

ECD Cross-Departmental Collaboration Learning Series

Full Responses and Perspectives Across Special Olympics

Early Childhood Development Team

September 2026

About This Resource

This document brings together the **full responses and perspectives shared by colleagues across Special Olympics** as part of the ECD Cross-Departmental Collaboration Learning Series. While the weekly one-pagers highlighted key messages and practical ideas, this resource provides an opportunity to go deeper into what each contributor shared—their expertise, resources, recommendations, and ideas for stronger collaboration.

We encourage you to spend time exploring the sections most relevant to your work—and those that may be **outside your usual area of focus**. The goal is not to implement everything presented, but to better understand the expertise and resources that already exist across our movement and consider where new connections could strengthen your Program.

As you read, consider: **Who could we collaborate with? What resources could we use? Where could we better connect our work?** Even one new connection can help create a stronger, more coordinated Special Olympics journey for children and families.



From the ECD Team: Turning Collaboration into Action

Over the past several weeks, colleagues from across Special Olympics have shared how their work connects with Early Childhood Development. What we hope Programs see is that **ECD does not need to grow by creating more stand-alone activities—it can grow by making stronger connections across the work already happening.**

Sport can help create the next opportunity for a child. Health can support development and well-being from the earliest years. Families can strengthen participation and belonging. Education and youth engagement can build the bridge into schools and future leadership. Government Relations, International Development, Communications, and Advocacy can help expand our reach, partnerships, visibility, and sustainability.

For the ECD team, the next step is helping Programs **turn those connections into intentional pathways for children and families.** That means looking at who is already working in your Program and community, identifying where ECD can naturally connect, and bringing the right people together around shared goals.

What We Hope You Do Next

- **Look beyond ECD programming.** Identify the teams, partners, and systems already reaching young children and families.
- **Build connections, not new silos.** Consider how existing Sport, Health, Family, Education, and community activities can support your ECD goals.
- **Think about the full journey.** Ask what happens before a family reaches Special Olympics, what they experience when they arrive, and where they go next.
- **Use us as a resource.** Bring questions, challenges, and opportunities to your Regional and global ECD colleagues so we can help identify resources, connections, and approaches that may already exist elsewhere in the movement.

A Final Thought from the ECD Team

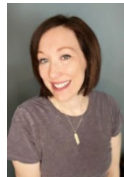
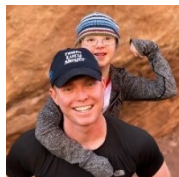
The opportunity ahead is bigger than any one ECD program. It is about building a connected network around children and families so they can find Special Olympics earlier, access the support and opportunities they need, and continue growing with our movement. We do not expect every Program to do everything. We hope every Program identifies **one connection it can strengthen.** Collectively, those connections can create a stronger and more inclusive pathway for children and families around the world.

Thank you!

Jennifer Hansen | Director, Early Childhood Development

Cassandra Ryan | Senior Manager, Early Childhood Program

Ryland Towne | Manager, Young Athlete




Special Olympics

A STRONG START. A LIFELONG JOURNEY.

Special Olympics Early Childhood Development



1 PLAY TOGETHER

Young Athletes helps children ages 2–7 build movement skills, confidence and friendships through inclusive play.



2 GROW HEALTHY

A health screening, family education and at-home resources connect children and caregivers with support.



3 FIND THE NEXT STEP

Junior Athletes helps children ages 6–12 move from early play into sport and continued participation.



4 BELONG FOR LIFE

Families, schools, health providers and communities create stronger pathways to inclusion.



RESEARCH IMPACT

After two months in Young Athletes, children with intellectual disabilities achieved a seven-month gain in motor skills.

INCLUSION STARTS EARLY.

Learn More by Contacting: ecd@specialolympics.org

Sport

Overview of Sport Development

Across the Sport Development Team we lead across five key areas: Coach Education and Development, Competition Management, Sport Development, Sport Partnerships and Sport Operations.

Coach Education and Development involves supporting the organization-wide coach education and development work in three main areas: Coach Education Resource Development, Coaching System Development, Coaching Research.

Competition Management work involves the planning and delivery of international single and multi-sport competitions, up to and including Special Olympics World Games. This ranges from sport presentation and scheduling, to divisioning and rules management, education and implementation.

Our Sport Development work focuses on sport-specific initiatives and activities, purposefully designed to extend the quality, reach and impact of specific sports. At present, we have staff members with direct sport development responsibilities for Athletics, Badminton, Golf, Swimming, Football, MATP and Volleyball. Other sport development activities are managed by the wider Sport Development team.

Sport Partnerships are a crucial part of the sport development strategy at SOI. We actively engage and collaborate with a range of international sport partners including international sport federations, multi-sport organisations, coaching agencies and others. Our partnerships vary in their level of formality but all focus on activities which are primarily aiming to increase the quality and reach of local programming (through national level partners) and improving the quality of international competition experiences.

Sport Operations underpins all of this work and includes vital functions including grant management; monitoring, evaluation and learning; data management, strategic and operational planning and fundraising, as well as maintaining oversight of the Sport Development team's work and alignment cross-departmentally and cross-regionally.

How Sport Development and ECD Programming Connect

- Special Olympics sport currently offers training and competition opportunities from age
- The sport development team works in partnership with the global sport teams across all seven Regions to support the delivery of traditional and Unified Sport programs.
- The Sport Development team at HQ is typically not a service provider to local Programs, but rather works through the regional and Program structure to provide access to the knowledge and resources to deliver local programming.
- The sport development team is currently developing youth sport coaching resources, which may be useful for YA/JA coaches, and for coaches who will transition with their athletes from YA/JA Programs into more structured sport.
- We are also developing a youth sport coaching position statement which will inform our future youth sport coach development pathway.
- ECD offers the opportunity for children with ID to develop competence in fundamental movement and sports skills, which can provide a strong foundation for lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity.
- ECD also provides an environment where children can build both confidence in their capability as well as a love for sport and being active, both of which can also support an active lifestyle into adulthood.

Collaboration in Action

- SOI Sport and Competition (Sport Development Team) partners directly with health in several areas – primarily Fitness, MATP and Research and Evaluation.
- Sport Development also provides input into Junior Athletes and Fitness resource development
- We suggest working closely with your local youth sport structures (this could be local sports clubs or community sports organizations, to understand what is available in your locality. Offering sports in SO which are complemented by sports Programs outside of SO can make it much easier to find educated coaches, sports officials and volunteers who have a passion for sport.
- Athlete leaders help build local capacity. Programs are often short of coaches, volunteers, speakers, trainers, all these are roles that athletes can take on given training and support.

Advice for Programs

- When implementing Young Athletes and Junior Athletes Programs, ensure you are also planning for the next stage, when these athletes are ready to progress into more structured sport. Remember that even when athletes are ready to move on from Junior Athletes into sport, they have much left to learn and many skills yet to develop.
- Ensure that you can offer a child-friendly sports experience, supported by appropriately educated sport-specific coaches, who understand youth sport.
- SO Sport will shortly be launching new Youth Coaching Resources, which may offer some useful guidance on how to structure youth sport training and competition.
- Although our various Programs and functions within Special Olympics may have different teams delivering them, for athletes, their coaches, their families – it should all feel like a seamless experience. This can only be achieved if we all work together, recognizing that a positive sport experience which meets the developmental and motivational needs of each athlete is the ultimate goal.

Key Takeaway

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with our department is ... our role is to provide resources and guidance and facilitate local partnerships. Each local Program understands their own needs and contextual realities. While we understand that there is rarely a simple 'drag and drop' solution, we encourage Programs to reflect on their most urgent needs and priorities and engage with the support available to help them meet their needs. If the solutions you need are not available – the more you can communicate that to us, the more likely it is that we can address that need in the future. Work closely with your Program and regional sports teams to communicate those needs. We also suggest working collaboratively with your SO Program sports team to create sustainable age-appropriate youth sport-specific training and competition opportunities as these frequent opportunities to be physically and socially active will have long-term benefits for our youngest athletes.

Meet Our Contributors

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Resources

- [Sport Resource Pages](#) (by sport – coaching guide, sports rules, warm-up and cool-down)
- [Special Olympics online learning portal](#)
- [Coaching course information page](#)
- [Coach Recruitment and Retention Guide](#)
- Coach Webinar Series [Dashboard](#)



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT LEARNING SERIES

SPORT

BUILD THE NEXT STEP

Early movement and sport skills give children confidence and a foundation for lifelong participation.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

1

Plan the transition from **Young Athletes** and **Junior Athletes** into age-appropriate sport.

2

Connect Early Childhood Development teams with Program and Regional sport leaders, local clubs and trained youth coaches.

3

Create a seamless experience for children, families, coaches and volunteers.

FEATURED CONNECTION

Junior Athletes bridges inclusive early play and more structured sport.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Fitness

Overview of Fitness & Healthy Lifestyles

Special Olympics Fitness supports individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) to maximize their health and well-being by developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to lead a healthy and active life. Through fitness programming, people with and without ID participate in short term or multi-week fitness programming that focuses on physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. We focus on training key leaders—including fitness professionals, educators, and sport coaches—to integrate fitness into sport and community settings. We also train Special Olympics athletes to engage in fitness as Fitness Captains or as physical activity advocates through the Health Change Champion Health Messenger Specialized Role. Lastly, through the Special Olympics Fitness app, we provide fitness challenges and tools for people with and without ID to engage in physical activity, nutrition, hydration, and monitor their sleep and Healthy Minds activities. We provide technical support to Special Olympics Regions and their Programs through trainings and consultations.

How Fitness & Healthy Lifestyles and ECD Programming Connect

- We have opportunities to introduce health and fitness concepts to young children (ex: High 5 has been used to support warm-ups and cooldowns) and their families to help them build lifelong healthy habits, movement skills, and positive experiences with physical activity.
- We encourage family engagement in fitness through Unified programming and embed takeaways and activities for caregivers in many of our resources, such as the [Fitness through Sport Playbook](#) and [High 5 for Fitness](#).
- The Fitness through Sport Playbook can be utilized by coaches and emphasizes “homeplay activities,” which are intended to be shared with athletes and their families and build upon each lesson’s key goals.
- High 5 for Fitness includes a [caregiver’s guide](#) which provides strategies for using High 5 at home, and each age group’s classroom lesson plans include health education components to support healthy nutrition and hydration habits both at school and at home.
- ECD equips children with fundamental motor skills necessary for meaningful engagement in fitness programming throughout their lifespan.
- By developing these foundations early, children are better prepared to engage in fitness and sport programs as they grow, supporting their health, well-being, and performance over time.
- Lastly, ECD is important because it lays the foundation for everything that follows. Experiences, relationships, and opportunities children have during these early years shape their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development for years to come. By equipping parents and families with the right knowledge and tools, we can help them create positive environments that support healthy development and long-term success.

Collaboration in Action

- We can learn more about how ECD approaches parent education, knowing children at this age learn a lot from modeling. Understanding what behaviors and attitudes parents have regarding health and fitness for their children can help us to think through better strategic approaches to our work.
- We could consider building out a more targeted structure for how to introduce and embed fitness into ECD.
- We also can focus on maintaining consistent language about fitness and fitness resources when possible so that athletes leave YA programming prepared to learn deeper fitness concepts starting at age 8 onward.

- Knowing that children older than age 8 who participate in fitness programming may have younger siblings who do not know about YA programming, we could look for ways to promote and educate those in fitness about YA.
- Programs could engage Fitness Captains in Young Athletes programming by leading warm-ups and cool-downs, sharing Health Tips, and introducing young children to healthy habits and physical activity. This creates meaningful athlete leadership opportunities while helping embed fitness into ECD programming. Some Programs are already doing this.
- Programs can also collaborate by integrating fitness concepts and activities into Young Athletes and Junior Athletes coach education. Similar to how Fitness through Sport principles are embedded within Level 1 and Level 2 coach training and sport-specific coaching resources, ECD coach training could include guidance on movement skills, physical activity, warm-ups and cool-downs, and age-appropriate ways to promote healthy habits.
- Partnerships seem to be critical to growing YA programming (ex: reaching young children and their families, offering access to space)- would suggest Programs should continue to prioritize this, and could consider working with partners to host both YA and Fitness programming.
- **Advice for Programs**
- Introduce High 5 to support fitness integration- particularly by helping young ones begin to think about drinking water at practice, making sure to warm-up and cool-down properly, and eating healthy from a variety of food groups.
- Programs could engage Fitness Captains in Young Athletes programming by leading warm-ups and cool-downs, sharing Health Tips, and introducing young children to healthy habits and physical activity. This creates meaningful athlete leadership opportunities while helping embed fitness into ECD programming.
- Programs can also collaborate by integrating fitness concepts and activities into Young Athletes and Junior Athletes coach education. Similar to how Fitness through Sport principles are embedded within Level 1 and Level 2 coach training and sport-specific coaching resources, ECD coach training could include guidance on movement skills, physical activity, warm-ups and cool-downs, and age-appropriate ways to promote healthy habits.
- Health and fitness should not be introduced later in life; they should be a part of a child's life from the very beginning. The earlier families establish healthy habits, the greater the opportunity to positively influence the lifelong health and well-being of athletes, parents and siblings.
- Aligning TA structures-including communicating dates for webinars- across departments will make seeking assistance easier for Programs.
- Stronger communication and shared planning can help ensure that health, fitness, and ECD initiatives are aligned, resulting in more coordinated technical assistance and a more seamless experience for participants and families. By working together, collaborators can identify opportunities to share resources, reinforce common messages, reduce duplication of effort, and create clearer pathways for continued engagement across programs. This can ultimately strengthen program quality, participant outcomes, and long-term impact. It can also help create smoother transitions for children and families as they move from ECD programming into other health, fitness, and sport opportunities within Special Olympics.

Key Takeaway

Our goal is to truly build a culture of fitness—there are opportunities to embed fitness in every single setting—from schools, to communities, to sports, and through messaging and communications.

- Fitness programming can be cost effective and integrated into existing initiatives/events with minimal equipment.
- Introducing fitness early matters. Embedding movement skills, physical activity, and healthy habits into ECD programming can help children build a strong foundation for lifelong health and create a pathway into future sport and fitness opportunities.

- By working together, we can help families build healthy habits from the very beginning stages of a child's life. We can help equip parents with the tools and



Meet Our Contributor

Melissa Otterbein, Director, Fitness & Healthy Lifestyles

Melissa Otterbein is the Director, Fitness and Healthy Lifestyles at SOI. A Certified Health Educator Specialist, she oversees the strategic direction of Special Olympics fitness, focusing on quality growth of fitness through the areas of on-going programming, education, and technology. These areas provide opportunities to support individuals with intellectual disabilities to maximize their health and well-being by developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to lead a healthy and active life. She has a Master of Public Health in Physical Activity and is the proud sister of a Special Olympics athlete. She's been involved as a Unified Partner and former coach alongside her Dad.



Resources

- [Fitness Resources Webpage](#): Houses the most relevant fitness resources for Programs to use. Make sure to click through each tile to learn more about resources, including those that can be used to promote fitness in sport settings/coach education, our Special Olympics Fitness App, youth fitness resources, and Fit 5 resources.
- [Fitness Implementation Guide](#): Provides guidance on how to implement, track, and evaluate fitness, and provides a comprehensive list of all available fitness resources along with links.
- [Fitness Strategy 2022-2026](#): Identifies fitness core priorities, activities, and goals. While the strategy will be updated with new metrics for 2027-2031, much of this framework will still be relevant.



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT LEARNING SERIES

FITNESS

START HEALTHY HABITS EARLY

Movement, hydration and nutrition can become part of a child's routine from the very beginning.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

1

Use warm-ups, cool-downs and simple health messages in Early Childhood Development activities.

2

Engage families and Fitness Captains in active play and healthy habit-building.

3

Align fitness and Early Childhood Development training so children are ready for future sport and wellness opportunities.

FEATURED RESOURCE

High 5 for Fitness offers age-appropriate activities and caregiver support.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Athlete Leadership and Organizational Development

Overview of Athlete Leadership and Organizational Development

- **The Organizational Development** teams support country Programs to develop and grow through technical assistance, relationship building, and contextual knowledge. OD focuses on the people of our movement- cultivating strong leadership while also building sustainable structures and strategies that power our mission forward and help Special Olympics to achieve operational excellence through effective practices and processes globally.
- **The Leadership Development** area work drives personal and cultural change. First, we build leadership skills in athletes, so they have the opportunity to become leaders within the movement, their communities, and ultimately, teachers of inclusion. Then, through the Unified Leadership approach, athletes educate people without disabilities to improve their behaviors and practices creating more inclusive environments for all.

How Fitness & Healthy Lifestyles and ECD Programming Connect

Athlete leaders are fantastic role models, not only to young children but to their families and caregivers as well.

Unified Leadership: through our 2-part education series we can train people without IDD on building inclusive mindsets and behaviors towards people with IDD. We can offer this training to partner organizations, coaches, etc. Unified Leadership grows understanding of what IDD is, and equips participants with simple, practical actions they can take to support inclusion.

The sessions invite individuals to reflect and learn so that they can act in ways that are more inclusive of those with IDD. By shifting mindsets and reducing stigma, the sessions help transform how people without IDD understand and engage with those who have IDD.

ECD and leadership development are deeply connected, especially for people with IDD. Leadership does not begin with public speaking or serving in leadership positions; it begins with the development of the cognitive, social, emotional, and self-determination skills that emerge in the early stages of life. For people with IDD, this connection is particularly important because early experiences can create the foundation for future leadership or reinforce dependence and limited expectations.

Collaboration in Action

- Athlete leaders can contribute meaningfully to Young Athletes programming in several ways, here are some examples:
 - YA coaches.
 - Volunteers at YA events.
- Facilitate session at Family Health Forums for caregivers of YA. Not only can they speak from their lived experience as people with IDD but it showcases the fact that they can lead, modeling the way for others.
- We can also provide Unified Leadership education to stakeholders without IDD so they build inclusive mindsets and behaviors towards people with IDD. This education can take place internally, with SO Program staff or externally with partner organizations, coaches, volunteers, etc.
- Athlete leaders help build local capacity. Programs are often scares of coaches, volunteers, speakers, trainers, all these are roles that athletes can take on given training and support.

Advice for Programs

- If you have athlete leaders in your Program, ask them if they are interested in working with young children. It's very important for athletes taking on leadership positions to have a real interest and passion for it. If you are able to identify someone, invite them to YA sessions, train them, and create a leadership pathway for them so they can learn leadership skills and practical skills that will allow them to support your YA programming efforts.
- If you don't have Athlete Leadership programming, get started! [Here is a helpful resource](#) on how to start AL in your local Program.
- Athlete Leadership does not stand alone in the Special Olympics universe. Athletes must be meaningfully involved in everything we do: sport, health, youth. Collaboration between areas of work is essential to guarantee the support and leadership athletes provide is not only successful but sustainable. From operational planning and looking for opportunities for collaboration to seeing those through making switches along the way.

Key Takeaway

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with our department is we can help them build local capacity through Athlete Leadership programming, ensuring that programming is athlete led. Through Unified Leadership, help build inclusive mindsets and behaviors towards athletes so they have the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents in Special Olympics and the community.

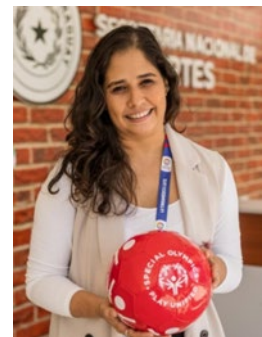
Meet Our Contributor

Cristina Rodriguez, Director Global Leader Development, Leadership & Organizational Development

I lead global leadership development strategy across seven regions for Athlete Leadership and Unified Leadership, guiding education, training, and cross-department collaboration that

advances inclusive leadership for people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities. Champion regional and cross-functional integration of inclusive leadership

practices and lead external engagement with corporate partners to promote inclusive mindsets and behaviors in the workplace, expanding meaningful opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and fostering inclusive communities for all.



Resources

- **Leadership & Skills Curriculum for athlete leaders:** The [Leadership & Skills curriculum for Athlete Leadership](#) is designed to provide athletes with leadership training as well as personal development that they can apply to leadership roles in their Program, community and workplace. See all available resources here: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/leadership-development/leadership-and-skills-training>.
- **Unified Leadership Overview:** <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/inclusive-leadership/unified-leadership>

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT LEARNING SERIES

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GROW LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY TOGETHER

Athletes and strong Program systems can help Early Childhood Development efforts become more inclusive, sustainable and locally led.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- 1 Invite trained athlete leaders to serve as speakers, mentors, facilitators and advisors.
- 2 Build Early Childhood Development into Program planning, leadership development and technical assistance.
- 3 Use local knowledge and shared learning to strengthen people, structures and delivery.

FEATURED CONNECTION

Athlete leaders can help welcome families and model lifelong belonging.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Family Engagement

Overview of Family Engagement

Family Engagement welcomes, connects, educates, and empowers parents, caregivers, and siblings as valued members of the Special Olympics movement. The team develops resources, peer connections, and leadership opportunities that strengthen families' ability to support their children, contribute to programming, and remain engaged throughout their Special Olympics journey.

How Family Engagement and ECD Programming Connect

My work connects to Early Childhood Development through the family and caregiver side of a child's development. While I don't lead the ECD work, family engagement is an important part of creating strong supports around young children. I help connect families to information, resources, peer support, and opportunities within Special Olympics, while building their confidence and capacity to support their children. This creates natural overlap with ECD by ensuring families are engaged, informed, and connected from an early stage.

From my perspective, ECD is important because the early years are a critical time for children and their families. It is an opportunity to build strong foundations for development, inclusion, and belonging, while also helping families feel supported and equipped from the beginning. I see family engagement as an important part of that—when families are connected, informed, and empowered, they are better positioned to support their child and stay engaged over time.

Collaboration in Action

There are several opportunities to collaborate, particularly around creating a more connected experience for families. Family Engagement can help ensure that ECD and Health resources, information, and opportunities reach families in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them. We can also partner on family education, communications, events, and peer support, while leveraging existing family networks and leaders to help connect families to ECD and Health initiatives. This allows us to complement the work already happening rather than duplicate it.

Programs could replicate simple, connected approaches that bring Family Engagement and ECD teams together around the needs of young children and their families. For example, family leaders can host a family health forum, create a family-friendly resource for newly diagnosed families, or connect families to local health and developmental supports. Programs could also involve family leaders in planning and delivering ECD activities, helping ensure that resources and opportunities are relevant to what families need. These types of collaboration can start small and build over time.

Advice for Programs

Start with the family engagement opportunities you already have. Look for simple ways to incorporate ECD topics into existing activities rather than creating something new. Most importantly, involve families early and ask what information, resources, or support would be most helpful to them.

Stronger communication and shared planning can help teams coordinate their efforts and make it easier for families to access the right information and support. When Family Engagement, ECD, and Programs are aligned, we can provide more consistent technical assistance, create a more connected experience for families.

Key Takeaway

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with our department is that we can help make the connection between families and other areas of work. You don't have to create a separate family engagement effort—there are often simple ways to bring families into what you're already doing.

Meet Our Contributor

Hannah Helton is the Senior Manager of Family Engagement at Special Olympics International, where she leads global efforts to engage, educate, and empower families as valued members of the Special Olympics movement. She develops and implements family engagement strategies, builds resources and leadership opportunities for parents, siblings, and caregivers, and works across the global movement to ensure family voices help shape programs and initiatives.



Resources

- **Special Olympics Family Resources** — Resources and information designed to support and engage families throughout their Special Olympics journey. [Explore Family Resources](#)



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT LEARNING SERIES

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

WELCOME THE WHOLE FAMILY

Parents, caregivers and siblings are essential partners in a child's development and Special Olympics journey.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- 1 Create peer connections and leadership opportunities for families.
- 2 Include family voices when planning, improving and evaluating Early Childhood Development activities.
- 3 Connect families to resources, other families and continued Special Olympics opportunities.

FEATURED CONNECTION

Family engagement turns a child's first experience into a lasting relationship.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT
ECD@specialolympics.org

Global Youth & Education

Overview of Global Youth & Education

The Global Youth & Education (GYE) department at Special Olympics works to advance inclusion by empowering young people with and without intellectual disabilities to learn, lead, and create change together. GYE supports Special Olympics Programs around the world in expanding inclusion in education, youth leadership, and school-based programming, including Unified Champion Schools and Unified Sports.

The department provides Programs with technical assistance, resources and tools, training, program guidance, partnership support, and opportunities for global learning and collaboration. GYE also works closely with regional and local teams to strengthen pathways for youth engagement and leadership, helping Programs create opportunities for young people to move from participation to meaningful leadership roles.

At the heart of GYE's work is a commitment to ensuring that young people with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities to learn, play, lead, and belong together, from their school years into adulthood.

How Global Youth & Education and ECD Programming Connect

Global Youth & Education (GYE) sees Early Childhood Development as an important starting point in a young person's journey toward lifelong inclusion. The early years are when children begin forming their understanding of friendship, belonging, difference, and how they engage with others. Those experiences can shape how they enter and experience school and their broader community.

As children move into their school years, GYE builds on this foundation through Unified Champion Schools, Unified Sports, youth leadership, and other education-focused programming. By connecting early childhood experiences with opportunities in schools and communities, we can help ensure that children and families experience a supported transition into the next stage of their journey. We want young people with and without intellectual disabilities to grow up learning, playing, and eventually leading alongside one another.

From our perspective, ECD is important because inclusion should not begin when a child reaches a certain age or enters a particular Special Olympics program. Together, we have an opportunity to create a continuum of inclusion that begins in early childhood and continues throughout a young person's education and beyond.

Collaboration in Action

There is a natural opportunity for GYE and ECD to work together to create a stronger continuum of inclusion from early childhood into the school years.

Young Athletes and other ECD efforts can introduce children and families to Special Olympics at an early age. As those children grow and enter school, GYE programming can provide opportunities for them to continue participating, building friendships, developing leadership skills, and remaining connected to the Special Olympics movement.

Programs can strengthen this connection by:

- Creating intentional pathways from Young Athletes and ECD programming into Unified Champion Schools and Unified Sports as children reach school age.
- Ensuring that families understand what opportunities are available and remain connected to the Special Olympics movement as their children enter school.
- Identifying schools or early learning communities already connected through ECD that could become strong partners for school-based inclusion.
- Sharing relationships, resources, and lessons learned so that ECD and education efforts reinforce one another rather than operating separately.
- Planning together around important transition points, particularly when children move from early childhood settings into primary school.
- Engage shared schools, educators, coaches, and community partners across early childhood and school-based programming.
- Invite Young Athletes and their families to school-based Unified activities, where appropriate, to strengthen relationships and familiarity.
- Sharing data and stories that demonstrate the long-term impact of sustained participation from ECD that could help strengthen school programming.

For Programs where one staff member may oversee both areas, collaboration does not have to mean creating more work or another meeting. It can simply mean building these connections into existing planning and asking, "How do we make sure the inclusion this child experiences today continues as they grow?"

Advice for Programs

Our first suggestion is to think about the full journey of the child and family, not only the program they are participating in today. If a child is involved in Young Athletes, what opportunity will be available to them when they enter school? How can we make that transition easier for the child and their family?

Second, connect ECD and education planning early. Even simple communication can make a difference. Share which schools and communities you are working with, where children participating in ECD programs are headed next, and what opportunities already exist through Unified Champion Schools or Unified Sports. This can help identify natural connections without creating entirely new initiatives.

We also recognize that many local Programs have small teams, and in some cases one person may be responsible for ECD, education, sport, health, fundraising, and much more. The goal is not to add another layer of work. It is to make the work you are already doing more connected. A little shared planning on the front end can create a much more seamless experience for children and families and ultimately extend the impact of both ECD and GYE programming.

Key Takeaway

Our biggest opportunity is to create a continuum of inclusion. A child's experience with Special Olympics should not feel like a series of disconnected programs. From their earliest experiences of inclusive play through school, sport, youth leadership, and beyond, we can create pathways that allow young people to continue belonging, participating, and growing.

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with GYE is that your regional GYE colleagues can be an important partner in helping build the bridge between early childhood and what comes next. Bring them into the conversation early. They can help identify connections to existing education and youth programming, explore opportunities for collaboration, and support pathways that allow children engaged through ECD to remain connected to Special Olympics as they enter school and grow.

Meet Our Contributors

The Global Youth & Education team works with Regional and Program education and youth engagement colleagues to expand Unified Champion Schools, Unified Sports, and youth leadership opportunities. Together, they help Programs build a continuum from early inclusive play into school-based inclusion, friendship, sport, and leadership.

Resources

GYE provides Programs with technical assistance, resources and tools, training, program guidance, partnership support, and opportunities for global learning and collaboration, working closely with Regional and local teams.



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERIES

GLOBAL YOUTH + EDUCATION

CREATE A PATHWAY INTO SCHOOLS

Inclusive education and youth leadership help children learn, belong and grow alongside their peers.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

1

Connect Early Childhood Development with school and youth engagement leaders before children transition into classrooms.

2

Use Unified approaches to strengthen inclusion, friendship and leadership.

3

Build continuity from Young Athletes to Junior Athletes and school-based opportunities.

FEATURED CONNECTION

Unified Champion Schools can extend inclusion beyond early childhood.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

International Development

Overview of International Development

International Development builds partnerships and funding pathways with governments, UN agencies, development banks, international NGOs, and other global development actors. The team helps position Special Olympics as an implementation partner that can translate commitments to disability inclusion into practical, measurable results across sport, education, health, youth development, refugee inclusion, and social cohesion.

How International Development and ECD Programming Connect

Through International Development, this work connects directly to early childhood development by positioning Special Olympics' Young Athletes, Child and Family Health, and family engagement efforts as practical, evidence-informed solutions for governments, UN agencies, development banks, and international NGOs focused on inclusive child development. By framing these programs in issue-forward language—early learning, responsive caregiving, family support, health equity, disability inclusion, and systems strengthening—I can help partners see Special Olympics not only as a sports movement, but as a trusted implementation partner that supports children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families from the earliest stages of life.

I can support Special Olympics Programs by helping identify funding opportunities, develop partner-ready concept notes and proposals, connect Programs to global and regional development actors, and strengthen the tools needed to deliver and report strong early childhood development work. This support can include helping Programs package Young Athletes and related family health interventions for ministries of education, health, social protection, and child development; building partnerships that expand access in schools, community centers, and family settings; and ensuring Programs have clear outcomes, budgets, implementation plans, and reporting systems that demonstrate measurable impact for children, families, and communities.

Collaboration in Action

International Development can work with ECD, Health, Education, Government Relations, and Regional teams to turn strong programming into partner-ready opportunities. This may include shaping shared concepts, aligning outcomes and budgets, identifying potential funders, and connecting Programs with development actors whose priorities include early learning, disability inclusion, family support, health equity, and stronger community systems.

Advice for Programs

Bring International Development into the conversation early when you see an opportunity involving a UN agency, development bank, international NGO, foundation, or government donor. Be ready to describe the local need, the children and families you want to reach, the partners already involved, the results you expect, and what will be required to deliver and sustain the work. Programs do not need a fully developed proposal before reaching out; early collaboration can help shape a stronger opportunity.

Key Takeaway

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with International Development is that strong local programming can become part of a much larger development opportunity when it is connected to the priorities, language, and outcomes that global partners are working to advance. Bring us in early so we can help position the work, identify potential partners, and build a clear case for investment.

Meet Our Contributor

Haylie Wrubel

Vice President, International Development & Global Government Relations

Haylie Wrubel serves as Vice President of International Development and Global Government Relations at Special Olympics, where she works to position the movement as a trusted implementation partner for governments, multilateral organizations, development banks, UN agencies, and international NGOs. She has been with Special Olympics International for 15 years and originally began her journey with the organization as a Special Olympics Coach, a role she continues to hold today. In her current position, Haylie leads efforts to expand Program-level impact and reach by strengthening partnerships, identifying funding pathways, and supporting country Programs as they pursue and deliver inclusive development opportunities. Her work focuses on advancing disability-inclusive outcomes through sport, education, health, youth leadership, refugee inclusion, and social cohesion, while ensuring Special Olympics is recognized as a practical partner in helping global actors translate commitments to inclusion into measurable community impact.



Resources

While dedicated resources are not currently available for Programs to use in this area, a full modular package is planned for release at the start of 2027. This package will be designed to help Programs more easily engage global organizations and pursue funding opportunities by providing ready-to-use sample language, talking points, key data, and positioning statements. Programs will be able to pull from these materials when preparing funding proposals, developing concept notes, or speaking with UN agencies, development banks, international NGOs, and other global partners about how Special Olympics' early childhood development work supports inclusive child development, family engagement, health equity, and long-term community impact.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERIES

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CONNECT EARLY DEVELOPMENT TO GLOBAL PRIORITIES

Early Childhood Development advances inclusive child development, health equity, family engagement and community participation.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- 1 Position Early Childhood Development within proposals and partnerships with global development actors.
- 2 Show how early inclusion contributes to measurable outcomes across sectors.
- 3 Engage the International Development team early when shaping partnership or funding opportunities.

FEATURED OPPORTUNITY

Use Early Childhood Development to connect inclusion commitments with practical local implementation.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Global Government Relations

Overview of Global Government Relations

Global Government Relations helps Special Olympics Regions and Programs build strategic relationships with governments and public-sector leaders. The team supports government engagement, the Global Coalition for Inclusion, and national and international advocacy opportunities that can mobilize commitments, resources, policies, and partnerships for the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

How Global Government Relations and ECD Programming Connect

Government Relations connects to Early Childhood Development by helping create the policy, partnership, and funding environments that allow Special Olympics programming to reach more children and families and become sustainable over time. Our team works with Regions and Programs to build relationships with governments and other public-sector stakeholders who can help integrate inclusive programming into national, state, and local education, health, sport, and social development priorities.

The Global Coalition for Inclusion is particularly relevant to this work. Through the Coalition, Special Olympics works with governments to secure commitments that expand inclusive opportunities and strengthen systems serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Early childhood programming provides an important opportunity to demonstrate that the inclusion of people with ID should begin long before an individual becomes a Special Olympics athlete or becomes school aged. Engaging children, families, educators, health professionals, and communities early can create a pathway into Young Athletes, inclusive education, health, sport, and ultimately lifelong participation in the Special Olympics movement.

From a government relations perspective generally, ECD is important because early childhood sits at the intersection of several government priorities, including education, health, disability inclusion, family support, and social development. This creates opportunities for Special Olympics to engage government stakeholders around a shared objective and position our programming as a practical way for governments to advance their local, national, and international commitments to the inclusion of people with ID.

Collaboration in Action

One of the greatest opportunities is to bring ECD programming into government engagement earlier and more intentionally. When Programs meet with government stakeholders responsible for education, health, sport, disability, social development, and youth, ECD can be presented as part of a broader continuum of Special Olympics programming rather than as a standalone initiative. This helps government stakeholders understand that Special Olympics can support individuals and families across all stages of life.

Our team can collaborate with Health and ECD teams by helping Programs identify the government stakeholders who can support these initiatives, incorporate ECD priorities into government engagement strategies, and create opportunities to showcase successful programming during senior-level government visits, roundtables, Coalition convenings, and other advocacy events.

Programs can replicate this approach locally. For example, a Program could bring together its ECD, Health, Education, Sport, and Government Relations leads before approaching government and develop a shared engagement plan. Rather than making separate requests to different government entities, the Program can demonstrate how Young Athletes, early childhood health interventions, inclusive education, and subsequent Special Olympics participation form a connected pathway for children and families. This creates a stronger value proposition for governments and can open conversations about funding, referrals, access to schools or health systems, data sharing, and long-term institutional partnerships.

Advice for Programs

First, bring Government Relations into the conversation early. Do not wait until an ECD initiative is fully developed to think about government engagement. If government stakeholders are identified during the planning process, Programs can better align their work with existing national, state, or local priorities and determine where government can contribute—not only financially, but also through policy support, facilities, schools, health systems, personnel, referrals, communications, or opportunities to scale impact.

Second, use storytelling when engaging with government officials. Use these stories to show government officials how the different components of Special Olympics reinforce one another. When engaging government stakeholders, do not assume they already understand the breadth of Special Olympics' work. Use plain language, like early childhood development programs, rather than Young Athletes, to best connect with officials who are not familiar with Special Olympics programs. Presenting our programming demonstrates that Special Olympics is not simply offering individual services, but rather we help governments build more inclusive communities and systems.

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with our department is that Government Relations can help turn strong programming into government-supported, sustainable impact at scale.

Bring us into the conversation early. The strongest government partnerships begin when we can clearly demonstrate how Special Olympics programming helps governments achieve their own priorities for the inclusion of people with ID and supports their work related to international commitments, such as those made to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Key Takeaway

Government Relations can help Programs move strong ECD programming toward sustainable, government-supported impact. Involve the team early, connect ECD to public priorities in education, health, disability, sport, and family support, and show how early childhood programming creates a pathway to lifelong inclusion.

Meet Our Contributor

Christian Clesi

Senior Director, Global Government Relations

Christian Clesi serves as Senior Director of Global Government Relations at Special Olympics International, where he leads government engagement efforts supporting the Global Coalition for Inclusion and works with Special Olympics Regions and National Programs to strengthen partnerships with governments around the world. Christian also leads the development and implementation of national and international government engagement events, such as EU Day, to position Special Olympics as leading implementation partner with government officials. His work focuses on positioning Special Olympics as a strategic partner to governments, mobilizing public-sector commitments and resources, and creating opportunities for government leaders to engage with Special Olympics athletes and programming. Through this work, Christian helps connect Special Olympics' work with broader government priorities and efforts to advance inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Resources

To learn more about the Global Coalition, its goals, and current members visit our website:

<https://www.specialolympics.org/special-olympics-global-coalition-for-inclusion> The GR department is in the process of developing a Global Coalition toolkit to support programs through the process of securing a Global Coalition commitment from their national government. The toolkit will include initial planning considerations, templates, instructions for approaching governments, and implementation guidelines after a Coalition commitment is secured. This will likely be released in 2027.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERIES

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

BUILD SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS

Early Childhood Development connects education, health, disability inclusion, sport, family support and social development priorities.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- 1** Bring Government Relations into Early Childhood Development planning early.
- 2** Develop one shared engagement plan across Early Childhood Development, Health, Education and Sport.
- 3** Use clear stories and plain language to show the full pathway for children and families.

FEATURED OPPORTUNITY

Government partners can support policy, facilities, referrals, funding and scale.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Global Inclusive Health & Education Advocacy

Overview of Global Inclusive Health & Education Advocacy

My team includes folks with experience living and working in different contexts and health systems and speaking (collectively) Arabic, French, Spanish, and various southern African languages. In close collaboration with Regions, we can help Programs plan for strategic approaches to governments and other stakeholders regarding health topics. Depending on capacity, we can also support Regional adaptation and non-English-language delivery of certain trainings—for example, for Health Messengers and Community Health Workers.

How Global Inclusive Health & Education Advocacy and ECD Programming Connect

In most countries, many people look to governmental health systems to get the services they need to be healthy. Health systems often deliver care related to pregnancy, delivery/birth, and early childhood, from childhood vaccines to developmental monitoring. My work aims to make these systems stronger and more able to provide better services to people with IDD, which would contribute to the development of young children and their families.

Collaboration in Action

As systems thinkers, we may be able to help identify system entry points, opportunities for cross-sector (and cross-department) work, and share resources and approaches from the health systems field that may be relevant for ECD.

We can help identify and prepare Health Messengers and/or mentors to participate in different ECD initiatives and speak to different ECD audiences. (Echoing Cristina's answer to this question)

Rosemary Collaboratory and the Guide for Action process are systems strengthening initiatives that start with engaging a range of stakeholders and completing an assessment of gaps in the system, continue with the creation of an action plan, and aim to culminate in changes in policy and policy implementation that strengthen services in the health system. ECD-related components in these tools and processes are minimal, but can be introduced through stakeholder influence.

Advice for Programs

Make sure you are aware of your local policy and institutional landscape regarding ECD, including stakeholder priorities. This is key to identifying strategic entry points and partners.

The issues that Special Olympics works on are connected to each other. We are unified by one mission and have many shared or very similar objectives. Not talking to each other puts us at risk of duplicating efforts (e.g., creating very similar training materials aligned to similar objectives) or dividing efforts (e.g., speaking to a government actor about only one aspect of our work rather than being able to speak broadly about possible collaborations).

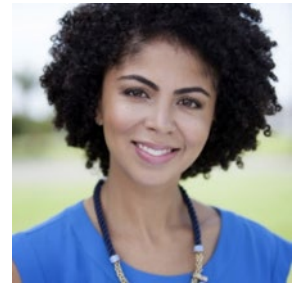
Key Takeaway

Systems strengthening is slower than we would all like, but it's less scary and more intuitive than it maybe sounds. Like you, we are friendly people who want a future where people with IDD are living longer, healthier, more empowered lives, included in their communities, and we may have insights that help you increase your impact.

Meet Our Contributor

Anjela Jenkins, Senior Director Global Inclusive Health and Education Advocacy

Within the Health team, I lead work that aims to make health systems and actors better able to provide people with IDD with easier access to better health services. This involves helping leverage Special Olympics Health programming along with advocacy, strategic partnerships, knowledge transfer, and policy-focused approaches, working closely with colleagues across Health and GRID. My work also includes the training and activation of athletes as Health Messengers.



Resources

[Health Messenger Training](#) and continuing education resources that prepare athletes to advocate for inclusive health. Additional materials are planned to be available online by the end of 2026.

[Global Report on the Health of People with IDD](#) available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish, with information and recommendations that Programs can use when engaging government stakeholders.

[Health System Navigation Curriculum](#) resources for people with IDD and caregivers to better understand and navigate health systems. Global templates for local adaptation are planned for September/October 2026.

INCLUSIVE HEALTH + EDUCATION ADVOCACY

STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEMS AROUND FAMILIES

Children and families interact with health, education and community systems long before and beyond Special Olympics.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

1

Map the policies, institutions and stakeholders shaping local Early Childhood Development services.

2

Identify entry points for cross-sector collaboration and systems change.

3

Include Health Messengers and people with lived experience in Early Childhood Development advocacy.

FEATURED APPROACH

Coordinate messages and resources so Special Olympics speaks with one voice.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Health Communications

Overview of Health Communications

Health Communications develops strategies and content that make Special Olympics Health work visible, understandable, and relevant to diverse audiences. The team supports storytelling, media



engagement, digital communications, partner activations, and campaigns that help Programs reach families, professionals, funders, partners, and the broader public.



How Health Communications and ECD Programming Connect

Health Communications works to amplify the importance of early childhood development (ECD) and raise awareness that ECD is a critical component of both Special Olympics' work and health more broadly. Through collaboration with the Prevention (Pillar 1) area of the Health team, we identify key audiences who can benefit from learning about ECD and develop communications assets and strategies to reach them. These audiences include current and prospective parents and families, partner organizations, and other stakeholders.

ECD is important because establishing a strong foundation for health and well-being early in life not only helps children succeed in future endeavors with Special Olympics, but more importantly supports lifelong health and well-being. This includes the development of social-emotional and gross motor skills. Additionally, because Special Olympics' ECD work centers on inclusion from the very beginning, such as through Young Athletes programs that engage both children with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), ECD has the potential to instill values of inclusion early in life.

Collaboration in Action

We can build on existing structures and collaborative efforts by continuing to brainstorm and implement communications strategies and activations that highlight our ECD work. For example, the ECD team and Health Communications have already taken initial steps to create engaging content that showcases the importance of ECD, such as filming short interview-style videos with parents and children at Young Athletes events.

By continuing to collaborate on engaging content like this, we can expand our reach and grow our audiences. We can also explore opportunities to engage partners in the ECD space to further elevate our work among audiences we have not previously reached. Examples include developing content through partnerships with the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) and Childhood Education International (CEI), both of which are currently in development.

Social media activations tied to ECD-related observance days are a great example of collaboration that can be replicated at the Program level. The ECD team has been an excellent partner in developing tiered recommendations for social media activations around observance days such as the International Day of Play. Programs can adapt these approaches to create their own local content.

Additionally, Programs can invite local media to attend and report on Young Athletes events or other ECD activities in their communities. This can help build awareness and engage new audiences.

Advice for Programs

Video content, even when captured on a phone, can be highly compelling and effective in telling the story of impact. Whether it is a highlight reel of a Young Athletes event or short interviews with parents about why they value their child's participation, authentic video content can go a long way in engaging audiences.

We know that many powerful stories emerge from Special Olympics programming, particularly within ECD, but they are often not shared. Stories help demonstrate impact and can play a significant role in recruitment, fundraising, advocacy, and community engagement.



Storytelling and content collection do not need to be large-scale productions to be effective. The Special Olympics Health Communications team is here to help Programs identify, capture, and amplify meaningful stories. By communicating early and often with Health Communications about promising story opportunities, participant experiences, or exciting program developments, Programs enable us to provide strategic guidance and maximize visibility. Together, we can use storytelling to increase awareness, strengthen engagement, and drive greater impact.



Key Takeaway

One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with Health Communications is that powerful stories are already happening in your ECD programming. Share promising stories and upcoming opportunities early. Simple, authentic content can help recruit families and volunteers, support fundraising and advocacy, engage partners, and show why inclusive early childhood development matters.

Meet Our Contributor

Health Communications Team

The Health Communications team works with colleagues across Health, ECD, Regions, and Programs to identify strong stories, develop audience-focused messaging, and create communications opportunities that increase the reach and visibility of inclusive health and early childhood programming.

Resources

[Special Olympics Master Branding Resources](#)



HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

SHARE THE STORIES THAT MOVE PEOPLE

Clear, authentic stories can increase awareness, participation, partnerships, advocacy and funding.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

1

Capture short videos, photos and family perspectives during Early Childhood Development activities.

2

Plan storytelling early and connect with Communications before key moments.

3

Use observance days, local media and partners to reach new audiences.

FEATURED ACTION

A compelling phone video can show the impact of inclusion from the start.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT

ECD@specialolympics.org

Healthy Families / Family Health Education

Overview of Family Health Education

Family Health Education welcomes and engages families through accessible health information, shared learning, and connections to health and community resources. Through initiatives such as Family Health Forums, the team helps families strengthen their knowledge and confidence, prioritize the health of the entire family, and remain connected to Special Olympics over time.

How Family Health Education and ECD Programming Connect

Family Health Education serves as an entry point for welcoming, engaging, and sustaining families throughout their SO journey. In ECD, engaging parents, caregivers, siblings, and family members is often the first opportunity to build relationships, provide support, and connect families with SO. We support family units in prioritizing their health through education while creating opportunities to connect with other families through shared experiences and with healthcare and community services providers.

ECD is important and valuable because it reaches families when their children are at a prime age for early intervention and prevention. The earlier we engage families, the greater the opportunity to establish healthy habits, strengthen family well-being, and address challenges before they become barriers to long-term health.

Collaboration in Action

Cross-departmental collaboration among teams to align work and funding when possible. Family Health Education creates opportunities to connect families across SO programming. Jointly planning family events across departments. Partnerships with external agencies serving families create opportunities to broaden support and connect families with additional community resources.

Advice for Programs

Regarding Family Health Education, identify the needs of the families served and use those insights to make greater connections to SO Health and other SO programming.

Stronger communication and shared planning will support identifying the needs of Programs and sharing best practices to address challenges, creating a more seamless experience for families as they engage with SO initiatives.

Key Takeaway

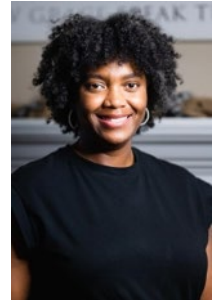
One thing I wish every Program knew about partnering with our department is that supporting families is supporting athletes. When families have the knowledge, confidence, and resources to prioritize their own health, they are better equipped to support the health and success of their athlete.

Meet Our Contributor

Jennifer Pittman, Manager, Healthy Families

Manage Family Health Education initiatives to include Family Health Forums. Support regions in delivering quality family health education, welcome and engage families through health education, and sustain family engagement through ongoing family health education.

Mother of 3, including a SO athlete. Based in Florida, USA. Joined the Special Olympics International team in 2021. Public Health Educator and Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES).



Resources

[Family Health Forums & Family Health Education Resources](#) Access standardized presentations, guides, and supporting materials for **Family Health Forums (FHF), Family Health Forum Series, and Family Health Education programming**. The page also includes guidance for Programs receiving support from **Lions Clubs International Foundation**, along with Overview and Family Impact videos highlighting Program and family experiences

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERIES

FAMILY HEALTH EDUCATION

SUPPORT FAMILIES TO SUPPORT ATHLETES

Accessible health education helps families build confidence, strengthen well-being and stay connected.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- 1 Ask families what health information and support they need.
- 2 Connect Early Childhood Development events with Family Health Forums and community resources.
- 3 Plan across departments so families experience one coordinated pathway.

FEATURED CONNECTION

Supporting the health of the family strengthens the health and success of the athlete.

LEARN MORE AND CONNECT
ECD@specialolympics.org



Stronger
Healthier
More Inclusive
Together

ECD Collaboration Learning Series

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF IT!

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Collaboration Learning Series is now complete. We heard from colleagues across Special Olympics who shared their expertise, resources, and practical ideas for how we can work together to reach children and families earlier, build stronger pathways, and create a more inclusive world.



Real People

We heard from team members across departments.



Real Ideas

Colleagues shared practical examples and inspiration.



Real Resources

We gained tools, trainings, and materials to use in our work.



Real Impact

Together, we can create stronger pathways for children, families, and the entire Special Olympics movement.

A Look Back at Each Week

Over four weeks, we explored how different teams across Special Olympics contribute to Early Childhood Development.

WEEK 1



ECD Is for Everyone

ECD Team

We set the foundation, highlighting why collaboration matters and how ECD connects across the entire movement.

WEEK 2



From Early Skills to Lifelong Participation

Sport, Fitness, Families, and L&OD

We learned how movement, family engagement, and coaching build foundational skills and a strong pathway to lifelong participation.

WEEK 3



Expanding Opportunities Together

Global Youth Engagement, International Development, and Government Relations

We explored how education, development, and government partnerships help scale ECD and create more inclusive opportunities in every community.

WEEK 4



ECD Across Health

Healthy Athletes, Family Engagement, Fitness, Inclusive Health & Education Advocacy, and Health Communications

We highlighted how the Health team supports ECD through prevention, assessment, training, advocacy, and storytelling.



Explore the Full Resource

Dive deeper into the complete responses from each team member, including more detail, examples, and resources than what was featured in the weekly communications.

[VIEW THE FULL DOCUMENT >](#)

(Click the link to access)

INCLUSIVE
PLAY TODAY.
BRIGHTER
TOMORROWS
TOMORROWS.



Thank you
to all who shared, listened,
and collaborated!



Stronger Starts.
Brighter Futures.
Together.

