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SPECIAL OLYMPICS INTERNATIONAL

MASTER CASE FOR SUPPORT

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Special Olympics

INTRODUCTION

Consider the basketball. Left alone on flat ground, it is still. It is just a basketball.

Now put the basketball in the hands of a Special Olympics athlete. What happens next is much more than basketball.

She throws the basketball through the hoop and feels joy. Her family cheers with pride.

Spectators without intellectual disability start to see her a little differently, perhaps re-considering how they view people with intellectual disabilities.

Little by little, the world changes. The sport is the medium, but the real power lies within the Special Olympics experience and all the people it touches.

Special Olympics is a global organization that uses sports as a catalyst to change society's perceptions and treatment of people with intellectual disabilities. This world-changing mission has been at the heart of Special Olympics since the First International Summer Games in July 1968. There, through the vision of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, athletes with intellectual disabilities commanded the spotlight at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois. For the first time, the world witnessed the dedication, dignity and worth of a people who had long been invisible. The world has never been the same since.

Special Olympics has improved the lives of millions of people, and along the way has grown into one

of the world's most powerful and effective social movements. Today, Special Olympics is more than an event: It is a lifetime experience encompassing year-round sports competition, health, education and inclusion opportunities. Today's Special Olympics is not just for "them," it is for all of us.

From Special Olympics, the world sees a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. In the moments of the Special Olympics experience, the athlete changes from a person of diminished value to a champion. And in these moments of transformation, everyone else is changed too. We are more open, joyful, tolerant and accepting. Ultimately, these are the traits that can help create a better world for us all.

BY USING SPORTS AS A PLATFORM, SPECIAL OLYMPICS IS ABLE TO USE ITS GRASSROOTS PENETRATION TO GO WHERE OTHERS CAN NOT. ITS GLOBAL REACH RIVALS THAT OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE AND THE UNITED NATIONS.

- SPECIAL OLYMPICS SERVES NEARLY 3 MILLION ATHLETES IN 180 COUNTRIES
- SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES COMPETE IN MORE THAN 30,000 EVENTS EVERY YEAR
- APPROXIMATELY 21 MILLION PEOPLE CLOSE TO ATHLETES AS FAMILY MEMBERS, COACHES, VOLUNTEERS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, SPECTATORS AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES DIRECTLY BENEFIT FROM WITNESSING THE POWER OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS
- SPECIAL OLYMPICS IS THE ONLY ORGANIZATION AUTHORIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE TO USE THE WORD "OLYMPICS" WORLDWIDE
- THE GLOBAL REACH OF THE HEALTHY ATHLETES PROGRAM MAKES SPECIAL OLYMPICS THE LARGEST PUBLIC HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN THE WORLD
- DURING THE 2007 SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD SUMMER GAMES IN SHANGHAI, 109 INDIVIDUAL ATHLETES' PERFORMANCES WOULD HAVE MATCHED THOSE IN THE 2008 OLYMPICS SUMMER GAMES IN BEIJING

THE CHALLENGE

People with intellectual disabilities are still among the most vulnerable populations in the world. They are less likely to be employed and more likely to be victims of violence and abuse than the general population.ⁱ They experience poorer health and have trouble finding and paying for quality health care.ⁱⁱ

In some countries, people with intellectual disabilities are still institutionalized—sometimes under horrific conditions. A 2005 investigation in Romania, for example, found children in some institutions emaciated, many tied to their beds unable to move. Other children were found rolled up in bed sheets, some even lying in their own excrement.ⁱⁱⁱ Sadly, we know that terrible conditions also persist in many other places.

While the situation seems less dramatic in more developed countries, individuals with intellectual disabilities still struggle to gain independence, acceptance and inclusion into societies that have low expectations for what they can achieve. Children with intellectual disabilities face even greater challenges, in general isolated and rejected socially by their peers. Most young people say that

they would not spend time with someone with intellectual disabilities outside of school, and only 10 percent of young people in the United States report having a friend with an intellectual disability.^{iv}

In the face of these challenges, Special Olympics has created a global platform through sports to communicate the dignity and value of people with intellectual disabilities. In doing so, we have catalyzed a worldwide community of an estimated 21 million people without intellectual disabilities who have taken a stand for dignity, acceptance and the human race. This growing community recognizes that ultimately, Special Olympics is about fighting the misunderstanding and mal treatment of any one particular population—a cause that is relevant to all humankind.

Special Olympics has created a global platform through sports to communicate the dignity and value of people with intellectual disabilities

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY DEFINED

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY (ID) IS CHARACTERIZED BY A SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT COMBINED WITH LIMITATIONS IN THE ADAPTIVE SKILLS NEEDED TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY. INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY CAN BE CAUSED BY GENETICS, SUCH AS DOWN SYNDROME, OR PRENATAL COMPLICATIONS SUCH AS FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME. INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY CAN ALSO OCCUR IN CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM. THE MOST COMMON FORM OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IS OF UNKNOWN CAUSE. MOST INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES – 85 PERCENT—ARE ONLY MILDLY IMPAIRED.^v

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES. THE GENETIC FORMS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES CUT ACROSS THE LINES OF RACIAL, ETHNIC, EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS. MORE MILD FORMS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ARE FOUND IN SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY IMPOVERISHED AREAS. APPROXIMATELY 2 PERCENT OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION—OR ALMOST 200 MILLION PEOPLE—HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES, MAKING IT ONE OF THE LARGEST DISABILITY POPULATIONS IN THE WORLD.^{vi}

WHAT WE DO: EMPOWER THROUGH SPORTS

Special Olympics sports are transformative experiences that bring out pride, courage and joy in athletes—while inviting families and entire communities to join in the celebration. The Special Olympics sports experience has always been rooted in a radical notion: That every person has the capacity to be an Olympian, and that human greatness is defined more by the spirit than the body.

Sports are at the heart of Special Olympics because they are universal. Sports are understood and celebrated by all people, regardless of race, nationality, gender, economic level, religion and—thanks in large part to Special Olympics—intellectual ability. Athletes with and without intellectual disabilities compete according to the same rules and have the same motivations, the same goals, and reap the same benefits.^{vii}

“Playing sports with Special Olympics has given me the opportunity to express myself like many other athletes,” says athlete Anthony Green. “Sometimes when you have a disability, people look at you and only see the outside. Playing sports lets you be who you are on the inside, so you can bring that out.”

By providing a platform for achievement and a large social network of teammates, coaches, family members and community groups, Special Olympics makes a measurable difference in the lives of athletes. In fact, at least 80 percent of families in the United States say they have seen improvements in their athletes’ self esteem, self confidence, social skills, friendships and health thanks to their participation in Special Olympics.^{viii}

“With every medal or event my son has attended, he has become more social and confident in himself and his abilities as a person, and he has never felt more accepted by others,” says Special Olympics father and volunteer Alan Fry.

The benefits of participation translate beyond sports, helping athletes to live more independent and rewarding lives. For example, more than half of Special Olympics athletes in the United States hold jobs. While reliable data about the employment status of the general population of adults with ID are not widely available, values as low as 10 percent have been cited—suggesting a strong relationship between Special Olympics participation and the ability to be employed. When people with ID have gainful employment and are contributing members of society, **everyone benefits.**

Participation in Special Olympics sports also promotes healthy, active lives among a segment of individuals who are more likely to face obesity and related health problems than the general population. Almost all (98 percent) Special Olympics athletes play at least two sports, and nearly half (48 percent) engage in more than three hours of physical activity per week.^{ix}

Unified Sports have been shown to raise the self esteem of all participating athletes, with and without ID

UNIFIED SPORTS

Unified Sports is a groundbreaking initiative where people with and without special needs join together—often for the first time—in relationships of equality, reciprocity and fun. Perhaps more than any other initiative, *Unified Sports* captures the power of the Special Olympics movement to overcome barriers that separate people.

In *Unified Sports*, an equal number of players with and without intellectual disabilities compete on a team together. Athletes and “partners” (athletes without ID) are matched with players of similar ages and ability. *Unified Sports* leagues are often initiated by community partners, including parks and recreation departments, schools and community sports organizations. They take place at all levels of Special Olympics, including National and World Games.

Unified Sports are proven to promote meaningful inclusion and acceptance of individuals with ID. In fact, 93 percent of partners say that they gained a better understanding of individuals with ID after playing *Unified Sports*. *Unified Sports* have also been shown to raise the self esteem of all participating athletes, with and without ID.^x

YOUNG ATHLETES

The Special Olympics *Young Athletes*[™] program applies cutting-edge research on social, neurological and cognitive development to create play activities for children with special needs, their families and their communities. Around the world, *Young Athletes* programs come to life in community centers, child care centers, schools and homes where the joy of play and the therapeutic power of activity not only support the development of children with ID, but also highlight their potential.

For children with intellectual disabilities ages two through seven, *Young Athletes* introduces the world of Special Olympics by engaging them in developmentally appropriate play activities. An evaluation of the program indicates this early intervention is working. Teachers and family members of participating children reported substantial gains in childrens’ social and motor skills, adaptive behavior (self care, community, self-sufficiency, etc.), communication and cognitive development.^{xi}

Young Athletes welcomes family members of children with intellectual disabilities to the Special Olympics network of support, and helps create a more inclusive society by creating opportunities for children of all intellectual abilities to play together. The curriculum can be used with small groups of young children with and without intellectual disabilities. The exercises are also versatile enough for

use at home by individual families. Parents say they use the program as a way for their children with intellectual disability to play together with non-disabled siblings.

Wendy English, a Special Olympics parent, says the *Young Athletes* exercises created an opportunity for her three-year-old son to act as a “coach” to his brother, who has Down syndrome and autism. “I feel like this moment was something I had waited a lifetime for, just to see my boys play catch like two ordinary kids,” English says. “I have found a common ground — a place where my son and I can connect — through sports,” says another parent of a Young Athlete.

Over the next three years, Special Olympics will continue to grow and enhance the *Young Athletes* initiative by:

- Growing the number of participating children to 8,500 and families to 11,500.
- Expanding the program to reach even younger participants, from birth to two years old, and their families.
- Conducting health screenings for *Young Athletes* participants at state, national, regional and global Special Olympics events.
- Continuing to measure the effectiveness of the initiative on children and their families.

WHAT WE DO: BUILD COMMUNITIES

The Special Olympics model can be replicated anywhere in the world, creating communities of support everywhere it goes. In Special Olympics, a small investment in a soccer ball and some goal markers is leveraged with human capital. A coach is recruited from the community to teach sports skills to athletes and to guide the team. Doctors volunteer to provide entrance physicals and other health screenings. Other community members are recruited to referee, keep score, provide refreshments, and transport athletes. Families come together to assist with sports activities, and their involvement transforms into an ongoing family network of support.

Over time, other community players join the movement. Law enforcement officials run marathons to raise money to support training and competition events, organizations send their employees to volunteer, and local companies sponsor events. Stories about athlete achievements and data about the health disparities faced by athletes are highlighted to garner financial and public policy support from federal, state, and local governments.

In this way, Special Olympics moves beyond a game of soccer cobbled together on a field behind a school. It becomes a vehicle for bringing community members together, for changing attitudes, and for giving individuals a chance to achieve and succeed both on and beyond the playing field. One at a time, communities around

the world are experiencing this transformation, adding up to monumental changes.

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

All over the world, Special Olympics sport fields attract not only athletes of all ages but also their families, friends and neighbors. For Special Olympics families, this unique vehicle for connection often comes amid the heartbreak of isolation and rejection. Special Olympics provides a positive venue for families to become part of a caring community, and to become involved in the movement.

Research indicates that just watching their children participate in Special Olympics benefits parents. Parents who frequently attend their children's competitions report less child-related stress than those who attend less frequently.^{xii} During competitions,

parents have a chance to witness their children's capabilities and feel pride in their accomplishments. More than two-thirds of parents report that Special Olympics helped raise their expectations for their sons and daughters. Brothers and sisters feel the impact of Special Olympics too: 75 percent of siblings say that Special Olympics has had a positive impact on their families and on their relationship with their sibling.^{xiii}

Families are vital to the success of Special Olympics. Family members recruit new athletes, coach teams, transport athletes, raise funds, officiate games, chaperone events and train other volunteers. They also play the important role of embracing, informing and supporting other families who are new to the organization. *Family Support Networks* are a formalized way to honor the importance of Special

Olympics families, provide support and resources, and empower families to speak and act on behalf of their loved ones, others with ID and the Special Olympics movement.

Over the next three years, Special Olympics will continue to enrich the lives of athletes' families by:

- Reaching at least 100,000 families in 70 countries by 2011
- Collecting and documenting families' stories
- Providing families with expanded opportunities for engagement in areas such as international development, the Global Football initiative, and the World Games

SCHOOLS AND YOUTH

Among the greatest values of the Special Olympics movement is its power to change attitudes of people who are fearful of, or misunderstand people with special needs. This power is most effective in schools, among young people who have the potential to form an acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities that can last throughout their lives. Special Olympics' outreach to schools and youth is an effort to engage people up to age 21 in positive, healthy, joyful experiences with their peers with intellectual disabilities. By engaging youth without intellectual disabilities, we are shaping future generations of tolerance and acceptance for all people.

Yet, there is much to be done. According to a study of youth attitudes in the United States, less than 30 percent of students say that would speak to a person with an intellectual disability. Less than 40 percent would invite a student with ID to go out with friends, come over to their house, or go to a movie together. Nearly 70 percent of the public thinks students with ID should attend special schools.^{xiv}

To help change these attitudes, schools in more than 65 countries around the world use the Special Olympics *Get Into It*[®] curriculum. The program, available free of charge to schools, introduces students without intellectual disabilities to Special Olympics, and encourages them to become part of the movement. SO Get Into It has been translated into 22 languages and has reached more than 2 million students without intellectual disabilities.

Project UNIFY is a new, school-based program in the United States that will help Special Olympics become a leading cause among youth and develop the next generation of Special Olympics leaders. *Project UNIFY* builds and strengthens partnerships between local Special Olympics Programs and participating schools to create "Project UNIFY Schools." Each partnership is customized to the school, designed to maximize inclusion of peers with ID. For example, one *Project UNIFY* School may choose to create a Unified Sports program, in which students with and without intellectual disabilities compete together on a team. Or, an elementary school might partner with its local Special Olympics

QUICK FACTS

- SPECIAL OLYMPICS IS YEAR ROUND: AN AVERAGE OF MORE THAN 80 COMPETITIONS ARE OFFERED ON ANY GIVEN DAY AROUND THE WORLD
- SPECIAL OLYMPICS OFFERS SPORTS TRAINING AND COMPETITION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AT ALL PERFORMANCE LEVELS AND DEGREE OF DISABILITY
- ATHLETES COMPETE WITH OTHERS WHO ARE AT THE SAME PERFORMANCE LEVEL
- MOST SPECIAL OLYMPICS TRAINING AND COMPETITIONS ARE OFFERED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, WITH CERTAIN EVENTS QUALIFYING ATHLETES FOR STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL COMPETITIONS, BUILDING UP TO THE WINTER AND SUMMER WORLD GAMES HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS.
- SPECIAL OLYMPICS OFFERS 30 OLYMPIC-TYPE INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM SPORTS
- ATHLETICS, AQUATICS, BASKETBALL, BOWLING AND FOOTBALL ARE THE MOST POPULAR

Program to offer *Young Athletes*, where children of all levels of intellectual ability can play together.

Project UNIFY seeks to create a legion of young people who are leaders in their communities for Special Olympics and advocates for people with intellectual disabilities. Young people like Soeren Palumbo, who at the age of 18 gave an eye-opening speech against the word “retard” at his high school and became a leader in the global movement to eliminate the use of the word, using the Internet and social networking. Palumbo, inspired by a sister who has an intellectual disability, is now taking that conversation to the campus of Notre Dame University, launching a global university-based volunteerism, advocacy and fundraising initiative called “SO College.”

Special Olympics will continue to catalyze a grassroots movement of youth who speak out and act on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities by:

- Improving *Project UNIFY* based on an evaluation of its first year, and creating a blueprint for the *Project UNIFY* concept to be applied outside the United States
- Increasing the number of *Project UNIFY* schools in the United States from 2,000 to 4,700 by 2011, and growing the number of youth volunteers to 400,000
- Revising the SO Get Into It curriculum to include Web-based engagement elements and activities
- Create a robust and fully integrated Web presence with social networking and other interactive platforms focused on engaging youth
- Engaging national and international partners to collaborate on large-scale *Project UNIFY* campaigns
- Convening a U.S. National Youth Activation Summit in 2010

Special Olympics becomes a vehicle for bringing community members together, for changing attitudes, and for giving individuals a chance to achieve and succeed both on and beyond the playing field

QUICK FACTS

- SINCE 2001, SPECIAL OLYMPICS HAS CONVENED MORE THAN 37 NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL YOUTH SUMMITS INVOLVING MORE THAN 1,500 YOUTH LEADERS
- MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION IN 35 COUNTRIES HAVE ENDORSED THE *SO GET INTO IT* CURRICULUM
- SINCE 2007, GLOBAL VOLUNTEER YOUTH LEADERS FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS HAVE HELPED RECRUIT MORE THAN 1,400 NEW VOLUNTEERS AND CONVINCED MORE THAN 13,000 PEOPLE TO JOIN THE “R-WORD” CAMPAIGN

WHAT WE DO: CHANGE ATTITUDES

Special Olympics is the world's leading voice in elevating awareness of the needs and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. For Special Olympics, communications is not a tool to support our mission: Communications is our mission. Sports are at the heart, but our ultimate goal is to use stories of athletes' achievements, skills and challenges to educate, engage and ultimately change attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES

Special Olympics World Games are one of the most powerful venues for communicating to the world the abilities and gifts of people with intellectual disabilities. Every two years, the World Games are broadcast to hundreds of millions of viewers in the host countries and across the globe. The Special Olympics World Games are world-class sporting events featuring intense competition and inspiring performances by athletes. Equally important, the World Games act as a catalyst for growth in Special Olympics sports programs in communities around the world and promote awareness among leaders of all levels of society.

World Games are a proven tool to trigger positive changes in the treatment and perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities. The 2007 World Summer Games in Shanghai, China, marked a turning point in the country's attitudes toward

people with intellectual disabilities. Chinese government officials once denied that individuals with ID lived in China. Now, as a direct result of winning the rights to host the Special Olympics, Shanghai operates a network of 240 "Sunshine Homes," which provide vocational training for people with intellectual disabilities. China is now the largest Special Olympics program in the world.

The late Chinese film director Xie Jin, father of two children with ID, had said he burst into tears at the World Games opening ceremony, which featured elaborate dancing, appearances by music producer Quincy Jones, Chinese film star Zhang Ziyi, and cellist Yo-Yo Ma. "What I saw," Xie Jin said, "was something I never thought would have happened—not in my lifetime."

Similarly, the 2003 World Summer Games—the largest sporting or cultural event ever held in

Ireland—brought the country together during the Games and left an indelible mark long after. More than 30,000 people volunteered and nearly 700,000 watched the competitions.

"The 2003 World Games was one of the best things that ever happened in this country" says Charlie McCreevy, who was then Ireland's Minister for Finance.

Soon after the Games, the Irish government passed a new Disability Rights Bill, announced a 50 million euro grant for disability services, and introduced a bill to improve education for children with disabilities—illustrating the transformative power of the Special Olympics World Games.

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

The belief that individuals with intellectual disabilities should be seen as centers of vision, en-

ergy and value—rather than primarily as needy or vulnerable—sets the Special Olympics movement apart in its field. Special Olympics puts this belief into action. For example, every accredited Special Olympics Program is required to have an athlete on its board of directors, and athletes design the Special Olympics codes of conduct.

To formerly channel the often overlooked value of people with ID, Special Olympics has created Athlete Leadership Programs, which train athletes to play meaningful roles as public speakers, board members, sport officials, coaches, photographers and more. All Athlete Leadership Programs are designed to create communities of empowerment—not pity—and to offer to people with ID their rightful place as leaders on and off the playing field. By participating in the Special Olympics movement as leaders, not just recipients of services, athletes help shape the public’s perceptions about what they can do and gain skills that help them in other areas of life.

Special Olympics athlete Trisha Torre credits the Athlete Leadership Programs for giving her the

self-confidence and public speaking skills needed to become a home owner—one of the ultimate signs of independence and community inclusion. Thanks to her ability to articulate her needs, goals and understanding of the responsibilities of home ownership, Torre became the first person with intellectual disabilities in Indian River County, Fla., to receive a Habitat for Humanity home.

Over the next three years, Special Olympics will continue to be on the vanguard of developing leaders among athletes by:

- Creating a formal system to capture athlete input at all levels and elevate it to Special Olympics leadership for action
- Implementing at least one Athlete Leadership opportunity in every Special Olympics Program around the world
- Convening a Global Athlete Congress in 2010, during which athlete delegates from all over the world will come together to discuss pressing issues and make direct recommendations to the Special Olympics International Board of Directors

AWARENESS BUILDING

As one of the most well-known brands in the world, Special Olympics uses its position to garner awareness and support for issues important to the movement. The integrated marketing campaign, “Be a Fan,” communicates that the mission of Special Olympics is relevant to everyone, not just to people directly touched by intellectual disability. The messages of “Be a Fan” are distributed through television, radio, in print, and other media, reaching millions of people around the world.

Special Olympics also encourages the use of proper terminology to talk about people with intellectual disabilities. We are working with a coalition of organizations to eliminate the derogative use of the “R Word” (“retard” or comparable words in different cultures) from use in everyday speech. We believe that this campaign will help create a more accepting and inclusive world for all people, with and without intellectual disabilities.

The Special Olympics World Games are world-class sporting events featuring intense competition and inspiring performances by athletes

WHAT WE DO: QUALITY HEALTHCARE

Though conditions vary for people with intellectual disabilities worldwide, many have little or no access to health care that could drastically improve or even save their lives. Special Olympics *Healthy Athletes* is the world's largest public health program for people with intellectual disabilities, delivering basic levels of health information and care to hundreds of thousands of people each year. As a sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics recognizes that helping athletes attain overall, long-term physical health is an integral part of our mission.

Healthy Athletes also provides:

- A leading clinical education program for healthcare practitioners
- The world's most robust data collection capability on the health of people with intellectual disabilities
- A powerful platform for highlighting the gap in healthcare for individuals with intellectual disabilities among policy leaders and healthcare leaders around the world

At Special Olympics events, *Healthy Athletes* provides athletes with free screenings in several areas—vision, hearing, dental, podiatry, physical therapy and healthy habits—providing free care when possible and making referrals to local practitioners when appropriate. So far, *Healthy Athletes*

has conducted more than 700,000 screenings in nearly 90 countries. For some athletes, the screenings are the first time they have ever seen a doctor.

Moise Ahoussimou, a poor West African boy with an intellectual disability and next to no vision, is one example of the life-changing power of *Healthy Athletes*. When a screening was offered in Porto Novo, Benin, a volunteer doctor realized Moise had been blinded by cataracts. Though he was referred for a simple operation, Moise left his appointment with restored sight. He saw his father for the first time. "I can see, I can see trees, I can see houses, I can see the sun," he said.

Services are provided by health care professionals who volunteer their time and talents to benefit this medically under-served population. Health

care volunteers walk away with a first-hand understanding of the disparities faced by Special Olympics athletes. On a personal level, *Healthy Athletes* volunteers come to challenge their own perceptions about people with ID.

"I can't even begin to put into words the great impact these few days at a World Games competition made on my life," says one volunteer. "There is no way a health care professional can listen to a Special Olympics athlete speak of the glaring inequities they've experienced in health care, and refuse to treat them. I made a promise to them and to myself that I would devote part of my career to serving this population."

Beyond screenings, *Healthy Athletes* trains health care professionals about the needs and care

So far, Healthy Athletes has conducted more than 700,000 screenings in nearly 90 countries. For some athletes, the screenings are the first time they have ever seen a doctor

of people with intellectual disabilities; collects, analyzes and disseminates data on the health status and needs of people with ID; and advocates for improved health policies and programs for people with ID.

As a result, *Healthy Athletes* has reached people far beyond those who directly participate in Special Olympics. For example, *Healthy Athletes* was instrumental in improving dental education standards in the United States and dental services availability for individuals with ID in Belgium. U.S. dental students are now required to complete competency training in the diagnosis and treatment of people with intellectual disabilities. When the Belgian government found out about oral health disparities in the Belgian Special Olympics athletes, it passed federal legislation enhancing access to preventive care for people with ID.

Over the next three years, Special Olympics will continue to grow the *Healthy Athletes* program in order to serve more athletes around the world by:

- Holding 1,000 *Healthy Athletes* screening events per year.
- Providing 250,000 free health screenings to athletes per year.
- Training 30,000 health professionals per year
- Creating science-based community health promotion programs for Special Olympics athletes in all seven Special Olympics global regions.
- Implementing a lifelong personal electronic health record system for all Special Olympics athletes.
- Developing a research and evaluation program addressing athlete health and wellness and the improvement in well-being through sports and related programs.

IN A LARGE STUDY OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES:

- 30 PERCENT FAILED HEARING TESTS
- 35 PERCENT HAD UNTREATED VISION IMPAIRMENTS
- 29 PERCENT OF MALES AND 13 PERCENT OF FEMALES HAD BELOW NORMAL BONE MINERAL DENSITY
- 50 PERCENT HAD ONE OR MORE FOOT DISEASES OR CONDITIONS.

WHAT WE DO: LEADING RESEARCH

As the world's largest sport community for people with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics has embarked on an ambitious program of research. We invite the world's best thinkers to assess the quality of Special Olympics programs and their impacts in order to improve them, as well as to highlight the barriers facing Special Olympics athletes and their families.

Special Olympics research has often challenged leaders to take action on behalf of people with ID, with the results being much more than Special Olympics could have accomplished alone. In 2001, for example, Special Olympics unveiled a comprehensive study of the health status and needs for people with intellectual disabilities. The U.S. Surgeon General used this report as the basis for a national blueprint for closing the gap in health care for people with ID. As a result, President Bush signed the Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act into law in 2004. The act included a federal appropriation enabling Special Olympics to extend its *Healthy Athletes* program to thousands more athletes.

Special Olympics also convenes high-profile Global Policy Summits, in which world leaders in government, health, nongovernmental organizations, sports, academia and business come together to discuss their commitments to people with intellectual disabilities. These commitments are more than just rhetoric. For example, after speaking at the 2007 Special Olympics Global Policy Summit in Shanghai, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo transferred management of the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons to her own office, in order to strengthen government programs for people with disabilities in the Philippines.

Special Olympics research has often challenged leaders to take action on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities

“...To say that the lot of people with intellectual disabilities has improved because of Special Olympics would be a gross understatement. [Eunice] Shriver's movement did nothing less than release an entire population from a prison of ignorance and misunderstanding. It did something else, too—create a cathartic covenant between competitor and fan that is unlike anything else in sport. You watch and what you see is nothing less than a transformation, the passage of someone who has been labeled unfortunate, handicapped, disabled or challenged to something else: athlete.”

Sports Illustrated
December 2008

HOW WE DO IT: A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Acceptance. Dignity. Courage. From Kansas City, to Kiev, to Kuala Lumpur, the values for which Special Olympics stands are universal, cutting across all sectors of society in all cultures. These universal values have attracted a diverse community of fans to Special Olympics. Our partners are presidents, prime ministers, first ladies, celebrities and Fortune 500 executives. They are joined by civic leaders, professional athletes, teachers, law enforcement officers and millions of others who have taken a stand for dignity, acceptance and the human race. More than 700,000 extraordinary volunteers keep the Special Olympics magic alive year-round, with some Special Olympics Programs run entirely by volunteers.

Special Olympics is accepted everywhere, regardless of religion or political beliefs. It helps bring hope and positivity to some of the poorest and most war-torn places on earth. Special Olympics athletes from Israel and the Palestinian Authority have competed side-by-side. In a stadium where the Taliban once performed mass public executions, female athletes competed in Afghanistan's first National Games in 2005. The people of East Timor, a nation ravaged by more than 30 years of conflict, rallied around the country's first and only delegate to the 2007 World Summer Games.

In many developing nations, no specialized infrastructure exists for people with intellectual disabilities. In

these places, Special Olympics is one of the few ways that the challenges of people with intellectual disabilities and their families may gain attention from overburdened governments—and one of the few ways that public awareness of those challenges can be raised in a safe and supportive environment.

It is often in these places where Special Olympics can have the most impact on the public's perception. Ross Tebele, director of Special Olympics in Botswana, says because of Special Olympics, parents who have children with intellectual disabilities no longer hide them; they bring them forward to be helped. "The community has moved from the belief that having a disabled child is a curse," he says.

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT: JOIN US IN CHANGING THE WORLD

[Note: The language below can be used to lead into a request for support, but the specific ask will need to be tailored according to the donor and request.]

As Special Olympics moves into its fifth decade, we are gaining new understandings of the importance of the movement. In the smiles, in the relationships formed, and in the examples set by the athletes, the world sees a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. In the moments of the Special Olympics experience, the athlete is changed from a person of diminished value to a champion. And in these moments, everyone else is changed too. We are introduced into a more open, joyful, tolerant, accepting and ultimately peaceful world. In a time of war, of economic uncertainty, and of intolerance, the world needs Special Olympics more than ever. Please join us in changing lives, and in changing the world.

NOTES

- i. Violence Against Children with Disabilities, 2008, UNICEF.
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