

Health Messenger Training

Facilitator's Guide



Special Olympics

Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY **Golisano** FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW:

The goal of the Health Messenger training is to:

- Train Special Olympics athletes to serve as a health and wellness leader, educator, advocate and role model within their Special Olympics communities and the community at large
- Empower Special Olympics athletes to advocate for the health needs of people with intellectual disabilities (ID)

The objectives of the training are to:

1. Educate Health Messengers about the health status of people with ID and the Special Olympics Health Program;
2. Review how to build positive health behaviors and be a peer role model;
3. Teach the skills and activities Health Messengers can use to help their local communities or teams become healthier;
4. Empower Health Messengers to advocate for the health of people with ID;
5. Create individual Health Messenger activation plans;
6. Develop a network of Health Messengers who can share ideas, discuss challenges and celebrate successes with each other.

As a result of attending the training, Health Messengers will:

1. Have increased confidence in their ability to act as peer leaders and role models within their Special Olympics communities for health education, wellness and fitness.
2. Understand the steps involved to lead activation and advocacy within their broader communities and with their peers to raise awareness and influence other community members to be more inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities.
3. Have knowledge on how to catalyze and support external organizations to work toward making their services, programming, or policies more inclusive.
4. Have a plan in place for how they will deliver a practicum based on the training – to put their learning into action.

Step 1: Plan Your Training

1. Assemble your Health Messenger training planning team:

Athletes have keen insight into the health problems they face as well as ways these problems can be addressed, so include them in every stage of the planning process. Consider bringing together an “athlete council” to gather input and guide the design of your training. It is also good idea to learn as much as you can by talking to coaches, caregivers, Clinical Directors, and others. Each of these groups can provide you with valuable insight that will aid in training planning.

2. Determine the health needs of your Special Olympics athletes:

Think about the health issues and barriers to health facing people with intellectual disabilities in your Program, country, state, or community. What health knowledge and behaviors do you want to address?

3. Determine the role(s) of your Health Messengers:

Where can Health Messengers assist in changing the landscape for the health of people with intellectual disabilities? Do you need peer educators? Health advocates? Athletes who can provide presentations on the health status of people with intellectual disabilities and meet with partners? Keep in mind that every athlete is different and has different leadership skills.

4. Select your Health Messengers:

There are a few different options for selecting your Health Messengers. You might have existing athlete leaders who would be natural fits for the program. Alternatively, you might ask coaches, teachers or volunteers to nominate athletes who they consider leaders and would be strong leading in health and fitness. You could also invite interested athletes to complete a short application.

5. Design your training agenda:

Each training facilitator is allowed the flexibility to design an agenda that is best suited to meet Special Olympics Program Health Messenger needs, athlete communication styles, available training facilities, and allotted time that the Health Messengers and mentors can dedicate to participating.

The training agenda should include a combination of:

- Classroom style lecture (10%)
- Group discussion (25%)
- Hands on skills development (40%)
- Individual work time (25%)

You should also provide your athletes with ample breaks, refreshments, and opportunities for fun.

The type of training you provide will depend on the role you have chosen for the Health Messengers and the type of health messages they will provide to their peers. Be sure to give your Health Messengers the health information they need, tips on how to communicate that information, and an interactive portion where they can practice what they learned and become comfortable with their role. Consider the health knowledge and literacy levels of your advocates- you might want to work with health partners or others with expertise in developing training materials that are appropriate for your advocates. If you bring in an outside presenter or speaker, it is important, in advance, you educate them on how to present to people with ID, ensure the session is interactive and agree upon the material that will be delivered.

It is important, however, to allot enough time to fully meet the objectives of the Health Messenger training. You will need to determine when is the best time to conduct your training. For some that could mean a 1 day, 8-hour training, for some it could be a 10-hour training divided over 2 days, and for some it could mean 12 one-hour sessions given once a week for 12 weeks. You will also need to determine if it is better for you to host your Health Messenger training as part of a larger Athlete Leadership University, or Athlete Congress or sporting event, or if it will be better for you to host a stand-alone event.

To help you design your training there is a sample agenda, resources, presentations and activities provided on the Health Messengers Resources page:

https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx.

6. Determine Logistics and Meeting Materials

It is important to secure meeting space that allows for an interactive training experience, and have meeting materials available that fully support participant learning. See Appendix A for more information.

7. Distribute the Health Messenger Practicum Guide:

Each Health Messenger is required to complete a practicum as part of their activation strategy. The practicum is designed to ensure Health Messengers are putting into practice what they learned at the training and helping them think about what leadership skills they have and can use as Health Messengers. Before coming to the training, send the Health Messenger Practicum Guide to each selected athlete attending, so they have time to talk to their mentors and chose a health activity practicum to focus on in order to use the skills they gained at the Health Messenger Training.

During the training, allow time for athletes to work on developing a plan for their practicum. For more information see Health Messenger Practicum Guide on the Health Messengers Resources page: https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx.

Step 2: Implement Your training:

To certify an athlete as a Health Messenger there are components that MUST be included as part of the training:

- Athletes trained complete a practicum within a year of attending the Health Messenger Training
- Time for group discussion to support empowering Health Messengers to advocate for the health of people with intellectual disabilities
- Time for hands on learning of at least 2 health education modules (i.e. nutrition, hygiene, physical activity, hydration)

1. Complete the Health Messenger Practicum:

During the training athletes should work on a plan for putting their health activity practicum into action over the next year.

2. Facilitate group discussions:

The agenda should include several opportunities for peer-to-peer athlete discussions on a variety of health topics, led by an athlete leader.

3. Teach hands-on health education modules:

It is critical to equip Health Messengers with activities and tools they can take back to their communities. The training should provide health education through hands-on activities athletes can utilize as a Health Messengers. Module templates and activities have been developed for you to use, adapt or modify on the Health Messengers Resources page:

https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx. You may wish to create your own activity, as well! If you create a new activity, please share the activity with healthmessenger@specialolympics.org so it can be shared with other trainings and Special Olympics Programs.

4. Recognize Health Messengers:

It is important to recognize your Health Messengers for their hard work at the training.

- Present them with a Health Messengers Certificate (see certificate template on the Health Messengers Resources page: https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx)
- Provide a Health Messenger shirt (see shirt template on the Health Messengers Resources page: https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx)
- Distribute a press release with photos of participants
- Post the story on your website and social media channels
- Submit success stories to Special Olympics International for posting on national media channels at <https://www.specialolympics.org/stories/share>.

5. Gather Participant Feedback:

Meet with your Health Messengers and mentors to discuss the training and lessons learned. You might choose to debrief with the Health Messengers following events, quarterly, or at the end of the grant period. Take their opinions seriously and use the feedback to shape future health education programming or training.

Step 3: Support Your Health Messengers:

After the training, check in with your Health Messengers periodically to monitor their work and provide any necessary support. Consider asking health volunteers, teachers or coaches to work with your Health Messengers and assist them as they serve in their new roles. The Health Messengers should have someone in your Program to go to if they need more materials, are asked a question they can't answer, or need any additional support.

There is a central Facebook group for trained Health Messengers.:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soathleteleadersinhealth/>. Once they have been trained, they (and their mentors) can request to join the group. In order to gain access to the group, they need to be registered as a Health Messenger (see below).

Step 4: Capture Data:

1. Keep track of the number of athletes you train and who becomes Health Messengers:

An online [registration survey](#) has been created to allow Special Olympics can keep a central repository of contact information, preferred method of communication, biography and desired health area of expertise for all trained Health Messengers. Special Olympics Program staff should complete the [registration survey](#) for each of your trained Health Messengers after your trainings. To help you collect this data a paper survey is available on the Health Messengers Resources page: https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx.

2. Distribute the Lifestyle Survey:

Collecting information on health behaviors helps Special Olympics to understand the baseline health levels of Health Messengers. Further, it helps Health Messengers to be accountable for monitoring and evaluating their own health. The data can then be used to understand the impact of health messenger trainings on improving health outcomes.

[The lifestyles survey](#) asks athletes to answer questions about their health behaviors, such as fruit and vegetable intake, water consumption, and physical activity. It also provides a place for athletes to record goals that they have for sport and/or health. This survey can be taken [electronically](#) or on paper (found the Health Messengers Resources page: https://resources.specialolympics.org/Taxonomy/Health/Health_Messengers.aspx.)

3. Keep a Health Messenger activation "diary":

In order to keep track of all the Health Messenger activities in a year and measure the number of athletes reached (e.g. provided with peer education, mentorship, engagement in wellness opportunities, etc.) we have set up an online [activation "diary"](#) that coaches, mentors or Health Messengers can complete after **each** health messenger event or activation. If Health Messengers are giving presentations, they could record the number of athletes in attendance. If they are engaging athletes in conversation outside of a Healthy Athletes screening, they could record the number of athletes with whom they spoke. Make an effort to also capture qualitative data, including inspirational stories and feedback/suggestions from the advocates and those with whom they interact. If you can, make sure to have a camera and digital video recorder available for the activities. This content can be used for a later pitch to media and to share the best stories with your internal network and with the wider Special Olympics Movement.

Questions? Planning to hold a Health Messenger Training?

We would like to support your efforts in putting together your Health Messenger training! If you are planning to hold a Health Messenger training, please send an email to healthmessenger@specialolympics.org.

Appendix A: Recommended training logistics:

Room set up:

- Round tables to allow for group discussion
- Open space for fitness breaks and hands on learning activities

Audio/visual:

- Microphones (2: 1 podium; 1 floor)
- Podium
- Laptop
- Projector

Food/beverage:

- Provide healthy meals and snacks
 - Morning and afternoon, if a day-long session
- Have water available the entire day
 - Bring reusable water bottles for the Athletes to keep, if available.

Other materials:

- Flip charts
- Markers
- Pens
- Name tags
- Folders
 - Training agenda
 - Attendee contact information
 - Health Messenger Overview presentation
 - Vision, goals and healthy habits worksheet
 - Education modules (presentations, activity guides, worksheets)
 - Practicum
 - Practicum planning worksheet
 - Practicum completion worksheet
- Lifestyles survey (if using paper)
- Health Messenger certificates
- Sun screen, chap stick, sun safety bracelets or other health related giveaways

Attendee Attire:

- Attendees should plan to be active and work up a sweat during this event! Comfortable workout attire (t-shirt and shorts/yoga pants/sweat pants), socks and tennis shoes/sneakers should be worn. Attendees should also plan to bring a sweatshirt or jacket in case they get cold.
- Participants should be provided with a Health Messenger t-shirt or uniform, if available, to wear at the training and as they are activating at home.