**SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROJECT UNIFY**

**YEAR TWO**

**Results from**

**2009-10 National Youth Activation Demonstration Program**

A Final Report to the U.S. Department of Education

Office of Special Education Programs

Prepared by

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2010 Special Olympics USA National Games Legacy Presentation**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is in response to an award from the U.S. Department of Education to Special Olympics International (SOI) under authorities of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act. The project focused on one central area of activity: Project UNIFY, a National Youth Activation Demonstration program which brings youth with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) together through sports and other school-based activities, providing them with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to create school communities of welcome for persons with ID. The project was inaugurated under U.S. Department of Education funding originally awarded in June 2008 for FY2009, and, for this report year, in June 2009, for FY 2010.

Special Olympics (SO) programming focuses on inclusion by using sports as the catalyst for student awareness, understanding and engagement, and where SO initiatives serve as vehicles for bringing young people together in meaningful ways. There is strong empirical evidence that SO sports and related programs provide platforms for youth to understand and value their peers with ID, and empower and activate youth to create opportunities for and with them in sport, friendship, leadership, team building, and advocacy (Norins, Harada & Brecklinghaus, 2007).

Project UNIFY is an SO strategy for collaboration with educators to activate youth to develop school communities where all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with ID by utilizing the existing initiatives of SO, as well as new, student-led initiatives. Our ultimate goal is to create a climate of social inclusion (not merely physical inclusion) found to be so critical to all students for success. The progress of SO Project UNIFY is based on the achievements of all youth, particularly students with ID, but is also measured by the level of engagement between SO and U.S. educational communities from the national to the state and local levels. The program builds upon existing partnerships and initiates new partnerships.

Evaluation findings from this report year (hereafter referred to as year two) add to a mounting body of evidence that Special Olympics programming can positively influence attitudes and acceptance. The data collected suggests that involvement in Project UNIFY, especially the cumulative impact of inclusive sports, education and leadership opportunities in a single school setting, is associated with more positive attitudes and perceptions towards persons with ID and towards school climate among youth participants. (See attached addendum, Project UNIFY Evaluation Report, 2009-2010). Through Project UNIFY, educators and school communities are provided the opportunity to witness firsthand the value of Special Olympics in helping schools reach the mutually held goal of sustaining quality inclusive strategies in schools that support academic, civic, and social skills and all students.

We are also beginning to see evidence of an impact on the way in which SO state Programs are interacting with schools and education communities, as well as in how they incorporate youth leaders and youth activation into their ongoing business and activities. These shifts are consistent with the objectives set out by Project UNIFY for year two activities.

During the second year of Project UNIFY, we focused on advancing and broadening experience and practice on those factors identified in year one as being predictive of success in schools. In year two of Project UNIFY, we used what was learned from year one to broaden the opportunities for sharing among various constituents by continuing to build the infrastructure and collaborations that ensure the sustainability of our work. We built upon the interest generated among students, teachers, parents and school administrators, and focused on defining a specific set of interventions to achieve a cumulative impact. Specifically, we increased professional development opportunities offered to youth, educators and Program staff, enhanced the youth leadership infrastructure, and a completed revision of related curricula.

There is strong evidence, based on results of evaluation in the second year of Project UNIFY, that the value proposition of Project UNIFY is well-founded, and that continued growth and expansion is viable and sustainable, to the benefit of the development and education of youth with and without ID.

**I. Special Olympics Project UNIFY Description**

Special Olympics Project UNIFY was developed as a strategy for engaging schools to use the tools and sports programs of SO to create school climates of inclusion, acceptance, respect and human dignity for all students with and without ID, building on SO values, principles, practices, experiences and impacts. Project UNIFY’s original stated purpose is to activate youth to develop school communities where all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) by utilizing the existing initiatives of Special Olympics, as well as new, student-led initiatives. At completion of year two, we refined our definition of Project UNIFY as a Special Olympics/school community collaboration for engaging young people with and without ID as leaders promoting acceptance and inclusion in their schools using the sports and education initiatives of Special Olympics. The shift is a minor, but notable, as we clarify and help our state SO Program leaders understand, our role as collaborators with the school community.

Project UNIFY was designed to give students with and without ID opportunities for engagement together as athletes, teammates, classmates, and peers. For students with ID, emphasis is placed on sport and non-sport skills and sense of self. For students without ID, emphasis was also placed on skills, as well as their knowledge and perceptions of ID. Through Project UNIFY, youth are to be educated, motivated and activated to gain knowledge, develop better attitudes and demonstrate a real commitment for working on behalf of people with ID. Structured educational and sports opportunities should create the platform for increasing students’ skills and knowledge, as well as the formation of positive social relationships. Schools are essential to this process as the primary setting for youth to interact in a variety of situations and social contexts.

Distinctive Project UNIFY characteristics, identified early on, have continued to form the framework:

* Youth Leadership
* School/Community Collaborations
* Communications
* Professional Development
* Unifying Programming
* Creating and Sustaining Relationships
* Continuous Improvement

Special Olympics initiatives are the tools of Project UNIFY, include a variety of educational and social integration models that have proven effective through decades of SO sports programming and related initiatives and incorporate these Project UNIFY characteristics. It was the “unification” of these programs in purposeful combinations that was at the crux of the Project UNIFY model. In year two the combining of multiple types of activities was promoted, as it was expected that the accumulation of multiple and varied experiences would produce the strongest results. It was anticipated that traditional and Unified Sports experiences, in combination with other non-sport activities, such as school assemblies, Partners Clubs or R-word campaigns, would be the optimum combination, and, in year two, we sought to identify specific examples where this cumulative approach was undertaken with discernable effects. Ultimately, we sought to make impressions regarding individual knowledge and attitudes through the one-on-one interactions provided by sports activities, and deepening that one-on-one impression through collective experiences with the larger group activities. These programs include:

* **Unified Sports®**, a program that places athletes with ID and “partners” (athletes without ID) on the same team to compete in team sports;
* **Get Into It® (GII)**, a curriculum to help students understand, accept and celebrate individual differences;
* **Young Athletes™**, a program designed to engage young children (2½ - 7 years old) with ID through developmentally appropriate play activities;
* **Camp Shriver**, a recreational summer program that uses sports to bring children and young adults with and without ID together to interact, learn, and play with one another as equals;
* **Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPS)** to foster and support the development of leadership skills in individuals with ID as a way to build self-confidence;
* **Youth Rallies and Youth Forums and Assemblies**, where young people educate each other on issues, motivate each other and activate on a set of agreed upon engagement practices;
* **The R-Word Campaign,** a prescribed set of resources and tools to help students eradicate the hurtful and harmful use of language to demean and diminish;
* **Partners Clubs,** non-academic, school-based clubs thatbring students with and without ID together for planning and participating in sports, recreation, social and community activities that foster understanding and acceptance and promote leadership and collaborative skill building;
* **Fans in the Stands**, a way for students of all ages to engage with persons with ID when direct interaction is not possible, where entire student bodies cheer their athlete peers with ID and support SO athletes at events; and,
* **Fan Community**, participation in the SO social network, or on-line Fan Community, which allows members to share stories, ideas, photos and videos.

**SO State Program Projects**

Local school- based projects that met Project UNIFY objectives were supported through a sub-contract process for state SO Programs utilizing funds from this award. While the contracting process was conducted as a competitive, criteria-based process, efforts were made to work with each interested state SO Program to assist them in meeting the Project UNIFY criteria, with the expectation that, as a demonstration project, we would gain the broadest knowledge from engaging with the largest possible number of project executions. Programs were instructed to use the above list of programming as a starting point for their projects, and were asked to implement sports and non-sports activities in combinations that best complemented the Program’s existing strategic goals and the needs and objectives of the school systems with whom they were going to collaborate.

Even as we embarked on the second year of the project, not all SO Programs had the same level of relationships with schools, and often, collaborative partnerships needed to be established before Project UNIFY could be implemented. Therefore, we expected a continuum of engagement, where those SO Programs with existing partnerships with schools would be able to implement more complex and comprehensive Project UNIFY designs than those Programs that were initiating new collaborations. We hoped that the broad nature of Project UNIFY and the latitude given to state SO Programs to design their own specific projects would allow for flexibility in implementation, yet still allow for across-the-board evaluation and comparisons. In the second year we narrowed in on more specific parameters for receiving funds for projects, including a requirement for there to be both inclusive sports and educational and youth leadership components in the project designs. There was an effort to allow for flexibility to accommodate unique local and state considerations, while, at the same time, promoting fidelity to the Project UNIFY principles. This was done by creating and disseminating guidelines that communicated the key characteristics of effective practices, as well as by providing ongoing technical assistance and support.

In summary, Project UNIFY sought to build upon existing relationships and commitments to provide quality opportunities for youth with and without intellectual disabilities to contribute their fullest to society. It has had an influence on the way many SO state Programs do business and on the strategic direction of the movement as a whole*.* It focuses on supporting and engaging youth as leaders and major contributors to project design, implementation, evaluation and sustainability. We expected that as youth co-created projects focused on advocating for youth as *change agents*, they would begin to acquire the knowledge, confidence and skills necessary to be effective champions of social justice.

**I1. Project Activities**

**Data on Schools and Participants**

Clarified definitions of what was expected from state Programs in conducting Project UNIFY were provided for year two. As would be expected, because of differences in local, district and state education structures and priorities, there continued to be strong variations among Programs and schools in the implementation of Project UNIFY. Because of the nature of Project UNIFY and the differences with regard to not only the types of SO initiatives implemented across schools, the number of activities implemented, and the frequency with which they were implemented, there was great variability in the reporting formats of students with and without intellectual disabilities in Project UNIFY activities from each state. As might be expected, given that each school enrolls a limited number of students with intellectual disabilities, the greatest variability in participation across schools was found among students without intellectual disabilities. For both students with and without ID, participation for some meant ongoing involvement over time, and for others it represented attendance at a single event (e.g. a school-wide assembly). Nonetheless, we have attempted to distinguish between those students who had an ongoing relationship in Project UNIFY and those who had some exposure to the messaging and philosophical premise. Our definition of “exposure” became stricter in reporting for year two as well. It was not enough to count a student as merely enrolled in a Project UNIFY school unless it could be established that they had specifically participated in an assembly, school-wide program, or specific Project UNIFY activity.

**Table 1: Participant Numbers Collected from State SO Program Project UNIFY Year Two Reports**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| New Schools | New SO Athletes | New Partners | Youth Exposed to Project UNIFY | Teachers participating | Returning Schools | Returning SO Athletes | Returning Partners | Young Athlete Program Participants |
| 772 | 9,018 | 11,054 | 243,371 | 2,645 | 787 | 14,914 | 4,735 | 30,623 |

*Note: There will be instances in this report where numbers may not align perfectly with numbers in the Project UNIFY Evaluation Report. (See Addendum.) This is because the Evaluation Report surveys were filled out by a sub-sample of the entire project participation.*

**Technical Assistance and Project Management**

In year two of Project UNIFY we continued with approximately the same basic management team as in year one, providing for consistency and building on experience. There was a full time staff of five persons as well as the services of one consultant devoted to the execution of the goals and objectives set forth in the original Project UNIFY proposal. We included in our growth for year two a social media manager and media interns, as well as a Partnership/Foundations Director to help identify additional partnership and funding opportunities for expansion. While we were able to bring on someone in the social media and communications realm, we addressed the partnership needs with smaller consultant contracts. This group of core personnel was responsible for the creation and dissemination of all materials and resources to internal and external constituents, including project descriptions, business, marketing and operation plans, promotional materials, reports, evaluation and administrative procedures. The team developed a set of criteria, review processes and dissemination plans for $2,800,000.00 in sub-contract funding to 45 state SO Programs, which included collecting and reviewing programmatic and financial reports on a semi-annual basis. Technical assistance was provided in the form of weekly individual calls to project managers in each of the 45 state SO Programs participating in Project UNIFY, as well as monthly and quarterly technical assistance conference calls on general logistical topics, as well as specific topics for professional development. A regular monthly Fan Mail e-newsletter was created and disseminated monthly to all constituents with updates, local stories, best practices and feature articles. In addition, 37 site visits were conducted over the course of 10 months to the state SO Programs and participating schools. Leadership groups (defined in detail below) were also formed, involving nomination and selection processes to provide advisory support from youth leadership, education leadership, and practitioners. These groups were supported by the core staff team with regular face-to-face and virtual communications and interactions.

This core staff group and leadership groups were involved in reaching out, delivering presentations and exposing the Project UNIFY principles and practices to organizations interested in the project objectives. Partnerships were either initiated or developed in the second year with America’s Promise Alliance, the Association of American School Administrators, the National Middle School Association, the National Association of School Boards, Learning for Life, the Lions Clubs International/Leos Clubs, the NEA Foundation, and SEANet, the State Education Agency K-12 Service-Learning Network. In addition, because the work of Project UNIFY is integrated throughout Special Olympics Inc., an SO based team of staff from other departments were involved in the various pertinent activities such as web design and development, communications and public relations, special events, curriculum and training development, marketing and fundraising, and finance.

While overseeing the operations and execution of the local Project UNIFY projects across the 43 state SO Programs, the core team also designed and executed four major events. These events, the National Education Leadership Roundtable, the National Youth Activation Summit, the National Education Conference, and the Youth Rally, were held in July 2010 in conjunction with the 2010 Special Olympics National USA Games.

**Project UNIFY Year 2 Highlights**

In the first year of Project UNIFY, SO state Programs had latitude to design Project UNIFY programs that fit the unique needs of their state, school districts and individual schools by selecting from a menu of programming, and also took into account the existing level of interaction and collaboration between the SO Program and schools. While there was some similarity across the different state Programs, there were also major differences in design, execution and foci. In some cases, the programming was not combined in single schools, but across the state programming landscape. This continued to be the case in year two in a few states, but we did make progress in year two in documenting how Project UNIFY unfolded in a school and identified key components that would help to better define Project UNIFY as a program in the future. We sought to take this rich tapestry of examples and activities and identify models of uniformity. One way we did this was to provide more specific guidelines to State SO Programs. States were required to include a sport component (e.g. Unified Sports, Traditional Special Olympics sports, or Young Athletes) and a youth leadership/education component (e.g. ALPs, Partner’s Clubs, SOGII). It was expected that State Programs would be able to build off of the partnerships established in the first year to implement more initiatives and involve greater numbers of youth, while also reaching out to new schools and other stakeholders. The objective was to develop programming that would “facilitate a culture that routinely serves up experiences and opportunities for youth in schools and communities to practice respect, dignity and advocacy for all students, including those with ID.”

In fact, this new iteration focused directive prescription in year two and resulted in a more concise set of programming formats, a better understood definition of what constituted Project UNIFY, and more realistic and reliable numbers reached. These more precise sets of options provided for a more measurable intervention for showing impact on schools and students.

The following is provided as a summary and to highlight some of the Project UNIFY activities. It should be noted that, in addition to the work in local and state Programs, many of the activities in year two culminated in the activities scheduled to take place at the 2010 Special Olympics National Games in July 2010 in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska.

Project UNIFY School Projects

* $2.85M in Project UNIFY funds were distributed to 44 state SO Programs in the US to implement Project UNIFY programs; $5.2M in Project UNIFY funds have been distributed on a competitive basis over the past two years.
* In Year 2 Project UNIFY was implemented in 44 states and involved 1,895 schools, and for which we have data on 1,559 schools. In many of these schools students were actively involved in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY, demonstrating that it is possible to include young people in creating communities of understanding and acceptance;
* 70,344 young people participated in projects, including 9,018 new Special Olympics athletes and 30,623 Young Athletes;
* 243,371 youth were reported to have been exposed to Project UNIFY activities and messaging such as rallies, assemblies and school activities;
* 2,645 teachers were reported to have been involved.
* All state Programs now report that they are working with general education teachers as well as special education teachers in their school programming. All but three states report full cooperation by teachers.

**►Impact: Being Part of the Solution**

*“Hays High School in Hays, Kansas was one of the original 4 pilot schools in Kansas.  In the initial year of Project Unify, the school initiated almost next to nothing to become involved in the Project.  During the summer following the first year, I received a phone call from the Assistant Principal who said to me, ‘You know, after looking further at Project Unify and what it is trying to accomplish, we decided that if we didn’t participate, then we are part of the problem.’  Today, Hays High Schools has embraced and expanded their relationship with Project Unify.  The schools decision to become a part of the solution has made a tremendous impact upon a community of 15,000 in western Kansas.”*

*Chris Hahn, President and CEO, Special Olympics Kansas*

Youth and Education Leadership

* The Youth Activation Committee formed as part of Project UNIFY in year one was comprised of 16 youth leaders, with and without ID, who worked to help guide and advise Project UNIFY;
* The Youth Activation Committee designed and planned the 2010 National Youth Activation Summit held in July 2010 in Nebraska. Youth leaders also supported and managed logistical elements of the meeting for 180 SO Program leaders and young people with and without ID from 42 states;
* Project UNIFY Youth Activation Committee members presented at the Service-Learning Forum, hosted by America’s Promise Alliance for more than 100 teachers from around the country;
* A National Education Leaders Network (NELN), which included some of the leading voices in education, service learning, school climate and character education continued to meet quarterly and participated as presenters and facilitators at the 2010 National Youth Activation Summit and National Education Conference. They also joined members of the Youth Activation Summit as collaborators and advisors on designing many of the Summit sessions (See addendum for list of members and affiliations.);
* National education leaders and youth development professionals, such as Terry Pickeral, Co-Chair of the National School Climate Council, William Hughes, Superintendant of Schools in Greendale, WI, and leader in the American Association of School Administrators(AASA), Anderson Williams, youth development leader from The Oasis Center; and Teri Dary, Co-Chair of State Education Agency K-12 Service-Learning Network (SEANet), continued to support the work by providing insights, technical assistance and professional development, as well as developing tangible materials, resources and products;
* Small “mini” grants were awarded to youth on a competitive basis to allow for the development of youth-conceived, created and executed projects to further the goals of Project UNIFY in their schools and communities.
* Eight young people, with and without intellectual disabilities, joined the Project UNIFY team and completed summer internships providing them opportunities in leadership, investigation and professional development.
* Interns supported the work of Project UNIFY and the Special Olympics movement by creating materials, developing programs and processes, contributing to communications and marketing efforts and making presentations to a variety of internal and external audiences.
* In Year 2 there were 13 state Youth Activation Committees and 9 state Education Leaders Networks, the result of an added emphasis placed on these leadership formations.

**►Impact: Youth as Agents of Change**

*"Over the past year Project UNIFY funding and initiatives have allowed us to reach****21 additional school districts*** *with the message of Acceptance, Respect, and Dignity for people of all abilities. Awareness is spreading like wildfire and is evidenced by outcomes such* ***as three Special Olympic athletes being selected as homecoming or prom kings in their respective schools****,* ***Unified Partners increasing by over 100%*** *in some areas and* ***150 youth and teachers attending a Youth Activation Summit*** *February 3-5, 2011.  At the Summit, all attendees receive training and implementation materials for Spread the Word, Young Athletes, Unified Sports, Partners Clubs, Be a Fan, Social Networking strategies and developing winning action plans. Additionally, Project UNIFY has made it possible for Montana to premier "It's Our School Too!" as part of the Summit.*

*Tammy Peterson, Project UNIFY Director, Special Olympics Montana*

Education Leadership Roundtable

* During the 2010 National Games in Lincoln, Nebraska, 55 members of the national education community aged 13 to 65, including Alexa Posny, Deputy Secretary, the Office of Special Education Programs of the US. Department of Education, came together to discuss and coalesce around a commitment to a broader vision of inclusion;
* The facilitated conversation included practitioners, school, district, state and federal administrators, researchers, business and academic leaders, non-profit and foundation leaders, including six youth leader facilitators (with and without ID) and 10 youth pair participants. The group discussed the questions surrounding how we can all commit to promote a shared vision for more authentic and real inclusion in schools and make it a national priority in policy and practice;
* The group committed to a plan of action in which adults support and promote all young people -- with and without intellectual disabilities -- to become effective and visible leaders in their schools, communities and society by providing opportunities to use their voices and talents in meaningful and responsible ways;
* Outcomes included commitments for partnership, collaboration and awareness building from 15-20 organizations & individuals with a focus on authentic inclusion, where students are not separated in schools by ability;
* Follow up work has been refined into development of committees of the NELN with four focused areas of work: 1) Create a coalition with associations, businesses, civic organizations, and other stakeholders to unify partners in the movement; 2) Create a policy guide for use at the local, state, and federal levels; 3) Develop set of model standards for inclusive youth leadership and engagement; and 4) Develop Unified Schools Standards of Excellence around inclusion, climate, and diversity that reflect a strong youth voice. (See addendum for full outline of committee work and list of committee members and affiliations.);
* The format has become a template for other national conversations and additional Roundtables are planned in year 3 at the state and national level to continue to build national, regional and state leaders engagement in Project UNIFY.

Youth Activation Summit (YAS)

* 120 unified youth (pairs) from 38 Programs, plus 40 chaperones participated in 6 days of youth-created and led sessions and activities, conducted by a fully integrated youth leadership team, from content and facilitation to logistics;
* Sessions focused on how to promote social justice in schools using Special Olympics and Project UNIFY – including what is social justice, how to work with adults, how to improve Project UNIFY, working with different kinds of people/groups and communication skills, how to use SO programs to promote change and inclusion, etc.;
* A new level of awareness was gained by Special Olympics leaders of the power of youth to lead with quality, as well as deeper understanding of the r-word message to be more than pledge campaign and how our overarching objective is creating schools of acceptance with no barriers between students;
* David Osher, Project UNIFY NELN member, who is leading federally mandated Inter Agency Working Group (IAWG) of 12 federal agencies to create strategic plan for youth, conducted two focus groups with our YAS members to gain feedback on key questions of what they need to make their lives, schools and communities better. Twenty-four (24) young people with and without ID shared their concerns for how to create inclusive, accepting, welcoming and safe schools and communities, data which will be included in IAWG report;
* National education, youth development, social researchers, social justice and school reform leaders and scholars were engaged and influenced, with one calling the experience “the most youth integrated and youth led experience I have ever seen,” and another commenting “I didn’t understand social justice until just now.”

**►Impact: Breaking Down Barriers of Exclusion**

*“What I saw enabled in youth at the Youth Activation Summit can only be described as a sort of social genius. … these young people (at least in this setting) were already unfettered by the social and cultural norms and expectations of the teenage years, of disability, and of so much more. All of the anxieties, the self consciousness, the uncertainty of youth were somehow set aside and overpowered by the collective and by the commonality of difference. These were teenagers who were willingly and passionately deconstructing through their relationships and actions the prohibitive and exclusionary norms of their schools, communities, and our broader culture that label and exclude those with intellectual disabilities.”*

*Anderson Williams, Director of Consulting, Oasis Center, Nashville, Tennessee*

National Education Conference

* 75 general and special education teachers from 35 state Programs attended at the first ever Special Olympics education conference held in conjunction with Youth Activation Summit. Topics included inclusive education topics like assessment, 40 developmental assets, autism, as well as how to use the tools of Special Olympics (Get Into It, Unified Sports, r-word campaign, Partners Clubs, inclusive youth leadership) to further authentic and social inclusion;
* The conference was co-hosted with the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and co-facilitated and led by educators and youth with and without ID, with a major focus on inclusive practices in the classroom, and how to use inclusive opportunities to enhance school climate;
* Overlap and interaction with the Youth Summit was deliberately facilitated in order to promote a laboratory effect. Cross-over topics included social justice and advocacy, social networking, how adults and young people can work together effectively, and youth engagement;
* Teachers were invited to continue to further their work and lessons learned at the conference by applying for small grants to supplement funding provided by the National Education Association Foundation and to participate in a learning/sharing network or Community of Practice that was created.

**►Impact: Collaboration with All Teachers**

*“(The conference) was awesome, phenomenal, and awe inspiring. I am ready to return to school, inspired, motivated and ready to activate my plan of actions. There was so much that I liked about the conferences until I don’t know where to begin …I have been a teacher for almost twenty years and this was, by far, one of the greatest conferences I have attended. The information presented was not just for special education teachers but for general educators as well. “*

*Janice S. Robinson, teacher, Beaufort County School District, South Carolina*

Original Play – *It’s Our School , Too*

* An original play was commissioned by Project UNIFY inspired by the real stories of Project UNIFY youth across the country featuring young people with and without ID as actors was premiered at the 2010 National Games;
* An enormously powerful message of inclusion in the voice of young people, the play, a DVD of the performance and a script, is available as a tool for teachers, students and Project UNIFY programmers to put on the play in their schools and communities. The play will be strongly promoted and included as a featured Project UNIFY resource.

National Games Youth Rally

* The National Games Closing Ceremony served as Youth Rally with 3,000 tickets allocated just for youth in the community and a live streaming version available on our website;
* The messaging of inclusion was conveyed in the voice of young people and youth oriented entertainment, combined with Project UNIFY Youth leaders serving as co-emcees for large portion of show. The content included a strong call to action for youth to join Special Olympics Project UNIFY Facebook and to take action in students’ home schools or communities.

Communications and Awareness

* Web-based networking and social communications platform on the Special Olympics website, the Special Olympics Fan Community, is used as the communal platform for collecting youth-generated content, videos, photos, slide shows and essays and articles. Every Project UNIFY state Program has a group membership with 2,632 members currently. Of 4,436 photos and 194 videos, 1,321 are Project UNFY tagged (28 %);
* Youth and Project UNIFY related work has had an immense impact on the traffic to the Special Olympics website. One evaluation showed that 3 of the top 5 searches on the Special Olympics website were youth specific (Spread the Word, R-word, and Project Unify), In addition, more than half of the total searches on the site overall pertain to the Project Unify related activities;
* In 2010, Special Olympics Project UNIFY youth-related articles consistently appeared in print media around the country with an average of 3-5 articles per week;
* Nearly 30% of all print media coverage around the 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games highlighted events and activities around the Youth Activation Summit and the National Education Conference—both sponsored by Special Olympics Project UNIFY;
* Special Olympics communities on other social networking sites, such as Facebook, have grown exponentially with youth generated activity: on Facebook 228,043 Special Olympics followers, 94,005 Spread the Word followers, and 729 Project UNIFY followers, four State Programs (DE, ID, OR and RI) have unique Project UNIFY pages; the YouTube SO Channel has seen views quadruple over the past year to 287,547, and 627 subscribers, and 336,826 views and 695 subscribers for Spread the Word; and, Twitter followers have grown over 400% to 7,901 for Special Olympics, and 4,789 for Spread the Word, engaging hundreds of thousands of users virtually in the cause of social justice for people with intellectual disabilities.

Spread the Word to End the Word 03.03.10

* With over 500 events throughout the month of March, this nationwide campaign at high schools, universities, and throughout communities asked every young person to help lead an effort to eliminate demeaning uses of the r-word (retard) and replace it with respect and acceptance for all people;
* The youth generated and youth led campaign, started in 2009, resulted in Special Olympics exceeding its goal of 100,000 pledge signatures on the [**www.r-word.org**](http://www.r-word.org/) pledge site.
* The nation-wide campaign was implemented in high schools, universities, and throughout local communities for one day asking every young person to help lead an effort to eliminate demeaning uses of the r-word (retard) and in 2010 more than 500 schools conducted *Spread the Word to End the Word* events in their communities and schools;
* The national awareness day, being the first Wednesday of March, has now become an ongoing campaign, and not just a single day event;
* The campaign has become one of the most galvanizing youth led activities in Special Olympics, and has spread beyond the US to India, China, and countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In India, 9 million signatures have been collected in schools across the country of young people pledging not to use hurtful language to describe people with ID;
* Almost immediately after these successes, plans started in schools across the U.S. and around the world for the 2011 campaign scheduled for 3.02.11.
* Examples of activities in 2010 include:

-In Utah, East High School, home of High School Musical, in Salt Lake City, UT hosted a “Spread the Word to End the Word” competition where schools across Utah, for the month of February, were ask to submit an art, literature, poetry, music, dance, cheer, videography, film, computer, or freestyle competition that illustrates the hurtfulness behind the r-word;

-In Delaware,over 30 high schools, along with the University of Delaware, participated in the national campaign to Spread the Word to End the Word.  On March 3, many schools held assemblies about the campaign and showed videos featuring youth speaking out about the r-word, handed out information cards about the campaign to students, had students sign a pledge banner at their school and encouraged others to pledge their support online;

-Jersey City School District held a Youth Rally on March 5th with over 2,500 students in attendance.  The theme of the rally was respect, empathy and inclusion. 20 of the 38 district schools were onsite for the rally. Every school participated in creating Spread the Word activities and skits for the rally and will be included in a final video that the school board television channel will air.  There were also multiple pledge banners showcased from every school.

**►Impact: School District ~ Special Olympics Collaboration**

***“Special Olympics New Jersey and the Jersey City Public School partnership have proven success on and off the playing field. We have seen an increase of unified partners and Special Olympics athletes at the grassroots level of competition. In year 1 we had over 2800 students participate in the Unified Sports training during physical education classes. Due to the increase of funding and support from Jersey City Schools administration we have over 5,000 students participating in year 2. The relationship between the staff of SONJ and administration from Jersey City Public Schools is one of cooperation and striving to work on including everyone in Special Olympics.”***

*Lillian Narvaez, Vice President of Sports and Programs, Special Olympics New Jersey*

K-12 “Get Into It” Curriculum

* In Year 1 the Special Olympics Get Into It Curriculum (SOGII) was reviewed for an entire overhaul and in Year 2 revisions were completed, resulting in the new “Get Into It” Curriculum, a fully endorsed K-12, standards aligned, integrated and service-learning curriculum promoting acceptance and understanding of differences, especially those with ID;
* The curriculum was launched nationally in the fall of 2010 with an interactive website that engages teachers and students in online activities and learning communities;
* Initial review by a small group of teachers in 3 states revealed that after experiencing “Get Into it”:
  + Students developed an appreciation for the contributions of Special Olympics athletes and revealed a likelihood to get involved with SO;
  + Most of their involved students had made an effort to reduce incidents of intolerance towards students with ID;
  + Most of their students changed what they thought of persons with ID;
  + Nearly all teachers rated it “excellent” or “good”;
  + Every teacher who completed the survey planned to use the curriculum in their classes;
* Further evaluation is to be conducted in the spring of 2011.

**►Impact: Student Engagement**

*“It made me feel like I was changing something for the better for the athletes and in the community and I’m so happy to be a part of it.”*

*Hailey (Student & Youth Council Member), Airport High School, South Carolina*

Young Athletes

* Young Athletes, introduced in pre-schools is the earliest opportunity for students to engage in inclusive physical education and motor activities. Project UNIFY has facilitated the participation of 30,623 new young participants between the ages of 2-7, including them in a pipeline of school based Special Olympics activities as they grow old enough to participate in regular Special Olympics sports activities;
* Study results show that a significant percentage of teachers reported improvements in Motor Development (strength and endurance, balance, eye-hand coordination, specific motor skills, improvements in Cognitive Development (understanding of directional words, awareness of body parts, memory of routines), improvements in Social Development (self confidence, peer relationships), improvements in Self Help Skills (following 2-3 step directions, turn-taking, eye contact, attention span), and improvements in Communication Development (increased interactions with peers, increased use of alternative communication). A randomized intervention pilot study underway shows interim results of significant motor activity development compared to control groups.

**III. Project UNIFY Evaluation Approach and Report**

SO is committed to documenting the effectiveness of its programs and its principles through evidence based approaches. We believe the relationship between program evaluation and program implementation yields significant and powerful results which work to ensure the overall success and future of Project UNIFY. We perform documented and scientific summative and formative evaluation in order to provide evidence-based support for our work. An independent evaluation for the second year of Project UNIFY is included in the attached “Project UNIFY Evaluation Report 2009-2010” (See Addendum).

While the scientific data is critical, the overall evaluation schemata for Project UNIFY also included the principle of continuous improvement. As an ongoing function of our work, we reflect on, review, and incorporate changes in our activities at all levels and in all phases on a continuing basis. For Project UNIFY, we engage formal advisory teams that review activities, materials and processes and make recommendations for improvement. The teams consist of all stakeholders to ensure that all activities are reflected on and analyzed and the resulting “improvements” are appropriate and geared to program enhancement. The information obtained through our assessment measures in year two has been shared with staff and constituents at all levels and serves as the foundation for improving and expanding Project UNIFY in subsequent years, and is reflected in the enhancements and opportunities we outline for our subsequent year’s work.

Although the Project UNIFY activities occur at both the national and local levels, our evaluation focus has been on measuring what happened at the school level. Because of that focus, our detailed evaluation has centered on the impact of Project UNIFY as it is implemented by SO Programs through their contract projects. (See attached Evaluation Report for full evaluation of Program projects). In addition, evaluation was conducted on the National Youth Activation Summit and National Education Conference held in conjunction with the Special Olympics U.S. National Games in Nebraska. This event provided an opportunity to review the implications of Project UNIFY activities on individual behaviors and responses on a more national scale (See attached National Youth Activation Summit and National Education Conference Evaluation Report).

With the priority of Project UNIFY in year two focused on expansion and deepening of programming, the focus of the evaluation shifted to reflect that. The evaluation involved two levels, allowing us to continue to describe the implementation of Project UNIFY in schools and the collaboration between Special Olympics staff and school staff in carrying out Project UNIFY, as well as providing a more in-depth evaluation of specific schools to document the impacts of Project UNIFY.

**Major findings from the second year include:**

* Involvement with Project UNIFY is associated with more positive student attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and school climates;
* Project UNIFY increases youth representation on state Special Olympics planning boards and committees and youth with and without ID are serving as leaders for Project UNIFY;
* Half of all schools participating in Project UNIFY (51%) implemented 3 or more initiatives; and,
* Increasingly, SO Programs are reaching out to general educators and administrators and are developing collaborative relationships with the education community.

Our plans are that the evaluation undertaken in Year 3 will build on these findings and include intense focus on 60 schools in 12 states.

**IV. Project UNIFY Progress, Impact and Opportunities**

After two full years of implementation, Project UNIFY has been strongly embraced by the SO Movement in the U.S. at multiple levels as a way of approaching the fulfillment of the organization’s mission. “UNIFY” is a framework for all activities involving our athletes and our other constituencies. It has been integrated into the 2010-2015 Special Olympics strategic plan, within which “Building Communities” and youth engagement and activation are critical core focus areas of growth for the global organization. Special Olympics President and Chairman, Timothy P. Shriver stated recently , “Special Olympics Project UNIFY is one of three fundamental pillars to the Special Olympics foundation as we engage a new generation of leaders, advancing this century’s most vital social justice movement for promoting the rights of people of all abilities through sports, health and community acceptance.“

**►Impact: Youth are Leaders *Today***

***In Montana the Youth Activation Committee (YAC) facilitated an Athlete Input Council and the results of that council were presented to the SO Montana Board of Directors, who subsequently folded them into their 10 year strategic plan, Vision 2020.  Project UNIFY has positioned youth in Montana to affect school climate, impact the field of competition, and engage policy and program at the highest levels.***

We believe that following a framework of Educate, Motivate, and Activate, youth who are under-informed about ID, who may hold attitudes that work passively or actively against people with ID, and who have no real engagement with youth with ID, are made aware (Educate), then supported in gaining understanding (Motivate), and, ultimately, become actively engaged in sport and non-sport activities with youth with ID (Activate).

**►Impact: Schools as Communities of Welcome**

***Illinois has seen significant growth in the past two years in regards to the Young Athletes Program. We have seen over 50% growth in the program having effected over 12,000 Young Athletes since its inception. This is mainly due to the quality and consistency of the program, the fact that the program helps to meet several standards of learning, and we make it convenient to attend a certified training as we offer them at each individual site. Any one of our site coordinators would tell you that the addition of Young Athletes and Project Unify activities has made their school more of a community rather than just a learning establishment.***

We hope and expect that youth with ID gain experiences that enhance a belief in their own self worth and their role as social change agents (Educate), are provided with the resources and the safety and security which emboldens their confidence to make a difference (Motivate), and are given leadership opportunities with their peers to advocate together (Activate) on their own behalf and that of others.

In year two SO has gathered anecdotal, qualitative and quantitative evidence as to the positive impact of Project UNIFY. It is clear from the growth, and overwhelming response that many policymakers, educators, teachers and students are hungry for innovative programs like Project UNIFY to enhance opportunities for promoting the key values of acceptance and inclusion. Project UNIFY promotes an environment where student-led projects demonstrate the value of all young people. Project reports, site visits, testimonials, youth created videos, essays, slide shows, and face book posts, and now independent evaluation data, create a compelling case for Project UNIFY as a program with enormous value. Focusing on the deeper social emotional needs and capacities that children demonstrate over the span of K-12 education, rather than as a short-term intervention for a specific issue, Project UNIFY becomes an integral and sustainable part of a school’s culture of acceptance and inclusion.

**►Impact: Schools Community Partnerships**

***“The partnership with the Missouri Association of Student Councils(MASC) builds a solid relationship with schools because STUCOs get involved in service-learning projects that help to achieve the district goals.  In Year 1, we had more than 3,200 youth volunteers participate at various levels.  The goal for Year 2 was for 4,000 youth to volunteer at various levels. The final result for Year 2 was that Missouri engaged 5,182 youth volunteers who organized events for athletes, participated as fans in the stands and served as day of volunteers.  The majority of the volunteers at sporting events are youth who are engaged because of MASC.  In addition, in Year 2, 1120 youth also participated in the Polar Plunge resulting in $137,391.42 being raised by youth.  By recruiting youth to participate in the Plunge, we are also building sustainability for Project UNIFY.”***

*Trish Lutz, Project UNIFY Director, Special Olympics Missouri*

**Building on Success**

As we continue to move forward (at the time of this report we are in the middle of the third year of Project UNIFY activities), building on our success and findings from the first two years of this demonstration, we prepare for a disciplined narrowing to a more prescribed intervention that is soundly based in multiple years of evidence, yet still allows for flexibility at the state level, and for creativity at the school and student activation level. We address the following challenges:

* How do we continue to monitor, measure and address the successes and challenges of Project UNIFY and share these promising practices and resources among all constituents?
* How do we more effectively develop models of programming that ensure whole school engagement, including general and special educators, administrators and parents, and how can we characterize that in valid measures?
* How do we continue to create resources and improve our ability to enhance the skills of young people with and without ID to work together as co-creators and collaborators in sports, learning and service?
* How do we mobilize the education organizations that have expressed a desire to join this movement towards a more authentic vision of inclusion in schools?
* How do we harness the SO global enthusiasm for youth activation and engagement generated by Project UNIFY and ensure cultural modifications do not interfere with the core value proposition?
* How do we continue to educate, motivate and activate all young people in relevant substantive ways, offering continuing ways for them to engage in our movement as leaders, dedicated to social justice?

**Opportunity Moving Forward**

The majority of Project UNIFY activity takes place locally. We will continue to challenge SO Programs to implement integrated and expanded school and community-based educational initiatives that seek to build upon the positive effects that have been achieved through initiatives to date and to supplement these initiatives with new ones. The unique opportunity that year three provides is for our Programs to bring together expanded, integrated approaches that can impact both school and community.

To further challenge SO State Programs to grow Project UNIFY, the 2010-2011 school year has two different Project UNIFY funding strategies: Building Bridges and High Activation. Both categories aim to build the relationships between SO Programs and schools and to focus on engaging youth with and without ID in activities that excite and prepare them to be leaders for more accepting school communities.

Building Bridges is for Programs continuing progress from Year 2, or getting started with a new Project UNIFY project. The parameters and criteria are similar to those of this Year 2.

A significant enhancement in Year 3 will be that Project UNIFY will provide for up to 10 SO Programs that have shown a readiness to ramp up their Project UNIFY work and become a “High Activation” Program. Funding to these Programs will be awarded competitively based on strength of application and history of Project UNIFY innovation and effectiveness. These High Activation projects will serve as the incubators for Project UNIFY as we observe more intimately how the Project UNIFY components are combined and implemented and the levels to which they create, not just inclusive classroom environments, but unified school environments. The schools engaged in the High Activation projects, we envision, will provide us with a broader perspective on school and district-wide unified models of inclusion that involve a partnership between a non-governmental organization such as SO, and public education. Specifically, we are requiring a higher level of access and accountability in 6 select schools in each of the High Activation project states. We are prescribing a more universal set of required Project UNIFY components to be included so we can do more cross referencing against geographic and demographic variables. For example, each of these High Activation projects must include as part of their activities: Unified Sports teams; advocacy for respect campaigns; state level Youth Activation Committees; and, State Education Leaders Networks. They all will be required to integrate youth engagement as an important plank in their state Program strategic plans and show intent to impact change in organizational culture, as well as school climate.

These High Activation project models will allow us to evaluate more intensively the impact of Project UNIFY interventions on indicators of student engagement, attitude and other elements of school climate.

**V. Continuing in Year Three**

For the first two years of SO Project UNIFY we focused on the introduction of Project UNIFY concepts, practices and characteristics to SO Program staff and school communities to ensure the broadest possible implementation. Our goal was to gain an understanding of how the multi-faceted sports and education strategy of Project UNIFY fits within existing SO sports and education programming and to observe and measure how the strategy is executed by state and local staff and volunteers. As we have expanded and learned, the resonance of Project UNIFY’s stated objectives among administrators, teachers and students has grown more apparent. The range of approaches implemented across states shows creativity and enthusiasm by our Programs for the Project UNIFY concept. Programs have spent these first two years building stronger and more collaborative relationships with schools and educators while working internally to shift their own priorities to focus on youth as significant contributors to the present and future of SO. We have also been able to align with compelling and critical education trends such as character education, service-learning, student engagement, and the social-emotional development of youth. Project UNIFY is acknowledged by many national education leaders as an intervention which supports positive school climates of inclusion and acceptance for all students.

Project UNIFY has progressed from its initial focus on investigation of potential options and models for implementing the Project UNIFY concept. We have gained an enhanced understanding of the tools and resources needed and been enlightened by the experience of having youth leaders at the forefront in activation and engagement. Our focus in this phase is on advancing our understanding of the most meaningful and sustainable ways Project UNIFY is implemented, deepening relationships with other organizations, and providing professional development and sharing our progress with education stakeholders.

As we entered the third year of Project UNIFY, we felt greater accountability and acknowledged an expectation that our efforts should be measurable in terms of important indicators relevant to the education community. We were also more deliberate in identifying and supporting state projects that focus on the stated purpose of Project UNIFY to promote all young people as advocates for change in school climate fostering acceptance and inclusion. Important measures include: involvement by school principals, administrators, and general education teachers; youth-driven activities; opportunities for youth with and without ID to co-create; a combination of sports and awareness activities; more family involvement and advocacy; and, connection to local SO events.

**Other focus areas in Year Three include:**

* Advance our understanding of the most meaningful and sustainable ways Project UNIFY is implemented, deepening relationships with other organizations, providing professional development and sharing our progress with education stakeholders;
* Identify strategies to increase involvement by school principals, administrators, and general education teachers; promote more youth-driven activities and opportunities for youth with and without ID to co-create; introduce project designs that involve a combination of sports and awareness activities; provide for more family involvement and advocacy; and, make a deeper connection to local SO events;
* Continue to align with compelling and critical education trends such as character education, service-learning, student engagement, and the social-emotional development of youth;
* Require, not just suggest, Unified Sports and Get Into It as project components;
* Work with “High Activation” state Programs chosen to serve as the incubators for Project UNIFY to observe how Project UNIFY components are combined and implemented and the levels to which they create unified school environments. (Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Missouri, Oregon, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas were chosen in July 2010);
* Distribute 70% of the total funds received for this project in Year three to state SO Programs in the form of criteria-based funding;
* Develop a research agenda for Project UNIFY that guides our own research activities, as well as partnerships and collaborations with existing research efforts in areas that can support, inform, and contribute to the fields of inclusive education, school climate and social emotional development;
* Prepare for participation in the Global Youth Activation Summit (GYAS) at the 2011 SO Summer Games in Greece; continue our investigation into global opportunities for youth engagement and activation pilots and Project UNIFY programming;
* Monitor projects conducted by select participants in the 2010 National Education Conference (NEC) who were provided funding to implement and enhance teaching strategies; create safe, accepting and tolerant school climates; and, sustain the professional learning community developed during the NEC;
* Create a student-designed, on-line set of lessons, strategies and resources for teachers to educate, motivate and activate all students through sports, service-learning curricula and other engagement strategies;
* Join with national education leaders and policy makers in developing consensus among youth and educators on the major education, political, and social issues of student engagement, school climate, and equitable education for all students with a call-to-action in the form of proposed policies and national action steps that further the cause of youth voice, youth leadership, inclusion, and social justice as education principles;
* Implement an aggressive marketing plan to bring the “Get Into It” curriculum to educators across the country, in a way that will create sustained learning and teaching communities of practice for both teachers and students;
* Market to national, state and local stakeholder groups, organizations and associations the Project UNIFY support resources and tools developed to date, and conduct on-site professional development in each of the High Activation project states.

**VI. 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games Report - Lincoln/Omaha, Nebraska**

Executive Summary

The following report documents results of the 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games, conducted in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska during July 2010. The generous support provided by the United States Department of Education for these Games created countless opportunities for Special Olympics athletes to demonstrate courage, determination, sports excellence and solidarity to the global community.

The 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games brought together Special Olympics athletes from 48 States and the District of Columbia. Dedicated to sports excellence and a platform for change, Special Olympics athletes competed in thirteen (13) Olympic-type sports to demonstrate the strong contribution that persons with intellectual disabilities bring to sport, and to society at large. Supporting these Games and this platform for change were thousands of coaches, delegates, families and volunteers that helped make the National Games a success.

The diverse sports program implemented in Nebraska only tells a portion of the story. As part of the National Games, many additional programs and activities were implemented to strengthen the athlete experience, encourage participation from all sectors of society, and provide a national stage for educational and social integration models promoting acceptance of difference, advocacy, self determination, youth activation, family outreach, and community involvement in the lives of Special Olympics athletes.

Special Olympics is proud to have partnered with the United States Department of Education on the National Games, and looks forward to future collaboration to help provide the benefits of Special Olympics sports programming and related services to more and more athletes, and communities, worldwide.

Post Event Report

Special Olympics’ proposal to the U. S. Department of Education outlined a number of core programs and strategies that would be implemented as part of the National Games, directly related to providing inclusionary, leadership development, and educational opportunities for youth with and without intellectual disabilities.

The Special Olympics funding proposal committed to the implementation of the following programs:

* Competition in 13 Olympic-type Sports;
* Cessna Airlift – the largest civilian airlift in the world;
* Opening and Closing Ceremonies – include the Parade of Athletes, entertainment, and keynote addresses delivered by distinguished guests;
* Law Enforcement Torch Run – 150 police officers for across the nation run ‘The Flame of Hope’ into the Opening Ceremonies;
* Healthy Athletes Program – offer seven (7) different free health screening for all athletes attending the Games;
* Sports Experience – an interactive sports opportunity between the general public and SO athletes, and;
* Athlete Leadership Program – 51 non-competing SO athletes and 51 of their non-disabled peers will participate in an intensive leadership development program.

The goals and objectives of the 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games are expressed in the Games Agreement between the Games Organizing Committee and Special Olympics Inc with the following: *The Special Olympics National Games are the Special Olympics Movement’s most effective method for stimulating nationwide sports training and competition opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities, for developing Special Olympics Program;, increasing public awareness of Special Olympics and the gifts and accomplishments of Special Olympics Athletes; promoting athlete growth; fostering development of* *Special Olympics* *sports; creating attitude change toward persons with intellectual disabilities; attracting VIPs and opinion leaders to the Games; attracting corporate partners to the Special Olympics movement; and encouraging local Special Olympics program development. The Games shall offer opportunities for athletic competition to all U.S. Programs* *and shall showcase Special Olympics* *Athletes and initiatives* *in the United States**.*

The proposal from Special Olympics, Inc. included ambitious goals that were to be realized through support by the United States Department of Education. The following section will provide the results of each of the core programs and strategies listed above. In addition, a thorough evaluation by constituency was conducted via on-line survey. The executive summaries for each of those evaluations is attached (see addendum).

**2010 Special Olympics USA National Games Goals and Results**

Competition in 13 Olympic-type Sports

The 2010 Special Olympics World Winter Games brought together delegations from 48 States and the District of Columbia to participate in 13 Olympic-type sports. The participation included both persons with and without intellectual disabilities, through the Special Olympics Unified Sports program.

Sports Competitions:

* Aquatics
* Basketball
* Bocce
* Bowling
* Flag Football
* Golf
* Gymnastics
* Power lifting
* Soccer
* Softball
* Tennis
* Track & Field
* Volleyball

World class competition was conducted for 2,407 athletes with 258 Unified Partners competing alongside the Special Olympics athletes. The athletes were supported by 911 coaches and delegates. Quality and fair competition was ensured through 276 certified officials representing 30 States and 6,500 volunteers.

Cessna Airlift

To assist U.S. Programs participation in the 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games, 160 Cessna Aircrafts were secured that provided transportation for 1000 athletes, coaches and delegation members from 25 states. The 2010 Cessna Airlift was one of the largest and greatest recognized peace time civilian airlift known. Through the assistance and leadership of the Cessna Corporation, Harrison Ford served as the Honorary Chair of the Airlift. He appeared in PSA’s promoting the airlift and flew one of the delegations into the Games.

Opening and Closing Ceremonies

The 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games officially began with Opening Ceremonies on Sunday, July 18. Highlighted with the Parade of Athletes that included 3576 athletes/coaches/delegates, Opening Ceremonies were hosted by celebrity guest emcee’s Brooklyn Decker (Actress/Model) and Eddie Barbanell (Actor/Special Olympics Athlete). Entertainment included performances by one of the most highly acclaimed performers of our time Sandi Patti, Grammy Award winning Jars of Clay, American Idol finalist Michael Sarver. Keynote addresses were delivered by Governor Dave Heineman, President and COO of Special Olympics Brady Lum, motivational speaker Jim Cathcart, Olympian Pablo Morales, tennis star Andy Roddick, and Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics Tim Shriver. Throughout Opening Ceremonies features on Special Olympics athletes and communities that focused on inspiration, unity and acceptance were viewed by the estimated 13,000 people in attendance. Following a tribute to Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Games were declared officially open with the lighting of the Special Olympics Cauldron by the Law Enforcement Torch Run.

On Friday, July 23 the Games celebrated with the Closing Ceremonies that was combined with the National Youth Rally. Beginning with a modified Parade of Athletes that included 4 participants from each participating states, the Closing Ceremonies were emceed by local radio and television personalities. With a focus on youth, the ceremonies included performances from Small Change, Fe Fe Dobson, Kristina DeBarge, LaShell Griffin and Special Olympics athlete and recording artist David Steffen. Keynote addresses were delivered by participants of the National Youth Rally, President and CEO of the Games Charles Cooper, and the First Lady of Nebraska Sally Ganem. The ceremonies concluded with the extinguishing of the Olympic Flame and a call to action for the 10,000 spectators in attendance.

Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR)

On July 10, 2010 110 police officers from across the nation and Special Olympics athletes joined forces in Ames, Iowa (site of the 2006 Special Olympics USA National Games) to light The Flame of Hope and begin the journey to Lincoln, NE. The LETR ran the flame of hope through Iowa and 80 communities throughout Nebraska creating awareness and excitement for Special Olympics and the Games. LETR served as the Guardians of the Flame by maintaining the flame until the lighting of the cauldron at the Opening Ceremonies which highlighted the official opening of the Games.

Healthy Athletes

The Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program was one of the strongest components of the 2010 USA National Games. The Healthy Athletes program screened 1675 athletes, representing 68.4% of all participating athletes. The average age of the athletes screened was 29 years old. The total numbers of athlete screenings registered by each of the clinical disciplinary areas were as follows:

Healthy Hearing: 749

Opening Eyes: 994

Special Smiles: 977

FUNFitness: 523

Fit Feet: 930

Health Promotion: 595

The athlete screenings also included some intervention measures that helped create additional impacts for athletes:

* For the first time, Mission of Mercy/Nebraska Dental Association provided on site follow up dental care to the athletes
* 564 athletes were provided prescription eye glasses; those not needing glasses received new sunglasses or sports protective goggles
* 288 athletes were fitted for custom made mouth guard to protect again injury in sports
* 52 athletes were fitted with one or two hearing aids with instructions on follow up and maintenance

The Healthy Athletes program included a National Train the Trainer seminar. This seminar invites interested and qualified health professionals to be trained to serve as national Clinical Directors for specific Healthy Athletes programs. The Train the Trainer program implemented at the USA National Games welcomed 65 health professionals, representing 32 Programs. Two training videos were successful filmed for future Train-the-Trainer sessions.

Healthy Athlete data was collected for all athletes whom were screened at the National Games, a total of 4,768 screenings.

Sports Experience

To further integrate the community with our Special Olympics athletes, we created a one stop entertainment center; Special Olympics Town. Special Olympics Town included the Sports Experience, Fan Fest and Health Athletes. Fan Fest included vendors and a main stage that provided entertainment each night of the week.

The Sports Experience gave the general public and guest of the Games an opportunity to compete with and against Special Olympics athletes in the sports of basketball, volleyball and soccer. Sports clinics and demonstrations to include the Young Athletes Program were also conducted in this area. There were interactive games, pool tables, foosball tables, golf simulators and other activities to keep participants active.

Athlete Leadership Program

The Athlete Leadership Program was achieved through the National Youth Activation Summit.

Legacy from 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games

As part of each Special Olympics World Games events, the Movement places heavy emphasis on the legacy that the Games create for the continuity of services for the state Special Olympics Program. The 2010 USA National Games in Lincoln & Omaha, NE were no exception.

There have been a number of developments in Special Olympics Nebraska since the Games that demonstrate the strong legacy the National Games created. Special Olympics Nebraska is now a household name in communities around the state as Law Enforcement representatives, Special Olympics athletes, schools and  dignitaries held ceremonies and public awareness events in 72 communities leading up to the Games.

The legacy of the Games has grown the athlete and volunteer base significantly. The Young Athletes Program has been introduced to 20,000 children.  The approximate 6500 National Games volunteer names are now housed in the Special Olympics Nebraska data base and all volunteers have been communicated with and have opportunities to volunteer in varying capacities.

A state-wide Youth Activation Board was formed with 25 Youth leaders with and without intellectual disabilities.  The Education Leadership Network, represented by 25 educational professionals and chaired by the First Lady of Nebraska is keeping the work of Special Olympics in the forefront for schools and policy makers.  Four corporate partnerships were sustained and five key National Games Board Directors’ now serve on the Special Olympics Nebraska Board.

**Concluding Statement**

Special Olympics would like to thank the Department of Education for their strong support in making the 2010 Special Olympics USA National Games one of the best in the Movement’s history. It is through the DOE’s continued support that Special Olympics can continue to promote inclusive sports programming, youth activation, youth engagement with persons with intellectual disabilities, early intervention services for children with intellectual disabilities ages 2-7, health screenings, and many more services.

Special Olympics is proud of the partnership shared with the Department of Education, and through this collaboration, Special Olympics is confident in the partnership’s ability to generate more success that benefit Special Olympics athletes, their families, and the communities they reside in.

It is therefore the hope of Special Olympics that this partnership continues to include future National and World Games events. Such continuity stands to demonstrate the strong commitment this partnership represents in improving the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities, while promoting tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion as core tenets of the Department of Education’s strategy toward a more inclusive nation for all of its citizens.

**VII. About Special Olympics**

Special Olympics International (SOI) has implemented sports training and competition for people with ID continuously since its founding in 1968. Special Olympics (SO) is designed to provide opportunities for people with ID, who have been consistently isolated by society, to participate in Olympic-type sports activities, develop skills and friendships, gain competency, and demonstrate their dignity and ability to contribute to society. As an organization, SOI has come to understand how powerful a platform sport can be for demonstrating what people with ID can achieve; however, research indicates that too few members of the public have availed themselves of the opportunity to experience and understand people with ID and what they can accomplish (Siperstein, Norins & Corbin, 2003).

Because of success in the sports arena, SO is traditionally perceived as just a sports event for people with ID. This does not reflect the current reality, as SO has become a global social change movement using sport as a platform to build understanding, acceptance and tolerance for all. This is clearly part of the SO mission: to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with ID, *giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.* The focus has often been on the first part of the mission statement, with a dismissal of the important outcomes defined in the second part.

**VII. References**

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