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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## PLAY UNIFIED. LIVE UNIFIED.

Special Olympics implements a collaboration strategy with schools and communities to engage young people with and without intellectual disabilities, bringing them together to become leaders for inclusion. Through a combination of youth leadership, Special Olympics Unified Sports® or inclusive sports, and whole school engagement, the strategy breaks down barriers creating more welcome school environments through social inclusion.

Project UNIFY, a collaboration between Special Olympics and the United States Department of Education was launched in 2008 and has been the genesis of this Play Unified. Live Unified. Movement. This strategic grant program includes schools in 45 states, including New Jersey. Since 2008, the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at the University of Massachusetts Boston has carried out an extensive evaluation of Special Olympics Project UNIFY®. Below are responses from students involved (including Unified Sports activities and Inclusive Physical Education) from the Project UNIFY Year 6 Final Evaluation Report 2013 – 2014.

General response: students have opportunities to develop skills in a wide range of areas, and feel they are impacted on a personal level by their involvement in the program.

The students polled reported:

- 89% - learned about helping others
- 81% - changed their school for the better
- 87% - standing up for something they believed was right
- 81% - afforded the opportunity to develop leadership skills and learned about the challenges of being a leader
- 84% - became better at sharing responsibility

**Three quarters of students (76%) reported that participation in Special Olympics Project UNIFY® had an impact on their plans for the future. In fact, students generally (84%) regarded Project UNIFY as a positive turning point in their lives.**

*(Jacobs, Martin, Albert, Summerill, & Siperstein, n.d.)*



# Suggested Book List for Young Children

**Special  
Olympics  
New Jersey**



- Andy and His Yellow Frisbee (Woodbine House Special-Needs Collection) By: Thompson, Mary
- Bully Beans By: Julia Cook
- Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability By: Thomas, Pat
- Everyone Matters: A First Look at Respect for Others By: Thomas, Pat
- Giraffes Can't Dance By: Andreae, Giles
- Ian's Walk: A Story About Autism By: Laurie Lears
- My Brother Charlie By: Robinson Peete, Holly
- My Friend Isabelle By Eliza Woloson
- Rolling Along: The Story of Taylor and His Wheelchair (Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago Learning Books) By: Heelan, Jamme Riggio
- Some Kids Use Wheelchairs (Understanding Differences) By: Schaefer, Lola M.
- Susan Laughs By: Willis, Jeanne
- Taking Down Syndrome to School (Special Kids in School) By: Glatzer, Jenna
- Teamwork Isn't My Thing and I Don't Like to Share! By: Julia Cook
- Tease Monster: A Book About Teasing vs. Bullying By: Julia Cook
- The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone With Autism By: Sabin, Ellen
- The Special Stories Series 2 (Moonbeam childrens book award winner 2009) – 4 childrens books that introduce Dyslexia, Autism, Down syndrome and Hearin By: Gaynor, Kate
- Trevor Trevor By: Twachtman-Cullen, Diane, Ph.D.
- We'll Paint the Octopus Red By: Stuve-Bodeen, Stephanie
- What I Like About Me By: Allia Zobel Nolan
- What's Wrong with Timmy? By: Shriver, Maria

# Special Olympics Research Overview

Special  
Olympics



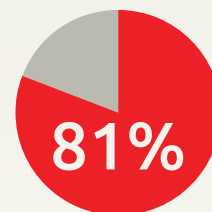
More than  
**4.5 million**  
Special Olympics  
athletes  
compete across  
**170**  
countries,  
averaging  
**258**  
competitions  
each day  
around  
the world.



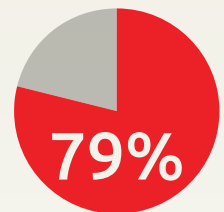
**94%** of Special Olympics athletes reported improved sports skills.



Children ages 2-7 experienced a  
**7 month gain**  
in motor skills after participation in an 8-week Young Athletes program.



**81%**  
of students say that the Unified Strategy is changing their school for the better.

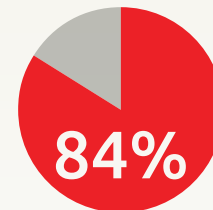


**79%**  
of Unified teammates without disabilities reported increased understanding of people with intellectual disabilities.



**65% of parents**

felt that participation in Special Olympics had raised their expectations of their sons and daughters.



**84%**  
of healthcare providers felt better prepared to treat people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics' brand ranks highly in  
**familiarity and favorability ratings.**

 **57%**

**Over half** of athletes' siblings in the United States felt that participation in Special Olympics brought their family closer together.



# Special Olympics Young Athletes Research

## WHY YOUNG ATHLETES?

Participating in Special Olympics has been shown to inspire joy, improve self-confidence, bolster family relationships and improve parents' expectations of their children with intellectual disabilities (ID).<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> While this is crucial for people with ID of all ages, Special Olympics' traditional sports program is only available to athletes ages 8 and over. Furthermore, for families experiencing having a child with ID for the first time, it can be challenging to find a social network for support and guidance. This network is crucial, as parents who have social support have better mental health and positive parenting interactions (hugging, praising, etc.) with their child with ID.<sup>5,6</sup> Young Athletes (YA) engages children with ID between the ages of 2 and 7 in a sport and play program with a focus on activities that are important to mental and physical growth. The program benefits the child and the family, challenges expectations, forges relationships, fosters support networks, and builds crucial skills for young children.

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**“I have found a common ground – a place where my son and I can connect – through sports.”**

— Parent of Young Athlete, United States<sup>7</sup>

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1 Harada, C. M., Parker, R. C., Siperstein, G. N. (2008). *A comprehensive national study of Special Olympics programs in China. A special report.* University of Massachusetts Boston. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

2 Siperstein, G. N., Harada, C. M., Parker, R. C., Hardman, M. L., & McGuire, J. (2005). *Comprehensive national study of Special Olympics programs in the United States. A special report.* University of Massachusetts Boston. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

3 Harada C, Parker R, Siperstein G. *A comprehensive national study of Special Olympics programs in Latin America: findings from Argentina, Brazil, and Peru.* Boston: University of Massachusetts Boston; 2008.

4 Kersh, J., & Siperstein, G. N. (2008). *The positive contributions of Special Olympics to the family.* Special Olympics: Washington, DC.

5 Wade, C., Llewellyn, G., & Matthews, J. (2015). Parent mental health as a mediator of contextual effects on parents with intellectual disabilities and their children. *Clinical Psychologist*, 19(1), 28-38.

6 Feldman, M., Varghese, J., Ramsay, J., & Rajska, D. (2002). Relationships between social support, stress and mother-child interactions in mothers with intellectual disability. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 15, 314–323.

7 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006.* Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

# IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Children with ID often experience challenges developing motor skills.<sup>8,9</sup> Research conducted by Special Olympics and its partners has found that YA improves the motor skills of participants in both U.S. and international contexts.

- A [U.S. study](#) showed that after two months of participation in YA, children with ID experienced a **seven month gain in motor skills**. Participants in YA **improved motor skills at twice the rate** of children who do not participate.
- **The benefits from YA persisted even after the program ended.** At 5 and 10 month follow-ups, children who participated in YA **maintained a 4 month advantage** in development on two of three areas where they improved.<sup>10</sup>
- A [study in Kenya, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Romania](#) found that **children who participate in YA outside of the United States also experienced significant improvements in motor skills**. For example, in Romania at the beginning of YA only two (18%) of 16 children were within one standard deviation of the average score for motor skills for their age and gender. At the end of the YA program, that number had risen to 11 children (69%).<sup>11</sup>
- **Skills learned in YA translate to other settings.** A 2006 study found that 50% of teachers in the United States, 60% in Romania, and 44% in Latin America (Venezuela, Panama, Chile, and Paraguay) observed skills learned in YA being used in other activities or settings (at school or home).<sup>12</sup>

## BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN WITH ID PARTICIPATING IN YOUNG ATHLETES



Children who participated in the YA program experienced a **seven month gain** in motor skills, twice the rate of children who did not participate in the program.



At 5 and 10 month follow-ups, children who participated in YA maintained a **four month advantage** in development on two of three areas where they improved.

8 Emck, C., Bosscher, R., Beek, P., & Doreleijers, T. (2009). Gross motor performance and self-perceived motor competence in children with emotional, behavioural, and pervasive developmental disorders: a review. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 51(7), 501-517.

9 Provost, B., Lopez, B. R., & Heimerl, S. (2007). A Comparison of Motor Delays in Young Children: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental Delay, and Developmental Concerns. *Journal Of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 37(2), 321-328.

10 Favazza, P. C., Siperstein, G. N., Zeisel, S., Odom, S. L., & Moskowitz, A. L. (2011). *Young Athletes intervention: Impact of motor development*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

11 Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

12 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.



In addition to motor skill development, participants benefit from learning in a social environment with their peers.

- **89% of teachers in the United States reported that a benefit of YA was children having fun with peers.** Teachers in Israel reported similar benefits.<sup>13</sup>
- **Participants in YA improve their social skills.** One teacher commented: *“Many parents and grandparents had never placed their child in a group setting or group activities...By the end of the second or third week, we all could see differences in the child’s ability to listen, participate, socialize with adults and other children, and, of course improve in their motor abilities.”*<sup>14</sup>

YA creates an environment where children with ID can play with their peers, perhaps for the first time, while developing motor and social skills.

## IMPACT ON THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

YA’s impact has a ripple effect that extends benefits beyond the participants in the program to the family and community. In this way, **YA serves as a catalyst for change in the community and a mechanism to enhance social inclusion for people with ID.**



Families benefit in a number of ways, including helping parents understand what ID is, raising parent expectations, fostering support networks, and creating opportunities for family engagement. Studies have found that through YA, parents begin to better understand their child with ID:

- A 2014 study found that by demonstrating that children with ID can participate in and benefit from group activities, **parents became more willing to bring their children into social settings.** A parent from Romania commented, *“I was surprised how much he/she changed in his/her first group experience. We clearly need to do more group activities, which prior to this, I was afraid of.”*<sup>15</sup>
- **YA raises parents’ expectations of their child with ID.** In the United States, 21% of teachers reported that a benefit of YA was raising parental expectations of their child’s capabilities.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

<sup>14</sup> Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

<sup>15</sup> Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

<sup>16</sup> Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.





## FAMILY NETWORKS

YA also builds social networks of families. Research has found that a major benefit of YA is **parents getting support through networking with other families.**<sup>17,18</sup> A parent of a participant in the United States remarked: *“It provided opportunities to communicate with other parents about needs of other kids with disabilities. Connecting and sharing information is really a huge benefit...it gives you an opportunity to talk to someone that can relate to what it is like to have a child with disabilities.”*<sup>19</sup>

Another study in 2014 found similar results and showed that this knowledge sharing led to an **increased understanding of people with ID.** As a YA leader in Tanzania reported, *“The families feel relieved after learning that having a child with ID is not a personal issue/problem but it is common in the community.”*



## COMMUNITY

Furthermore, YA is shown to have a **positive impact on the broader community.** Schools and community members who assisted with YA were given the opportunity to learn about and interact with people with disabilities. One volunteer remarked, *“At first, I did not know how to work [with] really young children with disabilities. So that was a new experience for me and one in which I learned a great deal.”*<sup>20</sup> YA provides the community with an opportunity to learn about ID and to embrace members of the community with ID and their families.

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**“Because of J. a whole world of kids with disabilities – a whole circle of families with children with disabilities has opened up for us. It is exciting and overwhelming to be a part of a new world – in the best way (sense). It changed my life.”**

— Parent of Young Athlete, United States

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17 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

18 Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

19 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

20 Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.





**Community:** Enhanced interaction with and understanding of people with intellectual disabilities by community members, particularly university partners.

**Family:** Increased understanding of intellectual disability and willingness of parents to bring their child with an intellectual disability into social settings, as well as the development of support networks among parents.

**Individual:** Improvements in participants' motor skills, social skills, cognitive abilities, and adaptive skills.

**KEY FINDINGS:**  
SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES RESEARCH



In 2014, **110,486** children participated in YA in 140 Programs.<sup>21</sup>



Participants experienced a **7 month gain** in motor skills after participation in an 8-week YA program.<sup>22</sup>



The benefits from YA continue even after the program ends. At 5 and 10 month follow-ups, children who participated in YA maintained a **4 month advantage** in development on two of three areas where they improved.<sup>23</sup>



YA raises parents' expectations of their child with ID. In the United States, **21%** of teachers reported that YA benefited families by raising parental expectations of their child's capabilities.<sup>24</sup>



YA forms a **community of support** for parents and caregivers of children with ID by creating a more **positive** view of their child, building a network of parents, and inspiring them to imagine a better, more **hopeful** future for their child.<sup>25,26</sup>

21 2014 Reach Report (2014). Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

22 Favazza, P. C., Siperstein, G. N., Zeisel, S., Odom, S. L., & Moskowitz, A. L. (2011). *Young Athletes intervention: Impact of motor development*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

23 Favazza, P. C., Siperstein, G. N., Zeisel, S., Odom, S. L., & Moskowitz, A. L. (2011). *Young Athletes intervention: Impact of motor development*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

24 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

25 Favazza, P., & Siperstein, G. (2006). *Evaluation of Young Athletes Program 2006*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics and University of Massachusetts Boston.

26 Favazza, P., Siperstein, G., & Ghio, K. (2014). *Young Athletes Globalization Project*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

## **SONJ MISSION STATEMENT:**

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.

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY VISION:**

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

**Special Olympics New Jersey**

**1 Eunice Kennedy Shriver Way, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648**

**(609) 896-8000 / [www.sonj.org](http://www.sonj.org)**





**TEAMWORK IS A BEAUTIFUL THING.**



young  
special  
olympic  
athlete  
program



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