



## A Program's Guide for Sibling Youth Engagement

This guide outlines for Programs the importance of sibling engagement for siblings, SO athletes, Programs and Special Olympics as a whole. It also provides specific recommendations for promoting sibling engagement in Special Olympics Programs.

### A Need for Sibling Engagement

Siblings of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) may experience challenges such as:

- 'Disability by association' through bullying and social isolation;
- Inability to manage the family stress, often caused by ID;
- Feeling overburdened by caregiving responsibilities; and
- Worrying about their role in future caregiving.

To address these challenges, Special Olympics is developing a sibling engagement initiative supported by the Samuel Family Foundation. Through Special Olympics' **mission of inclusion**, we can offer siblings of people with ID:

1. An accepting community;
2. Supportive peers and role models;
3. Opportunities to strengthen the relationship with their sibling with ID; and
4. Opportunities to share their experiences and grow as leaders and advocates throughout their life.

In turn, siblings can be particularly effective **youth leaders** in the Special Olympics movement because they have:

1. Personal experience with disability and marginalization, providing them with powerful motivation for advocacy;
2. A lifelong relationship with an individual with ID, potentially leading to a lifetime of engagement; and
3. Close proximity to SO Athletes, making them easier to reach than other youth.

Sibling leaders have been and will be **critical** to every phase and layer of the Special Olympics movement. For example, Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver was a sibling. Siblings like Soeren Palumbo have driven advocacy initiatives like Spread the Word Inclusion. Siblings are also involved as Board Members, coaches, volunteers, staff and Unified partners.

### What is SO Sibling Engagement?

SO Sibling engagement occurs when the sibling of a person with ID is actively involved in their brother or sister's life in SO. Together, they can play, learn and work, strengthening their relationship in the process. The siblings are a team who motivate and support each other, rather than working separately on their own personal goals. Within the context of Special Olympics, sibling engagement can occur in almost any area and age group. The current initiative is specific to siblings ages 8 to 25 with the aim that they will continue to engage with their siblings and Special Olympics throughout adulthood.

Examples of Special Olympics opportunities for sibling engagement include:

Type of Involvement	Special Olympics Opportunities
Volunteering	General volunteer, one-time event, Healthy Athletes®, officiating
Participating	Inclusive Young Athletes, Unified Sports®, university engagement, coaching
Health and Fitness	Unified Fitness Club, Fit Families, SOfit
Connecting with Others	Family Support Network
Advocating	Whole school advocacy and inclusive youth leadership
Program Leadership	Staff, National Director, National Family Coordinator, leading Inclusive Youth Activation Committees, leading Athlete Leadership Trainings, etc.

### Promote Sibling Engagement

Listed below are strategies for promoting sibling engagement in your Program.

1. **Take advantage of existing recruitment efforts to encourage sibling participation.** For example, during athlete registration events, encourage siblings to sign-up as Unified partners.
2. **Share sibling-inclusive materials with families.** When distributing newsletters, flyers, social media posts, etc., use clear language that invites siblings to participate in Special Olympics events and activities.
3. **Share sibling stories.** Collect stories and interviews with siblings and share them with your community. By sharing the experiences of siblings in Special Olympics, we can motivate others to become involved, too! Allow siblings to use their own voices when sharing their experiences. Ask them how Special Olympics has influenced their relationships with their siblings and what they would like to say to other siblings who are not yet involved in Special Olympics. Contact your Regional office for specifics about collecting and sharing sibling stories.
4. **Work with the leaders of your Family Support Network and/or Family Forums to be sibling-inclusive.** Hold sibling sessions, start sibling support groups, or ask siblings to speak to the group. Use the Family Support Network as a way for siblings to connect and find their community.
5. **Share this initiative with coaches and Local Program Coordinators who work directly with athletes and families.** Have them identify siblings who show interest in becoming more involved with Special Olympics, and then connect them with the opportunities listed above.

### Helpful Resources

- A Guide for Sibling Youth Engagement
- A Parent's Guide for Sibling Youth Engagement
- [Young Athlete Activity Guide](#) (Young Athletes in Communities and the Home)
- [Unified Fitness Club](#), [Fit Families](#) and [SOfit](#)
- [Story Starter Template](#) and [Medium Blog](#)

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