

Expanding Unified Sports Opportunities in Local Programs

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Special Olympics
Pennsylvania



Session Overview



- **Special Olympics Pennsylvania Unified Sports Growth Plan**
- **Benefits to Local Programs, Athletes, and Unified Partners**
- **Building Local Unified Sports Programs**
- **League Play**

Growing Unified Sports in PA



SOPA wants to grow Unified Sports statewide in 2017 and 2018 by creating new programs at the Local Program level.

WHY?

1. Unified Sports is highly effective in fulfilling the two major goals of the SOPA 2016-20 strategic plan:
 - Enhance athlete opportunities to achieve their best
 - Build positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities
2. It provides Special Olympics athletes with more inclusion opportunities, meaningful relationships, and community connections
3. Improves overall sports performance and fitness



Addressing Concerns About Expansion

SOPA will not be expanding Unified Sports in team sports at state level competitions in 2017 or 2018 if there is no room for growth. This protects existing slots.

SOPA will collaborate with Local Programs to develop a plan for conducting statewide Unified Sports competitions starting in 2019.

- ▶ Separate Unified Sports state level events
- ▶ Included as part of current state events by adding new numbers and not taking away existing slots
- ▶ Combination of both

Ways to Grow Unified Sports



- One way to build Unified Sports programs is through league play or local/county competitions (depending on program size)
- Focus team sports: SOPA will be looking to identify one or two sports per season
- Local programs can offer any “pairs” or small roster (no more than four) Unified Sports options such as golf, bocce, tennis, and bowling

Unified Sports Advisory Committee



- Members
- Purpose
- Working on developing a SOPA Unified Sports Plan

Benefits of Unified Sports for Special Olympics Athletes



- Social Inclusion – building meaningful, fulfilling, and sustainable relationships with peers w/o disabilities
- New friendships
- Health, fitness, and improved sports skills/tactics
- Empowerment; new opportunities in the community due to changed attitudes
- Life skills development



Benefits of Unified Sports for Partners

- New friendships with Special Olympics athletes and fellow partners
- Opportunity to participate in a fully-inclusive sports program
- Gaining a better understanding about people with intellectual disabilities and advocating for them
- Health, fitness, and improved sports skills/tactics
- Life skills development



Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



1. New enthused volunteers and program supporters
2. New friendships and advocates for SO athletes
3. Source of coaches and management team members
4. Expansion of fundraising and resources
5. Opportunity to serve more Special Olympics athletes

Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



New energetic volunteers who support Special Olympics athletes as Unified partners and contribute to the program



Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



New friendships and advocates for Special Olympics athletes



Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



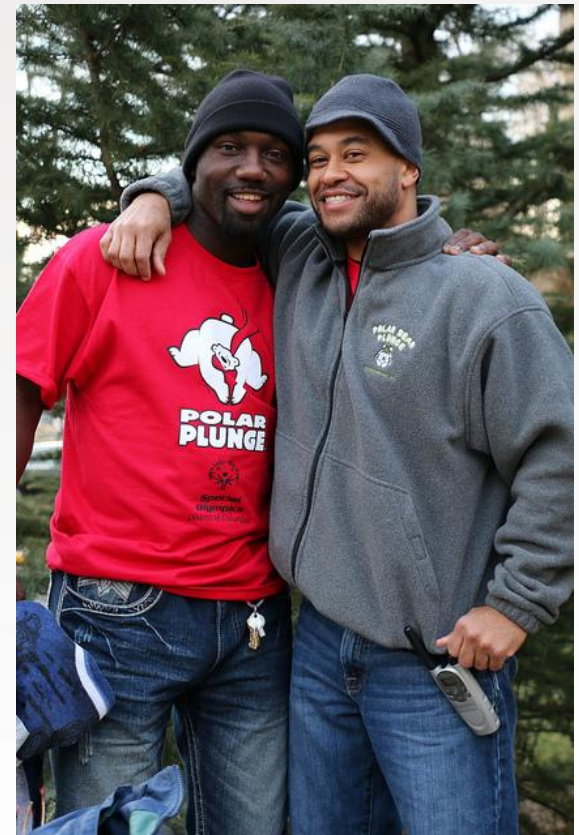
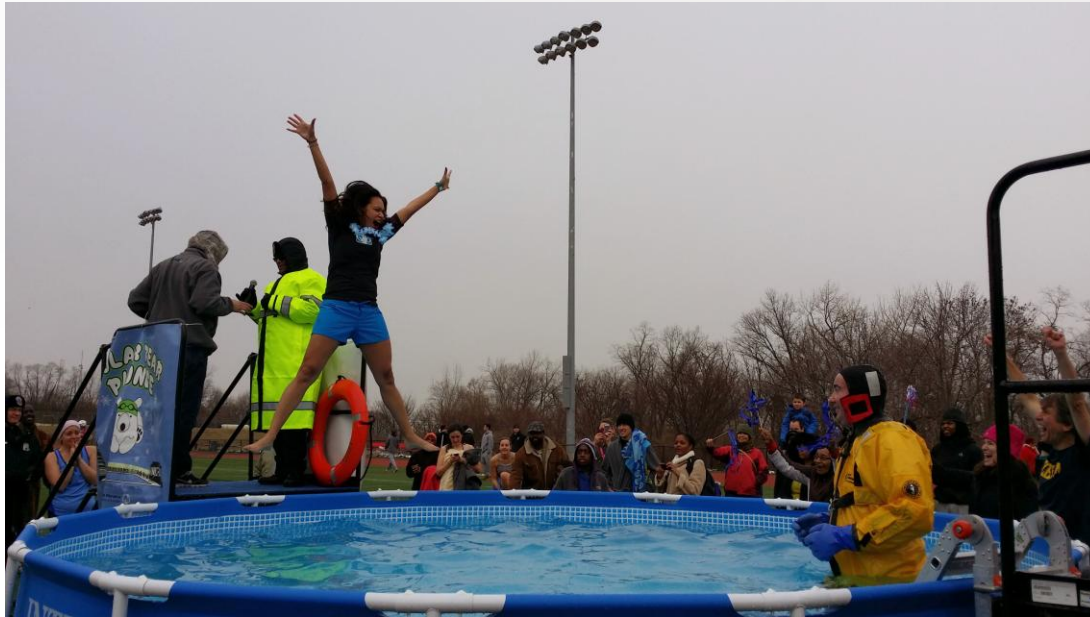
Source of coaches and management team members



Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



Expansion of fundraising and resources



Benefits of Unified Sports for the Local Program



Opportunity to serve more Special Olympics athletes



Summary of Special Olympics DC Unified Sports League Play

Unified Sports programs are offered year-round in Special Olympics D.C. for **adult athletes**

- **Fall:** Unified Bocce
- **Winter:** Unified Basketball and Unified Bowling
- **Spring:** Unified Volleyball
- **Summer:** Unified Tennis

Phase I

- Recruit existing adult Special Olympics athletes and new athletes from group homes
- Unified partners -- young professionals working in the District of Columbia ages 22-32.
- Select a sport that offers the best opportunities for maximum participation among SO athletes and partners, as well as social interaction – **Bocce**
- Leverage existing partnerships (i.e. D.C. Department of Recreation and Parks) for facility space



DC Unified Bocce League

- 18 Unified Bocce teams consisting of 6-8 members
- Highly-beneficial inclusion program which produces social connections and meaningful relationships



- Eight weeks of league play on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm under the lights at a D.C. Recreation Center in the autumn
- Season ends with Unified Bocce Championships



Phase II

- Build from success and continue momentum and enthusiasm engendered by Unified Bocce
- Create a new Unified Sports program from a traditional Special Olympics sports requiring revitalization:
Volleyball
- Recruit partners and athletes from Unified Bocce, as well as from new sources

DC Unified Volleyball League

- **Seven Unified Volleyball teams** train and compete against each other during the spring season
- Training and games were held over the course of eight weeks
- Culminating championship event held as part of Summer Games





Partners and athletes who had previously played Unified Bocce strengthened their social connection.



**Fulfilling
friendships
emerged**

Phase III

- Elevate the level of training and competition for SODC's most popular team sport, **basketball**
- Create two adult Unified Basketball leagues: one for high skilled players and one for less experienced and moderate skilled players
- Utilize existing network of Unified partners and access new sources of recruitment – “each one reach one” is a highly-successful method

East Division on Tuesday nights is for beginner players. Athletes and partners are age and ability-matched through pre-season skills assessments and scrimmages.

Demographic Profiles

SO athletes who are seeking to improve their skills and understanding of the game

Majority of partners are women who never played competitive basketball and valued the opportunity to develop friendships with Special Olympics athletes through sports.



West Division on Thursday nights is for higher skilled players. Athletes and partners are age and ability-matched through skills assessments and scrimmages to determine placement in East or West Division.



DC Unified Basketball League

East Division on Tuesdays, West Division on Thursdays

- Nine weeks of Unified Basketball training and league play is conducted involving **two competition divisions** and **12 teams** in the winter season
- Quality of performance and skill development improved among athletes and partners
- SODC Unified Basketball team won gold medal in Division I at the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games.



Social relationships and friendships flourished. SO athletes and partners spent time together doing different activities outside of basketball.



Let's talk Unified!

Discussion and questions

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