my lunch breaks, I would always log into Survey Monkey and just see what everyone had to say about where they Special Olympics Pennsylvania was successful and what could be built on in the upcoming Strategic Plan.

Athlete Input Surveys also made their debut in 2015 and almost every year, they have been modified to cater to all reading abilities and calculate the results following the event. When I looked at one of the first Athlete Input Surveys conducted, I'm surprised on how far it has come in just three years. What I'm most proud of with Athlete Input Surveys are a new grading formula I created last year. The reason I'm most proud of that is because I've developed a system that can now more accurately summarize how athletes evaluated their overall event experience and give the Games Organizing Committee a better understanding on what can be improved. By doing that, it allows me to identify common trends from each event and theorize why athletes may feel a certain way about a certain area of the event.

What I think is most important that I want to share is that in addition to the data that I've been collecting in each survey, I've made it a goal of mine to figure out a plan on what to do with it. The only way a survey is worthwhile is if the conductor can use the data to better what their subject expressed concerns over. That is why when I think of a survey conductor, I also think of a train conductor, and here's why:

- As a survey conductor, you want to make sure only the people you're targeting take the survey, the same way a train conductor makes sure all passengers have a ticket.
- It's important to listen to what others have to say. Many times, people are satisfied and don't see any need for improvements. Other times, if there are problems, the conductor needs to know what they are and how to find a solution.
- Most importantly, you want your subjects/passengers to get off in the right place. This gives you a sense of satisfaction that you helped guide them along their way to make something meaningful to them just a bit better.

I know I tend to push out a lot of surveys and it can be annoying at times. However, I wouldn't be in my position if it wasn't for a survey. Additionally, here are a list of things Special Olympics Pennsylvania might not have if it wasn't for athletes feedback provided in a survey:

- Healthier food and beverage options at each State Competition.
- Increased opportunities for athletes to be screened at Healthy Athletes.

- A new and simplified Code Of Conduct holding all athletes and volunteers to the standard of excellent behavior.
- Creation of new Athlete Leadership University Courses and improvement of existing ones.
- A statewide athlete Facebook Group.
- The addition of the Indoor Winter Games.
- And much more!

When you take a survey, the feedback you provide may not be addressed overnight. However, when you bring it to someone's attention, something will be done. A survey is not an exam, there are no right or wrong answers, just your opinions to make Special Olympics Pennsylvania a better organization for athletes like you and me.

Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and has been participating in Special Olympics for 14 years. Jordan also graduated from West Chester University in 2015.

2018 Winter Games Athlete Input Council/Athlete Input Survey Results

Grading System: Percentage of answers selected as "Excellent" plus one half percentage of answers selected as "Average" divided by X (Total # of graded questions) = Grade

Example: 80% Excellent + 20% Average ÷ 2 = 90%

Athlete Input Survey Results 134 Surveys Completed as of 2/7/18

Survey Breakdown by Sport:

- Alpine Skiing: 69 (51%)
- Cross Country Skiing: 19 (14%)
- Snowshoeing: 45 (34%)
- Speed Skating: 1 (1%)

First Time vs. Returning Athlete:

- First Time: 23 (17%)
- Returning: 111 (83%)

Grades:

- Experience compared to previous years:
 - 74% Better + 20% Same ÷ 2 = 84% (B)
 - 7 athletes answered "Needs Improvement"
- Overall quality of competition:
 - 84% Excellent + 16% Average ÷ 2 = 92% (A-)
- Food and beverages:
 - 75% Excellent + 21% Average ÷ 2 = 86% (B)
 - 5 athletes answered "Poor"
- Opening Ceremonies:
 - 91% Excellent + 7% Average ÷ 2 = 95% (A)
 - 2 athletes answered "Poor"
- Olympic Village:
 - 80% Excellent + 16% Average ÷ 2 = 88% (B+)
 - 47 athletes did not attend
 - 3 athletes answered "Poor"

Overall Grade:

- 89% (B+)

Additional Comments:

- Healthy Athletes was awesome.
- Better direction for the different skill levels (Alpine).
- Finish line was not well marked (Alpine).
- Enjoyed bringing in banner.
- Ice made it difficult to compete (Cross Country).
- Salads were good.
- More gluten free options.
- Bring meals to snowshoe and cross country venues.
- Best Opening Ceremonies I've seen.
- Couldn't see speakers at Opening Ceremonies.

Athlete Input Council Results
Approximately 20 Athletes in Attendance

- 1. Were there any delays in your competition schedule?**
 - Busses were delayed going to and from Cross Country venue.
 - Directions were unclear for snowshoeing.
- 2. Were there enough healthy food and beverage options at meals?**
 - Hard to tell which salad dressing was which.
 - No doughnuts at breakfast, serve them during dinner.
 - More variety of fruits.
- 3. Is there anything you would like to add/change for Opening Ceremonies and/or other extracurricular activities?**
 - Not a lot of room in the plaza.
 - More media coverage.
 - Arts and crafts in Olympic Village.
 - More games at Olympic Village like checkers that are adult friendly.
- 4. Do you have any other questions, comments and/or concerns about Winter Games?**
 - Better signage to find Healthy Athletes.
 - Water at each competition venues.
 - Bigger level signs at Alpine.
 - Give volunteers more specific information on how to help athletes.
 - Better communication between athletes and course officials.

Thanks to all the athletes that completed an Athlete Input Survey and attended the Athlete Input Council at Winter Games. Athlete Input Surveys and Athlete Input Councils are at all State Competitions. If you are unable to complete an Athlete Input Survey or attend an Athlete Input Council, but have input on the event you would like to share, contact Senior Competition Director, Gina Reid at greid@specialolympicspa.org.

Important Notices

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

2018 Athlete Congress Priority Survey:

The 2018 Athlete Congress Priority Survey is open from now until July 2nd. Each athlete will be asked to vote for a Goal/Strategy in the Strategic Plan that they would like more athletes to support. You can complete the survey by clicking [here](#).

Please share this link with as many athletes as you can. The goal is to get at least 200 votes.

Athlete Leadership University Update:

Registration is open for the Athlete Leadership University session taking place June 23rd-24th at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Courses being offered are Athletes as Coaches and Healthy Lifestyles and are open to all current and future Athlete Leaders.

Please review the [Registration Information](#) if interested in attending. Once approved by your Local Program, you and your Mentor may register [here](#).

2018 Athlete Congress Registration:

The 2018 Athlete Congress will be taking place Friday, August 24th-Sunday, August 26th at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center. Registration for the 2018 Athlete Congress will be available soon. As a reminder:

- Only one Athlete Representative from each Local Program may attend.
- Athlete Representatives must have taken Athlete Representative I at Athlete Leadership University. No exceptions will be made.
- Only one Mentor may attend for each Athlete Representative.

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: 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

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.

Share Your Story: If you would like to share a story on Summer Games, USA Games or any other Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at jschubert@specialolympicspa.org by August 31st for a chance to have your story shared in the Summer, 2018 edition of SOAR.