

## Special Olympics of Washington

<http://www.specialolympicswashington.org/sowa/about>

**“Resonating from the playing field is a message that everyone can play, everyone counts and everyone deserves a chance.” Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Founder Special Olympics**

### OVERVIEW

**Vision:** The vision of Special Olympics is to help bring all persons with intellectual disabilities into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected and given the chance to become useful and productive citizens.

**Mission:** Special Olympics Washington provides 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:** Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver and the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation, Special Olympics formed to improve the lives of the intellectually disabled. That year, 1,000 athletes from 26 states and Canada competed in an Olympic type competition at Soldier Field in Chicago. During a time when the intellectually disabled were most often confined to institutions, the organization of Special Olympics began a movement to change the world’s view about intellectually disabled people. The Special Olympics movement has grown to over 1.7 million athletes worldwide in 150 countries. Special Olympics Inc. holds the World Winter Games and World Summer Games on an alternate two- year schedule. Special Olympics Washington incorporated in 1975 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (federal tax identification # 91-0962383) following several years of program presentation by local community volunteer groups. A board of directors that provides guidance to SOWA staff and volunteers governs the organization.

**Participation:** Persons with intellectual disabilities, regardless of ability level, may participate in sports and other programs offered by Special Olympics Washington. Individuals are eligible for training and competition at age eight and there is no upper age limit. More than 10,000 athletes participate in SOWA activities; over 1.70 million athletes compete in Special Olympics programs in 150 countries.

**Training & Competition:** Training and competition is offered year round to Special Olympics athletes. Competition takes place at local, regional and state tournaments. Individuals and teams compete in divisions according to age, gender and ability.

**Volunteers:** More than 8,000 volunteers support Special Olympics Washington activities. Volunteers serve as coaches, sports officials, committee members and on-site volunteers at competitions and fundraising events.

Coaches and officials are trained and certified at clinics offered by Special Olympics Washington. More than 1.7 million volunteers support Special Olympics programs worldwide.

**Funding:** Special Olympics Washington is a registered 501(c) (3) non-profit organization supported entirely by individual, corporate and foundation contributions. Athletes participate at no cost to themselves or their families.

**Get Into It:** A free K – 12 school-based curriculum initiative, **SO Get Into It** helps teachers and students promote awareness and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. **Educate-Motivate-Activate** <https://getintoit.specialolympics.org/> Establish your username and password, and download the age-appropriate lessons to build **EMPATHY** in your school culture.

**Activities for students:** <https://getintoit.specialolympics.org/students/>

**Unified Sports:** Athletes with intellectual disabilities pair with persons without disabilities and form teams for training and competition. Unified Sports integrates Special Olympics athletes with other athletes to build self-esteem and increase understanding of persons with different abilities.

**Healthy Athletes:** Special Olympics athletes are provided opportunities to improve health and fitness through dental, vision, feet, hearing and general health screenings. Physicians and healthcare professionals provide these services at no cost to Special Olympics athletes at tournaments.

**Sports:**

- 1) Winter Season & Winter Games: Alpine Skiing, Basketball, Cross Country Skiing, Figure & Speed Skating, Snowboarding
- 2) Spring Season & Summer Games: Aquatics, Athletics (Track & Field), Long Distance Running/Walking, Cycling, Power Lifting, Soccer
- 3) Summer Season & Summer Sports: Classic - Golf, Softball  
Fall Season: Bowling, Volleyball (recreational)

**Young Athletes:** An innovative sports play program, designed for early childhood intervention, seeks to strengthen self-esteem and physical development for children with ID ages 2-7 years old. [Learn More](#)

**Athlete Leadership Program:** Athletes are provided the opportunity to expand personal growth by acting as spokespersons, team captains, coaches, officials or by representation on the Special Olympics Washington Board of Directors.

**Special Olympics Washington Local Programs:** There are local programs at the regional level that are promoted on the Special Olympics Washington website (schedules, photo galleries, blogs.). For further information, please contact Special Olympics Washington. Specifically, Clark County, Edmonds, Enumclaw, Issaquah, Lake Stevens, Monroe, Skagit County, and Whatcom County.

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