



Special Olympics Australia

Orientation guide for volunteers

Special Olympics
Australia





1. Global Movement, Local Impact

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Sport for people with an intellectual disability

Special Olympics Australia is part of a global movement that is in over 177 countries and supports over 5 million athletes.

GLOBAL MISSION

The global mission of Special Olympics is 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 a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Special Olympics movement began in the early 1960s when Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the sister of former US President John F Kennedy, invited children with and without an intellectual disability to play sport in her backyard.

Her elder sister Rosemary had an intellectual disability and Eunice knew that she could do more than anyone ever thought or cared to discover.

But it was when Eunice heard that children with an intellectual disability were being denied the ability to participate in mainstream summer camps that she decided to take action. She started her own summer camp known as Camp Shriver.

Camp Shriver was the first step in the Special Olympics movement which today supports almost 5 million athletes in 177 countries.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS IN AUSTRALIA

Special Olympics began in Australia in 1976. Back then many people with an intellectual disability were shut in institutions. Today, many remain shut out by low expectations of what they can achieve.

Today, Special Olympics Australia supports over 8,300 athletes and participants across 48 community clubs each year. Athletes participate in a range of Olympic type sports that include athletics, basketball, bocce, cricket, equestrian, football (soccer), golf, gymnastics, netball, sailing, softball, swimming, table tennis, tennis, tenpin bowling and winter sports.

Mission, Vision and Values



UNDERSTANDING OUR STRATEGY MAP

Our strategic pillars purposefully spell out TEAM as a visual reminder of the goal of a one-team culture. All activities undertaken by Special Olympics Australia at all levels should align to one of the strategic pillars.



2. Volunteering

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Volunteers are our backbone

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Special Olympics Australia has long been supported by the generous contribution of volunteers at all levels of the organisation. Volunteers assist with every aspect of Special Olympics, whether it's coaching, club administration, event support, office support, officiating to fundraising.

Without the generosity of volunteers we simply couldn't exist. Volunteers make up the backbone of every one of our clubs across the country. They play an important role in the governance within the club to delivering on the sport training and competition opportunities for athletes.

Together, we can all play a role in creating a welcoming environment for people with an intellectual disability.

YOUR IMPACT

Your help supporting Special Olympics Australia means we can enable more athletes with an intellectual disability to have the opportunity to participate and achieve in sport. Athletes get fit, have fun and make friends, which improves their ability to succeed in all walks of life.

Inclusive communities are built on the respect for diversity that Special Olympics Australia encourages and celebrates.

Through Special Olympics some of our athletes go on to compete which gives athletes opportunities to demonstrate their skills and be recognised for their achievements. Other athletes are selected to participate in our Athlete Leadership Program where they are given the skills and training to share their voice and play an active role in the leadership of the organisation at various levels.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

As an equal opportunity employer we welcome individuals from all backgrounds to volunteer across the organisation. Certain roles may have screening requirements or required qualifications that will be considered during the recruitment, selection and screening process. This may include criminal history checks, working with children checks and accreditations.

Special Olympics Australia is committed to building a strong volunteer engagement culture that involves volunteers in meaningful work across the organisation. As a volunteer you should feel engaged, supported and valued at all times.

If you have any feedback, concerns or issues during your time with Special Olympics you may contact the Chair of your club or alternatively our office on 1300 225 762 or email info@specialolympics.com.au.

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

CREATING A SAFE AND WELCOMING CULTURE

Special Olympics Australia is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults who participate as athletes in our programs. All athletes who participate in Special Olympics Australia activities have the right to feel safe and to participate in an environment where they are protected from any form of abuse. Abuse may take many forms and includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect.

We take this responsibility to safeguard our athletes seriously and we recognise that safeguarding athletes is everyone's responsibility.

As an organisation we have put in place a number of initiatives that we invite you to be familiar with and support during your time with Special Olympics Australia.

Working with Children Checks and/or Police Checks

For each of our volunteer roles we have conducted a risk assessment and have determined that some roles require one or more checks. As a volunteer we ask that where your role requires a working with children check or police check that this is kept valid during your period of volunteering. Changes are to be notified to your local club or the person you report to. Anyone with direct contact to children must meet their states/territory working with children check requirement.

Member Protection and Code of Conduct

To support our commitment to the health and safety of our athletes and volunteers we have in place a member protection policy that can be found on our member resources page on our website (www.specialolympics.com.au). This includes a code of conduct that we ask all volunteers to be familiar with and adhere to at all times. A copy of the code of conduct is included as part of the volunteer registration from.

Complaints and Allegations Handling

We take complaints and allegations seriously. If you suspect anyone involved in our activities to have breached our code of conduct or you have concerns for the welfare of an athlete please immediately raise your concern to:

complaints@specialolympics.com.au or call 1300 225 762 (9am to 5pm AEST).

We have a clear complaints handling process and the flowchart can be found online on our member resources page on our website (www.specialolympics.com.au).



3. Understanding the Organisation

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Special Olympics and the Olympic Movement

SPECIAL OLYMPICS, PARALYMPICS AND THE OLYMPICS

Special Olympics is often confused with the Olympics and Paralympics, but it is unique.

The **Olympics** is a major competition for elite athletes.

The **Paralympics** is a major competition for elite athletes with a disability, mainly physical.

Special Olympics is a year-round sports program for all people with an intellectual disability who can also access competition pathways which pinnacle at the World Games.

Special Olympics is proud to be the only organisation authorised by the International Olympic Committee to use the word “Olympics” under a Protocol of Agreement signed in 1988.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS STRUCTURE

Special Olympics, Inc. (Governing Body)

Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI) is the creator and international governing body of the Special Olympics movement.

SOI establishes and enforces all official policies and requirements of Special Olympics, oversees the expansion of the movement and owns the registered trademarks to the Special Olympics name, logo and other intellectual property. It is a not-for-profit organisation based in Washington DC, USA.

Special Olympics Asia Pacific (Region)

To assist SOI with communication, administration and operations there are seven Special Olympics regional offices: Africa, Asia Pacific, East Asia, Europe Eurasia, Latin America, Middle East North Africa and North America. Special Olympics Australia reports to Special Olympics Asia Pacific based in Singapore.

Special Olympics Australia (Program)

Special Olympics Australia is responsible for overseeing the strategy, direction, reputation and financial sustainability of the organisation. Special Olympics Australia is governed by a Board of Directors.

Special Olympics Australia Clubs (Sub-programs)

The clubs of Special Olympics Australia deliver weekly sports training and regular competition for athletes with an intellectual disability through a network of dedicated volunteers from the local community. A volunteer Club Leadership Team is responsible for the effective running of the club and the provision of safe and regular sporting opportunities.



4. What is intellectual disability?

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Invisibility, Disability or Ability

People with an intellectual disability are among the most marginalised groups, experiencing high levels of health, social and financial inequities. Their invisibility is accompanied by low expectations.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Intellectual disability is a term used to describe a person with reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills. People with an intellectual disability all have the capacity to learn, they just learn differently and require varying levels of support.

15 year old Special Olympics Australia athlete Brittney Neill (VIC) sums it up: “It’s about what I can do and not what I can’t do. I can do everything everyone else can do, but it sometimes takes me longer to learn and process information, I just have to keep trying.”

For some people with an intellectual disability no cause is found, but for others, identifiable reasons for an intellectual disability are:

- Brain damage, before or at birth; brain damage after birth due to illness or accident; malnutrition or other deprivation in early childhood
- Hereditary factors / genetic condition
- Chromosomal abnormalities
- Developmental delay

Some people with an intellectual disability may never master the skills necessary to lead an independent life. However, many people with an intellectual disability do live very full lives. Some work in private or sheltered employment, pay taxes, get married, have children and have an active social life.

Participating in sport gives them an opportunity to achieve in their own community and Special Olympics Australia gives them the place to train and compete with other people who may have similar challenges and abilities.

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

Almost 600,000 Australians have an intellectual disability and every two hours another child is diagnosed. This makes them the largest disability group in Australia.

Intellectual disability knows no boundaries. It cuts across the lines of racial, ethnic, educational, social and economic backgrounds and it can occur in any family.



5. Understanding intellectual disability

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Breaking Down the Barriers

HOW TO TALK ABOUT DISABILITY

Special Olympics Australia understands that words can be demeaning to people with a disability so we prefer to focus on the individual, their gifts and accomplishments.

When writing or speaking about intellectual disability use words to portray each person with individuality and dignity.

Always put the person first. Refer to “individuals”, “person” or “people with an intellectual disability”, rather than “intellectually disabled people” or “the intellectually disabled”.

Do not use the word “unfortunately” when talking about people with an intellectual disability. Disability does not have to be life defining in a negative way. A person has an intellectual disability rather than “is suffering from” or “afflicted with” or a “victim” of intellectual disability.

In Australia, the words “mental retardation” and “spastic” are not considered appropriate.

Adults are an integral part of Special Olympics and it is important to respect their age. Distinguish between adults and children and avoid using the word “kids”.

Refer to participants in Special Olympics as “Special Olympics athletes” rather than “Special Olympians” or Special Olympic athletes.”

Do not preface Special Olympics with the word “the”. This implies that Special Olympics is a single event rather than a year-round, ongoing program of sports training and competition.

Try not to sensationalise the accomplishments of people with a disability. While achievements should be recognised, people in the disability rights movement have identified the negative impact of excessive praise.

Finally, encourage people with an intellectual disability to tell their own story.

UNDERSTANDING COMMON DISABILITIES AND TERMS

Autism

With Autism, impairment in the social and communication areas are severe and sustained, and are clearly present before the age of three. Autistic children are often anxious, have poor attention and motivation, respond unusually to many different stimuli and are seen as being ‘different’ from other children. Speech is delayed, or largely absent. A strong reliance on routine is apparent, and ritualistic behaviours such as toe walking, hand flapping and finger gazing can occur. The child/adult with autism may also have an intellectual disability.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

A diagnosis of ASD may be made when the following are all present: major delay or problem in language; problems relating to other people; unusual repetitive behaviour and limited play. Some may be affected more severely in one or more areas. The majority of those with ASD have an intellectual disability. ASD may also coexist with speech and language disorders, anxiety and depression, epilepsy, attention disorders, Tourette Syndrome and Down Syndrome.

Disability

Disability refers to the effect that an impairment has on the individual. An impairment does not always result in a disability. For example many vision impairments can be corrected.

Down Syndrome

People with Down Syndrome are born with an extra chromosome 21. They have varying degrees of intellectual disability, characteristic facial features and often heart defects and other problems. It is one of the most common chromosomal abnormalities.

Fragile X Syndrome

This is the most common inherited intellectual disability. It results in problems with learning and behaviour. Developmental delays are the most significant characteristic and the range of learning problems is wide. Some are affected in small ways while others have severe intellectual disability, particularly males.

Handicap

Handicap refers to situations where an impairment or disability contribute to a person being disadvantaged compared to their able-bodied peers. An impairment or a disability may be a handicap in some environments and not in others. For example poor language skills may be a handicap during meetings, but may have little impact during the 100m sprint.

Impairment

Impairment (or condition) refers to the medical description of a specific loss or abnormality of psychological function and/or anatomical structure.

Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS)

Those with Prader-Willi Syndrome have an obsession with food and eating, poor muscle tone and balance, learning difficulties, lack of normal sexual development, emotional instability and lack of maturity.

Williams Syndrome

This is a rare genetic disorder that is characterized by a distinctive facial appearance, mild intellectual disability and an overly sociable personality. A missing segment of genetic material on chromosome 7 is the cause. These deletions occur as a random event.



6. Sport and Competition

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Training and Competition

SPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATHLETES

Special Olympics Australia offers weekly sports training for people with an intellectual disability in:

- Athletics
- Basketball
- Bocce
- Cricket
- Equestrian
- Football
- Golf
- Gymnastics
- Netball
- Sailing
- Softball
- Table Tennis
- Tennis
- Tenpin Bowling
- Winter Sports (Alpine Skiing, ice skating, snowboarding)

Not all sports are offered in all states or clubs. Generally the sports offered depend on:

- the interest of athletes
- the availability of volunteer coaches
- suitable sporting facilities

COMPETITION PATHWAYS

Progression through Special Olympics is much the same as in other sport organisations, from local to state, state to national, national to international.

The unique difference in Special Olympics is that competition is for every one of any abilities. To do this, Special Olympics uses divisioning so that athletes of similar ability are combined to enable competition of like ability. The basic principle is that athletes of all abilities have an equal opportunity to advance to the next level of competition provided the sport and event is offered.

Divisioning

In Special Olympics competition athletes compete against other athletes of similar ability. This is called “divisioning”. The system is not exclusive to Special Olympics. For example, weightlifting and judo have various divisions and golf has a handicap system to ensure fair competition. Ability is based on pre-competition information and/or on-site preliminary events.

Sports Rules

All Special Olympics competitions follow the official Special Olympics Sports Rules. These rules have been adapted where necessary from the official rules of the National Sports Organisation or International Sports Federation for each sport offered.



7. Initiatives



More than just Sport

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (ALPs)

The Athlete Leadership Program offers athletes an opportunity to enrich and grow their experience within Special Olympics. It is an organised training program designed to prepare interested athletes to take on roles within Special Olympics Australia. Participants of the program are provided practical experiences that develops their skills, improve their self-esteem and self-confidence. The program guides athletes toward a variety of roles that include board/committee representation, games and competition support, public speaking, coaching, volunteering and employment.

HEALTHY ATHLETES PROGRAM (HAP)

The Healthy Athletes Program is dedicated to providing health services and education to Special Olympics athletes, and changing the way health systems interact with people with intellectual disabilities. Healthy Athletes screening are conducted at major games and provides free health assessments. The program includes Fit Feet, Healthy Hearing, Opening Eyes and Special Smiles.

YOUNG ATHLETES PROGRAM (YAP)

The Young Athletes Program introduces children aged from two to seven to sport with the goal of preparing them for regular sports training and competition when they get older. The program is offered in selected clubs and provides a great opportunity to bring young people through our network of clubs.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TORCH RUN (LETR)

As part of Special Olympics tradition, the Law Enforcement Torch Run is a key event in the lead-up to any major games. It is an important grassroots fundraiser and public awareness vehicle organised by the police force.