**CHOOSE TO INCLUDE**

Empower Athletes to Lead

Inclusion does not begin the moment the referee blows the whistle announcing the start of the game, and it does not stop as competitors high five at the end; inclusion must also be found in every moment in between. Being offered the opportunity to live up to your fullest potential on and off the playing field is one of the greatest benefits of inclusion. However, to be recognized as a contributing member of society, one must first be afforded the OPPORTUNITY to contribute. Unfortunately, many people with intellectual disabilities are left out. Even worse, far too often they are not even considered.

Fifty years ago, Eunice Kennedy Shriver was regarded as unconventional, and even rebellious in her efforts to confront the discrimination and isolation experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. Later she insisted that people with intellectual disabilities should not only benefit from Special Olympics, but also take active leadership roles within the movement. Mrs. Shriver recognized there was no one better to speak about the impact of Special Olympics than those who actively participated. In fact, it seemed common sense to Mrs. Shriver that people with intellectual disabilities who have been coached for years would want to one day be coaches themselves; that they would want to organize competitions, help with fundraising, and speak on behalf of the movement and importantly, themselves.

Today individuals with intellectual disabilities serve on Boards of Directors, as coaches, officials and are employed by Special Olympics around the globe. In addition, many Special Olympics participants have sought and retained employment in the private sector. These leaders are blazing trails, pushing boundaries and demanding that their abilities are appreciated and their voice is heard.

Yet the culture of dependence is rampant among the disability community and is still the norm for too many. Individuals with intellectual disabilities also face enormous attitudinal, structural and logistical barriers to getting and keeping a job, and find that living up to their fullest potential is still a fight. A 2015 PWC survey found that only 7% of CEOs were considering disability initiatives as a way to promote diversity & inclusion, highlighting a major need to change mindsets about inclusive leadership.

Special Olympics understands that lasting change will require a solid foundation. In order to empower people with intellectual disabilities, a renewed and comprehensive focus must be placed on moving beyond sport and augmenting programming to include training and skills- building to unlock future leadership and employment opportunities.

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Special Olympics has identified the following bold initiatives:

**Inclusive Leadership**

Special Olympics has provided multiple pathways for individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate in the movement beyond sports. True inclusion begins at home, within the community and within Special Olympics, where new and innovative leadership roles will be filled by individuals with intellectual disabilities. Financial resources will be dedicated to aggressively expanding capacity to work alongside partners to deliver leadership and skills based training that develops athletes who are prepared to lead with Special Olympics, the community and the workplace.

In the coming years, with support from the Campaign, Special Olympics will undertake an ambitious plan with the following goals:

* **Recruit and train 15,000 new athlete leaders around the globe**
	+ Scale innovative youth and adult leadership development programs into Unified Schools and local Special Olympics activities worldwide to identify leaders within the movement.
	+ Identify and recruit 3,000 mentors to work alongside individuals with intellectual disabilities to prepare and support their work in leadership positions by targeting new sources who are increasingly interested in high-value volunteering.
	+ Leverage the global Special Olympics network to improve infrastructure through the appointment of 40 new full-time Athlete Leadership Coordinators to lead the recruitment, training and activation of athlete leaders.
* **Invest in the expansion and development of Special Olympics Athlete Leadership resources and offerings to activate the highest quality, most diverse, and most restlessly creative leaders in the world**
	+ Develop 30 Athlete Input Councils across the seven Special Olympics regions to provide athletes an opportunity to provide feedback and drive content in the creation of their own program.

* + Ensure effective leadership training in all locations around the world, add new skills-based training modules that enhance and augment preparations for staff and mentors, and support Special Olympics’ ability to organize athlete leadership workshops.
	+ Work with technology industry experts in the development of digital leadership training opportunities and content for athletes, enabling athlete leaders to build an online community that empowers athletes to share leadership experiences, ideas, best practices and opportunities.

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**Leadership and Workforce Readiness**

Changing the world starts with changing mindsets. Special Olympics will drive toward a world where everyone believes that people with intellectual disabilities can lead in ways that benefit society. A world where governments, businesses, influencers and community organizations not only embrace, but thirst for the leadership of people with intellectual disabilities.

In order to fully realize the potential of its leaders Special Olympics must be bold and reach beyond the organization and, alongside our partners, foster networks to amplify the skills and voice of people with intellectual disabilities. As a new charge, Special Olympics will expand its skills-based trainings to prepare athletes for valued roles within Special Olympics, the workforce, and their communities. Through partnerships with organizations that specialize in workplace inclusion, more possibilities that go beyond Special Olympics will be available.

Through these collaborative efforts the following goals will be achieved:

* **New skills modules will be added to prepare athletes for leadership and workplace opportunities**
	+ 4-5 key skills-based training modules that dramatically enhance preparedness for leadership roles will be designed. Module examples include: personal skills, people skills, problem-solving and technical skills.
	+ Catalyst grants will be provided to support skills-based training modules, innovative utilization of 3,000 athlete leaders within Special Olympics, and connect 2,000 athlete leaders with leadership and workplace opportunities in their communities.
* **A Global mindset change towards inclusive leadership will be initiated**

* + Partnerships with organizations that promote meaningful social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the workplace, will be established.
	+ Educational sessions and workshops will be conducted at the global, regional, national and local levels to promote inclusive leadership.
	+ A network will be built between the movement and 50 corporations and community organizations – “50 for 50” – to promote inclusive hiring practices.
	+ Speaking engagements and tours will be established for athlete leaders to help people better understand the power and potential of individuals with ID.

For 50 years, Special Olympics has served as a catalyst for change, empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to expect and demand more of themselves. Through the development of skills that prepare them for inclusion, individuals with intellectual disabilities will be empowered in new ways to demand more of society, to lead, and to show the world the true power of inclusive leadership.

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