

**CHOOSE TO INCLUDE**

Unify Youth to Create an Inclusion Revolution

With approximately half of the world’s population under the age of 25, young people are critical to addressing many of society’s most pressing issues. This new generation brings creativity, energy and an openness to change, and Special Olympics seeks to harness this power. By engaging young people in creating a lifetime of inclusion and appreciation for people with differences, Special Olympics can affect massive changes to social norms. Young people are open to inclusion and they seek to understand and embrace differences. This unified generation is our way forward.

There is a global call to action outlined by the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which calls for the “full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.” As catalysts for change, youth with and without intellectual disabilities are vital owners of the inclusion revolution, and when empowered and unified they will be unstoppable.

The massive and documented success of Special Olympics’ youth and school engagement programming within the U.S. has laid the foundation for bold plans for growth globally. This work has definitively shown the power of inclusion. When children and youth – from pre-school to college-aged students – with and without intellectual disabilities play and interact, fears and insecurities dissipate and acceptance and friendships flourish.

The **Unified Schools Program** developed by Special Olympics and initially focused on schools and youth in the United States, is designed to promote Unified Sports, physical activity and health. In addition, the program provides classroom and community experiences that reduce bullying and exclusion, combat stereotypes and engage young people in activities that lead to improved behavior and school climate. Unified Schools is an excellent example of what Special Olympics and young people can work together to achieve. At its core, Unified Schools is not just about including students with disabilities, but unifying all students and shifting the norm in schools - from adult-led programming to student-led mobilization and action; from sports as recreation to sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and attitude and behavioral change.

As a result of these efforts, millions of young people around the world are leading the charge to re-imagine and create communities in which all people are included and accepted as valuable members.

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Catalyzed by the Unified Schools program, Special Olympics’ youth-focused work has included:

* Global, Regional and Program level youth summits, including a Social Impact Summit at each World Games dating back to 2001;
* Youth Leadership training and seminars and youth-led community-based projects to promote inclusion;
* School-level Unified Sports and youth leadership opportunities for students in the U.S. and internationally; and,
* Regional adoption of the Special Olympics College/University model, where students organize and participate in sports and leadership activities in college and university settings.

Unified programming has been embraced in schools throughout the world, however Special Olympics’ inclusive programming for children and youth is still in its infancy. Inconsistent models, varying versions of success and unsustainable programming mean that global expansion is slow at best. In order to build upon the initial success and maximize the global opportunity, Special Olympics must create meaningful opportunities for youth to challenge inequity and exclusion in their own communities.

With the support of the Campaign, Special Olympics will create a flexible framework in which young people can join the inclusion revolution and lead the way to achieving a vision of a more inclusive world. As part of this work, Special Olympics will build and launch the Special Olympics Institute for the Unified Generation aimed to support the creation of 40,000 new Unified Schools and Universities around the world. This online Institute has two main priorities:

* Create a digital community that hosts productive, inspirational and cutting-edge discussions and research among young people and adults aimed at leveraging the power of inclusive play, sport and learning to promote inclusion from cradle to age 25.
	+ Empower millions of young people around the world to connect with their peers and share innovative ideas and resources.
	+ Increase awareness and understanding by engineering partnerships with organizations and experts to support Special Olympics as a global convener of youth in the promotion of social inclusion.
* **Execute a flexible framework for global youth-led program expansion.**
	+ Develop a youth-led think tank to synthesize the insights from youth around the world and develop transformative strategies to make real world impact.
	+ Provide innovation grants to youth who propose potential breakthrough approaches and unconventional strategies to knock down barriers to inclusion around the world.

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* + Launch regular regional workshops to train students, educators, staff and community members on how to create and expand Unified Schools in their area.
	+ Provide grants to 120 countries to grow Unified Schools activities in all seven Special Olympics regions.

Young people are the future policymakers, educators and business leaders of this world. Special Olympics must be committed to opening hearts and minds and increasing youth participation in taking down barriers to inclusion and working across sectors to create lasting change in the world.

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