Volunteer Orientation
Welcome

You are about to start a unique opportunity that will bring you into contact with some very talented athletes and provide experiences that you will never forget.

We here at Special Olympics Kentucky have a saying, “The athletes are why we exist, but our volunteers are how we exist.” Without the support and the dedication of volunteers, like you, we would not be able to provide the top-notch competitive opportunities that we do for our athletes. With that being said, we are excited to welcome you to the SOKY team!

Sincerely,

Kelli Firquin
Volunteer Services Manager
Our Goals

Through this orientation we hope that you will gain an understanding of:

• The mission and history of Special Olympics
• The athletes we serve
• The volunteer opportunities available
• How to engage with athletes
Special Olympics Mission
Mission

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 friendships, with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.
Philosophy

Special Olympics believes that through sports training and competition, people with intellectual disabilities benefit:

- physically
- mentally
- socially
- spiritually

Families are strengthened; and the community at large, both through participation and observation, is united with people with intellectual disabilities in an environment of equality, respect and acceptance.
Vision

Through the vast array of programs offered by our program, we hope to improve the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities, instilling new attitudes of self-confidence and self-worth and we hope to educate the general public about the value and talents of every human being.

Our vision is a world where every person, regardless of their ability or disability, is accepted, welcomed, and valued!
Special Olympics History
Overview

What is Special Olympics?
Special Olympics is an international program of year-round sports training and athletic competition for more than one million children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

It All Began
in 1968 when founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the First International Special Olympics Games.

The Impact
Since 1968, millions of children and adults with intellectual disabilities have participated in Special Olympics.
History

• In 1968 the first International Special Olympics Games were held at Soldier Field in Chicago. A total of 1,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 26 States and Canada competed in track and field, swimming, and floor hockey.

• By the 1970’s multiple milestones were reached for the Special Olympics movement. One to note - In 1971 The U.S. Olympic Committee gave Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized to use the name “Olympics” in the US.
History

- Throughout the 1980’s Special Olympics gained recognition as the premier sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities around the world.

- The 1990’s brought the opportunity to hold the first International Games outside of the US and signified Special Olympics gaining a stronger global foothold. Also, new health programs were developed and marked a turning point for athletes.

- The 2000s served as the decade of exponential growth for Special Olympics around the world with millions of athletes taking part in thousands of competitions.

- In the decade of the 2010s, growth in the visibility and power of Special Olympics to change lives worldwide was recognized.
The Special Olympics Movement:

- Supports over 5 million athletes, 1 million volunteers, and more than 100,000 competitions each year
- Offers 32 Olympic-style individual and team sports through programs in more than 170 countries
- 1.4 million people worldwide take part in Unified Sports
- More than 80% of the 5 million athletes live outside the United States
- 33.5% of athletes are adults, 22 years of age or older
Leadership

- **Timothy Shriver**, son of founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver, is the Chair of Special Olympics Inc.
- **Mary Davis** is the CEO of Special Olympics Inc.
- **Marc Edenzon** is the Chief of Global Program for Special Olympics North America
SOKY

Special Olympics Kentucky (SOKY):

- Provides year-round sports training and competition in **15** Olympic type sports
- Serves over **11,362 athletes** across the state
- Annually conducts 10 state-level competitions and over 599 additional competitions at local, area, and regional levels each year
- Statewide Polar Bear Plunges, Truck & Plane Pulls, annual raffles, and support of the Law Enforcement Torch Run assist in funding SOKY’s program
- **Trish Mazzoni** is the President and CEO of Special Olympics Kentucky
Unique

Special Olympics is similar to other sport organizations but, is unique in three main areas:

- Sport opportunities are provided for athletes of all ability levels
- Ability groupings are created through a process called divisioning to provide equitable competition for all athletes
- Awards are provided to all participants who compete
Special Olympics and Paralympics are commonly confused but, are in-fact two separate organizations. Both are recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). They are similar in the fact that they both provide sport programs for athletes with a disability and are run by international non-profit organizations.

However, they are different in three main areas:

• The disability categories of the athletes
• The criteria under which athletes participate
• The structure of the organizations
Special Olympics
Athletes
Athlete Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in Special Olympics athletes must be at least eight years of age and identified by an agency or professional as having one of the following conditions:

- An Intellectual Disability
- A Cognitive Delay – measured by formal assessment
- Significant Learning or Vocational Problems – due to cognitive delay that requires specifically-designed instruction

There is no maximum age restriction for athletes. Athletes the age of two to seven years old are eligible to participate in the Young Athletes Program.
Athlete Training

- Athletes are expected to have trained a minimum of six to eight weeks prior to their first competition.
- Athletes are expected to compete in events according to the rules and competition is expected to be fair and evenly contested.
- A good training program challenges an athlete to do his/her own personal best.
- Through good training and coaching athletes should always be challenged to move to the next level.
- Training helps to build an athlete's confidence and strength to perform at their highest ability levels during competition.

Athlete Oath:

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."
Divisioning

- Divisioning serves as the foundation of fair and equitable competitions for athletes of all ability levels.
- The system provides all competitors with a chance to excel.
- No more than 8 athletes or teams are included in each division.
- Athletes are grouped by age, gender, and ability.
Rule Enforcement

Special Olympics competition is based on the principle that the enforcement of the proper rules is essential for athletes to develop their full potential.

Enforcing the rules:

- Provides athletes with a safe and fair competition
- Upholds the integrity of the sport and the Special Olympics movement
- Provides athletes with a foundation for setting goals and standards
- Prepares athletes for other sports programs
- Prepares athletes for everyday life
Special Olympics Kentucky offers training and competition opportunities in a total of 15 sports. Both team and individual sports are offered.

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**Winter Season**: Alpine Skiing, Snowshoeing, Basketball, and Cheerleading  
(Nov. - Mar.)

**Spring Season**: Swimming, Bocce, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Track & Field, and Soccer  
(Feb. - Jun.)

**Summer Season**: Golf and Softball  
(Jun. - Sept.)

**Fall Season**: Flag Football, Bowling, Equestrian, and Artistic Gymnastics  
(Aug. - Dec.)
State Maps

Area Map:
This is the map that is used to divide the state into 9 areas for competition in all individual sports.

Regional Map:
This is the map used to divide the state into 3 regions for competition in all team sports.
Unified Sports is a program that combines approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes with athletes without intellectual disabilities (unified partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Unified Sports increases inclusion in the community by helping to break down barriers that have historically kept people with and without intellectual disabilities.

SOKY offers the following Unified Sports opportunities:

- Bocce
- Bowling
- Cheerleading
- Golf
- Swimming
- Track & Field

Click [HERE](#) to learn more.
Unified Champion Schools is an education-based program. The goal of the program is to build self-sustaining, school-based programs that foster inclusive, positive, and equal student relationships. This is accomplished with the implementation of three pillars: **inclusive sports**, **youth leadership**, and **whole school engagement**. The program covers the span of all school environments ranging from elementary to college.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more.
SOKY and the Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) began a partnership in 2014 to sponsor an inclusive program where students with and without intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to train and compete together for their high school. Currently, Unified Bowling and Track and Field are offered across the state.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more.
Young Athletes is an innovative sports play program for children with intellectual disabilities, ages two to seven. The program engages participants in developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster physical, cognitive, and social development while also introducing them to the world of sports prior to Special Olympics eligibility at age eight.

Click HERE to learn more.
The mission of the **Healthy Athletes** initiative is to improve, through better health and fitness, the athlete's ability to train and compete. To reach this goal programs involving dentistry, optometry, audiology, health promotion, and physical therapy come together to provide services at Special Olympics events. The program also provides training for healthcare professionals and students about the specialized needs of patients with intellectual disabilities.

SOKY offers eight healthy athlete programs: **Special Smiles, Opening Eyes, Healthy Hearing, Health Promotion, FUNfitness, Fit Feet, Strong Minds, and MedFest**.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about Healthy Athletes and MedFest.
Athlete Leadership Program

The purpose of the **Athlete Leadership Program** is to empower athletes to develop leadership skills and utilize their voices and abilities to take on meaningful leadership roles, influence change in the Special Olympics movement, and create inclusive communities around the world.

SOKY Athlete Leaders serve as Global Messengers, volunteers, officials, assistant coaches, Board/Committee members, and fundraisers.
Special Olympics Kentucky hosts a variety of special events annually to raise funds for all programs. These events include Polar Plunges, Truck Pulls, a Plane Pull, Golf Tournaments, a Holiday gift card raffle, and the Disney raffle.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more.
Volunteer Opportunities
Class A volunteers work directly with athletes in a leadership role by serving as Head Coaches, Assistant Coaches, Unified Partners, Chaperones, Transporters, etc. These volunteers have consistent interaction with athletes and these roles can require a time commitment of several hours, once or twice a week, for 6-8 weeks. All Class A volunteers are required to complete the volunteer screening process to be eligible to serve.
Screening Process

The Class A volunteer screening process:

1. Complete and submit the [Class A Volunteer/Unified Partner Application](#) with a copy of your state issued driver's license

2. Review and complete the required online trainings
   - [Volunteer Orientation](#) *(This Training)*
   - [CDC "Heads Up" Concussion Training](#)
   - [Protective Behaviors Training](#)

3. Receive an official approval letter

4. Renew the application, Concussion, and Protective Behaviors training every 3 years to remain an "approved" volunteer
Become a Coach

Class A volunteers interested in coaching can choose between two roles – Head Coach or Assistant Coach.

**Head Coach:** Assumes the overall responsibility for the team/delegation. Head coaches must be 18 years of age and willing to commit to leading and being present for all practices and competitions throughout the sport season. Head coaches are **required** to become certified in their respective sport by completing the online [sport certification](#) training or attending an in-person clinic when available.

**Assistant Coach:** Assistant coaches must be at least 16 years of age and willing to commit to being present for all practices and competitions throughout the sport season. Becoming certified is not required but, is highly encouraged.

*Important Note: Class A Volunteers under the age of 18 are **NOT** permitted to transport athletes to and from Special Olympics events including: practices, competitions, and social gatherings.*
Class B Volunteers

Class B volunteers or **Day of Event** volunteers assist on the day of competitive or special events. Volunteer roles include serving as Announcers, Timers, Referees, Umpires, Scorekeepers, etc. Typically these roles consist of 3 to 8 hour commitments and take place on the weekends. Occassionally, there are weekday opportunities. Most opportunities do not require experience or specific sport knowledge. Serving as an official, umpire, or referee does require official certification or experience.

Visit [www.soky.org/volunteernow](http://www.soky.org/volunteernow) to view all day of event volunteer opportunities and [create a profile](http://www.soky.org/volunteernow) in our online volunteer database to stay up to date on all upcoming events.

*Important Note: Day of event volunteers serving independently **must be at least 14 years of age**. Those under 14 **must be accompanied by an adult** for the entirety of their service.*
Working with Athletes
Engaging With Athletes

• Be yourself and use your normal voice. Give support to all athletes and try not to over praise.
• Excessive hugging and kissing is not appropriate.
• Encouraging pats on the back or handshakes is another way of praising an athlete. Let the athlete take the lead as to what recognition they are comfortable with.
• Get to know the athletes. There are often opportunities to sit and talk with an athlete and get to know who they are, where they work, go to school, etc.
• Expect and encourage appropriate behavior and sportsmanship from all athletes.
The following language guidelines have been developed by experts for use when writing or speaking about individuals with intellectual disabilities. As a SOKY volunteer, we ask that you use these guidelines when referring to our program and when working with our athletes.

- Refer to participants in Special Olympics as "Special Olympics athletes" rather than "Special Olympians" or Special Olympic athletes."
- Refer to individuals as persons or people with intellectual disabilities, rather than "intellectually disabled people" or "the intellectually disabled."
Language Guidelines

• A person has intellectual disabilities, rather than is "suffering from," is "afflicted with" or is "a victim of" mental retardation/intellectual disabilities.

• Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disabilities. Use adults or children, or older or younger athletes.

• A person "uses" a wheelchair, rather than is "confined" or "restricted to" a wheelchair.

• A person has a physical disability rather than is crippled.

• Do not use the label "kids" when referring to Special Olympics athletes. Adult athletes are an integral part of the movement.

• Do not use the word "the" in front of Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event or official.
Language Guidelines

- Do not use the adjective "unfortunate" when talking about persons with an intellectual disability.

- Use the word "special" with extreme care when talking about persons with intellectual disabilities. The term, if used excessively in references to Special Olympics athletes and activities, can become a cliché.

- Do not over sensationalize the accomplishments of people with intellectual disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of people with physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities with excessive hyperbole.
Final Step

Thank you for taking the time to review this PowerPoint and for your desire to serve as a Special Olympics Kentucky volunteer. To officially complete the volunteer orientation training complete the quiz by clicking HERE.

The quiz is required to complete the course. Visit www.soky.org to view all volunteer opportunities, access all required trainings, and additional resources.

Thank you!

Please contact Volunteer Services Manager, Kelli Firquin if you have any questions or need more information.

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