



## SPECIAL OLYMPICS FACTS

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS BY THE NUMBERS:**

**Nearly 3.5 Million** Special Olympics athletes worldwide

**226 Programs** around the world

**More than 170** Countries around the world

**Seven** Regional Offices

**32** Olympics-type sports

**44,000** competitions annually

**805,000** volunteers worldwide

**250,000** coaches around the world

### **OVERVIEW:**

Over the past 42 years Special Olympics has grown from a modest program serving local athletes to become the **world's largest movement dedicated to promoting respect, acceptance, inclusion, and human dignity** for people with intellectual disabilities through sports.

- With sports at the core, Special Olympics has grown to be a movement that is not just about the largest disability population in the world, but about all of us. Sports is a universal language which unites people on and off the field of play, cutting across lines of race, ethnicity, education level, social status, and economic background.
- Special Olympics currently serves **nearly 3.5 million athletes** in **226 Programs** across more than **170 countries** worldwide with **seven regional offices** around the world including Ireland, Egypt, South Africa, India, China, Panama, and the United States.
- Special Olympics offers **32 Olympic-type summer and winter sports** and holds more than **44,000 competitions annually**, with the help of the more than **805,000 volunteers** and nearly **250,000 coaches** who supported Special Olympics athletes globally during 2009.
- If you are a fan of sports that create unity, athletes who inspire, and connections that foster acceptance, then you are already a fan of Special Olympics.

## GROWTH:

- During 2009, Special Olympics continued to grow steadily and expand global reach at an annual rate of 8 percent. Since 2000 (when SO began to collect consistent data), the Special Olympics athlete count has grown from just under 1 million to the current nearly 3.5 million, **remarkably reaching over 2.5 million new athletes around the world in less than a decade.**
- In addition, key **demographics** to note: approximately 67 percent of our Special Olympics athletes are of school age (8-21) and over 31 percent are adults (22+); Special Olympics also serves nearly 57,000 individuals in the 2-7 age group. Female athletes account for 38 percent of the total athlete population.
- Guided by the Movement's Mission Statement, Special Olympics is determined to offer sports training and competition opportunities to all interested individuals with intellectual disabilities. Over the years, while we have significantly expanded our geographic scope of work and reached millions of new athletes, Special Olympics **still serves less than 2 percent of the world's population of people with intellectual disabilities.** People with intellectual disabilities are every **society's most neglected population.** Nearly 200 million people, have an intellectual disability (ID), making it the largest disability population in the world.

## IMPACT:

- Special Olympics provides a catalyst for **social change and building communities** Special Olympics believes in creating more unified communities around the world - places where each person, regardless of ability or disability, is accepted and welcomed, and where every individual contributes to the strength and vibrancy of the whole.
- Special Olympics is **empowering athletes** with intellectual disabilities to be leaders in society by providing them opportunities to learn skills that transcend the playing field. Our athletes hold jobs, go to school, and are active members in their communities.
- Nearly 70% of persons with intellectual disabilities have the capacity to function at much higher levels than society's perceptions allow or encourage (Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities, Special Olympics, 2003).

## SPORTS:

- Special Olympics continues to sharpen its focus on delivering year-round competition opportunities in a variety of sports. In 2009, Special Olympics offered athletes 12,000 more competitions than the previous year (34 percent more than in 2008) and **increased the overall number of competitions to 44,136** – equal to 121 competitions on average being staged every day around the world. Special Olympics most popular sports include athletics, football, basketball, bowling, aquatics and table-tennis.
- Unified Sports® continues to grow worldwide as nearly **130,000 Unified Sports athletes** and over **196,000 partners** are now engaged in Unified Sports opportunities. Unified Sports place Special Olympics athletes on the same field as partners without intellectual disabilities together on the same playing field. Special Olympics plans to grow Unified Sports 25 percent by 2015.

## **HEALTH & PUBLIC POLICY**

Special Olympics works with world leaders at the highest levels of government, health care, education and business, holding symposia and meetings that focus on the well-being of people with intellectual disabilities. Those contacts, coupled with our research findings, help shape public policy to effect social change.

- After her visit to the 2007 World Games in Shanghai China, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered the transfer of the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to the Office of the President to further strengthen the government programs for the welfare of persons with disabilities.
- In 2010, both chambers of the U.S. Congress introduced the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Act, a renewal of the 2004 Sport and Empowerment Act which authorized five years of funding for Special Olympics health, education, and other initiatives. The new bill also included authorization for grants for Best Buddies International and the establishment of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Institutes for Sport and Social Impact.
- In Belgium, clinical data from Special Olympics Special Smiles athlete screenings in 2003 and 2004 were used to convince politicians to change the dental reimbursement for preventive measures for people with disabilities. Beginning in February 2005, people with intellectual disabilities have been reimbursed for up to four visits to the dentist each year instead of just one, in recognition of the significant oral health problems in this population.
- Health Screenings have revealed that people with ID face huge health disparities, often due to the lack of medical professionals willing to serve a person with ID. Inexcusably, 39% have obvious untreated tooth decay; 28.7% have missing teeth; 55.4% have gait abnormalities; 25.9% fail hearing tests; 19.6% have low bone density; and 16.4% have eye disease. People with intellectual disability have 40% greater risk of preventable secondary health conditions than the general population.

## **FAMILIES:**

- **Helping families connect:** Communities of families have expanded their involvement in Special Olympics by coming together and organizing a Family Support Network. Special Olympics has established over 100 Family Support Networks globally to provide a welcome resource, develop community partner relationships and register thousands of new family members for local programs.

## **CORPORATE PARTNERS:**

- **Special Olympics** is a well-respected brand and marketing partner that reaches all around the globe and deep into local communities. Currently, our movement has partnerships with Coca Cola, Mattel, Safeway, Bank of America, Proctor & Gamble, The Lions Clubs International, Safilo and Essilor.
- **Our market research** has shown that Special Olympics has a 95 percent brand recognition (US).

## **YOUTH:**

- **Curriculum for Change:** SO Get Into It® (K-12) educates youth about intellectual disabilities while creating positive attitudes of inclusion, value and respect. SO Get Into® also encourages students without disabilities to participate in Special Olympics, bringing together youth who otherwise might not have the opportunity to meet and to learn from one another.
- **Endorsed and effective programming:** Available in 23 languages and used in over 75 countries, the SO Get Into It® curriculum is endorsed by numerous organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers. Independent research proved Unified Sports and SO Get Into It® highly effective in changing attitudes. The curriculum is free of charge.

## **UPDATED BOILER PLATE:**

*Below is a standard paragraph or boilerplate about Special Olympics to be used when describing the movement. Typically, this paragraph is used in press releases.*

### **About Special Olympics**

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to nearly 3.5 million athletes in over 170 countries in all regions of the world, providing year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place every day, changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood's backyard. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy and friendship. Visit Special Olympics at [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org).

###