

A Quick Guide to Coach Recruitment and Retention

Special Olympics coaches are the heartbeat of our movement. Without our coaches, our sport programmes simply cannot exist. In every community around the world, coaches volunteer their time, their expertise, their energy and their passion, to ensure that children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the opportunity to experience the power and the joy of sport.



Coach recruitment in Special Olympics (SO) is not a one-time activity. The reality is that all clubs and local programs must continually recruit coaches as well as ensuring they retain, develop and appreciate existing coaches. This is a challenging, but vital activity which helps ensure every athlete can have the best possible sport experience.

Before we start to look at **WHY** people might volunteer to coach, we will consider **WHO** they might be. We will then explore **WHERE** and **HOW** we might recruit them, as well as considering the importance of retention of these coaches once recruited.

? Why?

A recent report produced by a large voluntary sports organisation, identified some of the main reasons people volunteered in sports roles:

- Someone asked them
- To connect with their community
- To support their children
- To give something back to their sport
- To make new friends and connections
- To be associated with something positive
- To do something with their free time

Who?



Being a Coach means more than wearing the cap or whistle. Coaching is a skill which requires the application of specific knowledge and skills to support the development of athletes.

- Where possible, we recommend recruited coaches who are already qualified sport coaches or physical educators or sport teachers.
- You may need to provide them with additional knowledge to support their understanding of working with athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- As you recruit coaches, you should think about what education they will need. Coaching is a complex activity, which requires knowledge and skills.
- **Coaches need time to develop and become competent.**

Experienced Coaches may require education on how to work with people with intellectual disabilities, and how to prepare them for Special Olympics competition.

New coaches without coaching experience, may also need the opportunity to develop their sport and coaching knowledge and skills.

You may need to explore how partner organizations (such as sport Federations, Local Sports Clubs, Universities or Sport NGOs) can help support this education.

Where?

Identifying a need for coaches is an important step. The most challenging step however, is often finding those coaches -both experienced coaches and new coaches who are just beginning their coaching journey!

Every program, every community and every sport is different. There is no one fool-proof method of recruiting coaches.

Below are some examples of different groups and communities that you can consider approaching!



Local Sports Club

Clubs, Leagues and other community sports organizations in your local area are already committed to providing opportunities for more people to play.

They may be able to help connect you with local coaches (new or experienced) who are just waiting for the perfect opportunity.



Athlete Family Members

Family members such as parents and siblings are often a great source of coaching volunteers.

However, it is important to respect that some family members may not wish to commit to regular volunteering. Those who do get involved should be supported and educated like all coaches.





National Sports Federation

These organizations often have access to a nationwide community of coaches, many of whom are looking for opportunities to get involved in regular coaching.



Students

Upper Secondary or Third level students are at an appropriate age to begin coaching.

Students who are current or former athletes may be looking for an opportunity to develop their sports coaching skills, to give something to their community and to make connections.

University sport clubs in particular can be a great place to start!



Local Volunteer Organisations and agencies

Primary, Secondary and Third level schools are filled with adults who are committed to learning and to developing others.

Many school administrators and educators have already well developed communication and teaching skills and may be looking for an opportunity to use or develop those skills further in the community.



Local Schools

Primary, Secondary and Third level schools are filled with adults who are committed to learning and to developing others.

Many school administrators and educators have already well developed communication and teaching skills and may be looking for an opportunity to use or develop those skills further in the community.



Local Businesses Chambers of Commerce

Businesses will often provide their staff with voluntary hours, which they can choose to spend in community activities.

Furthermore, many businesses are keen to make a contribution to their local community.



Local Day Centres, Vocational Training Workshops or Intellectual Disability services

All of these organisations have access to a workforce of people who are committed in their professional life, to supporting people with IDD to reach their full potential. Some may be interested becoming involved in local Special Olympics Clubs in their spare time.

How?



CLUB OPEN DAYS

Club Open Days can be a great opportunity to invite members of the local area and sport community to visit the club, meet members and learn more about what is involved with coaching. These could also include you club hosting 'taster days' or 'come and try' days where you can attract new athletes, coaches and volunteers.



ATHLETE ADVOCACY

Athlete advocacy is a powerful tool for recruitment of coaches (and other volunteers).

Who better to share with coaches the impact they can have on athletes, the importance of their role and the contribution they can make! Our athletes are our most powerful agents of change.



SHARED EXPERIENCE

Encourage Coaches to share their story.

Many coaches do not realize the impact that coaching in SO can have on them as a person, but also as a coach.

Inviting existing coaches to share how coaching in Special Olympics has made them a better coach for all their athletes sends a powerful message of the value of coaching in SO.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media channels may be a useful tool to reach local coaches.

This may be via a club's own social media channels or it may be possible to work with other sports organizations, community groups and volunteer agencies to invite interested coaches to make contact.



RETIRED ATHLETES

Retired athletes or **athletes who are taking a step back** from regular involvement in sport (including SO Athletes, Unified Partners and other athletes from the community), can make fantastic coaches, with the right training.

You may be able to connect with adult or masters level athletes in your local community through clubs and sports facilities.



LOCAL GROUPS

Many **local sports clubs, community groups and schools** are actively seeking opportunities for their members, students and staff to engage in community activities.

There are many options for outreach with these groups such as: Posters on notice boards, articles in newsletters or websites! Remember, the number one reason people do NOT volunteer, is that no one asked them to!

Tips

Recruiting new coaches to your program is an important step, but it is only the first step. Once identified, your next job is to ensure that you give your new coaches the best possible start!

This helps to ensure a positive experience that will encourage them to stay involved and commit their time and skills to your club!



TOP TIPS FOR ONBOARDING COACHES



- ▶ Introduce them to the community
- ▶ Guide them through their registration requirements.
- ▶ Be specific about what they should DO and do NOT need to do.
- ▶ Be reasonable in your expectations, especially if they are new to coaching.
- ▶ Don't over-load them!
- ▶ Give them support (resources, people).
- ▶ Ask them how you can help? Or what they need?
- ▶ Ensure compliance with local programme safeguarding education, policies and background checks.

Volunteer coaches who feel supported and appreciated are much more likely to stay involved.



PREPARE YOUR COACHES



SUPPORT YOUR COACHES



APPRECIATE YOUR COACHES



PREPARE YOUR COACHES

Coaches come to SO with a range of experiences. They may be already coaching or new to coaching, former athletes or new to sport, some may have experience working with people with ID and some are new to it all.

We must ensure our coaches are well-educated and prepared for their role, by ensuring they have access to:

- Coach education courses and workshops relevant to their sport and role.
- Resources/guidance to support them in their role.
- More experienced coaches or mentors who can guide them and help them to improve.

Developing coaches does not end after basic coach education - this is JUST the beginning.

I



SUPPORT YOUR COACHES

Most SO coaches have many other full time commitments - as a parent, a caregiver, an employee, a student. They **choose** to spend their free time coaching. One of the best ways you can appreciate your coaches is by supporting them.

Here are some easy, low-cost ways you offer support:

- Identify some volunteer **Sport Assistants** who can help with laying out and collecting up sports equipment, washing uniforms, bibs or pinnies after training sessions and competitions.
- Assign tasks such as booking sport venues, transportation, communication with schools, families to **other volunteers**.
- **Recruit and educate assistant coaches** (even if they can't be available for every session!)
- Encourage your coaches and volunteers to think about **succession planning**. Empower them to to identify, support and develop others who are interested in coaching and be prepared to support those people with access to training and education.
- **Ask them!** Many volunteer coaches will gladly share with you how best they would like to be supported.

I



APPRECIATE YOUR COACHES

Our coaches **choose** to spend their time sharing their knowledge and skills to provide a positive sport experience to their athletes. We must ensure they feel their time and efforts are appreciated. This can be as simple as:

- Players and family members saying 'Thank You'.
- A periodic text/SMS message of thanks.
- Sharing a token of appreciation (e.g. certificate or even an item of kit such as a shirt or hat).
- Profile and celebrate coaches on social media or newsletters.
- Inviting coaches as Guests to Special Olympics competitions.

Never underestimate the importance of authentic gratitude in motivating your coaches.