

INSPIRE
GREATNESS



Special Olympics
Alaska

Fact Sheet

Organization

Part of a Global Movement

Special Olympics Alaska (SOAK) is an accredited program of Special Olympics Inc. (SOI), a global organization providing sports training and competition to over one million people with mental retardation in 150 countries. The state office of Special Olympics Alaska is charged with raising funds, organizing state competitions, and providing guidance and support to local area programs.

There are about 20 Area programs in Alaska that provide training at the community level. Area programs are organized in communities as large as Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kenai Peninsula and Mat-Su Valley, to rural Alaskan towns as small and remote as Kodiak and Kotzebue. These grass roots programs are the heart of Special Olympics Alaska. They are the point of entry for athletes and families, and provide the best forum for community support, including a critical volunteer force.

Mission

Training for Life

Mission: To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people eight years of age and older with mental retardation, 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.

Official Goal: To help bring all persons with mental retardation, and/or a closely-related developmental disability, into the larger society under conditions whereby they are accepted, respected and given a chance to become more productive citizens.

Philosophy: Training that is such an integral part of the Special Olympics program is truly “*Training for Life.*” Through training, Special Olympics athletes not only acquire specific sports skills to prepare for competition, they also gain an opportunity for even greater participation in family, school and community life.

History

A Foundation of Soul

Soon after President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, his sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver launched a crusade to change the way the world treated — or ignored — mental retardation. The re-education program gained credence as the Kennedys disclosed that one of their own, Rosemary Kennedy, had mental retardation.

Throughout the 1960s, Eunice Shriver’s commitment saw not only landmark legislation dealing with mental disabilities and disability rights, but was also instrumental in bringing mental retardation out of the darkness and into the light of public acceptance.

The genesis of Special Olympics was a summer day camp that Sargent and Eunice Shriver started in the backyard of their Maryland home. In July 1968, the world witnessed the First International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field in Chicago. In December of that year, the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation incorporated Special Olympics. Since then, Special Olympics has grown to become the largest program of its kind.

Special Olympics in Alaska traces its beginnings to 1969. Erica Ahrens’ initial interest blossomed into the first state games in Fairbanks in 1969. Another key player was Chuck Melick who served as the first games director in Alaska.

(see second page)

*Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be
brave in the attempt.*

— **Special Olympics Oath**



Programs

Lifting Spirits through Sports

Special Olympics programs are patterned after the Olympic Games. In fact, Special Olympics is the only organization authorized by the International Olympic Committee to use the word “Olympics” in its name. In Alaska, over 800 athletes and thousands of volunteers are involved in Special Olympics programs. During the year, athletes come together in state competition to participate in 14 official sports:

- **Winter Games** in March — Alpine Skiing, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey, Nordic Skiing, Snow Boarding, Snowshoeing and Speed Skating
- **Summer Games** in June — Athletics (Track & Field), Aquatics (Swimming & Diving), Basketball, Gymnastics and Powerlifting
- **Equestrian Tournament** in September
- **Bowling Tournament** in November
- **Unified Sports** throughout the year. (Unified Sports brings together Special Olympics athletes and people without mental retardation to train and compete as teammates. In Alaska, Unified Sports training and competition is offered in a variety of sports.)

Through statewide competition, athletes can qualify to compete in Special Olympics World Summer and Winter Games, which alternate every other year in locations around the globe. *Special Olympics Alaska is the host program for the 2001 Special Olympics World Winter Game, which will take place March 4-11 in venues around Anchorage. Over 2,000 athletes from 80-plus countries are expected to compete in winter sports.*

Volunteers

The Heartbeat

Volunteer participation make quality, comprehensive training and competition possible. Volunteer coaches are specifically trained to teach sports skills, as well as prepare athletes to overcome barriers that have stood between them and skills for many years ... even a lifetime. Other volunteers perform critical functions ... from running a competitive event to raising funds; from officiating a game to coordinating families; and from administrative support to public relations. Contact the state office for more information.

Sponsors

The Lifeline

Sponsorships constitute a significant part of SOAK’s operating budget. In an effort to provide sponsorship opportunities to businesses of all sizes, SOAK has developed sponsorship levels that range from sponsoring state games year-round, to contributing in-kind products and services in support of competition. Sponsorship can be very beneficial to corporate partners, given SOAK’s tremendous public image and recognition.

Eligibility

Our Courageous Athletes

1. **Agree to Abide by the Rules.** To be eligible for participation in Special Olympics, a competitor must agree to observe and abide by the Official Special Olympics Rules.
2. **No Discrimination.** No person shall — on the grounds of sex, race, religion, color or national origin — be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of Special Olympics.
3. **Age Requirements.** Persons are eligible for Special Olympics, provided that they are 8 years of age or older. An accredited program may allow children that are 6 or 7 years old to train; however, they may not compete. There is no maximum age limit.
4. **Identify as having mental retardation.** A person is considered to have mental retardation if:
 - An agency or professional has identified the person as having mental retardation; or
 - The person has a cognitive delay as determined by standard measures, such IQ testing or other measures that are generally accepted within the professional community; or
 - The person has a closely related development disability, i.e. functional limitations in both general learning and adaptive skills. Persons with functional limitations based solely on physical, behavioral, emotional, sensory or specific disabilities are not eligible.

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