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TARGET PUBLICATION: THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

# Special Olympics



A BRIEF HISTORY

# Learning Goal Background

During this fall semester of 2018, I have decided to work at Special Olympics Tennessee to complete my HOD Capstone Internship. I wanted to work for Special Olympics during this fall because I have a cousin with Down Syndrome who has competed in Special Olympics athletic competitions in Missouri, and I wanted to see how this great organization functions internally to bring joy to the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Going off of this desire to learn about the organization, I have selected my learning goal to be one that will help me better understand the history of the organization.

My learning goal is to better understand the history of Special Olympics by researching the various components of the organization and their history, including the founding of the organization, the various athletic programs the organization runs, and the organization's present-day state of affairs both nationally and in Tennessee.

I have decided to present my findings in the form of a longform journalism article because I personally enjoy reading journalism articles about the topics I am interested in and also because I believe that this format best allows me to showcase the research I have done, especially because it lends itself to the inclusion of photographs and interviews. The target publication for this article is *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, a well-known publication aimed at the nonprofit sector, where the average article length falls between 1,000 and 3,000 words (11). The inspiration for this format was found in an article about Bloomberg in the *Chronicle* (1).

In the following pages, you will read about the founding of Special Olympics on a national scale as well as features on several of their current worldwide programs. A timeline of major Special Olympics historical events is included in addition to a fact sheet about Special Olympics' present-day mission statement and statistics on an international scale. I have also included a brief feature of Special Olympics Tennessee to tie my research into the Special Olympics office I am currently working in.





SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE PLEDGE:

"LET ME WIN.

BUT IF I

CANNOT WIN,

LET ME BE

BRAVE IN THE

ATTEMPT."

(8)



# The Special Olympics Mission Statement

According to the Special Olympics website, the 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. This gives 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 (8).

# Historical Timeline

**-June 1962** the first Camp Shriver, a camp for children with intellectual disabilities run by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, took place in D.C.

**-1968** First International Special Olympics Summer Games held at Soldier Field in Chicago

**-1971** The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as the only other organization authorized to use the name "Olympics" in the USA

**-1977** The first ever International Special Olympics Winter Games are held in Steamboat Springs, CO

**-1981** Law Enforcement Torch Run is founded, which will eventually grow into the movement's largest grassroots fundraiser

**-1986** The UN launches the International Year of Special Olympics

**-1988** The Unified Sports initiative is launched to bring together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same teams

**-1993** The first International Games outside the USA are held in Schladming and Salzburg, Austria

**-1995** Healthy Athletes Program launches, providing free health care services to athletes worldwide

**-2000** the first Global Athlete Congress takes place in The Hague, Netherlands to discuss the future of the Special Olympics movement

**-2007** The Young Athletes program is launched for children ages 2-7

**-2013** The Special Olympics Bharat program in India welcomes the organization's 1-millionth registered athlete

**-2015** The Golisano Foundation donates a \$25 million gift to expand global health initiatives, the largest donation ever received by special Olympics

**-2018** 50th anniversary of the founding of Special Olympics

(3, 4, 5)

# The Beginning: Camp Shriver



In 1960, Eunice Kennedy Shriver received a phone call from a mother with a child who had intellectual disabilities; she was having a hard time finding a summer camp for her child, since none of the camps in the area accepted special needs children. After more parents approached her with the same concerns, Shriver famously decreed that she had had “enough” - she was going to do something about it (4).

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## “Enough” - Eunice Kennedy Shriver

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Shriver founded Camp Shriver on her own farm in Maryland, contacting local schools for children with special needs and clinics in the local area to send her the contact information for children who might be interested in the area's first camp for children with intellectual disabilities. High schoolers and college students were recruited to be the camp's volunteer staff, with the expectation that almost every child would receive one-on-one attention (4).

In addition to providing the camp for children with intellectual disabilities, Shriver was insistent that neurotypical children and the special needs children at the camp interact frequently in order to form bonds built in friendship and understanding. For example, Shriver's own son was paired with a young camper about his own age and quickly bonded with the boy, engaging in various activities together and being troublemakers together like any young boys love to do (4).

The original Camp Shriver continued for four years and eventually came to form the basis of Special Olympics in the United States and eventually worldwide (3).

Shriver was also heavily involved in the Kennedy Foundation, helping to advise President Kennedy and the United States Government on matters of intellectual disabilities and championing the eventual formation of the Special Olympics (5).





# Chicago, 1968: The First International Summer Games

In 1968 at Soldier Field in Chicago, the first International Summer Games for Special Olympics was held. This event was a joint venture between the Chicago Park District and the Kennedy Foundation where Eunice Kennedy Shriver was an adviser (3).

This event drew a large crowd, with over 1,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from both America and Canada competing in the Games. Over 200 sporting events were offered at the Games, including swimming, running, and water polo. One highlight of this event was the 45-foot high torch, called the John F. Kennedy Flame of Hope (3)

The success of this event caused Eunice Kennedy Shriver to declare that more games would be held in 1970 and promised that after that Games, they would be held every 2 years after that into the future (5).



In addition to hosting large International Games every few years, Special Olympics launched the Unified Sports program in 1988. This program worked to promote inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities by setting up shared experiences between special needs individuals and neurotypical individuals in an athletic setting. This program works to promote friendship and understanding between the Special Olympics athletes and their Unified partners (6).

About 1.4 million individuals compete in Unified Sports worldwide. ESPN has been the presenting sponsor of the Unified Sports program since 2013, bringing a greater awareness to the program and to the community of those with intellectual disabilities to the public eye (6).

## Unified Sports Program



# Healthy Athletes Program

The Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program was founded in 1997 and provides healthcare appointments and services to Special Olympics athletes across the world during events. This includes free examinations in vision, hearing, and dental screenings. Healthy Athletes also provides nutrition seminars and educational programs and injury prevention clinics (7).

The Healthy Athletes program has grown to provide more than 1.7 million free health screenings in over 130 countries since its inception (7).



## # CHOOSETOINCLUDE

Official hashtag of the Inclusion Revolution Movement,  
created by Special Olympics International (8).



**5,169,489**

The number of Special Olympics Athletes registered to compete worldwide (8)



# Special Olympics International Fact Sheet

**5,169,489** athletes registered worldwide

**103,540** competitions held annually

**1,114,697** volunteers

**174** countries

**195,471** athlete health screening in 2018

**17%** increase in unified teammates in 2018

## Sports:

- Alpine skiing
- Athletics
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Bocce
- Bowling
- Cricket
- Cross country skiing
- Cycling
- Equestrian
- Figure skating
- Floorball
- Floor hockey
- Football (soccer)
- Golf
- Gymnastics (artistic)
- Gymnastics (rhythmic)
- Handball
- Judo
- Kayaking
- Motor activities
- Netball
- Open water swimming
- Powerlifting
- Roller skating
- Sailing
- Speed skating
- Snowboarding
- Snowshoeing
- Softball
- Swimming
- Table tennis
- Tennis
- Triathlon
- Volleyball



(Source: 8)



# State Spotlight:

**Special Olympics**  
Tennessee



**33** volunteer area offices

**Over 17,000** athletes in Tennessee

**Over 100** competitions annually on area, regional, and state levels

**6** statewide events per year: summer games, golf, flag football, fall classic, winter games, and basketball

**More than 3500** volunteer coaches in the program

(9, 10)

As an intern with Special Olympics Tennessee, I have had the opportunity to learn from the full-time staff members and athletes that the athletic events and programming that SOTN puts on is "life changing" and offers the athletes a "chance to spread their wings and really be independent; for some of them, this is the first time in their life that they have had the opportunity to travel and pursue a hobby on their own, without the constant supervision of their parents," according to SOTN President and CEO Adam Germek (2). This sentiment has been echoed by all of the athletes I've met the past few months, and shows just how important SOTN is to the special needs community in Tennessee.



# Conclusion

Working at Special Olympics Tennessee this past semester has allowed me to invest time into a passion of mine, which is working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. I have several personal family members and friends who have special needs, so this organization is very near and dear to my heart, as it has provided a tremendous amount of resources and a positive community for these people. I knew coming into this internship that I wanted to learn more about why Special Olympics is so successful on local, national, and international scales based on its unique history. I modeled my learning goal after this desire to learn, and I believe I successfully captured and conveyed some of the major events and program formations throughout the history of Special Olympics that make the organization what it is in the present day. I am very grateful for this experience, and I know that I will continue to be involved with Special Olympics after college in whatever city I end up moving to post-graduation.





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