



In existence since 1968, 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 25,000 athletes, 26,000 volunteers and 20,000 family members.

## **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, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

## **History:**

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

## **Special Olympics New Jersey Vision:**

Special Olympics New Jersey will foster inclusive communities for people with and without intellectual disabilities through innovative sport, health, wellness and leadership opportunities for Special Olympics athletes, their families and society as a whole.

## **Eligibility:**

Every person with an intellectual disability who is at least eight years of age is eligible to participate in Special Olympics. People 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. The Young Athletes™ program offers developmental training and an introduction into sports for those too young to participate in traditional Special Olympics New Jersey programs, children ages 2 through 7.

## **Athletic Training & Competition:**

Special Olympics New Jersey conducts more than 260 competitive events throughout the state in 24 sports year-round, all of which are completely free of charge to participants. Each season, events are conducted at the local and county (area) level, and success at these levels qualifies athletes to advance to sectional and statewide tournaments and competitions, which are held at various venues throughout the state.

**Fall sports:** cycling, equestrian, flag football, golf, soccer, triathlon

**Winter sports:** alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, floor hockey, figure skating, snowboarding, snowshoeing, speed skating, volleyball

**Spring sports:** basketball, bowling

**Summer sports:** aquatics, athletics, baseball, bocce, gymnastics, powerlifting, softball, tennis

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## Special Olympics New Jersey Program Initiatives:

Special Olympics New Jersey initiatives enhance the mission of Special Olympics by offering athletes and community members experiences outside the realm of traditional Special Olympics competition. These programs further athletes' capacity to learn life skills, gain confidence, and grow as individuals, as well as encourage all involved to celebrate differences and break down barriers. All program initiatives are free of charge to participants.

- **Athlete Leadership** empowers athletes to explore greater leadership opportunities within the organization, including Athlete Congress, Athlete University, Sargent Shriver Global Messengers, and coach and referee training.
- **Young Athletes™** offers children ages 2 through 7 a chance to develop fundamental sports skills.
- **The Healthy Athletes Program** provides free health screenings in seven different health areas, all offered in a fun, welcoming environment.
- **Healthy Communities** provides an opportunity to reduce disparities in health statuses and increase access to community health resources, where Special Olympics athletes have the same access to health and wellness resources, and can attain the same level of good health as all community members.
- **Camp Shriver** enhances sports skills while teaching athletes about overall health and fitness.
- **The Play Unified. Live Unified. Movement** works to build inclusive schools and communities through Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and education.
  - **Unified Sports** brings together athletes with and without disabilities on sports teams to train and compete side-by-side, each one a meaningful and equal part of the team. Students can participate in school-based Unified Sports activities, clubs and leagues from Elementary School through College. Athletes and partners solidify bonds of friendship while competing on Special Olympics Unified teams.
  - **Inclusive Youth Leadership** clubs provide opportunities for youth with and without disabilities to work together as a Unified Generation to build a culture of acceptance, tolerance and friendship.
  - **Education** is an important venue where Special Olympics New Jersey provide resources for inclusive physical education, respect campaigns, disability awareness programs, professional development, and where the school, curriculum and educational initiatives promote social and athletic inclusion

## 50th Anniversary of Special Olympics (1968 - 2018):

The 50th Anniversary is an opportunity to share our past, celebrate our present and ensure that the next 50 years features a new generation of inclusion and unity that creates a permanent change in perspective and allows the power of sport to transform lives and open minds. Visit our website for more 50th Anniversary information: [www.50YearsSONJ.org](http://www.50YearsSONJ.org).

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