



Special Olympics is providing opportunities for more than 4.4 million athletes, 1.3 million volunteers and millions more people worldwide through 226 Accredited Special Olympics Programs in more than 170 countries. Special Olympics has extensive programming in the areas of health, education and community building in addition to its well- established sports programs.

### **What is Special Olympics Illinois mission?**

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-style 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.

### **How does someone become an Athlete?**

Fill out the [Athlete Interest Form!](#) Simply fill out the athlete medical form and submit it to the state office. Athletes of all ages and abilities are welcome!

### **What makes an athlete eligible to participate?**

To be eligible to participate in Special Olympics, an athlete must be at least eight years of age and identified by an agency or professional as having one of the following conditions: intellectual disability, cognitive delays as measured by formal assessment, or significant learning or vocational problems due to cognitive delay that have required specially designed instruction. Athletes are divided based on gender, age, and ability level by a process called "divisioning". [The Special Olympics Young Athletes program](#) was created for children with intellectual disabilities ages 2 through 7.

### **What if I am not eligible to become a Special Olympics athlete?**

If your IQ is above 75 and/or you have an intellectual (learning) difficulty (i.e. dyslexia or Asperger's Syndrome) you can still be part of the Special Olympics Movement. You can become a [Unified Partner](#) of a sport or a [volunteer](#).

### **How does Special Olympics help improve an athlete's life?**

Individuals who compete in Special Olympics develop improved physical fitness and motor skills and greater self-confidence. They exhibit courage and enthusiasm and build lasting friendships. These life skills enhance their ability to live normal productive lives. More than ever, Special Olympics athletes hold jobs, own homes, go to school and successfully confront life challenges on a daily basis. They grow mentally, socially and spiritually and, through their activities, exhibit boundless courage and enthusiasm, enjoy the rewards of friendship and ultimately discover not only new abilities and talents but "their voices" as well.

### **When is the next Special Olympics?**

Special Olympics is happening every day. 30,000 competitions take place around the world on an annual basis including local, national, regional and World Games.

### **Does it cost anything to participate?**

Special Olympics Illinois programs are offered at no cost to athletes, partners and families, but expenses amount to more than ten million dollars annually. Thanks to the generous support of our sponsors and donors, both athletes and volunteers can participate absolutely free. However, we are always accepting donations. Community support in our fundraising activities helps keep the Special Olympics up and running. The impact of our programs continues to grow.

### **How can I help out?**

Special Olympics couldn't operate without the help of our wonderful volunteers. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, click [here](#). We also couldn't operate without the generous support of our donors. If you are interested in making a donation, click [here](#). Many of our family members serve as volunteers (coaches, fundraisers, program committee members, etc.); however we know that not everyone has spare time available. Becoming an annual donor via one-time donation(s) or automated payroll deductions is a great way to be involved in supporting your local program. Every little bit counts, and we are greatly thankful for your contribution.