



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Special Olympics Pennsylvania Launches New Innovation Lab

**(NORRISTOWN, PA, April 28, 2020)** – Today, Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) announced the launch of a new Innovation Lab to foster more rapid and effective innovation across all aspects of the organization. Two areas of primary focus for the Innovation Lab will be: 1) “return to play” – how to safely and effectively resume athletic training and competition activities as coronavirus restrictions are eased – and 2) how to adapt fundraising events and activities to continue engaging supporters and generate revenue to support SOPA’s programs in the current environment. The lab will also look for innovative ways to deliver important programs such as Healthy Athletes/Healthy Communities, SOPA’s health and wellness initiatives, and “Athlete Leadership University,” a curriculum of training courses that prepare SOPA athletes to take on meaningful leadership roles both inside and outside of Special Olympics.

“We saw incredible success with our recent Virtual Beaver Stadium Run that raised more than \$350,000 and engaged more than 2,000 participants,” said Matthew Aaron, SOPA President and CEO. “I am incredibly grateful to our sponsors and participants who made this such a positive experience, and to the staff and volunteer team that brought it to fruition in just a few short weeks. We’re now applying the lessons learned and pouring our creativity and energy into SOPA’s upcoming Virtual Summer Games that will be held from 11-13 June. And we know we will need to innovate more and more in the future. Creativity and good ideas exist everywhere in our organization, and the focus of the Innovation Lab will be on identifying and harnessing these ideas so we can thrive when we emerge from this pandemic.”

A significant portion (approximately 20%) of SOPA’s existing staff team will be dedicated to the work of the Innovation Lab. The Innovation Lab team will work collaboratively with other staff, volunteers, Special Olympics athletes, partners, and stakeholders to develop and implement an innovation strategy.

### Special Olympics Pennsylvania

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*Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities*



“We need to innovate more, and we need to be able to do it quickly. We’ve been tasked with thinking differently during these uncharted times, and I can’t wait to see the future of SOPA take shape,” said Chelsea Hammell, Director of the SOPA Innovation Lab.

### ***About Special Olympics Pennsylvania***

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports to more than 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities. For 50 years, SOPA and its 54 local programs have used the power of sports to transform the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and unite everyone by fostering community and building a more acceptable and civil society. SOPA is much more than a sports organization. Through its Athlete Leadership Programs, athletes assume meaningful leadership roles, influence change within the Special Olympics movement and take on roles as Global Messengers (trained as public speakers for Special Olympics), athlete representatives, coaches, board members and more. SOPA also addresses major challenges facing its athletes including healthcare. Its Healthy Athletes program offers athletes free health screenings in the form of eye, ear, dental and podiatry assessments. Athletes are also taught how to live active lifestyles, eat healthy and more. Additionally, SOPA strives to create a unified world by promoting inclusion, uniting communities, and changing attitude. Through Unified Sports, SOPA brings together individuals with and without intellectual disabilities as equal teammates in training and competition, which promotes respect and acceptance, and facilitates meaningful relationships between people of all abilities. For more information about how you can join “The Inclusion Revolution,” visit [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org).

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