

Hanna Garises: Global Family Leader Africa



I become involved with Special Olympics (SO) as a family member when my son Garere was six years old. Garere has Down-Syndrome and attends a special school. In 2010, I become the family coordinator in Namibia and established the first family committee for the local sub program.

Since then I have recruited volunteers and more family members for the subprogram. I move around with my son within the community and use my influence as a school principal to address the attitudes of people towards people with intellectual disabilities. I try to make them understand that it is a God given gift and God's love and mercy is demonstrated through them to us on a daily basis and therefore we need to love and cherish them. I advocate for the intellectually disabled people so that their families must accept them and not to be ashamed of them. I hope to make them realize that SO programs will help their children grow physically and emotionally and that the athletes will have a sense of pride and belonging.

My aim is to recruit more young athletes and to reach out to intellectually disabled people that are not in special schools. I am mainly targeting the disadvantaged communities and hope to bring about a change in how families in these communities see and experience their children with intellectual disabilities as most of them see them as a curse and a burden.

