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ATHLETE OUTREACH—AN OVERVIEW

Since its founding in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics has reached millions of athletes with intellectual disabilities in the United States and in 170 countries.

Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI) serves over 10,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities in Wisconsin. There is ample room for growth, and while every individual with ID may not be interested in sports, the community support Special Olympics families enjoy is a significant benefit that many more Wisconsin families could take part in.

It is not realistic to believe that everyone with intellectual disabilities will be part of Special Olympics, but it is our mission to make Special Olympics available to those who choose to participate.

SOWI continues to focus their athlete recruitment efforts on improving services to existing Agencies through the work of the Agency Management Committee and the implementation of the Agency Management Program. It is our hope that by supporting the existing Agencies and documenting plans for new Agencies, and recruiting youth advocates and volunteers through Project UNIFY®, we are laying the foundation for future growth.

While some Agencies are searching for more athletes to create a viable program, others are straining at the seams from over enrollment. SOWI understands and respects the different demands facing Agencies, and in turn empowers Agency managers through the following guideline:

“An Agency may not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, nation, origin of political policy; however, if the Agency has reached the maximum capacity for providing a safe, quality program the Agency manager may contact the Regional office to inform them of the situation so we can work together towards a viable solution.”

ATHLETE OUTREACH OPTIONS

We rely on your expertise in knowing your Agency and which strategies are most appropriate for expanding your athlete enrollment. This list should be viewed as a menu. You can pick and choose whatever strategies or information fit your specific needs.

The SOWI website has materials for an Agency manager who wants to recruit new athletes or volunteers. Additionally, the Regional office can provide additional materials or be a technical resource to an Agency manager who is contacting groups in the community.

Special Olympics Programs (Many descriptions included in this section of the handbook)

- Unified Champion Schools
- Young Athletes™
- Healthy Athletes®*
- Unified Sports®
- Get Into It®
- Spread the Word to End the Word®
- Traditional Special Olympics sports programs (Agencies)

Target Areas for Athlete Recruitment

- Pre-school and Elementary Schools
 - Introduce Young Athletes for 2-7 year olds to school administrators
 - Introduce Unified Champion Schools
 - Introduce Get Into It to Principal or Teachers
 - Encourage schools to offer Special Olympics as an extracurricular activity
 - Make Special Olympics an extension of physical education curriculum
- Secondary Schools
 - Introduce Get Into It to Principal or Teachers
 - Introduce Project UNIFY
 - Establish sports teams coached by high school students, faculty and coaches for Special Olympics athletes
 - Create Fans Clubs which involve high school students who volunteer on a regular basis assisting Special Olympics athletes in practice and competition
 - Promote the Unified Sports program to bring together athletes with and without intellectual disabilities to practice and compete on the same teams. Unified Sports can be part of an interscholastic or intramural after-school league at the junior high or high school level
 - Involve athletes and students to coordinate the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign
- Parks and Recreation Departments
 - Encourage parks and recreation departments to include Special Olympics training, competition and coach's training schools among the activities they offer
 - Work with them to gain access to facilities, transportation, publications and events
 - Encourage them to run Young Athletes
- Work Settings
 - Establish Special Olympics training programs or health awareness projects as employee fitness programs
 - Have employers enable and encourage employees to participate in local Special Olympics programs
 - Start Unified Sports programs to generate interaction between employees with and without intellectual disabilities in integrated workplaces

- Families and Athletes
 - Introduce families with children with disabilities ages 2-7 to Young Athletes family kits
 - Continue to build the Global Messengers program in which Special Olympics athletes are selected and trained to become effective public speakers to express the benefits of Special Olympics (see *ALPs* section of this handbook)
 - Encourage athletes and family currently participating in Special Olympics to recruit other athletes and families
 - Establish family committees wherever there is a Special Olympics program
 - Host Family Health Forums to introduce new families to Special Olympics and to provide relevant health resources to their communities

*Introduce health opportunities at all age levels and outreach targets

A Ray of Hope, a Bright Future Ahead

When parents learn that their newborn or expected child has an intellectual disability, they are often faced with a crisis of conscience. In an instant, the joy and anticipation that these parents were experiencing turns into anxious questioning: What does the future hold for my child? What can we do? How can we cope?

Then they tell us how Special Olympics delivered a ray of hope.

Through year-round sports training and competition, Special Olympics builds self-esteem, fosters courage and teaches valuable lessons about striving, winning, losing and trying again. A recent Yale University study found that athletes participating in Special Olympics benefit from:

- Improved friendships and family relations
- Improved physical fitness and sports skills
- Enhanced self-confidence and social competency
- Greater readiness for employment
- Better preparation for independent living
- Increased ability to make personal decisions

Through SOWI, over 10,000 athletes and their families are discovering that a bright future lies ahead.

Families can find a network of people with similar concerns, questions and life experiences. They can help find medical expertise and community resources and they find a place of acceptance, respect and belonging.

Family Health Forums

Families around Wisconsin can come together at Family Health Forums to discuss topics that interest them (i.e. Health care, healthy relationships, home training, nutrition, etc.). The goal of these forums is to bring families together to learn, share, and become a strong network of support for each other. If you are interested in bringing a Family Health Forum to your community, contact The Director of Health Programs.

What Can You Do To Help?

Families and friends of Special Olympics athletes are encouraged to play an active role in their community Special Olympics program, to share in the training of the athletes, and to assist in the public education efforts needed to create greater understanding of the emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. You can be a:

- Fan in the Stands
- Driver
- Home Trainer
- Fundraiser
- Spokesperson
- Family Committee Member

One or all—it is your choice! A brochure and *Family Handbook* in English and Spanish can be found on the Family and Friends page of the SOWI website. These are great resources for new families as they help answer many general questions about Special Olympics.

SAMPLE ATHLETE OUTREACH LETTER

Date

Dear Athlete *(personalized when possible)*:

Congratulation on catching the spirit of *(name of your Agency here)*!

Would you like to join the *(number of athletes in your Agency)* athletes who are already receiving athletic training, improving physical fitness, achieving a sense of community, building friendships and competing in local, and State competitions?

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. Our program offers training in *(name of sports your Agency offers)*.

Currently, we are training in *(name of sport(s) currently training in)*. We practice *(#)* a week from *(training time)* at *(training site)*. There is no charge for training.

A good first step is to come and watch a practice or competition so you can witness how Special Olympics reveals the champion in all of us and determine if you'd like to join our team. Please call me at *(your Agency phone #)* so I can give you the details and answer any of your questions.

Cordially,

Name
Position in the Agency
Address
Phone

/encl

Special Olympics Wisconsin Fact Sheet
Eligibility Statement
(Any local fact sheet or training schedule you have developed)

SAMPLE FAMILY OUTREACH LETTER FOR A NEW FAMILY

Date

Dear Family Member (*personalized if possible*):

From skiing to aquatics, Special Olympics is an opportunity for families to share in the accomplishments of their children, participate in a year-round sports training and competition program that the whole family can enjoy and share their joy with other families. Special Olympics reveals the champion in all of us.

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide 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.

More than nine out of 10 participating families say that Special Olympics has added a new dimension of happiness for their family, improved their child's self image, and served as a strong network for the family.

Families can choose their level of involvement in our Special Olympics program. Some families provide not only encouragement and love, but may also coach, offer transportation, assist with fundraising, officiate, chaperone and train other volunteers.

Our program offers training in (*name of sports your Agency offers*). Currently, we are training in (*name of sport(s) currently training in*). We practice (#) a week from (*training time*) at (*training site*). There is no cost for training.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can involve a family member in Special Olympics, you are welcome to attend a practice and see firsthand the benefits of our program or you may call me at (*your Agency phone #*) so I may answer your questions directly.

Cordially,

Name
Position with Agency
Address
Phone

/encl

Special Olympics Wisconsin Fact Sheet
Statement of Eligibility
(*Any local fact sheet or practice schedule you may have developed*)

SAMPLE ATHLETE/FAMILY FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Date

Hello *(athlete or family member name)*:

We are very excited that you are interested in joining *(Agency Name)*.

The first part is to complete the Official Special Olympics Release Form AND Application for Participation. Both forms serve as an athlete's registration and must be completed before an athlete can participate in any practices or competitions. It provides for a photo release, necessary medical information, secondary insurance coverage by Special Olympics, Inc., and emergency medical treatment in the event a parent or guardian cannot be reached.

Please complete the enclosed forms carefully making sure that all the sections are complete, accurate and clear. Mail/deliver it to me by *(date you choose which gives you time to check it and still meet the Medical Deadline date)*.

Get ready! Here is the practice schedule so you can mark it on your calendar.

In addition, I look forward to seeing you at the family orientation meeting on *(date)* at *(time)* at *(location)*.

Cordially,

Name
Position in the Agency
Address
Phone Number

/encl

Official Special Olympics Release Form
Application for Participation in Special Olympics
Special Exam Form *(if necessary)*
Training Schedule
Family Handbook

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