

Young Athletes™ Overview



Special Olympics Young Athletes™ is an early childhood sports play program including games, songs and other fun physical activities for children aged 2 to 7 years old. Children with and without disabilities play together and families have the opportunity to get involved in the fun. It also gives siblings, parents, grandparents and other caregivers a connection to the broader Special Olympics community of support.

Our young athletes learn basic sports skills like kicking and throwing a ball and playing with others. This helps them prepare to participate in traditional sports programs when they are older, including those offered by Special Olympics. Participants also develop motor, social, language and cognitive skills important for their overall success in life, not just as athletes. While children practice sports skills their motor development improves in areas such as balance, flexibility, strength and coordination. In fact, in a recent study, children with developmental delays who participated in a structured 8 week Young Athletes™ program showed significantly more motor development than those who did not participate. Their teachers and parents also noted children

gained confidence along with their improved development and families played more together.

Young Athletes™ is easy to get started, fun for all, and a great way to boost confidence and expectations. It can be offered at home, in schools or in the community using Special Olympics resources and simple sports equipment (e.g. balls, hoops, cones). Like all our Special Olympics Programs it raises awareness and promotes inclusion and acceptance.

Special Olympics goal is to double participation in the Young Athletes™ program by 2015. We have a variety of resource materials available to help families, volunteers, and professionals lead the activities and support us in expanding the program. Our online Young Athletes Toolkit includes video clips, a simple Activity Guide with illustrations and basic instructions to lead the activities, a complete Young Athletes Curriculum with 24 lesson plans, and additional materials for planning and extending the activities.

We encourage you to join us in helping children develop skills and confidence and linking families to Special Olympics.

"When my baby was born and I found out that he had intellectual disabilities, my world fell apart and my plans for my son were in tatters. At Young Athletes I see him move about, perspiring, smiling, mixing freely with others and not holding on to the tail end of my skirt all the time. It makes me cry tears of happiness and restores my hope that he can be independent one day. Now I dare to dream and plan to play baseball with my son when he grows up."

Mrs. Misae Katsumata, Japan

Call to Action

Children with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to learn, grow and have fun because of you—their families, teachers, coaches, volunteers, early intervention specialists and sponsors. Your commitment to expanding the Young Athletes™ program at home, in the community and in schools is what makes the biggest difference in children's lives. Visit our website for access to resources and more information at: www.specialolympics.org/youngathletes.

Special Olympics Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is 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 sharing of gifts with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

