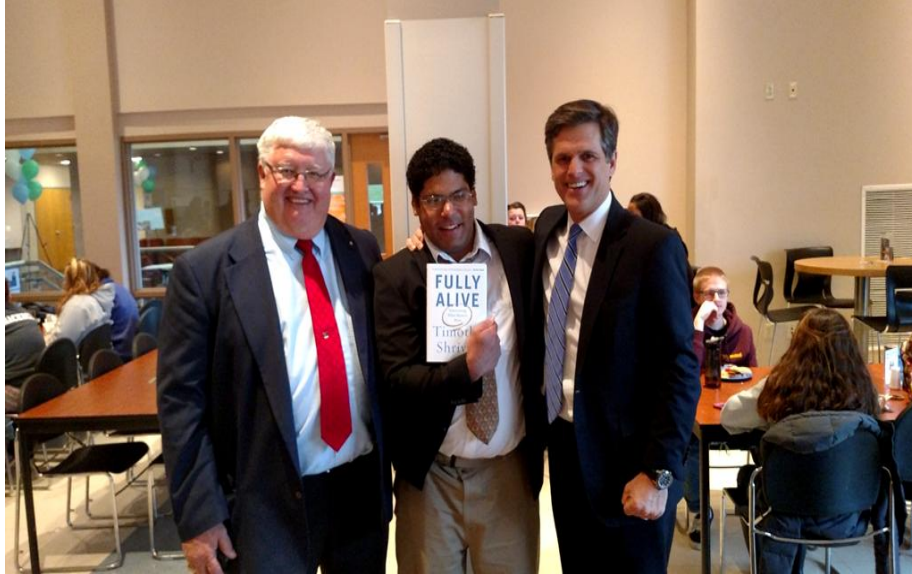




*I Present To You, Dr. Timothy Shriver*

Michael Silvis, Adams County Athlete Representative & Global Messenger



Hello, my name is Michael Silvis and I am an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Adams County.

This spring I had the great honor to introduce Dr. Tim Shriver at his book signing for *Fully Alive, Discovering What Matters Most*. As a young man I can't even begin to express what an honor it was!

It was a great day at Mt. Aloysius College where they really made us feel welcomed! I would like to thank Sheetz for the book and also thank the SOPA state office for giving me this opportunity. Finally, I can't forget about my mentor, Don Bair, and all other Athlete Leaders and Mentors who took the time to attend this great event! Thank you all.

*Editor's Note: Michael Silvis is an Athlete Representative and Global Messenger from Adams County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 15 years. Michael is also a certified coach and last year was inducted into the SOPA Hall of Fame and received the Athlete Leadership Award at SOPA's annual Leadership Conference.*

## *Healthy Athletes Assistant Experience*

Carolyn "Cajee" Bechtel, Centre County Athlete



My name is Carolyn Jean Bechtel. My friends call me Cajee. I first started participating in Special Olympics when I was at school in Rhode Island. When I moved to Boalsburg, near State College, in 1994, I started participating in softball. Over the years, I have played volleyball, tennis, bowling, and bocce. In fact, in 2014, I was selected, along with my teammates Greg Focht, Trevor Chester, and Emily Mowrey to be part of Team PA at the USA Games in New Jersey. Greg and I were in bocce and Trevor and Emily were in Unified Bowling.

This year, however, I could not participate because I had to have my knee replaced. The operation went very well, though I had a few "cheesecake" moments. ("Cheesecake" is the word I used when my knee hurt a lot.) Since I couldn't compete, I thought I'd miss out on the excitement of Summer Games at Penn State. Until I was asked to be a Special Smiles Assistant by Chelsea Drob, who coordinates the Healthy Athlete Initiative in Special Olympics Pennsylvania.

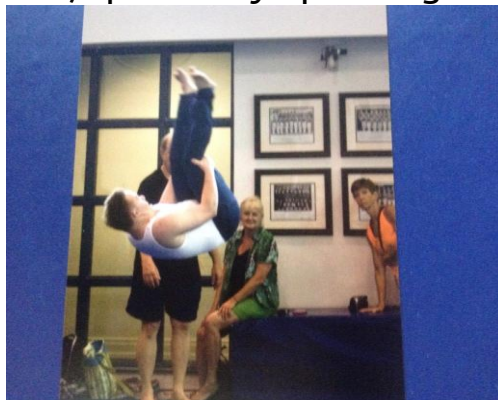
I was really glad to help! I got to work directly with Dr. Bresler, the Special Smiles Clinical Director, at Summer Games on Friday and Saturday. I greeted athletes from all over Pennsylvania. I showed them how to brush their teeth, floss their teeth, and use mouth guards. We made sure a lot of athletes left the 2015 Summer Games with a Special Smile.

*Editor's Note: Carolyn "Cajee" Bechtel is an athlete from Centre County and has been competing in Special Olympics for 21 years in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. Cajee also competed in bocce at last year's USA Games in New Jersey.*

*If you're not competing at a State Competition but are interested in volunteering as a Healthy Athletes Assistant, please contact Chelsea Drob at [cdrob@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:cdrob@specialolympicspa.org).*

## *My Experience At Penn State*

Michael Phillip Abraham, Special Olympics Virginia Athlete



My name is Michael Philip Abraham and I am a 30 year old gymnast with Special Olympics Virginia. Following is a brief summary I would like to share with you about the SOPA Summer Games.

My experiences at Penn State this year has given me the opportunity to compete against and cheer on athletes from Pennsylvania. I enjoyed the loud cheers at the Opening Ceremonies, watching the torch run, singing the national anthem, and getting autographs from the Penn State football players. I met many parents of other athletes and it was a pleasure to talk to them, the judges, the score keepers, and the fans! In addition to our trip to the Penn State creamery, I also enjoyed celebrating my teammates, Gavin and Jackie's birthdays. It has become an annual event.

Three of my aunts and uncles are Penn State alumni and support me every year at State College. We say our goodbyes at a social gathering with my family and fellow athletes at the Nittany Lion Inn for lunch after the competition day.

I have been involved with gymnastics for over 25 years which has changed my life and my passion for competing. Thank you, Pennsylvania for inviting me, my coach, and fellow athletes from Virginia.

*Editor's Note: Michael Phillip Abraham is a Special Olympics Virginia athlete and has competed in Special Olympics for 22 years in gymnastics.*

*SOPA would like to thank Michael and his SOVA delegation for traveling to Penn State for Summer Games.*

## *Catching Up With The World Of ALPs*

Jordan Schubert, ALPs Coordinator



It's been a while since I updated you all on the many great things happening in the world of ALPs. Before I get to that though, I'd like to share with you what I've been up to since the last edition of SOAR!

The first big thing that happened to me was that I graduated from West Chester University in May. Fun fact, West Chester was the site of the very first SOPA Games in 1970. Another fun fact, I first found that out from the first SOPA athlete I met, who also competed in that event, Loretta Claiborne!

After I graduated, SOPA promoted my position as ALPs Coordinator to full time! As a result, not only am I continuing to grow ALPs on an everyday basis, but I'll also be assisting other departments with their projects. One of my most notable responsibilities that I have been assigned to has been assisting the Interscholastic Unified Sports (IUS) Team in the development of Unified Youth Committees in schools, a state Unified Youth Committee.

Even with my expanded role with SOPA, I still make time to play my favorite sport, basketball. For the second year in a row, my team, the Chester County Blue Streaks took the gold at Penn State. Just like last year though, it wasn't easy as we battled it out with the Philadelphia Heat, Beaver Sharks, and two intense battles with the Westmoreland Bulldogs.

Enough about me though...it's time to share some important ALPs news! At last year's Athlete Congress, Athlete Representatives from throughout the state voted to improve the quality of health, nutrition, and fitness for themselves and their fellow athletes. The Regional Input Council

(RIC) members took the suggestions made from Congress and reached out to other Athlete Representatives in their region to ask for additional input. Throughout the month of April, the RIC had a series of conference calls with the Programming Committee on the Board of Directors to create a set of goals and action steps. After being validated in May, the goals and action steps were presented to the SOPA Board of Directors by RIC Chair and SOPA Board Member, Mike Stephens. The Board then unanimously approved our goals and action steps. I'll be sharing the official goals and action steps after my update.

Also at Summer Games, along with getting a gold medal and hearing the Board passed the Health/Nutrition/Fitness goals and action steps, I was also thrilled to have the largest Athlete Input Council turnout at a State competition. One of the reasons why we had this turnout is because we didn't talk just about the games. The RIC helped me facilitate part of the session discussing important athlete related issues such as creating a new Code of Conduct and providing more Unified Sports opportunities. In addition to our Athlete Input Council, we conducted Athlete Input Surveys at Penn State. The simple way to describe these surveys is an Athlete Input Council on paper, except in this case it's just talking about the event.

Even with my expanded role, I always can make time to talk to my fellow athletes. I highly encourage you to call or e-mail me and share your ideas, questions, and concerns when it comes to your experience as an athlete on both the local and state level. If you live in or are visiting the Philadelphia area, you are also welcomed to stop by my office in Norristown to discuss ALPs or just say hi.

Before I was hired, SOPA had already developed a strong vision for ALPs for the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan. As the new Strategic Plan quickly approaches, I'm excited to create new ALPs opportunities and engage more athletes from across the state to become leaders. Ask not what Special Olympics can do for you, but what you can do for Special Olympics.

*Editor's Note: Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Program Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and is an athlete from Chester County. Jordan has been competing in Special Olympics for 11 years in Pennsylvania and Illinois.*

## *Health, Nutrition & Fitness 2014 Athlete Congress Priority Goals and Action Steps*

Background: For the 2014 Athlete Congress, SOPA sent out a survey to every athlete across the state to vote on the issue that should be prioritized. As a result of receiving the popular vote, improving athletes' health, nutrition, and fitness was the priority of the 2014 Athlete Congress. Each Athlete Representative in attendance provided recommendations that they wanted to be presented to the SOPA Board of Directors. After a series of conference calls between the RIC and Programming Committee and validation, the following are the official goals and action steps to improving athletes' health, nutrition and fitness at this time and in the future passed by the Board of Directors in June:

### **Immediate**

#### **Health Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal:** Ban tobacco products from all state competitions and strongly encourage Local Programs to do the same. This includes athletes, volunteers, families, friends, coaches, and spectators.

**Action Step:** Where available and appropriate, add venue "Non-Smoking Environment or Smoke Free" signage.

**Action Step:** Make announcement during HOD and Head Coaches meeting that "we are a non-smoking organization."

**Action Step:** Provide an educational information flyer at the Registration Table at state competitions which includes support group resources on tobacco cessation.

**Goal:** Offer the Healthy Athletes initiative at sectional and local competitions.

**Action Step:** During the 2015 Fall Festival we will extend the Healthy Athletes initiative and screen an additional day. At the completion, evaluate its effectiveness.

**Action Step:** Explore barriers that prevent coaches and their athletes to go through the Healthy Athletes initiative where offered. Determine solutions for growth and increase screening numbers.

**Goal:** Educate athletes, families and coaches on how to live healthy and active lifestyle.

**Action Step:** Provide an educational information flyer at the Registration Table at state competitions which encourages and reinforces healthy habits at home.

#### **Nutrition Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal:** Provide educational information on portion control and nutrition on food being served at state competitions.

**Action Step:** Venue dining staff gives a visual representation of the proper portion size of each item served.

**Goal:** Athlete and program leader provide menu input on all state athlete participated events.

**Action Step:** Starting with the 2015 Leadership Conference, GOC Athlete and Mentor present during

menu selection and work with venue dining dietitian on sizing per portion.

**Goal:** Provide nutrition education for coaches on being role models as well as providing “good nutrition” encouragement to their athletes.

**Action Step:** Provide an educational information flyer at the Registration Table at state competitions which has “good nutrition” encouragement for coaches and athletes.

**Goal:** No soda/desserts during breakfast and/or lunch at state competitions where athletes are being served SOPA coordinated meals.

**Action Step:** Turn off soda machines during breakfast and lunch.

**Action Step:** Model of sugar per drink during dinner or similar visual representation for awareness.

### **Fitness Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal:** Partner with fitness organizations, like the YMCA, to provide discounted rates or free memberships for athletes with a valid medical within the database.

**Action Step:** Research fitness organizations.

**Action Step:** Explore the potential of partnering with health care organizations to receive pedometers.

### **Future**

#### **Health Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal:** Offer the Healthy Athletes initiative at sectional and local competitions.

**Action Step:** In 2016 will offer one Healthy Athlete discipline during an invitational competition.

**Goal:** Investigate Healthy Communities concept and future development.

**Action Step:** In 2016 explore a Health Fair in one market for athletes and unified partners to have a comprehensive sports examination that concludes with a completed SOPA medical.

**Action Step:** Based on the one market, we will create a network of medical professionals across the state.

### **Fitness Goals and Action Steps**

**Goal:** Each local program has a “Fitness Coordinator” held by an athlete and mentor. This would not be a position on the local program Management Team.

**Action Step:** Each local program has a “Fitness Coordinator” held by an athlete and Mentor. This would not be a position on the local program Management Team. The below action items will be encouraged but not a mandate.

**Action Step:** Ensure local programs have signed up and record progress on Get Fit for Sports.

**Action Step:** Fitness Coordinator creates a year-round fitness club at local parks led by athletes for athletes, unified partners and families.

## 2015 Summer Games

### Athlete Input Survey / Athlete Input Council



#### **Athlete Input Survey:**

This was the first State Competition we conducted an Athlete Input Survey to get instant feedback while the athletes were competing. In total, 151 athletes took the survey, at least 2 from each sport.

#### **Athlete Input Survey Sports Breakdown:**

- Aquatics: 14 Athletes (9.27%)
- Athletics: 26 Athletes (17.22%)
- Basketball 5V5: 32 Athletes (21.19%)
- Basketball 3V3: 3 Athletes (1.99%)
- Basketball Skills: 4 Athletes (2.65%)
- Bowling: 9 Athletes (5.96%)
- Equestrian: 11 Athletes (7.28%)
- Golf: 5 Athletes (3.31%)
- Golf Skills: 2 Athletes (1.32%)
- Gymnastics: 10 Athletes (6.62%)
- Softball: 16 Athletes (10.6%)
- Softball Skills: 7 Athletes (4.64%)
- Tennis: 10 Athletes (6.62%)
- Tennis Skills: 2 Athletes (1.32%)

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

- a. Excellent: 121 Responses (80.67%)
- b. Average: 26 Responses (17.33%)
- c. Poor: 3 Responses (2%)

#### **2. Were there any delays in your schedule?**

- a. Yes: 34 Responses (22.82%)
- b. No: 115 Responses (77.18%)

#### **3. How would you assess the food and beverages provided at this event?**

- a. Excellent: 85 Responses (61.15%)
- b. Average: 40 Responses (28.78%)
- c. Poor: 14 Responses (10.07%)



#### **4. How would you assess Opening Ceremonies?**

- a. Excellent: 108 Responses (75%)
- b. Average: 28 Responses (19.44%)
- c. Poor: 8 Responses (5.56%)

#### **5. Did you attend Olympic Town?**

- a. Yes: 118 Responses (78.67%)
- b. No: 32 Responses (21.33%)

#### **6. If you answered “Yes”, how would you assess Olympic Town?**

- a. Excellent: 91 Responses (76.47%)
- b. Average: 26 Responses (21.85%)
- c. Poor: 2 Responses (1.68%)

#### **7. Did you attend Healthy Athletes?**

- a. Yes: 29 Responses (19.59%)
- b. No: 119 Responses (80.41%)

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

This was the first time we hosted an Athlete Input Council in Findlay Commons where we did not just talk about the games, but also large scale topics that impact all athletes.

We had members of the Regional Input Council (RIC) assist in facilitating to gather Athlete Input on topics they have been working on such as creating a Unified Code of Conduct and more Unified Sports opportunities.

#### **➤ SOPA Code of Conduct:**

- **Each athlete was asked if they had to sign an agreement to follow the Code of Conduct.**
  - The majority raised their hand.

- **The RIC asked the athletes who did not raise their hand if they are familiar with the Code of Conduct with SOPA and/or their local program.**
  - Only 3 athletes raised their hand.
- **Some programs prohibit athletes from carrying cell phones out of the concern they might use them inappropriately. What guidelines should be set that allow athletes to have their cell phone at competitions and when and how is it appropriate to use them?**
  - Give cell phone to coach while competing.
  - Put cell phone in bag or locker.
  - Athletes should be held responsible for when and how they use their cell phone.
  - Limit cell phone usage to evenings.
- **What can be done to ensure that no one smokes or uses tobacco products while at a Special Olympics event?**
  - Create a designated smoking area.
  - Post “No Smoking” or “Smoke Free Zone” signs at each location being used by SOPA.
  - Give warnings.
  - Coaches handbook says no smoking however coaches may not see it. Make sure it’s in big font or bright colors.

### ➤ **Unified Sports:**

- **Each athlete was asked if they had heard of Unified Sports.**
  - The majority raised their hand.
- **Each athlete was then asked if they had participated in Unified Sports.**
  - Only a few raised their hand.
- **What are some key obstacles surrounding Unified Sports?**
  - Taking spots away from traditional athletes.
  - Not enough funding and / or transportation.
  - Lack of education.

- **Interscholastic Unified Sports promotes inclusion between students with and without intellectual disabilities. How are some ways in which your local program can get involved?**
  - Global Messenger speaks to school districts.
  - Video showing the relationship between an athlete and partner.
  - Spread the word on social media.
  - Create more fundraising opportunities.

*Editor's Note: SOPA would like to thank those who attended the Athlete Input Council and took the Athlete Input Survey at Summer Games. Athlete Input Councils take place at each state competition and Athlete Input Surveys will be conducted at each state and sectional competition. No ALPs experience is required to attend an Athlete Input Council and / or take an Athlete Input Survey.*

### **Important Notices**

Jordan Schubert, ALPs Coordinator

**ALPs University Update:** SOPA is hosting an advanced ALPs University session on October 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> in Central, PA. All athletes who have taken Athlete Representative I and/or Global Messenger I at ALPs University or at a prior training session must complete a practicum in order to enroll in advanced courses:

- Athlete Representatives must complete three Capstone Projects.
- Global Messengers must deliver three speeches.

A report form must be filled out following the completion of each individual practicum/speech and sent to me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org). Both the Athlete Representative and Global Messenger report form can be found on the SOPA Homepage under the Athlete Leadership tab.

More details soon to come!

**Share Your Story:** If you would like to share a story on an ALPs event in your area or a personal experience, please e-mail me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) by December 31<sup>st</sup> for a chance to be shared in the Year End edition of SOAR!