Special Olympics Overview

Special Olympics is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society through sports training and competition. Special Olympics currently serves 3.2 million people with intellectual disabilities in more than 225 programs in 180 countries.

Mission and Goals

Mission
The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports to children and adults with intellectual disabilities in order 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.

Current Goals
- To achieve quality growth by creating innovative opportunities to bring the Special Olympics experience to more of the world’s 190 million people with intellectual disabilities
- To create positive public attitudes toward a population that is often rejected or forgotten
- To promote global athlete leadership and dedicate the movement to empowerment and dignity, not charity
- To change negative attitudes and misperceptions about people with intellectual disabilities, replacing stigma and rejection with an emphasis on potential, ability and acceptance

Special Olympics 2011 World Summer Games

WHEN
June 25 – July 4, 2011
Opening Ceremony: June 25, 2011
Closing Ceremony: July 4, 2011

WHO
7,500 athletes from 185 countries
5,500 coaches and official delegates
40,000 athletes’ family members and friends
25,000 volunteers
3,000 media representatives
30,000 estimated spectators

WHERE
The Games and competition will be based around the Kallimarmaron Panathinakon Stadium and the Athens community.

SPORTS
Aquatics
Athletics (Track & Field and Marathon)
Badminton
Basketball
Beach Volleyball
Bocce
Bowling
Cycling
Equestrian
Football
Golf
Gymnastics
PROGRAMMING
Educational seminars will be offered to athletes and their families. Additional programming will be aimed to increase public knowledge and understanding of the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities.

EXHIBITS
Major sponsors and area businesses will host a Festival Area filled with information and activities for Games attendees.

VOLUNTEERS
Volunteers will be a key component to the overall success. Over 25,000 individuals will be needed to assist with the competition and signature events.

Special Olympics History

June 1962
Eunice Kennedy Shriver starts a summer day camp for children and adults with intellectual disabilities at her home in Maryland to explore their capabilities in a variety of sports and physical activities.

19-20 July 1968
The 1st International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. 1,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities from 26 U.S. states and Canada compete in track and field and swimming.

December 1971
The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized to use the name “Olympics” in the United States.

5-11 February 1977
Steamboat Springs, Colorado, hosts the 1st International Special Olympics Winter Games with more than 500 athletes competing in skiing and skating events. CBS, ABC and NBC television networks cover the Games.

1981
The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is launched in Wichita, Kansas (USA), where Police Chief Richard LaMunyon saw an urgent need to raise funds for and increase awareness of Special Olympics. The Torch Run is now the movement’s largest grassroots fundraiser, raising $30 million annually.

September 1986
The United Nations in New York City launches the International Year of Special Olympics under the banner “Special Olympics—Uniting the World.”

October 1987
“*A Very Special Christmas,*” a benefit album featuring holiday music by top rock & roll performers, is released worldwide. Produced by Jimmy and Vicki Iovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, all proceeds benefit Special Olympics. More than 2 million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.
February 1988
The International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs a historic agreement with Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, in which the IOC officially endorses and recognizes Special Olympics.

July 1988
Special Olympics Unified Sports® is launched at the annual Special Olympics Conference in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. Bowling, volleyball and softball are the first sports to be included.

20-27 March 1993
The 5th Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in the beautiful Austrian cities of Salzburg and Schladming. These are the first World Winter Games held outside North America.

1-9 July 1995
A number of new initiatives make their debut at the 9th Special Olympics World Summer Games, including the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes® and Research and Policy Symposia, and, for the first time, people with intellectual disabilities serve as certified officials.

January 1997
Healthy Athletes becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health-care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screening, injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

20 July 1998
Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of 12 30th Anniversary Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers who travel the world as spokespeople for the movement for the next two years.

17 December 1998
U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas from Washington D.C.”—marking the first time that the White House hosts a Special Olympics gala and the first time that artists from “A Very Special Christmas” album series gather together to perform. In 2000, President and Mrs. Clinton host “A very Special Christmas” for the second time.

2000
The “Campaign for Special Olympics” sets unprecedented goals to increase athlete participation by 1 million and to raise more than $120 million over the course of the next five years, changing the face of the movement.

18-22 May 2000
As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” Arnold Schwarzenegger joins Special Olympics athletes to light the “Flame of Hope” at the Great Wall of China and launch the Special Olympics China Millennium March, kicking off the most ambitious growth campaign in the movement’s history. China pledges to increase its current number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

12-14 July 2001
Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City South Africa, host Special Olympics African Hope. Former President Nelson Mandela, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Special Olympics athletes gather to light the “Flame of Hope” and kick off the largest Law Enforcement Torch Run through the streets of Cape Town. The event generates awareness of the movement throughout the continent and marks the launch of a major growth initiative to reach 100,000 new athletes in Africa by 2005.

October 2001
Special Olympics develops and distributes SO Get Into It™ kits for students with and without disabilities to schools and teachers worldwide at no cost. The kit teaches young people about intellectual disabilities while empowering them to “be the difference” by learning values of inclusion, acceptance and respect.
19-20 July 2002
The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund partners with Special Olympics to host an annual birthday celebration for its founder and chairperson, former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and helps Special Olympics launch its Unified Sports® program.

21-29 June 2003
Ireland hosts the first Special Olympics World Summer Games to be held outside the United States. 5,500 athletes participate in this landmark event. It is the largest sporting event in 2003, capturing the hearts and imaginations of the Irish people.

20 June 2003
“The Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities” reports on how people across the world view the roles and capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities in the workplace, classroom and daily social life. The study is the most comprehensive ever conducted on this subject.

30 October 2004
U.S. President George W. Bush signs the “Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act,” which appropriates $15 million per year over five years to fund the growth of Special Olympics and support initiatives that foster greater respect and understanding for people with intellectual disabilities. The signing marks the first time that Special Olympics secures support through legislation.

23 December 2005
“The Ringer,” a Farrelly Brothers film starring Johnny Knoxville, opens in theaters throughout Canada and the United States. The film includes appearances from more than 150 athletes. Its producers collaborate with Special Olympics to challenge destructive stereotypes and negative thinking about people with intellectual disabilities.

2006
Special Olympics surpasses its goal of doubling the number of athletes that participate worldwide to 2.5 million participants. With sports at the core, the movement stands as a leader in advancing rights and opportunities and policy change for its athletes in 165 countries worldwide.

10 June 2006
President and Mrs. George W. Bush host a tribute dinner at the White House to honor Special Olympics for its unprecedented growth over the past five years on the birthday of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

October 2007
The city of Shanghai, China, hosts the 12th Special Olympics World Summer Games, which are broadcast internationally on an unprecedented scale. These Games, with more than 7,500 athletes from 164 countries participating, are a historic moment in the movement’s history.

July 2008
Special Olympics celebrates its 40th anniversary as a true global movement, with almost 3 million athletes in more than 180 countries around the world.

February 2009
The Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, USA, draws nearly 2,000 athletes from close to 100 countries. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden visited and declared special needs advocacy “a civil rights movement.”

May 2009
The U.S. National Portrait Gallery unveils a historic portrait of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of Special Olympics. This historic painting is the first portrait the Gallery has ever commissioned of an individual who has not served as a U.S. President or First Lady.
11 August 2009
The founder of Special Olympics, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, dies at her family home in Massachusetts. Letters and messages celebrating her contribution to humanity poured in from world leaders and ordinary people around the world. See www.eunicekennedyshriver.org

November 2009
"A Very Special Christmas 7" is released, infusing the Christmas record series with the energy and talent of a new generation of music stars. See www.veryspecialchristmas.org.