



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Alexandra McMillin: 312-502-7954 | [amcmillin@soill.org](mailto:amcmillin@soill.org)

***Special Olympics Global Youth Leadership Forum to Help Advance Inclusive World***

*Youth Pair from North America will be one of 45 Countries to send Delegations*

**ILLINOIS, USA** – September 20, 2018 – 120 youth leaders with and without intellectual disabilities will attend an inclusion-focused forum in Baku, Azerbaijan from September 24 to September 28, 2018. The Special Olympics Global Youth Leadership Forum is one of the flagship events to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Special Olympics. There are 6 Delegations attending from North America- Illinois, Florida, North Carolina, Colorado, Wyoming and Arizona.

Special Olympics Illinois (USA) is pleased to be represented at the Special Olympics Global Youth Leadership Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan by Special Olympics Youth Leaders, Patrick and Zackary. Patrick and Zackary will be joined by Jillian Schneider, Assistant Director of Youth Initiatives at Special Olympics Illinois, David Wiant, Speech Language Pathologist and youth mentor, and Adam Garrett, school Special Education Director.

Patrick and Zackary's high school experience has been shaped by their involvement in Unified Sports and their role as leaders of their school's Key Club. Following the Forum, they will return home to Illinois and combine their training with their shared passion for inclusion to recruit new students for their Peer Program and Unified Sports. During high school orientation, their Key Club – which brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities - will disseminate information about Unified Sports to the greater school community and invite other students to join. Ultimately, Patrick and Zackary hope to harness Unified Sports as a catalyst for a more inclusive environment in their school.

The impact of Patrick and Zackary's project will contribute to a growing Unified Generation throughout the state of Illinois. For the past three years, Patrick has been a Unified Sports partner on his school's Special Olympics Unified soccer team. To Patrick, "the future is so bright with Unified Sports and I look forward to helping it grow even further." The adults in the Illinois delegation emphasize the importance of empowering youth as leaders of the inclusion revolution. Ms. Schneider, who oversees the Unified Champion Schools program across Illinois, believes that "the more we can encourage our youth leaders and help them grow, the better our leaders will be in the future."

This delegation will travel to Baku and have the opportunity to join a cohort of global youth leaders, educators, and Special Olympics Program staff equally passionate about fostering a more inclusive world and will return home to Illinois (USA) to make this vision a reality.

The Forum will see these young leaders, joined by an additional 100 adult leaders; from around the world develop group projects to create more inclusive communities in their home countries. The youth leaders will develop projects in Baku to be implemented in their home countries in the months after the Forum. These projects will be supported through grants from Special Olympics International. The five-day Forum is being supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan as well as Lions Clubs International, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and others.

"These young people represent the next generation of leaders, the Unified Generation, who are determined to deliver on the promise of inclusion – for the 200 million people in the world with intellectual disabilities and for everyone. In Baku, they will create the seeds of an inclusive world through their various projects, and when they return home, they will sow those seeds of inclusion throughout the world," said Dr. Timothy Shriver, Chairman, Special Olympics International.

One of the key objectives of the Special Olympics movement over the next 50 years will be the promotion of youth engagement through worldwide school-based initiatives – known as the Unified Schools programme – and the

**Special Olympics Illinois**

605 E. Willow St., Normal, IL 61761

Tel 309-888-2551 Fax 309-888-2570

[www.soill.org](http://www.soill.org)

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development of the Unified Generation, in which young people with and without intellectual disability come together through inclusive sport and leadership.

At the Forum, youth leaders will have opportunities to develop and expand their understanding of how they can drive social inclusion in their country, city, school, and community. They will learn new strategies and actions from globally recognized experts in leadership and social change to help advance a more inclusive world using the Special Olympics Unified Sports platform – where participants train and compete together.

The Hon. Azad Rahimov, Minister of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, said, “Azerbaijan is a country with an ancient and rich history, culture and traditions. We are proud to be known globally as a country of sport and a country that deeply values its youth. By hosting the 2018 Special Olympics Global Youth Leadership Forum, we once more demonstrate the value that we place on every single one of our young people – those with and those without intellectual disabilities. As a new bridge towards a more inclusive world, this Forum will serve as a beacon of hope to all of those who have felt excluded from society.”

Upon returning home, youth delegations will spearhead a variety of inclusive projects; supported through the Special Olympics Youth Innovation Grant initiative. However, this effort, over 8,500 young people will be newly engaged in inclusive sports and leadership activities in 250 new Unified Schools and sports clubs worldwide.

### **About Special Olympics Illinois**

Special Olympics Illinois is a not-for-profit organization offering year-round training and competition in 18 sports for more than 23,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities and nearly 20,000 Young Athletes ages 2-7 with and without intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics transforms the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, allowing them to realize their full potential in sports and in life. Special Olympics programs enhance physical fitness, motor skills, self-confidence, social skills and encourage family and community support. If you are interested in learning more about Special Olympics Illinois, volunteering or providing financial support to help make Special Olympics programs possible, contact your local Special Olympics agency, call 800-394-0562 or visit our website at [www.soill.org](http://www.soill.org). Follow Special Olympics Illinois on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

### **About Special Olympics**

Special Olympics is a global inclusion movement using sport, health, education and leadership programs every day around the world to end discrimination against and empower people with intellectual disabilities. [Founded in 1968](#), and celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year, the Special Olympics movement has grown to more than 6 million athletes and Unified Sports partners in more than [170 countries](#). With the support of more than 1 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers [32 Olympic-type sports](#) and over [100,000 games and competitions](#) throughout the year. Special Olympics is supported by individuals, foundations and partners, including Bank of America, the Christmas Records Trust, The Coca-Cola Company, ESPN, Essilor Vision Foundation, the Golisano Foundation, the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics, Lions Clubs International, Microsoft, Safilo Group, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, TOYOTA, United Airlines, and The Walt Disney Company. [Click here for a full list of partners](#). Engage with us on: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#) and [our blog on Medium](#). Learn more at [www.SpecialOlympics.org](http://www.SpecialOlympics.org).