

**CHOOSE TO INCLUDE**

*They said he would never be untethered from the tree keeping him safe… He was freed.*

*They said she could never make the basketball team… She played point guard for four years.*

*They said he could never get into shape… He lost 100 pounds.*

*They said he would never hear… He heard for the first time at age 15.*

*They said he could not learn… He graduated high school.*

*They said she would never make friends… She was voted Homecoming Queen.*

*They said she could never get a job… She became a fashion designer.*

**NEVER SAY NEVER.**

**OUR ATHLETES ARE DONE TAKING NO FOR AN ANSWER**

Throughout history people with intellectual disabilities have suffered from the worst forms of abuse and discrimination – mostly invisible, hidden from view and ridiculed by society, and in some cases, their own families. The world felt more comfortable ignoring the most basic human needs – connection, health and hope for a better life – than acknowledging people with intellectual disabilities as neighbors, let alone as valuable members of society. But one woman altered the course of history and started a revolution to change it all.

When Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics in 1968 she took a rebellious stand against the injustices faced by people with intellectual disabilities. No longer would the world turn its back on the most vulnerable among us. Her solution was simple: give people with intellectual disabilities a chance to demonstrate their abilities, determination and value through sport. She faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles and yet never wavered in her steadfast belief that every person deserves to be treated with respect and have an opportunity to be included. Fifty years later, Special Olympics has grown from a summer camp held in Mrs. Shriver’s backyard to a global movement reaching more than five million individuals with intellectual disabilities in 170 countries.

**OVERVIEW**



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Despite this amazing feat, there are *two hundred million people with intellectual disabilities* who continue to face an uphill battle for inclusion. The fight against complacency, ignorance and stigma Mrs. Shriver initiated 50 years ago is still just as critical today. For some, it is a lack of access to healthcare, for others education, and still others the threat of ongoing discrimination, ridicule, derision and even neglect and abuse. Consider the following statistics:

* People with intellectual disabilities die younger than the general population (average of 13 years earlier for men, 20 years for women) with the majority of the premature deaths due to delays or problems investigating, diagnosing and treating illnesses, and with receiving adequate care.
* Young people with intellectual disabilities are at greater risk for being victimized and bullied. In the US, multiple studies have concluded that children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities.
* Significant numbers of people feel that inclusion in the work place and school could have negative consequences including more accidents, lower productivity, decreased ability to learn and lack of discipline. These misperceptions contribute to a major gap between employment rates among the general population and those with disabilities in countries all over the world. According to the US Bureau for Labor Statistics, in 2015 only 17.5% of people with disabilities were employed, compared to 65% of the general population.

Today the fight for inclusion is more relevant than ever. People of all ages, races, genders, cultures, backgrounds and abilities continue to face discrimination, ignorance and disparagement. Just as Eunice Kennedy Shriver did in 1968, Special Olympics is setting a stake in the ground and is once again prepared to alter the course of history - this time, with people with intellectual disabilities leading the way.

No longer is it enough to provide a place for people with intellectual disabilities to come together through sport. It is time to demand uncompromising inclusion— in school, employment, healthcare, social activities and yes, sports, too. From the youngest among us to the oldest. Together:

* **WE WILL INNOVATE**. As growth in the number of individuals Special Olympics serves continues to climb, the quality of the coaching and sports experience combined with the sophistication of health outreach requires immediate and innovative efforts to meet the demands of the next 50 years. As the backbone of the movement, Special Olympics seeks to be the leading expert, convener and deliverer of the highest quality sports and health experience for people with intellectual disabilities in every community around the world.
* **WE WILL** **UNIFY**. Special Olympics views youth as the architects of lasting change and leaders of a dignity revolution. Together youth with and without intellectual disabilities will be called upon to break down persistent barriers to inclusion worldwide, creating a truly Unified Generation.
* **WE WILL** **EMPOWER**. Special Olympics acknowledges that full inclusion must go beyond the playing field. To empower people with intellectual disabilities to live up to their fullest potential, Special Olympics will place a prioritized focus on augmenting the availability of leadership opportunities and opportunities to attain and retain job readiness skills.

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This lifetime of inclusion begins with you. With our athletes at the helm, this revolution requires a personal commitment that you will no longer tolerate discrimination against anyone deemed different by society. It requires that you commit to help Special Olympics spread a message of inclusion, creating a world where all people are recognized for their diverse abilities and backgrounds, not discriminated because of their differences.

**We need rebels, heroes, and fighters like you NOW.** Join us in **INNOVATING** health care and sport opportunities; **UNIFYING** society by breaking down barriers; and **EMPOWERING** people with intellectual disabilities to live their fullest potential. Our athletes are done taking no for an answer. Are you?

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