



In existence since 1968, Special Olympics New Jersey is part of a worldwide program of sports training and athletic competition open to individuals with intellectual disabilities. Recognized by the International Olympic Committee, Special Olympics New Jersey promotes global athlete leadership and is dedicated to the movement of empowerment and dignity. Its goal is to change attitudes within communities about people with intellectual disabilities emphasizing potential, ability and acceptance. Special Olympics New Jersey consists of more than 25,000 athletes, 26,000 volunteers and 20,000 family members.

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS MISSION**

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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 the sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

## **HISTORY**

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Eunice Kennedy Shriver organized the First International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, in 1968. The concept was born in the early 1960s when Mrs. Shriver started a day camp for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics in New Jersey was founded by Walter Johnson and Bessie Perlman, and while athletes from New Jersey participated in the Chicago Games, the first New Jersey state Games were hosted by E.R. Johnstone Training and Research Center in Bordentown, NJ.

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY VISION**

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Special Olympics New Jersey will foster inclusive communities for people with and without intellectual disabilities through innovative sport, health, wellness and leadership opportunities for Special Olympics athletes, their families and society as a whole.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

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Every person with an intellectual disability who is at least eight years of age is eligible to participate in Special Olympics. People who have closely related developmental disabilities, such as those who have functional limitations, both in general learning and in adaptive skills such as recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care also are eligible. The Young Athletes™ program offers developmental training and an introduction into sports for those too young to participate in traditional Special Olympics New Jersey programs, children ages 2 through 7.

## **ATHLETIC TRAINING & COMPETITION**

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Special Olympics New Jersey conducts more than 260 competitive events throughout the state in 23 sports year-round, all of which are completely free of charge to participants. Each season, events are conducted at the local and county (area) level, and success at these levels qualifies athletes to advance to sectional and statewide tournaments and competitions, which are held at various venues throughout the state.

**Fall sports:** cycling, equestrian, flag football, golf, soccer, triathlon

**Winter sports:** alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, floor hockey, figure skating, snowboarding, snowshoeing, speed skating, volleyball

**Spring sports:** basketball, bowling

**Summer sports:** bocce, gymnastics, powerlifting, softball, swimming, tennis, track & field

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY PROGRAM INITIATIVES**

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Special Olympics New Jersey initiatives enhance the mission of Special Olympics by offering athletes and community members experiences outside the realm of traditional Special Olympics competition. These programs further athletes' capacity to learn life skills, gain confidence, and grow as individuals, as well as encourage all involved to celebrate differences and break down barriers. All program initiatives are free of charge to participants.

- **Unified Sports®** joins people with and without disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.
- **Athlete Leadership** empowers athletes to explore opportunities for greater participation beyond sports training and competition.
- **Young Athletes™** is an inclusive sports play program for children ages 2 through 7 that prepares them for future participation in sports while improving gross motor, social and cognitive skills.
- **Healthy Athletes®** is dedicated to providing education and free screenings in seven health disciplines to athletes while changing the way future healthcare professionals interact with people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Camp Shriver** enhances sports skills while teaching athletes about overall health and fitness.
- **Unified Champion Schools** promotes a socially inclusive school climate where acceptance, respect and human dignity for all students is the norm through inclusive sports, youth leadership and whole school engagement opportunities. SONJ offers opportunities from the preschool level through college.

Special Olympics New Jersey  
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