

***Special  
Olympics  
Pennsylvania***



***Transforming Lives Through  
The Joy of Sport***

**[www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org)**



*“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does... Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair... It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.” - Nelson Mandela*

## OUR MISSION & HISTORY

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

This mission has guided our growth from a backyard summer camp in 1968 to a movement making history in 172 countries. It started with the vision of our founder, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and her pioneering work with people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) was later established in May 1970 when 135 brave athletes participated in the first official Pennsylvania event – a small track and field competition at West Chester University. Today, SOPA trains nearly 20,000 athletes who participate in 21 Olympic-type sports at more than 300 local, sectional, and state level competitions.



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## OUR VISION & CORE VALUES

### OUR VISION

Our vision is to use sports to open hearts and minds towards people with intellectual disabilities and create inclusive communities all over the world.



Photo Credit: Patrick Mansell

### OUR CORE VALUES

Our ultimate goal is to improve each athlete's ability to train and compete in Special Olympics as well as in life. Therefore, six core values serve as a set of guiding principles that shape our behaviors and actions in achieving this goal: health and fitness, respect, inclusion, sportsmanship, passion and teamwork.

We are committed to inclusion, respect and dignity; and, we believe in the transformative power of sports to not only improve health and fitness but help our athletes to discover their passion. We embrace the purity of sports at all levels as we witness incredible personal athletic triumphs, sportsmanship and teamwork that shatter stereotypes.



## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS' BENEFITS AND IMPACT**

Numerous studies confirm that Special Olympics contributes to the physical, social and psychological development of people with intellectual disabilities. Through successful experiences in sports, they gain confidence and build a positive self-image that carries over into the classroom, the home, the job, and the community. Our athletes hold jobs, drive, go to college, live independently, and vote.

*"My greatest Special Olympics experience was when I received my very first gold medal for the 100 meter dash. I felt like I could take on the world while standing on the podium waiting to receive my medal."*

**- Raymond Anderson, Special Olympics Pennsylvania Athlete**

## WHO WE ARE

Special Olympics is a global movement of people creating a new world of inclusion and community, where every single person is accepted and welcomed, regardless of ability or disability. Through sports we are helping to make the world a better, healthier and more joyful place -- one athlete, one volunteer, one family member at a time.

## OUR ATHLETES

Athletes are the heart of Special Olympics. Our athletes are children and adults with intellectual disabilities – ages 8 years old and up – that come from all around the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We also have a Young Athletes program for children ages 2 to 7. People without intellectual disabilities can take part in Unified Sports, teams that mix people with and without intellectual disabilities.

Athletes are required to engage in an eight-week training program prior to any Special Olympics competition to develop skills and learn rules and strategies from their coaches.

*"Let me win, but if I cannot win,  
let me brave in the attempt."  
- Special Olympics Oath*



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## OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the backbone of our organization. We could not exist without the dedication of more than 30,000 Pennsylvania citizens. The time, energy and enthusiasm of volunteers fuel our movement and make our athletes' dreams a reality. There is a place for everyone in our organization (coach, official, unified partner, program management, games organizer, etc.). Special Olympics Pennsylvania is managed through 55 local programs, most of which are county or city-based. All of our programs need a full complement of talents and skills.

**To find a program closest to you, please visit our website at [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org) or call 1-800-235-9058 for more information.**

## OUR SUPPORTERS

We offer all of our training and competition opportunities free of charge to our athletes and families thanks to the generosity of our supporters. Our programs are funded by individual donations, corporate sponsors, foundations, special events, direct marketing, and through state and federal government assistance. Special Olympics also has deep relationships in the communities where it works. One of our most cherished partnerships is with the law enforcement community, who participate in grassroots fundraising and awareness events called the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics, which raises more than a million dollars annually in Pennsylvania.

Every day we empower athletes to shatter stereotypes and exceed their personal bests on the playing field and in life. But for every Special Olympics champion, there is another who is waiting for the chance to win. Please donate and help us get one more athlete onto the playing field. **Visit our website at [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org) to**

**donate online or call 1-800-235-9058 for more information.**



## THE UNIVERSAL POWER OF SPORTS

Sports are understood and celebrated by all people, regardless of race, nationality, gender, economic level or religion. Special Olympics Pennsylvania offers sports training and competition opportunities to athletes ranging from eight to over 80 years old in 21 different sports, with new sports emerging. Competition and training is available in more than 300 local, sectional, and state events in the following areas:

### OFFICIAL SUMMER SPORTS

Aquatics (Swimming)  
Athletics (Track & Field)  
Basketball  
Equestrian  
Golf  
Gymnastics  
Softball  
Tennis

### OFFICIAL FALL SPORTS

Bocce  
Long Distance  
Running/Walking  
Powerlifting  
Roller Skating  
Soccer  
Volleyball

### EMERGING SPORTS

Flag Football  
Kayaking  
Snowboarding

### OFFICIAL WINTER SPORTS

Alpine Skiing  
Bowling  
Cross Country Skiing  
Figure Skating  
Floor Hockey  
Snow Shoeing  
Speed Skating



*Emerging Sports – As the name states, are new to Special Olympics Pennsylvania. Training and local competitions may be taking place, but competition will not be offered at the State Level until the training numbers meet the requirement for adding a new sport.*

## NATIONAL AND WORLD GAMES

In addition to competition and training offered at the local, sectional and state level, Special Olympics World and National Games opportunities provide athletes with a global and nationwide stage to showcase and celebrate their abilities and accomplishments. Every two years, the World Games are held, alternating Winter and Summer Games. These are patterned after the traditional Olympic Games and follow many of the same customs, rules and regulations. National Games are typically held the year prior to Special Olympics World Summer Games.

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## ENHANCED ATHLETE OPPORTUNITIES

### ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

Special Olympics empowers athletes to be contributing and respected members of Special Olympics and society. Through organized training and practical experiences, our Athlete Leadership University and other programs prepare athletes to undertake meaningful positions of influence and leadership throughout the Special Olympics organization and their community. By participating as leaders, not just recipients of services, athletes help shape the public's perceptions about what they can do and gain skills that help them excel off the playing field.

### HEALTHY ATHLETES®

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® is the world's largest public health program for people with intellectual disabilities—a population that faces dramatically greater health issues than others, yet frequently receives inadequate care or no care at all. At Healthy Athletes events, volunteer healthcare professionals provide athletes with free screenings and services in seven clinical areas: Opening Eyes (Eye Care), Special Smiles (Dental screenings), Healthy Hearing, Fit Feet, MedFest (Physical Exam), FUNFitness (Physical Therapy), and Health Promotion.

*"You can't compete if your feet hurt, if your teeth hurt, or if your ears ache. Healthy Athletes is one of the best tools in reaching people with disabilities."*

**– Loretta Claiborne, Special Olympics Pennsylvania athlete and Chief Inspiration Officer/ Vice Chair, Special Olympics International Board**



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## **UNIFIED SPORTS®**

Unified Sports® places individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) side-by-side on competitive sports teams made up of people of similar age and ability. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

## **UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS**

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a comprehensive program that combines Interscholastic Unified Sports (IUS), Youth Leadership and Advocacy, and Whole School Engagement within the school environment to generate awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Unified Champion Schools are supported by the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and the Bureau of Special Education - Pennsylvania Department of Education.



## **YOUNG ATHLETES™**

The Special Olympics Young Athletes™ initiative introduces young children with intellectual disabilities ages two through seven to the world of Special Olympics by engaging them in active play. Teachers and relatives of participating children report gains in children's social and motor skills, adaptive behavior (self care, community, self-sufficiency, etc.), communication and cognitive development.

## BUILDING POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Sports are at the heart of the Special Olympics experience, but our ultimate goal is to use stories of athletes' achievements, skills and challenges to change attitudes. Those who witness the accomplishments of athletes cannot help but think differently about long-held stereotypes and prejudices. Through Special Olympics, people are reminded that we are all more alike than different.

The Movement creates opportunities for families, community members, local leaders, businesses, law enforcement, celebrities, dignitaries and others to band together to change attitudes and support athletes.

### SPREAD THE WORD INCLUSION CAMPAIGN

The Spread the Word Inclusion Campaign inspires respect and acceptance by advocating for inclusive words and actions to end the discrimination of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Campaign is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to promote and pledge their support of inclusion.





## GET INVOLVED

In the moments of a Special Olympics experience, an athlete is transformed into a champion. In those moments, everyone is changed. We are introduced into a more open, joyful, tolerant, accepting and ultimately peaceful world. The world needs Special Olympics now more than ever. So please join us in changing lives, and in changing the world.

**Special  
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## ENGAGE WITH US

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