

Tool Kit for Programs
Special Olympics Celebrates more than 1.2 Million Unified Sports Teammates

Overview:

In 2011, Special Olympics set forth a plan to have 1 million Unified Sports teammates throughout the world by the end of 2015, doubling the number of participants with and without intellectual disabilities training and competing together on the same team. We are thrilled to share that not only did we reach that goal, but we exceeded the goal with more than 1.2 million Unified Teammates participating around the world.

The Movement will celebrate this achievement and thank those who made it possible to reach this goal the week of June 6 and we hope all Programs can support the celebration through social media, public relations and/or event activation. This is also a time to recruit more Unified Teammates and promote Special Olympics Unified Sports.

This tool kit outlines the overall plans for the celebration, as well as provides tools to Programs to activate in your celebrations. These additional materials are provided for you in this tool kit for your reference and use in promoting this announcement:

- Fact Sheet on announcement
- Fact Sheet on Unified Sports
- Localized Template Press Release
- Graphics (attached in email)

This success was made possible by generous supporters including:

ESPN (@espncitizenship)
 Kim Samuel (@sconnectedness)
 U.S. Department of Education (@usedgov)
 Lions Clubs International (@lionsclubs)
 UNICEF (@UNICEF)
 Y&R (@YoungRubicam)
 Burson Marsteller (@B_M)
 Perfect Sense (@PerfectSenseDig)
 The Coca-Cola Company (@CocaColaCo)
 NBA (@nbacares)

WWE (@WWECommunity)
 UEFA (@UEFA)
 FIFA (@FIFAcOm)
 EuroLeague (@EuroLeague)
 MLS Works (@mlsworks)
 Uniqlo (@uniqloUSA)
 Seiko (@seikowatches)
 NIRSA (@NIRSAlive)
 NFHS (@NFHSNetwork)
 King Baudouin Foundation (@K_B_Foundation)

Celebration Plan:

June 2	Programs receive Tool Kit
June 8	SOI to distribute International Press Release Programs to share localized press release recognizing local supporters and local accomplishments
June 8 through end of June	Programs and Unified Teammates use the social media tools to celebrate the milestone and invite more people to #PlayUnified
June 8	SOI CEO, Mary Davis to speak at a Social Innovation Summit in Washington DC and talk about the power of Unified Sports
June 8 through end of June	Programs acknowledge milestone at Games & Competitions
June 8 through end of June	Programs post and share stories on impact through Unified Sports

Celebrating 1.2 Million Unified Teammates at Program Games & Competitions

Upcoming Games and Competitions in the next month provide an opportunity to acknowledge this Special Olympics Strategic Plan accomplishment, a chance to highlight your Program's Contributions to exceeding the goal of 1 million Unified Teammates, and to work toward reaching current strategic plan goals of expanding Unified Sports.

Here are a few ideas on how you can celebrate the milestone at your events:

- Mention the accomplishment and thank partners at Opening Ceremonies. To assist, there is a video message from Special Olympics Chairman, Tim Shriver: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTDXZBQpNAU&feature=youtu.be>
 - o You may also download for use at Games or other events [here](#) through Dropbox
- Hold a Play Unified experience during an upcoming event with fans and participants. Use a Special Olympics Unified Ball and invite people to join the movement at PlayUnified.org.
- Invite local Unified Sports Supporters to attend the Games and thank them publicly.
- Ask Unified Teammates to share their stories at Ceremonies, receptions or during media interviews.
- Invite media to cover Unified Sports competition and meet Unified Teammates to share their stories of friendship.
- Set up an information table about Unified Sports with Unified Teammates, tablet or laptop at Special Olympics Town/Village to share www.playunified.org and invite people to join the Movement.

Printable Sign & Graphics:

- 1) We have created several graphics to be used across your social media platforms in celebration of this milestone. These include graphics for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well as a specific Facebook cover photo. NOTE: We have included a thank you graphic for our top 3 supporters of Unified Sports. If your Program has others to thank, please use your social media channels to post thank you messages!
- 2) To engage your unified teammates, we have created a printable sign for them to write their own little celebratory messages about the achievement. Ex. "I love to #PlayUnified" or "I #PlayUnified with my best friend Tim." Once they have filled-out the sign, we ask that they snap a photo with them, the sign and share that photo on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram using #PlayUnified.

Social Media Guidance:

- Changing the world 1 game at a time! Today we celebrate reaching over 1 million unified teammates. #PlayUnified
- I am proud to #PlayUnified with @SpecialOlympics!
- Help us celebrate our 1 million unified teammates--Tell us why you #PlayUnified!
- 1 million strong but we always need more players on this team! Sign up to #PlayUnified: www.playunified.org

Story Gathering Guidance:

Celebrating this amazing achievement is a great time to capture stories throughout our Movement. This quick, but detailed, checklist will help you PUT YOUR STORY IN CONTEXT and ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. Download this one-page guide to help craft your best story at the link [here](#).

- Special Olympics set forth a plan to have 1 million Unified Sports teammates throughout the world by the end of 2015, doubling the number of participants with and without intellectual disabilities training and competing together on the same team.
- ESPN has been the Global Presenting Sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports® since 2013, having put forth commitment, support and resources to help Special Olympics reach their 1 million Unified Sports participant goal on the road to empower people of all abilities to engage through the power of sports.
- As part of Special Olympics' publishing of annual, global census data from 2015, Special Olympics is thrilled to share that not only did Special Olympics reach that goal, but exceeded the goal with more than 1.2 million Unified Teammates now participating around the world.
- Special Olympics will celebrate this milestone the week of June 6, 2016 and Special Olympics supporters and stakeholders worldwide will support this celebration with local publicity and engagement. Special Olympics is inspiring action and participation around the world and fostering an inclusive culture by encouraging fans to #PlayUnified and share their stories of impact on social media.
- On Wednesday, June 8, 2016, ESPN and Special Olympics will be part of a panel session at the Social Innovation Summit in Washington D.C. to speak to industry stakeholders about using the power of sports to inspire social change, and to celebrate this 1 million participant milestone as an example of collaboration for impact.
- In addition to ESPN, this success was made possible by additional generous supporters including: Special Olympics Board Member Kim Samuel and her family's foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and Lions Club International.
- For the last three years ESPN has invested more than \$3 million and strategically used its multi-platform media assets and marketing expertise to expand Unified Sports globally.
- Part of ESPN's commitment to support reaching this Special Olympics milestone over the past three years has included capacity-building Unified Sports grants to more than 14 global markets, both domestically in markets from Connecticut to Florida, as well as globally in markets ranging from Mexico to Brazil and China to India. Those ESPN grants helped contribute more than 335,000 new Unified Sports participants globally on the road to overall global growth for Special Olympics.
- In order to help increase awareness of Unified Sports, ESPN has also provided generous coverage and media in-kind support to Special Olympics. ESPN has provided coverage of a wide-array of Unified Sports activation, including Unified Snowboarding at X Games Aspen; NBA Cares Unified Basketball games; MLS WORKS Unified Exchange soccer games; Special Olympics Unified college flag football and basketball rivalry matches and more.
- Unified Sports is also an integral part of the Special Olympics Unified Strategy for Schools, which was founded in 2008 and funded through the U.S. Department of Education to use Special Olympics as a way to build inclusion and tolerance in schools. Unified Sports are now in more than 4300 middle and high schools in the United States. Seventy percent of Unified Schools (Pre-K through Grade 12) are engaging in Unified Sports.
- 215 US colleges and universities have Special Olympics clubs on campus, providing ongoing Unified and inclusionary activities for students and Special Olympics athletes. 73 of the 215 US colleges and universities activating Special Olympics College conduct ongoing Unified Sports on campus
- Connecticut was first state to create an official interscholastic - Special Olympics Unified Sports partnership in 1992; 23 Programs have formalized partnerships with their state high school interscholastic association, and 20 have emerging relationships.
- Special Olympics is committed to increase Unified Sports participation with youth worldwide, with goal of having 10,000 unified schools by the year 2020.

Team sports bring people together. Special Olympics Unified Sports® teams do that and much more. More than 1 Million people worldwide take part in Unified Sports, breaking down stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities (ID) in a really fun way.

Dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences, Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team and playing field. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

ESPN has served as the Global Presenting Sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports since 2013, supporting the growth and expansion of this program that empowers individuals with and without intellectual disabilities to engage through the power of sports.

Through a flexible framework of three models, Unified Sports can be implemented through schools, universities and community organizations. Unified Sports teams competing at Special Olympics World Games are made up of people of similar age and ability, which makes practices more fun and games more challenging and exciting for all. Having sport in common is just one more way that preconceptions and false ideas are swept away.

How does Special Olympics Unified Sports change society?

- Unified Sports creates equality through sport that transcends the playing field giving people with ID an opportunity to be accepted and dignified in their community.
- Through the shared experience of sports, teammates with and without intellectual disabilities come together and form meaningful friendships.
- These relationships lead to new opportunities for individuals with ID who often times are excluded ... primarily because they are misunderstood or isolated.
- Teammates without ID broaden their outlook, become advocates and help people with ID become more included in their community, gain new opportunities and access jobs.
- Unified Sports teams shatter harmful misconceptions and stigma which are limiting, and through participation in sports, they promote the values of inclusion and diversity.
- Participation in Unified Sports contributes to people with and without ID of all ages and abilities becoming healthier and fitter, thereby reducing the incidence of problematic health issues and increasing quality of life.

Unified Sports was first introduced by Special Olympics in 1989. From small beginnings it has grown to become a core part of Special Olympics. Recent successes include:

- ✓ Research which:
 - proves Unified Sports can lead to positive social inclusion outcomes, effect friendships and improve attitudes of people with and without intellectual disabilities.
 - shows that Unified Sports positively impacts sports skills development, enhances physical fitness, and builds confidence.
- ✓ Alignment with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Unified Sports has improved access to sports by providing a large number of people of all abilities with an inclusive opportunity to meaningfully participate and receive health and fitness benefits.
- ✓ Unified Sports has been utilized to fulfill public policy goals (e.g. U.S. Dept. of Education guidance encouraging schools to provide inclusive sports for students with disabilities) leading to growing Interscholastic partnerships.
- ✓ Establishing support from ESPN, The Worldwide Leader in Sports, to become the Global Presenting Sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports. Additional support for Unified Sports in markets across the world has included support from partners including: Lions Club International, The Kim Samuel Foundation, the U.S. Department of



Education and many more. Many high-profile, professional sports organizations and events have showcased Unified Sports as a vehicle to show the power of inclusive sports, including: the National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Soccer (MLS), Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), National Collegiate Athletic Association, D-III, ESPN's X Games Aspen, the National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) and the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).



For Immediate Release

Contact:

Name

Phone

E-mail

***Special Olympics **Program** Celebrates Organization Milestone
in Reaching 1.2 Million Participants in Unified Sports
Thanks to ESPN and other key supporters, milestone becomes possible***

CITY, STATE/COUNTRY 8 June 2016 – Today, Special Olympics **Program Name** is celebrating a significant milestone in Special Olympics’ 50-year history. Thanks to the generous support of ESPN, the Department of Education, Kim Samuel and the Samuel Family Foundation, Lions Club International, and [many others](#), Special Olympics surpassed its goal of registering 1 million Unified Sports participants, by registering 1.2 million participants, including athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and teammates (individuals without intellectual disabilities) in Special Olympics Unified Sports®.

In 2013, ESPN became the [Global Presenting Sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports](#), and committed to help provide support and resources on the road to Special Olympics’ goal of doubling the number of participants in inclusive sports. At that time just over 500,000 global participants participated in Unified Sports. Thanks to recent growth and awareness, now over 600,000 Special Olympics athletes and over 650,000 of their teammates have registered to participate in Unified Sports globally. Special Olympics **Program Name** currently has **xx** participants registered in participating in Unified Sports. Special Olympics **Program Name** offers **x** Unified Sports teams including **xx, xx and xx**. Dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences, Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team and playing field. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Quote from Program CEO, athlete and/or athlete’s coach

Officially launched in 1989, Special Olympics Unified Sports has gained momentum over the last 27 years due in large part to multiple partners and supporters who have facilitated the growth of the program, such as ESPN, the Department of Education, Kim Samuel and the Samuel Family Foundation and Lions Club International. In addition to the support from ESPN and others, Special Olympics **Program Name** would like to thank local partners **xx, xx and xx** for their support.

Beau Doherty, president of Special Olympics Connecticut, known to many as the first person who introduced Unified Sports to the Special Olympics Movement, comments on the expansion and growth of playing unified. “When I look back to that one afternoon in 1984 talking with Mrs. Shriver (Special Olympics Founder) about taking a chance and bringing people without disabilities onto the same playing field as our athletes – I never thought in my lifetime, I would see us reach over a million people playing Unified Sports. I’m literally blown away by the scale and success of our Unified Sports programming around the world. True social inclusion – the connections that people make through participating in

Unified Sports - is the end game. The day that I saw students in high school lettering on a Unified Sports team about 10 years ago made me feel that we were definitely moving down the path of true social inclusion.”

Unified Sports has been an integral part of Special Olympics Unified Schools (founded in 2008) which is funded through the U.S. Department of Education, and who encourages school communities to follow the model of Special Olympics and promote inclusion in schools. Three models exist within Unified Sports: competitive Unified Sports, Unified Sports Player Development and Unified Sports Recreation. The Unified Sports competitive model combines Special Olympics athletes and partners as teammates on sport teams for training and competition. All athletes and partners on a Unified Sports competitive team must have attained the necessary sport-specific skills and tactics to compete and teams that participate in this model may be eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games. For the Unified Sports Player Development model, equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and partners compete on the same team and are of similar age, but teammates are not required to be of similar abilities, and teammates of higher abilities serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities. Lastly, for the Unified Sports Recreation model, there are inclusive recreational sports opportunities for Special Olympics athletes and partners. This model does not follow any prescribed training, competition and/or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics. These recreational opportunities may take place in partnership with schools, sport clubs, the community and other private or public organizations as one-day events, exhibitions or demonstrations or ongoing activities such as physical education classes and intramurals.

To further expand Unified Sports, in September 2013, Special Olympics announced a global initiative with ESPN, the Global Presenting Sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports®, to inspire sports fans everywhere to come out and play their favorite sports while also making a difference in their community. For the last three years ESPN has invested more than \$3 million and strategically used its multi-platform media assets to expand Unified Sports globally. Such support has included capacity-building Unified Sports grants in more than 14 domestic and global markets including Connecticut, North Carolina, Mexico and India, as well as supporting key research, conferences, activations and other necessary resources to support the global expansion of Special Olympics Unified Sports. As part of its continued support of Unified Sports, ESPN will invest in Special Olympics’ goal of building Unified Sports programming and resources in 10,000 schools by the year 2020.

“Reaching 1.2 million participants in Unified Sports is such a significant milestone for our organization,” said Mary Davis, Chief Executive Officer, Special Olympics. “In the 40 years I have been involved in our Movement, the emergence of Unified Sports has been a key indicator of our success in breaking down the barriers that exist for people with intellectual disabilities. Being a part of a team and competing at your highest level while also building lasting friendships is something everyone wants to be part of, and we are offering that opportunity to everyone. We are so lucky to have such amazing supporters including ESPN, Kim Samuel, the Department of Education and Lions Club International who have really catapulted us into making this milestone possible. Thanks to them, we are seeing more and more partners who want to join us and build Unified Sports and help inspire change on the playing field.”

As part of the celebration of surpassing the 1 million participant milestone, Special Olympics **Program Name** is encouraging all who have been impacted by Unified Sports to share their story and thank those who have helped make the program possible. Fans and supporters are encouraged to use the hashtag #PlayUnified and share their stories from across the world. To read some of the inspiring stories from athletes and partners playing unified, visit [here](#).

A Look at the Facts:

Unified Sports is now in more than 4300 schools across the United States. In the 2014-2015 school year, Unified Sports was implemented in 54% of elementary schools compared to 75% of middle schools and 81% of high schools. In total, 71% of schools implemented Unified Sports, an increase of 12% over the previous school year. An impressive 24% of all participants, or 1,560 people competing at the 2015

Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles, competed in Unified Sports, making those Games the most unified World Games to date.

Thanks to the support of ESPN, Special Olympics also conducted an evaluation of Unified Sports programs worldwide to determine if Unified Sports impacts athletes' and partners' health, physical activity and sports participation outside of Special Olympics. Some key results from the evaluations revealed that 89% of teammates said they are more comfortable talking to people with ID and 91% reported their sports skills improved. Based on these results, Special Olympics conducted focus groups on the meaning of inclusion with approximately 70 players and 35 coaches in 3 countries (United States, Bharat and Germany). Qualitative results show the significance of friendship, sense of belonging to a group and access to opportunities on and off the sports field as indicators of inclusion.

About Special Olympics International

Special Olympics is a global movement that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports, every day around the world. We empower people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. Using sports as the catalyst and programming around health and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice and intolerance. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown to more than 5 million athletes in nearly 170 countries. With the support of more than 1.4 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers 32 Olympic-type sports and nearly 100,000 games and competitions throughout the year. Special Olympics is supported by individuals, foundations and partners, including the Christmas Records Trust, the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics, The Coca-Cola Company, The Walt Disney Company and ESPN, Microsoft, Lions Clubs International, Mattel, P&G, Bank of America, Essilor Vision Foundation, the Golisano Foundation, Finish Line, and Safilo Group. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org. Engage with us on: Twitter @specialolympics, fb.com/specialolympics, youtube.com/specialolympicshq, instagram.com/specialolympics and specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com.