

Special Olympics New Jersey Backgrounder

In existence for 40 years, Special Olympics New Jersey is part of a worldwide program of sports training and athletic competition open to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Recognized by the International Olympic Committee, Special Olympics New Jersey promotes global athlete leadership and is dedicated to the movement of empowerment and dignity. Its goal is to change attitudes within communities about people with intellectual disabilities emphasizing potential, ability and acceptance. Special Olympics New Jersey consists of more than 20,000 volunteers, 20,000 family members and more than 21,000 athletes.

Special Olympics Mission:

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities by 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.

History of Special Olympics:

Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the First International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois, in 1968. The concept was born in the early 1960s when Mrs. Shriver started a day camp for people with intellectual disabilities. In 1970, Walter Johnson and Bessie Perlman founded Special Olympics in New Jersey. While athletes from New Jersey participated in the Chicago Games, the first New Jersey state Games were hosted by Johnstone Training Center.

Eligibility:

An individual age eight or above, who is considered to have intellectual disabilities as determined by his or her locality, is eligible. Persons who have closely related developmental disabilities, such as those who have functional limitations, both in general learning and in adaptive skills such as recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self care also are eligible.

Athletic Competitions:

Special Olympics New Jersey conducts over 160 competitive events throughout the state in 24 sports year-round. Events are conducted at the local and county (area) levels to qualify athletes to advance to sectional and statewide tournaments and competitions. All athletic competitions are free of charge to participants.

Winter Sports: Alpine Skiing, Cross-Country Skiing, Snowboarding, Snowshoeing, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey, and Speed Skating.

Spring Sports: Basketball, Bowling, Motor Activities Training Program

Summer Sports: Aquatics, Bocce, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, Sailing, Softball, Tennis, and Track & Field.

Fall Sports: Cycling, Equestrian, Golf, Soccer and Volleyball.

Special Olympics New Jersey Program Initiatives:

Special Olympics initiatives enhance the mission of Special Olympics and offer athletes the chance to learn and grow as coaches, officials, spokespeople and leaders; improve athletes' health and fitness; and encourage school-age youth to celebrate differences and break down barriers. All program initiatives are free of charge to participants.

- *Unified Sports* – Special Olympics athletes and members of the community compete on the same team in Volleyball and Basketball in the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Sports & Training Center.
- *Athlete Leadership Programs*: Allow athletes to explore opportunities for Special Olympics participation in roles previously considered “non-traditional,” such as serving on the Board of Directors, becoming a coach or official, or representing the organization as a Global Messenger (spokesperson).
- *Young Athlete Program*: Children 2 ½ to 7 years of age with intellectual disabilities participate in activities designed to develop fundamental prerequisite skills to prepare for future participation in sports.
- *Camp Shriver*: Campers are offered training in a different sport each week while also learning about nutrition and overall fitness.
- *Healthy Athletes Program*: Designed to help athletes improve their health and fitness, its mission is to improve each athlete's ability to train and compete in Special Olympics.
- *MedFest*: Throughout the year new and returning athletes are able to receive physical and medical screenings provided by Special Olympics New Jersey and statewide medical organizations. MedFests are a part of the Healthy Athletes Program.
- *Super Sports Program/Sports Expo*: Athletes have the opportunity to participate in a variety of sports in a non-pressure environment. The open training environment is used to encourage interest in trying new activities to broaden the interest of the athlete.

Partnerships:

Special Olympics New Jersey has approximately 50 year-round partners that include: Law Enforcement for Special Olympics New Jersey; Continental Airlines, Inc.; Delta Dental of New Jersey Inc.; Jersey Shore Running Club; Professional Insurance Agents of New Jersey/ New Jersey Young Insurance Professionals; and ShopRite/Wakefern Food Corporation.

Vision:

Special Olympics New Jersey will be the premier non-profit sports organization worldwide, known for excellence and innovation in providing opportunities that enrich the lives of its athletes, their families and society, as a whole.

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Special Olympics
New Jersey