



SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETE PROGRAM

In early 2007, Special Olympics created the Special Olympics Young Athletes Program as a pilot program to reach out to children with intellectual disabilities ages 2 to 7, and to welcome them and their families to the Special Olympics movement. The program made its global debut in fall 2007 at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China. To date, more than 10,000 children worldwide benefit from the Young Athletes program.

Through Young Athletes, volunteers introduce young children to the world of sport, with the goal of preparing them for Special Olympics sports training and competition when they get older. The program focuses on the basics that are crucial to cognitive development: physical activities that develop motor skills and hand-eye coordination, and the application of these physical skills through sports skills programs.

Improved social skills is another inspiring reason parents enroll their children in Young Athletes. The confidence boost makes it easier for them to interact with other children on the playground, whether or not they have intellectual disabilities.

Reports from parents are encouraging, and the science looks promising, too. Special Olympics commissioned the University of Massachusetts to conduct a study of Young Athletes pilot sites to learn more about the program's benefits. Preliminary findings suggest that participation in Young Athletes may lead to improvements in motor development, social and emotional development and communication development.

Thanks to the support of organizations like Mattel, the Lynch Family Foundation and the Gang Family Foundation, Special Olympics is now able to welcome young children with intellectual disabilities and their families to a world of physical activity, social development, pride, and community. To date, we have brought Young Athletes to more than 10,000 children in 21 countries. But with 200 million people worldwide with intellectual disabilities, including children, there is a need to reach so many more.

Young Athletes Equipment

The following items are provided in the Young Athletes Program Kit:

Substitutions are listed beside each item

1. balance beam (*rope or floor markers*)
2. light, inflatable ball (*any ball*)
3. bean bags (*small toys, figures or natural items such as flowers, leaves, etc.*)
4. cones (*boxes or cut logs of different sizes*)
5. large plastic blocks (*cut logs of different sizes, foam blocks*)
6. dowels (*yardsticks, paper towel or gift wrap rolls, small tree branches*)
7. floor markers (*placemats or material in different sizes and shapes and colors*)
8. hoops (*different sized boxes, hula hoops*)
9. paddle (*short stick*)
10. scarf (*any flowing, light material*)
11. small foam ball (*any ball*)

Additional equipment that may be used includes junior-size basketball, junior-size plastic golf club, junior-size plastic hockey stick, junior-size racket, junior-size soccer ball, playground ball, plastic bat, rope, tee, tennis ball. You may purchase this equipment at www.flaghouse.com/ya

To learn more about the Young Athlete Program visit www.specialolympics.org/young_athletes