Special Olympics

2023 - 2026

Empowering Families



Stories and milestones on the path to impactful family engagement worldwide

These **Engage, Educate**, and **Empower** emblems are throughout this report to underscore how these core elements of the Special Olympics Family Engagement Strategy are finding life in places all around the world.

ENGAGE

Engage family members so they become active participants in the Special Olympics movement and increase the number of local Programs.

EDUCATE

Educate family members to improve and promote well-being through community and networking.

EMPOWER

Empower parents, siblings, and caregivers to become leaders, advocates, storytellers, and mobilizers who influence communities and decisionmakers.

On the Cover: A Fun Family Day in Maun, Botswana

Family Day activities brought families together to celebrate sport, leadership, and togetherness. Parents and caregivers participated directly and have become true partners in programming with Special Olympics Botswana.



Introduction

Families play an essential role as volunteers in the Special Olympics movement. Grant-funded family engagement and development take that role to a far more powerful level.

Take the example of Tang Rong, a family leader in Special Olympics China. Tang was a government worker when her child, Wang Yuan, was born with intellectual disabilities.

Tang left her job to start her own business so she could focus on her daughter's life and future. She became a local family leader after her daughter joined Special Olympics in 2012.

It wasn't until Tang received family leadership training in 2023 that she truly understood all that her role could be. That training, supported by a grant from the Samuel Family Foundation, excited, motivated, and most of all, empowered Tang.

She's a stronger leader now. She connected with family peers from other East Asia Programs and is contributing to family events and discussions at the local, national, and regional levels.

Tang is just one example showing how connecting families to one another leads to powerful and sustainable improvements for Special Olympics at every level. Grant support enables opportunities to participate, to share experiences, to learn from others, and to strengthen support for athletes.

That grassroots involvement is core to meeting the Special Olympics mission of building more inclusive communities.

This report highlights the impact of family engagement across the movement through stories from Programs and families around the world.

In **Botswana**, family forums grew a thriving community of family leaders.

In **Mongolia,** translated resources unlocked the power of Special Olympics, leading to expanded access to training and opportunities.

In **Thailand**, grant funding enabled strongly motivated staff to conduct an incredible number of family forums, igniting interest in Special Olympics that continues today.

That work and other accomplishments show the lasting impact of grant funding.

It enables profoundly important work by Special Olympics Programs and families. Funding makes ideas possible. It sparks commitment and excitement. It makes a difference long after the funds have been spent.



Tang Rong created a coffee brand inspired by her daughter with intellectual disability, partly to expand opportunities for people to understand others with ID. Tang brings her personal experiences to her role as a family leader at local, national and regional levels.

2023

JANUARY

Grants Kick Off for the East Asia, Asia Pacific, Africa, and Middle East/ North Africa Regions

FEBRUARY

The First Global Family Leadership Council is Established

MARCH

Family Resources Developed in East Asia Get Broader Reach through Translation

SEPTEMBER

Special Olympics Ethiopia's First Families and Siblings Engagement Workshop

Release of Advanced Family Leadership Training Course in East China

AUGUST

Training of 10 Health Messengers for Special Olympics Botswana

Sibling Grant Awardees Combat Prejudice against People with Intellectual Disabilities

JUNE

Family Leadership Council Meets in Berlin, in Person

Research Projects Reveal the Broad Range of Family Contact Methods

OCTOBER

Introducing Family Engagement and Special Olympics in Baga-nuur

NOVEMBER

Training Sessions for Family Members in Special Olympics Macau

DECEMBER

Hundreds of Family Members Learned and Shared Together in Forums Across the Asia Pacific Region

Celebrating Christmas and Togetherness in Hong Kong

JANUARY

Grants Kick Off for the East Asia, Asia Pacific, Africa, and Middle East/North Africa Regions

The four Regions committed to training 10 or more family leaders, training at least five Program leaders on Family Engagement, and updating five Program websites to include family information. The 10 trained family leaders will also attend a session discussing how to share your story for impact, a great first step towards families advocating to governments.

These grants laid the groundwork for progress that was seen months and years later. Training and empowering family members strengthens local work by engaging family members in genuine ways. Their comments and advice improved programming in their own neighborhoods and benefitted their own children and others.



FEBRUARY

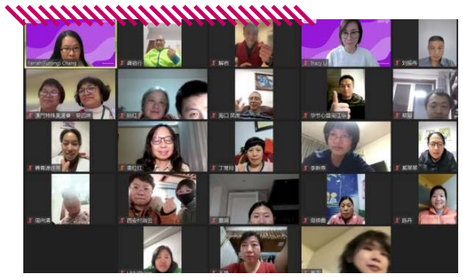
The First Global Family Leadership Council is Established



The 10-member council is made up of family members from each of the seven Special Olympics Regions. The goal of the council is to serve and advocate for Special Olympics Families globally. Members were tasked with developing global family strategies, providing feedback on initiatives, and promoting family engagement in their Region and local Program.

The members of the council came from varied backgrounds, but the qualification they all shared was their experience with children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That made them all experts in the way that matters most: their lived experiences.

EMPOWER



Lingering effects of the COVID pandemic were still affecting work and in-person gatherings worldwide as 2023 began. Much of the grant-funded work had been done virtually using video calls. Grant funding allowed travel and in-person meetings in 2023, gatherings that were a welcome change after so long.

ENGAGE

2023

MARCH

Family Resources Developed in East Asia Get Broader Reach through Translation

Special Olympics East Asia's family engagement work started long before development of similar materials by Special Olympics International headquarters. The original family engagement materials were written in Chinese, so translating them to English made them useful to many more people.

The East Asia Region's materials were finely tuned to the realities of life with disability in China, making them quite useful to that part of the world. **The insights, ideas and principles in those materials gave Special Olympics headquarters a strong head start when it began creating materials to be used in other Regions worldwide later in 2023.**

EDUCATE

JUNE

Family Leadership Council Meets in Berlin, in Person



The members of the Global Family Leadership Council met for their first in-person council meeting at the 2023 Special Olympics World Games in Berlin, Germany.

From 2023 to 2025, this first GFLC laid the groundwork for future councils, contributed ideas and insights to the Special Olympics Global Family Strategy, and helped decide what tactics were right for the strategy to be successful.

ENGAGE

Research Projects Reveal the Broad Range of Family Contact Methods



Consultant Aida Mohajeri completed grant-funded research projects that help Special Olympics understand the landscape of family contact collection, storage and maintenance within local Programs. Mohajeri (second from left in the photo above) visited Special Olympics Tajikistan. While there, she asked what contact methods worked best. Door knocking and other in-person worked best to inform people about upcoming events and to encourage them to attend. **The research has continued since then. It will play a foundational role in plans to standardize family contact information gathering worldwide.**

EDUCATE

AUGUST



Samuel Family Foundation grant funds supported the training of 10 Health Messengers for Special Olympics Botswana in 2023. All 10 athlete leaders are continuing in that role in various ways, such as promoting healthy practices, helping deliver programming, educating coaches, serving on boards and committees, and engaging with local and national media.

Health Messenger Tlamelo Mogotsi, center, posed after her first national television interview. She had shared her personal journey and experiences as a Special Olympics athlete. **She is just one example of grant-supported training and experiences leading to athletes who are more confident, more visible, and more influential.**

EMPOWER

Sibling Grant Awardees Combat Prejudice against People with Intellectual Disabilities

EunGyo and YeonWoo Cho of Special Olympics Korea were sibling participants in the Global Youth Leadership Summit from Special Olympics Korea. EunGyo and YeonWoo noticed misconceptions and prejudices against people with ID in their community. Their project focused on raising awareness of people with disabilities and increasing participation in cultural arts and sports activities.

EMPOWER

SEPTEMBER

Special Olympics Ethiopia's First Families and Siblings Engagement Workshop



Attendees got a general orientation to Special Olympics and instruction on health and nutrition. They were introduced to elements of Healthy Athletes programming and received training in effective storytelling. The Program held a second families and siblings workshop in October.

ENGAGE



内部测试文档，请勿外传

Special Olympics East Asia worked with One Plus One Disability Group of China to develop and release an Advanced Family Leadership Training Course. The course teaches families about disabilities, awareness and inclusion, society factors like fixed mindsets, prejudice and discrimination. It is tailored to the needs and circumstances of people in China and other parts of the East Asia Region.

EDUCATE

2023

OCTOBER

Introducing Family Engagement and Special Olympics in Baga-nuur





Over 30 family members gathered for a Special Olympics Mongolia forum in the small city of Baga-nuur, about 100 miles from the national capital, Ulaanbaatar. Program staff, family leaders and athlete leaders introduced the mission of Special Olympics and gave an overview of family programs, Young Athletes, youth and athlete leadership, health programs, and coaching and volunteer opportunities.

ENGAGE

NOVEMBER

Special Olympics Macau held numerous training sessions for family members to reach out to other families in their homes or in the Program offices to introduce them to Special Olympics. In all 43 families took part in those meetings. Special Olympics Macau also invited family members to learn and do activities to help them get over the stress of the COVID-19 epidemic. Families rolled balls, hiked, cycled, did yoga, meditated, and participated in essential oil workshops. Those activities helped parents maintain a happy mood to face daily challenges.



EDUCATE



DECEMBER

Hundreds of Family Members Learned and Shared Together in Forums Across the Asia Pacific Region



As of December 2023, over 800 family members in eight countries throughout the Asia Pacific Region had attended Family Health Forums, most supported by Lions Club International.

These forums benefit every member of a family. Topics often include nutrition, the importance of physical activity, preventing diabetes, and supporting mental wellness.

For families of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, leaving a forum with advice about accessing health services locally is essential and valuable. Through these forums, families come away with insights that can improve health every day and over the long term.

ENGAGE EMPOWER

Celebrating Christmas and Togetherness in Hong Kong





Special Olympics Hong Kong ended 2023 with a Christmas party that featured a game booth, a talent show, gift drawings and party foods. Weeks went into the preparation by the local family support network and the Special Olympics Hong Kong Athlete Leadership Council. In all 53 athletes and 46 family members gathered for the party.

ENGAGE

> "Special Olympics gave my daughter an equal place to participate, and it gave me a new way to see what is possible. Today, I want to help other families see that their children have talents, potential, and a meaningful place in our communities."
>
> **Tang Rong**
> *Family leader from Special Olympics China, who took part in grant-funded family training*

2023 Success Story Spotlights

Sharing Through an Exchange Program in East Asia







Two Programs who lie close to one another got together in 2023 to share ideas and best practices. Special Olympics Macau has strong family programming and good all-around family support, so the Program hosted a two-day visit by family and Program leaders from Special Olympics Hong Kong. Together, they did a crafts workshop, visited an integrated services center run by SO Macau, and took part in a Table Tennis Fun Day.

EDUCATE

2023 Family Statistics at a Glance

261
Family Leaders Trained

12
Program Websites Updated

71
Workshops, Trainings, Forums

10
Sibling Innovation Grants

528,479
Registered Family Members

22,092
Registered Family Members Increase

31,404
Registered Family Leaders







Special Olympics Training Materials Translated to Mongolian Unlock Learning for the Community

Mongolia's borders touch both Russia and China, but the language of Mongolia is different from Russian and Chinese. Grant-funded translation and proofreading made materials available in Mongolian for the first time. As a result, family and athlete trainings were much more accessible and effective. **The long-term effect of the new materials has been growth in Special Olympics activities and engagement throughout Mongolia. The effect is still visible in 2026 in family-run meetings and activities.**

EDUCATE

Family member training in 2023, above, made possible by grant-funded translation work, set the stage for family-run activities in Mongolia in 2026, below.





Big Family Forums in Gaborone and Maun in Botswana Kick Off a Vibrant Community that Still Thrives

Samuel Family Foundation support made it possible to hold the first in a series of family forums in Botswana. From then, family engagement has increased dramatically. Special Olympics Botswana started its grant-funded work with a goal of engaging 20 family members. In 2023, it reached 120 family members, and as of 2026, had engaged 200 family members, ten times its original goal.

Family engagements started as one-time participation, such as greeting people at public forums. It has evolved in Botswana to ongoing engagement and leadership by family members. Families take part in various programs, while trained athletes are now active in health promotion, coaching support, event delivery, and organizational leadership.

ENGAGE

2024

New Year, New Grants

The second full year of grant-funded activities began in two regions, Middle East/North Africa and Asia Pacific. Work kicked off for the first grants in the Europe/Eurasia Region and the Latin America Region.

JANUARY

Advocating for Children to Bridge the Gap between what the Law Promises and Real Life Delivers

MARCH

Setting the Stage for Success in Cairo

APRIL

The Center for Universal Education Hosted its Annual Symposium

Special Olympics Italy Family Training Sessions Started

MAY

A Strong Push for Family Engagement in Thailand Pays Off in 90 Days

JUNE

Family Convention in Germany

Special Olympics Italy's National Family Conference in Tivoli

Siblings from Special Olympics Romania Faciliated Their "Links of Good" Project

JULY

Fall Media Campaign Targets South Africa

AUGUST

100 Mobilizers Broaden Family Engagement in Bangladesh

SEPTEMBER

All-New Family Resources Get a Splashy Online Debut

OCTOBER

Latin America Region Family Forum

NOVEMBER

Reaching out to Media in Paraguay and Egypt

JANUARY

Advocating for Children to Bridge the Gap between what the Law Promises and Real Life Delivers

Paula Camino of **Peru** and Margret Turley, an athlete leader from **Special Olympics Ireland**, conducted surveys of families in Latin America, Europe/Eurasia and North America. Their work involved an online survey on disability inclusion and interviews to learn more about involvement in advocacy.

They found that the work of advocacy can lead to more than better education for their children. Many of the surveyed families reported a stronger sense of belonging to the disability community.



Paula Camino, above, is a Samuel Center for Social Connectedness Research Fellow from Peru. Margret Turley is a Special Olympics Athlete Leader and Sargent Shriver Global Messenger from Special Olympics Ireland.

ENGAGE

MARCH

Setting the Stage for Success in Cairo



Members of the Regional Family Council voted for president and vice president during their meeting in Cairo

The 10 members of the Regional Family Council for the Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa Region met in person for the first time at a meeting in March in Cairo. They benefitted from two full days of learning and sharing among themselves. The gathering was supported by funding from the Samuel Family Foundation.

Training sessions ranged widely: personal safety and emotional awareness for athletes; storytelling and communication; an overview of Special Olympics strategy; how to get brothers and sisters of athletes engaged in Special Olympics activities, plus more.

The eight mothers, one father, and one sibling of an athlete who make up the Regional Family Council set a goal of setting up local family councils in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

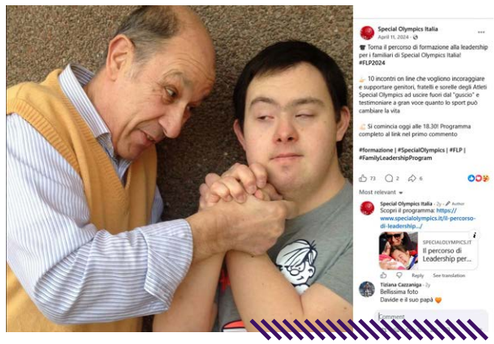
EMPOWER

2024

APRIL

The Center for Universal Education Hosted its Annual Symposium focused on education system transformation, co-hosted this year with Special Olympics and the Global Partnership for Education. Former Samuel Center for Social Connectedness research fellow, Paula Camino, was asked to attend and present her research on behalf of Special Olympics. The session she presented focused on building strategies for deeper engagement and partnerships between families of students with disabilities and schools based on research and promising practices in different cultural and country contexts.

EDUCATE



Special Olympics Italy promoted its 10-week course on Family Leadership on its Facebook page.

Special Olympics Italy family training sessions started in April and continued to June, when a national Family Conference was held in Tivoli. The 10-part course covered these topics and more: the family as the core of the movement, basics of communication, public speaking and story sharing, managing anxiety in public speaking, Unified sports, using social media the right way, and the weight of words.

EDUCATE

MAY

A Strong Push for Family Engagement in Thailand Pays Off in 90 Days



Special Olympics Thailand introduced family engagement in a very big way in 2024. In just two days in May, the Program trained, educated, and encouraged 108 volunteer participants from 57 provinces and 60 schools.

The conference was held in Bangkok and was supported by the Golisano Foundation.

The event covered many topics: exercise, nutrition, family roles in athlete development, the creation of family support networks and activity planning.

The two days paid off with results. In 50 provinces over 3 months, participants from the conference recruited other family members from their respective provinces and organized Family Health Forums where they shared their learnings from the conference. Through this outreach program, Special Olympics Thailand has reached over 2,200 families across the country and continues to engage families meaningfully.

ENGAGE

JUNE





ENGAGE EMPOWER

Family Convention in Germany

Grant funding offered the opportunity to implement a face-to-face convention with 15 representatives from all over Germany in Frankfurt am Main. Attendees took part in workshops and discussion on taking new approaches to family engagement. **All 15 family representatives were trained in ways to engage families, and the Program's website was updated to include family-related information.**



Special Olympics Italy's National Family Conference in Tivoli drew more than 100 participants for sessions that covered a broad range of topics related to the theme "We are not different, we are unique." The conference was the highlight of a year in which 33 family members completed the online Family Leadership Program

EDUCATE

Siblings Empower Their Peers

David and Eva Constantin from Special Olympics Romania successfully facilitated their Sibling Project, Links of Good, in their community of Ploiesti, Prahova. David and Eva wanted to empower teenagers with and without intellectual disabilities. **They engaged more than 200 youth leaders, each youth leader symbolizing a link in the "Links of Good" innovation project.**

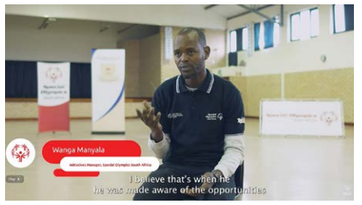
EMPOWER



JULY

Fall Media Campaign Targets South Africa





The Special Olympics Families team launched a media campaign focusing on families in South Africa. Stories, videos, and graphics went to the Special Olympics South Africa Program and to media companies in the country. This was the first of three targeted campaigns in different areas of the world, an effort to boost awareness and engagement.

ENGAGE

2024

AUGUST

100 Mobilizers Broaden Family Engagement in Bangladesh

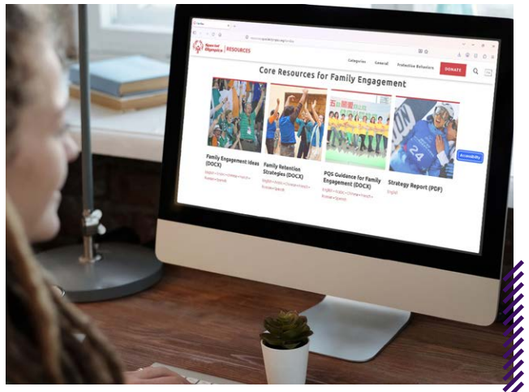


Special Olympics Bangladesh thoughtfully and intentionally worked to reach athletes and families that were new to Special Olympics. Program staff and family members worked together to recruit 100 community mobilizers. Their job was to use their knowledge of their communities to identify families whose children have intellectual disabilities and then to educate those families and invite them to upcoming Special Olympics events and activities.

ENGAGE

SEPTEMBER

All-New Family Resources Get a Splashy Online Debut





Strategic resources, a family-friendly guidebook, and official communication templates were announced in a webinar that drew attendees from all around the world. These grant-funded resources put engagement tools in the hands of staff and family members. They were published in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

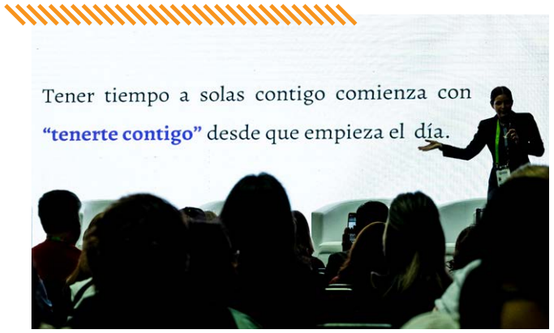
EDUCATE EMPOWER



OCTOBER

Latin America Region Family Forum





The Foro de Familias *brought together mothers, fathers, relatives and others for sharing ideas and learning from experts.*

The *Foro De Familias* was a chance for sharing and learning among family members from 18 Programs in the Latin America Region. It was held during the 2024 Special Olympics Latin America Regional Games in Asunción, Paraguay. Family members learned about topics that affect everyday life. There was a session on the grieving that many families do after finding their child has an intellectual or developmental disability. They learned about self-care of caregivers and stress management. Other workshops focused on strategies to build family engagement and the creation of Family Leadership Councils.

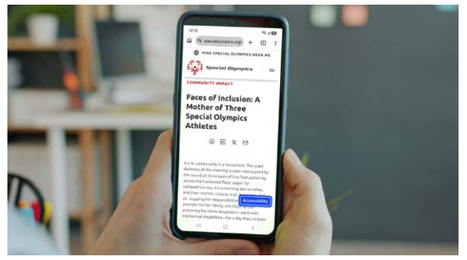
ENGAGE EDUCATE

NOVEMBER

Reaching out to Media in Paraguay and Egypt







The Special Olympics Families team launched campaigns focusing on families in Paraguay and Egypt. **The Paraguay campaign was a big success. It reached over 145,000 people on the web, which drove 11,500 clicks to the accompanying article**

ENGAGE

2024

At a Glance

58
Family Leaders Trained

30
Program Websites Updated

129
Workshops, Trainings, Forums

15
Resources Launched

663,224
Registered Family Members

34,684
Registered Family Leaders









The 16-page handbook was researched and written by Ben Haack, a Special Olympics athlete leader from Australia and a consultant in the United States. The two worked together for months conducting video interviews with family members from all over the world.

An Authentic Guide for Family Leaders is Published in Early 2025

Early in 2025, a new resource was produced that was inspired and filled entirely with the wisdom of Special Olympics family leaders from around the world. ***The Special Olympics Handbook for Effective Family Engagement: Advice, Stories, Observations, and Tips from Special Olympics Family and Program Leaders from Around the World*** was drawn from interviews conducted especially for the publication. The handbook and a companion video used the voices of experienced family members to deliver heartfelt comments and tips. Both were made possible with the support of the Samuel Family Foundation.

EDUCATE EMPOWER







A family health event presented by Special Olympics Marshall Islands (two above), and a health forum in Bangladesh (below).

Deep in the Numbers, Hidden Strengths in Family Engagement in the Asia Pacific Region

The number of family-focused workshops, trainings, and forums **in 2024 was 129**, nearly double the 71 held in 2023.

There were two standouts among the Special Olympics Programs who put those sessions on.

In **Special Olympics Marshall Islands,** the number of participants in their family events far more than doubled from 60 in 2023 to **142 in 2024**. Both numbers are for one-day events.

The growth happened because of a shift in outreach strategy. The program invited parents through the schools their athletes attend. Just as importantly, the Program arranged for transportation for the parents to their big event. Program leaders reached families where their children already were and removed the barrier of transportation.

Special Olympics Bangladesh managed to draw more than four times as many participants to its six forums in 2024. The Program benefitted from a bigger grant and encouragement from Asia Pacific Region staff to aim higher.

ENGAGE

2025

FEBRUARY

Training Workshops for Local Family Input Councils in Southern Thailand

MARCH

Family Reception at Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin, Italy

Family Health Forum in Selebi-Phikwe Benefits Families and Athletes

APRIL

East Asia Family Leaders Meet for Discussion and Leadership Training

MAY

The MENA Council Meets Again and Comes Away with Advice and Skills

JUNE

Welcoming Brothers and Sisters in Southern Thailand

JULY

Hong Kong Workshop Introduces Family Members to Special Olympics

AUGUST

Mindfully Growing Family Engagement in North America

SEPTEMBER

Learning about Inclusion through Family Cycling in China

OCTOBER

Developing Family Leadership Capacity through Online Training in North America

DECEMBER

Hong Kong Workshop Introduces Family Members to Special Olympics

FEBRUARY

Training Workshops for Local Family Input Councils in Southern Thailand



Family leaders and educators from five provinces attended training on leadership skills, online communication guidelines (including working with media and handling sensitive personal data), engaging siblings, working with the regional family input council. **The workshops were a chance for participants to play their important roles as advisors: they discussed what they need and are interested in for Special Olympics Thailand programs and activities. Southern Thailand is predominantly Muslim, so the comments and ideas of these family leaders were focused and valuable.**

EDUCATE EMPOWER

MARCH

Family Health Forum in Selebi-Phikwe Benefits Families and Athletes



Mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers all found fun and helpful advice in living active, healthy lifestyles. At this forum in Botswana, there were health screenings for such things as vision, hearing, foot health and general fitness for the attendees who were Special Olympics athletes. Family members got health education in the same session.

EDUCATE

Family Reception at Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin, Italy

Dozens of family members from around the world gathered at the family reception. Families joined in a spirit of camaraderie and shared stories, celebrated achievements, and created lasting connections. Families at the World Winter Games were well-informed throughout their time in Turin. Frequent newsletters gave timely updates, event highlights, and essential information. Each family received a Family Handbook containing detailed guidance on schedules, venues, and logistical considerations to support a smooth and enjoyable experience. In all, 1,812 family members registered for the Games, far surpassing expectations.

ENGAGE



Special Olympics Chairman Tim Shriver greeted family members at the reception. Moly, the mascot of the 2023 Special Olympics World Winter Games, appeared at the family reception. Kim Samuel, who established the Samuel Family Foundation, welcomed the many families who attended the reception.

2025

APRIL

East Asia Family Leaders Meet for Discussion and Leadership Training

The first in-person meeting of **Special Olympics East Asia Family Leadership Council** took place in Guangzhou, China. Members of the council discussed the critical role of families in promoting athlete health and well-being and how to advocate for inclusion. They shared training on effective storytelling to raise awareness as well as the efforts to break down the barriers to engage more siblings in Family Programs. The council members visited family service institutions in Guangzhou to learn about the growth of support for families of adults with intellectual disabilities.



Information sessions ranged widely, and participants found their own ways to take away what they found most valuable.



Family leaders learned techniques and the value of storytelling for raising awareness (above) and learned practices that help maintain good mental health.

EDUCATE EMPOWER

MAY

The MENA Council Meets Again and Comes Away with Advice and Skills





Nazek Marhoon from Special Olympics Bahrain shares her plan for family activation in Bahrain and what has been achieved so far.

The **MENA Region's Family Council** met in person for a second time in Cairo, thanks to funding from the Samuel Family Foundation. The council highlighted successes in their home Programs, described the many ways families are engaged, and shared challenges. Professional speakers addressed some of the top concerns for families, such as motivating children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, building their self-confidence and independence, and improving their employability. To help family leaders build their own successes, there was also a session on establishing partnerships to boost and sustain Special Olympics activities.

ENGAGE EMPOWER

JUNE

Welcoming Brothers and Sisters in Southern Thailand





Sibling engagement efforts continued throughout the year in Thailand, including this December event for siblings held in Bangkok.

Special Olympics Thailand's first Sibling Engagement Workshop was held in the southern province of Songkhla. **A four-member local family input council (two pairs of a teacher and a family member) planned and put on the event, showing that empowering family members produces events with local appeal and local impact. The event was a direct outcome of the training workshops held in February.**

ENGAGE

JULY

Hong Kong Workshop Introduces Family Members to Special Olympics





After introducing the history and background of Special Olympics to new families, **Special Olympics Hong Kong** engaged them in games that help young children develop motor skills. The games used ordinary household items so that family members could keep the learning going at home.

ENGAGE



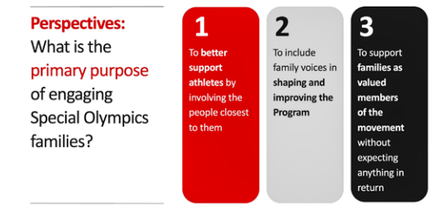
2025

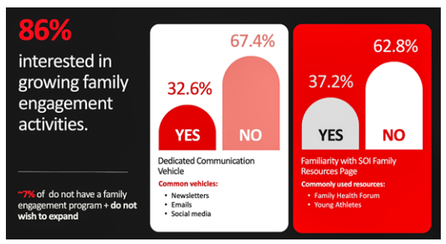
AUGUST

Mindfully Growing Family Engagement in North America

Special Olympics North America held its 2025 Regional Conference in Indianapolis, and the conference featured a training session on family engagement. Earlier in the year, Region staff had sent out a survey to understand the landscape of family engagement. **The presentation at the Regional conference was the first focused effort to build family engagement capacity in the Region as a whole.**







The family engagement session was packed, a great kickoff to efforts to build capacity in Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States.

EDUCATE

SEPTEMBER

Learning about Inclusion through Family Cycling in China



Around 100 people gathered for a Special Olympics Family event in Haikou, China. Among the 100 were over 30 families plus volunteers and supporters. One of the activities at the "Connecting Families, Integrating Communities" was inclusive cycling. **Families and their children formed cycling teams, fostering emotional connections and exemplifying the concept of "shared inclusion."**

ENGAGE

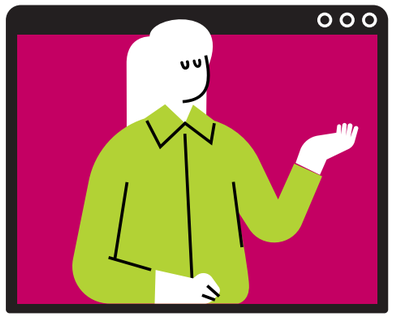
> "On the day of the event, it was pouring rain, and my son rode slowly, ultimately finishing in last place. During this process, I was not only moved by my child's perseverance but also deeply touched by the warm companionship of the cycling coaches."
>
> **Mother of a child who took part in the inclusive cycling event**

OCTOBER

Developing Family Leadership Capacity through Online Training in North America

Within two months of its formal introduction of family engagement at the North America Region Conference, Region staff presented an in-depth program that builds knowledge and skills needed to train others in principles of family leadership. **This "train the trainer" session equipped 13 North America Special Olympics Programs to begin strengthening their efforts to attract and engage family members in Special Olympics programming.**

EMPOWER





DECEMBER

Three Hong Kong Workshops for Families Build Leadership Skills

Participants loved the three workshops presented by Special Olympics Hong Kong on using the online design website Canva, facilitating meetings, and serving as an emcee for public speaking events. The events were lively and warm, and they introduced leadership skills that family members can use in a variety of ways in their daily lives.





Above, practicing public speaking skills.
Below, building skills for facilitating meetings.

ENGAGE

2025 At a Glance

251
Family Leaders Trained

3
Program Websites Updated

134
Workshops, Trainings, Forums

2
Resources Launched

734,572
Registered Family Members

43,235
Registered Family Members Increase



Turning a Talent for Chinese Desserts into an In-Demand Cooking Class in Hong Kong

Sandy Cheung was worried that no one would sign up for her new class on making Chinese desserts. In fact, the opportunity was so tempting that the number of registrants required a lottery to select the eight participants.

The class went smoothly, greatly boosting Cheung's confidence. The participants eagerly shared their own cooking methods and exchanged recipes.

Cheung's experience echoed the experience of her son, Chen Shaoqi. He was diagnosed with intellectual disability when he was very young. Shaoqi lacked confidence, and he found it hard to talk to others. Special Olympics sports, especially basketball, gave him the confidence to connect with others and make friends. Now an adult, Shaoqi has a job, and Cheung credits Special Olympics sports for the transformation.

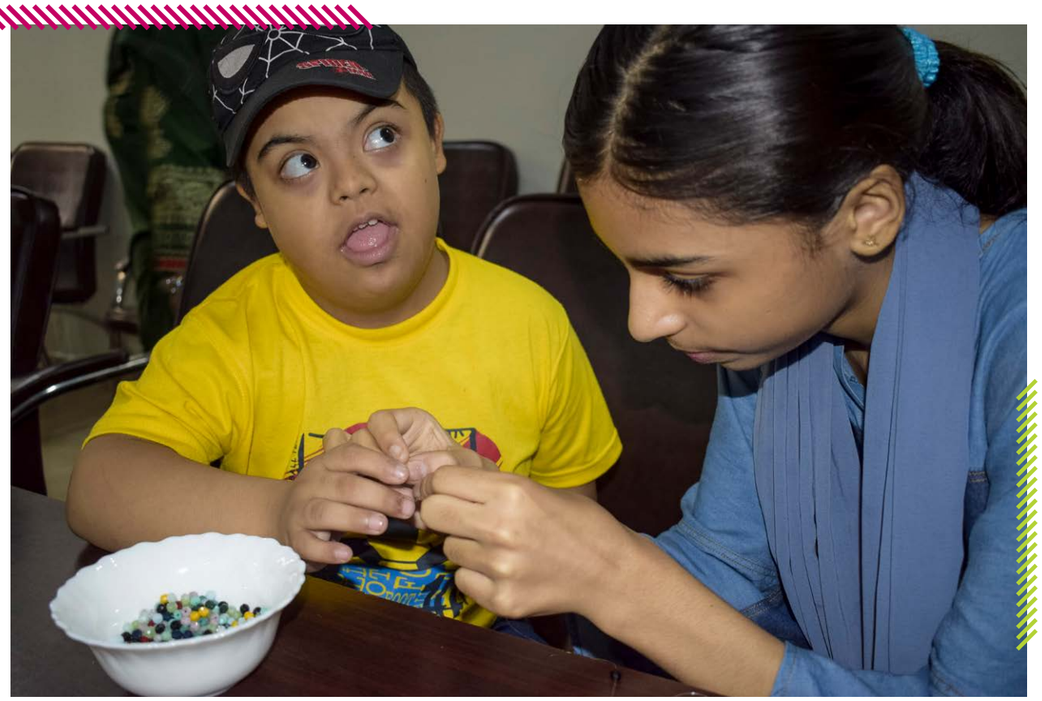
"One day, parents may no longer be able to walk beside their children," she said. "But sport can give them the strength, confidence, and resilience to face the future on their own."

And hosting cooking classes, even when you're nervous, can unlock confidence, too.



Sandy Cheung, right, demonstrated "lvdagun" (literally, "rolling donkey"), a traditional Chinese dessert made with sticky rice dough, sweet red bean paste, and roasted soybean flour.

EMPOWER







A Wide-Ranging Family Program in Pakistan Builds Skills and Knowledge throughout 2025

Special Olympics Pakistan put its family grant funding to broad use in 2025, running well-attended sessions in northern and southern Pakistan.

Topics Included

- Healthy eating for families
- Honest talk about puberty
- Sibling engagement
- Special Olympics orientation
- The importance of physical fitness
- Understanding intellectual disabilities
- Early intervention and parenting
- Autism awareness
- Dental care for children with disabilities

EDUCATE EMPOWER

2026



JANUARY

The 2026-2028 Global Family Leadership Council Takes Office with a Strong Role



Building on the foundational work and leadership of the first GFLC, a new set of family leaders from around the world took office in January. The GFLC will support key family engagement projects and initiatives across the global movement, including planning for the 2027 Special Olympics World Games Family Program and Reception in Santiago, Chile.

ENGAGE

JUNE

Five Special Olympics Programs in the North America Region are using Grants to Build and Strengthen Family Engagement

The grants to Programs in the United States and Caribbean will help family members in **Indiana** boost participation, leadership and well-being of female Special Olympics athletes. In **Washington, D.C.**, funds will build connections with families and the skills and talents of family leaders. Funding for Programs in **the Caribbean** will permit in-person family coordinator meetings, support storytelling efforts, and provide for calming places for athletes when they need it. In **Hawaii** and **Florida**, their established family networks will welcome funding to strengthen communication, connections, and training, expanding what's possible in family engagement.



Special Olympics Hawaii's long-running family network is called the Ohana Task Force. It was profiled in Special Olympics videos supported by the Samuel Family Foundation.

EDUCATE EMPOWER

JULY

Brothers and Sisters of Special Olympics Athletes Share Experiences and Challenges

Special Olympics youth leaders and siblings of Special Olympics athletes gathered for a virtual roundtable discussion of their lives, their hopes, and their goals.

The roundtable featured young people from **Special Olympics Egypt**, **Special Olympics Romania**, and **Special Olympics Zimbabwe**. Among the young people's wishes were a more defined role and voice for siblings and a global network for Special Olympics siblings to connect. A theme of gratitude was beautifully expressed by sibling Shahd Almowafy of Special Olympics Egypt: "Being part of Special Olympics with my brother [Abdurrahman] has been one of the most meaningful experiences in my life."

ENGAGE

SEPTEMBER

Using the Power of Networks to Continually Bring in New Families

Special Olympics Botswana's continued emphasis on engaging new families is paying off. At a family forum in capital city Gaborone, 40 new families signed up for Special Olympics. Pelotlhomogi Rantseo, a family member and longtime volunteer, says the Program actively engages with schools, disability groups, social services, churches, and elected representatives in local and national government. Rantseo herself secured a spot to talk about disability in a big conference held near her.



Pelotlhomogi Rantseo speaking at the Special Olympics Africa Leadership Academy.

OCTOBER

Strengthening Leadership for Family Members throughout Africa

Family members and family leaders from across Africa joined in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the first Special Olympics Africa Family Leadership Academy. The academy equipped parents, siblings, caregivers and advocates across the Region to lead alongside athletes—not for them. The Academy connected participants' personal journeys to practical leadership in their Programs and built the mindsets, skills and tools needed to grow the Special Olympics movement. The Samuel Family Foundation supported travel and lodging for participants. Each academy graduate received a grant to help them accomplish goals they set in action plans created during the academy.



The four-day Leadership Academy included a workshop on identifying and sharing strong stories of impact. Family members described and analyzed stories from their own experience to showcase lasting changes caused by Special Olympics work.

EDUCATE EMPOWER

> "[Training] has opened a wonderful world for me. I do learn every day, and I realize that every time I engage or attend any training, new things come that really help me open up my eyes."
>
> **Pelotlhomogi Rantseo** of Special Olympics Botswana
> *At the Special Olympics Africa Family Leadership Academy*

“Where Do You Need Me to Go?”

A Prized Volunteer Who Sees All of Special Olympics as Family





Kanysha Johnson volunteers for Special Olympics D.C. in as many ways as she can. Below, Kanysha with her sons. James Smith, who is 4, is involved with Young Athletes. Jonnard Butler, 17, is involved with several Unified Sports and Unified Champion Schools at his high school.

> “Special Olympics as a whole is a family. You don’t see color. You don’t see disability. You see people who are connected, people who are genuinely involved, who love one another.”
>
> **Kanysha Johnson**
> *Family member volunteer with Special Olympics District of Columbia*

“I meet parents everywhere, at school, on the streets, at the doctor’s office, wherever I may be, and I connect with them,” says Kanysha Johnson, a family member volunteer with Special Olympics District of Columbia.

Kanysha is the family coordinator for Washington, D.C.’s Young Athletes Program, so every parent she meets with a 2- to 7-year-old could be a new recruit.

Her steady presence and knowledge of the D.C. Program also made her a natural for the role of the Program’s volunteer family liaison.

“It’s all just genuine and authentic,” says Candace Johnson, Director of Youth Initiatives for Special Olympics D.C. “She’s stopping parents like, ‘Hey... why are you not working this table with me? ... What do I need to do to get you more involved?’”

Her Approach is a Model for Volunteers Everywhere

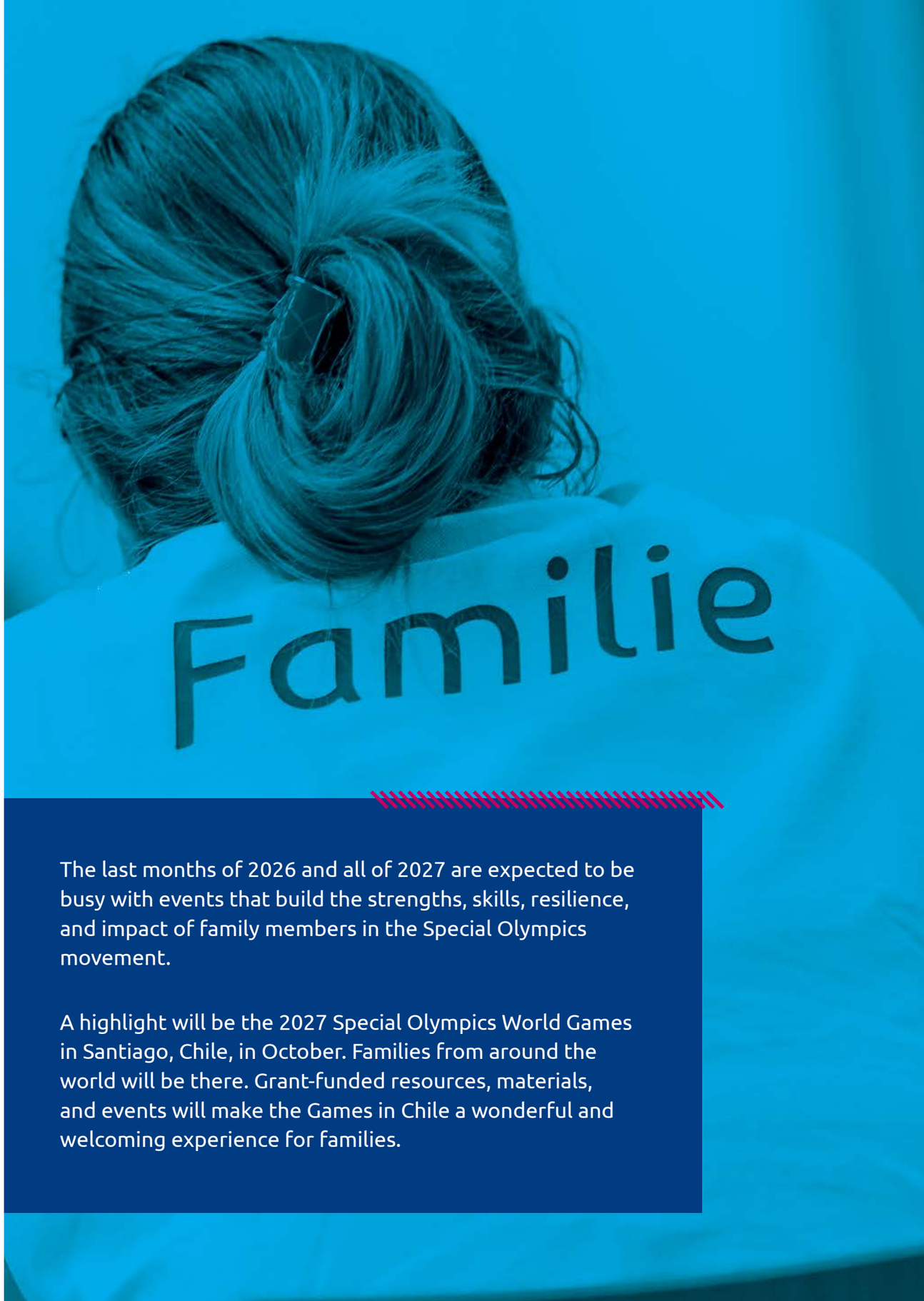
Kanysha’s hands-on, let-me-help approach stands out.

“I think what others see in me is my willingness to be there, my willingness to help. I always ask, ‘What do you need help with? Where do you need me to go?’” Kanysha says.

Her approach could stand as a template for Special Olympics volunteers anywhere on Earth.

“They see, ‘Okay, she knows what she’s doing, she asks the questions, she does her digging, she does her homework,’” Kanysha says. “And that’s what I do. I genuinely care about everyone, all of the athletes, all of the coaches, everybody. Everybody is like family to me.”

The Washington, D.C., Program is among five in the North America Region that will use Samuel Family Foundation grants to strengthen their family work. In Washington, funds will build connections with families and the skills and talents of family leaders.



The last months of 2026 and all of 2027 are expected to be busy with events that build the strengths, skills, resilience, and impact of family members in the Special Olympics movement.

A highlight will be the 2027 Special Olympics World Games in Santiago, Chile, in October. Families from around the world will be there. Grant-funded resources, materials, and events will make the Games in Chile a wonderful and welcoming experience for families.

Special Olympics

Thank you to these organizations who have supported family engagement over the years

Samuel Family Foundation

Special Olympics Health

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