



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

SPECIAL OLYMPICS ASIA PACIFIC



ASIA
PACIFIC

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Throughout huge parts of 2020 and 2021 we watched so many high profile sports events including football matches, tennis tournaments and perhaps the most high profile sports event of all, the Olympic Games in Tokyo, presented to the world in ways we had never seen before.

For once, stadiums were empty. Spectators were not in the stands. Athletes weren't being cheered on, the anticipation and excitement of a win and the feelings of pride, unity and celebration that we all associate with sports events were somehow muted. In so many ways, sports events were bereft of an essential component through which we dearly wrap our hopes, dreams and pride around – the people.

Whilst this has been a relatively new phenomenon across the more common parts of the sports world, empty stands are often the norm for Special Olympics events. On average we organized close to 40,000 competitions across the Asia Pacific region alone before the pandemic, yet few people would be in attendance as spectators.

Despite the lack of broader recognition, despite very little support from the sidelines, Special Olympics athletes have always approached the playing field with passion, commitment and a dedication to win. They have found pride in themselves, unity in each other and celebration in collective achievement. This reality is not just something I have witnessed at our competitions, but in everyday life. Despite being ignored and often excluded, when given the opportunity to find self-confidence and be inspired, our athletes will approach challenges with enthusiasm and stout determination to beat all odds.

As I write this, COVID-19 restrictions are beginning to ease across the region and people are becoming more confident, once again looking forward to connecting in school, in the workplace and of course, the playing field. The world is now recovering. My hope is that as this recovery gathers momentum, people will spare enough time to reflect on their own experiences of empty schools, empty offices and empty stadiums to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities don't simply continue living that experience. I hope that we will take the time to celebrate the achievements of people with intellectual disabilities, lauding courage and unity as they do in every aspect of life.

In 2021, our traditional sports and competition activities remained incredibly restricted but, even so, we adapted with a range of national and international virtual competitions.

Our inclusive health work focused on showcasing our work with community partners and health practitioners through our inaugural Regional Health Expo 2021 and we strengthened our advocacy work by giving our athletes a chance to learn about the UN Sustainable Development Goals and what those goals should mean to them, especially when looking at Quality Education and Decent Work.

2021 also focused on the importance of our early years work and how our Young Athletes programme gives children (2-7 year olds) the chance to play and learn, setting the stage to reach their full potential. This year we ran an awareness campaign #WalkforInclusion, encouraging the public to walk alongside us. Each step taken was symbolic and a celebration of the first steps, milestones and achievements of every child. We were encouraged to see the movement collectively take close to 2.8 million steps and engage close to 8 million people across the region.

For every single one of you who walked alongside our athletes during these difficult times, and lent your voices to spread the word of inclusion, I am grateful.

We now have a mammoth task ahead of us. The restrictions over the past two years have meant that despite best efforts, the number of athletes actively engaged in sporting activities with Special Olympics across the region have fallen by more than 80%. As restrictions are now lifting, we must reconnect, rebuild and restart, and I seek your continued support to enable this work.

As we all walk in to 2022 I hope you will join me in spreading the word of inclusion further and ensuring that when stadiums are once again full with spectators, that this includes Special Olympics events too.

DIPAK NATALI
PRESIDENT & MANAGING DIRECTOR
SPECIAL OLYMPICS ASIA PACIFIC

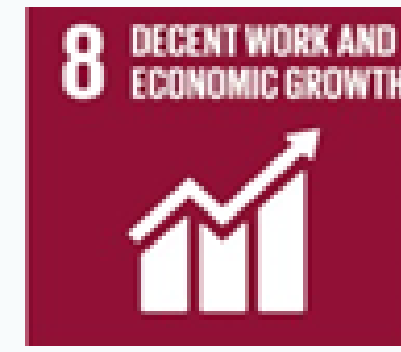
Achieving an inclusive world for all, driven by the power of sport, through which people with intellectual disabilities live an active, healthy and fulfilling life

This will enable people with ID to achieve their full potential and enjoy the same rights as anyone else and respect by wider society,

Then we will create inclusive mindsets which in turn improve organizations, policies and social norms to create more inclusive environments

If we provide high quality sports opportunities, improve health, share the achievements, gifts and leadership skills of people with ID, and create opportunities for people with and without ID to interact through and beyond sports

SPECIAL OLYMPICS AND THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



People with ID improve physical well-being, skills, fitness and health

People with ID, teammates, families, volunteers and others improve social and emotional well-being

People without disabilities behave more inclusively

Organizations are more inclusive through the work of Special Olympics and influence of athletes

SPECIAL OLYMPICS AND PARALYMPIC ARE TWO SEPARATE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS RECOGNIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC).

WHO WE SERVE

Special Olympics welcomes all people with intellectual disabilities (ages 2 and older) of all ability levels.

SPORTING PHILOSOPHY

Equal ability groupings are the foundation for Special Olympics sports, allowing athletes to compete within their own ability levels. Excellence is personal achievement, a reflection of reaching one's maximum potential.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Special Olympics is a community-based grassroots movement for people with intellectual disabilities, combining Sports, Healthcare & Community Inclusion.

Paralympics welcomes athletes mainly with physical disabilities who have to qualify according to sport-specific performance standards.

Athletes go through a stringent qualification process that meets certain sports specific performance standards.

Paralympics is run by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), mainly for athletes with a physical disability.



THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS DIFFERENCE

SPORTS

Sports is the first touchpoint for many of us in the movement - as athletes, volunteers, coaches or even family members. It could have been the impetus for taking that first step out of the door for their first training session - starting their fitness journey to being both physically and mentally well.

For some it is about having a sense of routine and an outlet to let go of unspent energy. From being sitting at benches and being part of a team to making friends from all over.

This journey that our athletes have taken of being consistent, present, and being brave every training and every competition hasn't been easy. 2021 has been a year of unlearning and relearning – as the movement found creative new ways to play – from how we turn up, train, compete, coach, judge or even volunteer in sports.

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Sport is quite a simple thing. It is play, and in play, people of all ages find the chance to engage their most profound emotions - love, fear, excitement, disappointment, anger and joy.

**– Timothy Shriver,
Chairman,
Special Olympics
International**



SPORTS IN FOCUS

VIRTUAL COMPETITIONS CONTINUE ACROSS APAC

Special Olympics Thailand and Special Olympics Bharat ran their inaugural virtual Unified Football and Cricket Competitions respectively, supported by Special Olympics Asia Pacific.

The format required athletes to showcase their skill through a recorded video, performing various skill components involved in the respective sports where they be judged by trained and certified referees who have had experiences with past unified competitions.

Special Olympics Bangladesh, Bharat, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand took part in Virtual Unified Cricket. Men's teams from Bangladesh, Bharat, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Pakistan, Samoa, Serendib and Thailand as well as Women's teams from American Samoa, Bharat, Indonesia, Pakistan, Samoa, Serendib and Thailand took part in the Virtual Unified Football competition.



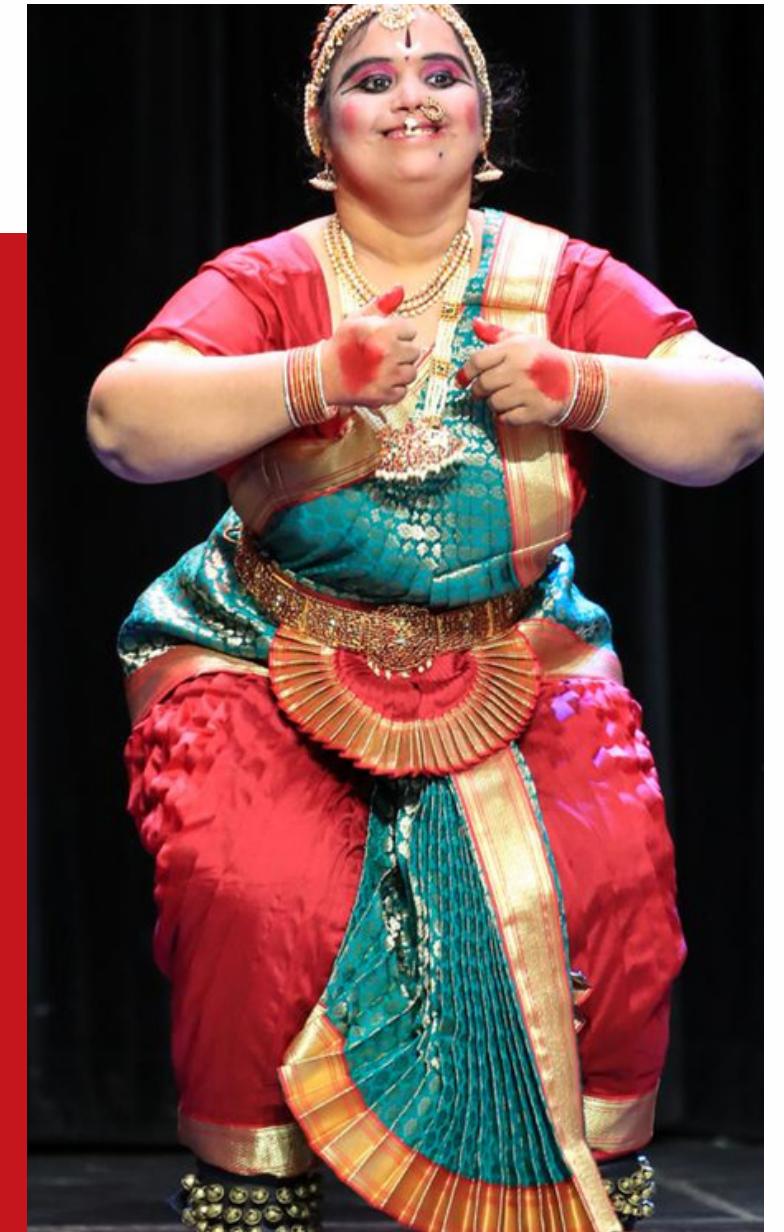
ARCHANA HEADS TO AUSTRIA FOR INAUGURAL DANCE SPORT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Special Olympics Bharat athlete Archana Javittal, the only representative from the Asia Pacific region at the Special Olympics World Championship Dance Sport Graz-2021, took to the floor with 80 athletes on 20 August, securing a fifth position.

"She was extremely happy, a bit nervous and confident all at the same time", said Akshay, her brother. "We could see her face light up with pride as she represented India on this phenomenal stage. Soon after the medal ceremony, she wanted to congratulate the Gold Medalist of the event and she did so. I found the gesture priceless".

Archana had initially faced issues like travel restrictions and getting fully vaccinated but she and family successfully made their way towards Graz, Austria, ensuring she got to be in the spotlight for her slot in the Classical-Solo category. More than 900 spectators witnessed the event in-person and the event was broadcasted live on multiple platforms for online viewers.

DanceSport became an officially recognized Special Olympics Sport in March 2019 during the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi where it premiered as a demonstration sport. It will be featured as a medal event at the Special Olympics Winter World Games 2025.



SPORTS IN FOCUS

TENNIS AUSTRALIA PARTNERS SO AUSTRALIA TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Tennis Australia has partnered with Special Olympics Australia to help improve access to tennis for people with intellectual disabilities and autism over the next four years.

The partnership aims to ensure the more than 850,000 Australians with an intellectual impairment or autism, are welcomed and offered a range of opportunities to experience the many benefits that tennis provides.



The collaboration will focus on School programs and events, Coach development, Club engagement and Tournaments.

“Sport is a vital part of our Australian culture and this partnership between Tennis and Special Olympics is another way to increase access to participation and competitive opportunities for players with intellectual impairments and autism,” said Tennis Australia CEO Craig Tiley.

NETBALL PNG INKS NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH SO PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Netball PNG and Special Olympics PNG signed a Memorandum of Agreement on International Day of Persons with Disabilities which aims to create a supportive environment for young people to learn, share and develop life skills through sport.

Training and competition, public awareness and engagement, resource development and administration were the top priorities highlighted in the memorandum.



President of Netball PNG Ulato Avei said since partnering with Special Olympics PNG, new avenues for netball inclusion have been unlocked.

“This is clearly helping us implement one of our strategic objectives covering inclusiveness and is a reflection of Netball PNG’s commitment to expanding opportunities to all interested parties, including people with disability,” Avei said. “The program delivered by trained coaches helps develop confidence in participants, enhancing their self-worth and perception. In doing so, it promotes positive attitudes towards women, youths, and people with disabilities.”

SPECIAL OLYMPICS SINGAPORE CO-HOSTS INCLUSIVE SPORT CONFERENCE 2021

Hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Sport Singapore, and co-hosted by Singapore Disability Sports Council and Special Olympics Singapore, the inaugural Inclusive Sport Conference 2021 brought together stakeholders from the disability sports ecosystem to share knowledge and promote inclusive practices.

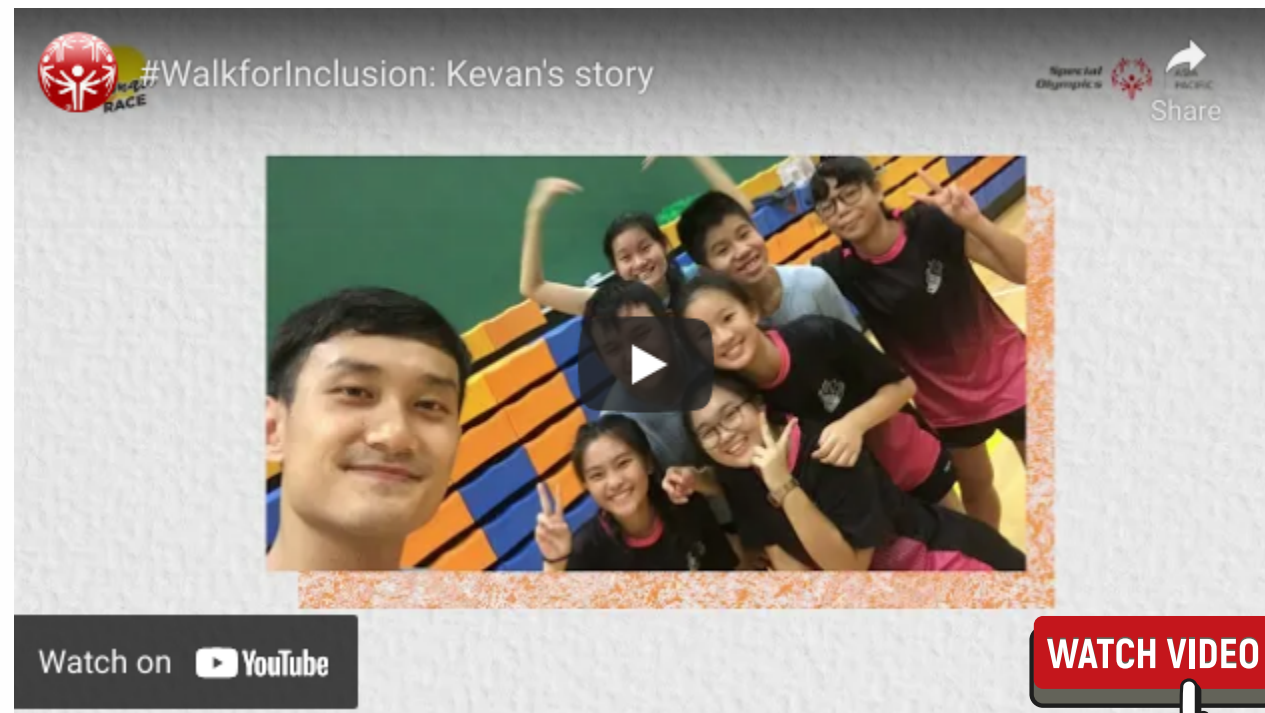
Graced by Singapore President Halimah Yacob, the virtual event attracted more than 900 registered participants including persons with disabilities and their families, athletes, sport practitioners, educators, students, allied professionals, caregivers and volunteers.



SPORTS: STORY OF CHANGE

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE WORLD

KEVAN LEE, COACH, SPECIAL OLYMPICS SINGAPORE



“The first time young Royston called out to me, “Kor Kor!” (big brother), was one of my happiest memories as a volunteer with Special Olympics. It was such a simple moment, a gesture taken for granted by most, but a huge milestone for us both.

Royston was the young athlete whom I had been paired with since I started my volunteering journey in 2017. Every weekend for over a year, we did simple sports activities together – throwing, catching, jumping, running – but he had never said a word to me. Royston, then 10, has autism.

I watched his progress week after week. He grew in strength and confidence, slowly but surely. I also saw how his parents realized through the program that they were not alone in this. There is an ecosystem that supports their child.

Young athletes like Royston are a constant inspiration for my students and me. I am a teacher at Saint Anthony's Canossian Secondary School. Until 2020, I was in charge of the badminton program, as well as a member of the Values-in-Action committee where we plan activities for our students to develop and contribute meaningfully to the community.

A friend introduced me to Special Olympics Singapore in 2017, and that was when I got my students involved as volunteers. We have been volunteering with both the badminton outreach program for athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID) as young as 10, as well as the Young Athletes program, a sport-and-play program for younger children with and without ID to improve their cognitive and motor skills.

I tell my students that volunteering isn't about 'us' helping or teaching 'them'. It's about mutual learning, respect, and making friends. They aren't 'beneficiaries', they're our buddies and athletes we learn and play with. In fact, some of my students have given me feedback that they can barely keep up with some of the athletes, who are really adept at sports.

I remember there was a young athlete who was literally a mini Ronaldo, we couldn't catch up! It's a humbling and eye-opening experience for all of us.

Another student told me that she was inspired by Nadia, the elder sister of a young athlete named Ryan. Nadia may be a young Primary School student herself, but she shows maturity beyond her years. She's always present to support and accompany Ryan for every session, constantly looking out for him and encouraging him. Through two years of volunteering and interacting with Nadia and Ryan, my student learnt how to be a better sibling to her own brother, who has Down Syndrome.

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SPORTS: STORY OF CHANGE

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE WORLD

KEVAN LEE, COACH, SPECIAL OLYMPICS SINGAPORE

The first time I took my students for the badminton outreach program, I was tentative as I had never interacted with people with ID. I was nervous that I would not know how to react to them. But my worries were totally unfounded. The athletes were friendly and welcoming and made me feel like I had known them for decades. They wanted hugs, high-fives, fist bumps, and even teased that I was handsome!

It's been almost five years, and they motivate my students and me all the time with their strength and resilience. They don't ever judge, they always live in the moment, coming together for the pure and simple joy of the sport.

Amin is a badminton athlete in his mid-30s who has been training rigorously with the hope of one day representing Singapore at the Special Olympics World Games. He never fails to turn up for training at least an hour earlier. He has a temper, and can sometimes aggravate his teammates.

One time, he threw a tantrum and stormed off in the middle of training. I had to reprimand him severely, reminding him about the importance of teamwork. Since then, he has been working hard to improve his attitude as well as his badminton skills.



We can all learn from his diligence and perseverance. I am confident he will one day stand proudly on the world stage, bringing honour to us all. be heard.

I was privileged to travel with the Singapore team to Abu Dhabi in 2019 for the Special Olympics World Summer Games. It opened my eyes to how sports can truly empower and create an inclusive world.

I met an athlete from Macau who's been in the movement for over 16 years and was a national hero, having represented his country at four world games. I spoke to a coach from Pakistan who shared how the Special Olympics movement helped athletes beyond the sports arena, to find employment and develop leadership skills. I was also inspired by a coach from Taiwan, who constantly innovates and comes up with new activities every weekend to keep her athletes engaged.

It made me realize that there are so many people all over the world fighting for a more accepting and fair society. Here in Singapore, we too, can and must do our part for people with ID. It is my goal to create more opportunities for students from Special Education schools and mainstream schools to interact. Growing up, I did not have these opportunities. But I hope for our young people, with and without disabilities, to experience life together so that we can create a truly inclusive society with equal opportunities for all.



HEALTH

ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH

Our work at Special Olympics goes beyond sports. Inclusive Health forms a huge area of our work to ensure that all athletes are given a clean bill of health before taking part in trainings and competition, as well as managing any necessary follow-up care.

Our inclusive health programming also includes identifying and reaching out and training clinical directors who are key in providing clinical training to other health professionals. These experts are also our bridge to help the movement gain access to health systems to advocate for people with intellectual disabilities - with the hope of fostering partnerships that enable access to quality health for people with intellectual disabilities.

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We are out to erase health disparities; through our health screenings, and then making sure you get the care you need.

**– Dr Alicia Bazzano, Chief Health Officer,
Special Olympics International**



HEALTH IN FOCUS

SOAP HOLDS INAUGURAL HEALTH EXPO



Special Olympics Asia Pacific held its first ever Regional Healthy Communities Expo from 29 to 30 Oct. The virtual event gathered close to 160 participants from healthcare providers and government agencies, to partners, family members and athletes with intellectual disabilities for a two-day conference to discuss the healthcare status of persons with intellectual disabilities (PWIDs), and the initiatives needed to create greater access to quality healthcare for PWIDs and their communities.

Despite severe need and higher health risks, PWIDs are often denied health services and die on average 16 years sooner than the general population as a result of undiagnosed and untreated conditions. With an estimated 200 million globally who have intellectual disabilities, PWIDs have continued to remain one of the most socially isolated and stigmatized groups, who do not enjoy equal opportunities and access to essential services such as education and healthcare.

Dipak Natali, President & Managing Director, Special Olympics Asia Pacific, shared, “Even before COVID-19 put tremendous pressure on health systems, many people with ID faced difficulty in accessing health services. Some have difficulty wearing masks or find it hard to understand why precautions are needed. Maintaining safe social distances are also tough for those living in congregate settings, such as group homes as well as those who require care from family members, aides, therapists or teachers.”

He added, “We believe that the issues they face can only be made better when we bring together the diverse players – from healthcare professionals, government ministries, businesses, families and PWIDs themselves together in the same forum – to take a forward step in making changes to our health systems to help this marginalised group.”

The Healthy Communities Expo 2021 focused on the importance of partnerships in creating and enabling access to quality healthcare for PWIDs. Through the two-day conference, participants engaged in panel discussions ranging from topics that sought to address the health disparities and inequalities faced by PWIDs, to understanding first-hand the experiences and challenges faced by PWIDs from the accounts of athlete leaders within the Special Olympics movement.

Representatives from Thailand to Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea were also invited to speak on their approach to driving healthy communities within their own countries. The event was attended by leaders from Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Papua New Guinea, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, Fiji, Vietnam and Samoa.

SOAP LAUNCHES SWIPE HEALTH CARDS

To help athletes stay updated on the latest health information during the Covid-19 pandemic, Special Olympics Asia Pacific launched a series of easy to read, educational materials that could be easily accessed through any smartphone. The series will help people with intellectual disabilities better understand Covid-19, and how to take care of themselves during the pandemic. Taking into account the diversity of the region, it has also been translated to several languages like Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Melayu, Divahe, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Mandarin, Tetun, and Urdu.

Topics range from general hygiene, vaccination information, as well as messages on how to stay clean and safe, and how to wash your hands. The resources aimed to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and promote the health, safety, well-being, and engagement of people with intellectual disabilities.

Access the Swipe Health Cards:

- [Covid-19 Signs](#)
- [Covid-19 Tips](#)
- [Getting Vaccinated](#)
- [How To Use A Mask](#)
- [How to Wash Your Hands](#)
- [Keeping Clean and Safe](#)

HEALTH IN FOCUS

TOM GOLISANO GIFTS \$30 MILLION TO EXPAND CRITICAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH ID WORLDWIDE

Tom Golisano, Paychex founder, philanthropist and father of a son with an intellectual disability, gifted \$30 million, his third major donation to Special Olympics. The funds will expand the Special Olympics Healthy Communities program, which provides health services globally for people with intellectual disabilities (ID), a population that has been critically underserved especially during the pandemic.

Through the Healthy Communities program over the past five years, Special Olympics conducted 700,000 athlete health screenings – double the number done in the previous five years – and offered follow-up care in the communities that decreased urgent referral needs by half. Healthy Communities added 150,000 athletes to fitness and health programs, decreasing their blood pressure, improving health outcomes and potentially adding years to their lives.

More than 150,000 health care providers have been trained in 60 countries and 130 health professional schools now have inclusive health curricula to train students on intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics has also partnered with many organizations, including foundations, governments, universities, and philanthropists to contribute to Healthy Communities programming.

“By investing in our Healthy Communities, Mr. Golisano will allow us to expand to hundreds of new domestic and global regions,” said Dr. Alicia Bazzano, Special Olympics Chief Health Officer. “This new gift comes at a critical time for our global community as we have seen during this pandemic just how little this population has been prioritized.”



WHY INCLUSIVE HEALTH MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Lack of Access to Healthcare Is the Greatest Threat

The most important risk for people with ID is not their underlying health conditions, but their lack of access to healthcare. In addition, more than 80% of healthcare providers are not trained to treat people with intellectual disabilities.

Despite severe need and higher health risks, people with intellectual disabilities lack equitable access to health services and die, on average, 16 years earlier than the general population.

People With Intellectual Disabilities Have Underlying Health Conditions

Higher rates of chronic health conditions put people with intellectual disabilities at a higher risk of serious illness and poorer outcomes from COVID-19. For example, people with Down syndrome can have compromised immune systems and smaller airways, which make them more susceptible to respiratory illnesses.

Adults with disabilities are three times more likely to have heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer than adults without disabilities. Those who have existing medical conditions, including breathing problems, are also at increased risk for COVID-19.



PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES ARE AT HIGHER RISK FOR COVID-19

According to a study done in New York, there was a 5x higher transmission of COVID-19 and 5x higher death rate among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New York.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN:

1 Lower access to healthcare



2 4 out of 5 healthcare professionals aren't trained to care for people with intellectual disabilities



3 People with intellectual disabilities have higher risk of contracting respiratory diseases

THE WORLD IS MY CANVAS

IJLAL IQBAL, ATHLETE, SPECIAL OLYMPICS PAKISTAN

“ For years, I lived in an overcast, dark world. Since I was a young child, I’ve had profoundly poor eyesight.

Believe it or not, I only got my severe myopia corrected more than a decade later, as a young adult. My life has been a rainbow of opportunities since!

My name is Ijlal Iqbal. I have Down Syndrome, and this is my story.

In Pakistan where I was born, children with intellectual disabilities are often seen as a curse. It is a challenge to get equal opportunities in all aspects of our lives, and even equal access to basic services like quality healthcare doesn’t come easy.

I remember my parents taking me to an ophthalmologist when I was 5. The doctor refused to treat me, and told my parents in front of everyone in the room, to take me to a place where there was special equipment to treat people like me.

My parents were speechless. The incident left them in shock and deeply humiliated. The experience was so traumatic that it prevented them from taking me to another doctor after that. So for years, I didn’t have the confidence to lead an active life, crippled by my visual impairment.

The turning point came when Special Olympics Pakistan conducted a free health screening for people with intellectual disabilities as part of their Healthy Athletes program in Karachi.



My parents realized at the screening that they were not alone. Almost 98 percent of parents with children like me, who often have issues articulating what we are going through, had not sent their children for health screenings. They had no idea about the health condition of their children.

I was referred the LRBT hospital, a free eye hospital in Karachi, for further care. After going through several tests, I finally received my prescription glasses on 13 April 2017.

HEALTH: STORY OF CHANGE

The moment I wore my glasses, I experienced a miracle. I moved my head in all directions and couldn’t stop blinking. I was not used to seeing the bright and beautiful colors of life.

My parents said that I was pointing at the window in excitement, and then pointing at every single thing in the room. I was amazed, surprised, overwhelmed all at once. My mother shed tears of joy. I finally understood what it meant to truly see.

It was a life-changing moment. Since that day, I have been participating in all the activities at school and at home. These days, I love playing bocce and cricket with my friends. I’m also discovering my talent in art through painting and block printing. I love video games too.

I feel so thankful that I’m finally living my life, after years of living in isolation and darkness. The world is my canvas, and I’m ready to fill it with colors!

”

Visit [Humanrace.asia](https://www.humanrace.asia) for more stories of change

YOUTH AND ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

CREATING A WORLD OF CHANGE

Youth make up over half the total force of our volunteer pool – an indication of their interest and the potential power of young people in creating a change in the world together.

At Special Olympics Asia Pacific, we believe in empowering young people with and without intellectual disabilities to be meaningfully involved in the inclusion agenda. This means that we value their skills and contributions. We provide accessible opportunities and resources for them to lead, ensuring a more accepting and inclusive future for all.

Issues that have been addressed by the youths in our movement have ranged from mental wellness, bullying, isolation and marginalisation, to systemic challenges around access to education and employment.

The inaugural Athlete Leadership Forum for athlete leaders by athlete leaders was held in August 2021 to engage, empower, inspire and activate them, which also saw many of their insights being put to action at the Youth For Inclusion Summit held in October 2021.

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Every one of us has the power to be a catalyst for change, particularly so for the young who will be leaders of the future. It is our hope that with youth at the forefront of the inclusion movement, the next generation will be a unified one.

– Dipak Natali, President and Managing Director, Special Olympics Asia Pacific



ATHLETE LEADERSHIP IN FOCUS

ATHLETE ADVOCATES

The inaugural Athlete Leadership Forum by Special Olympics Asia Pacific is an event for athlete leaders, by athlete leaders. Many of our Special Olympics athlete leaders are not just accomplished champions within the sporting arena, but also proud champions for inclusion.

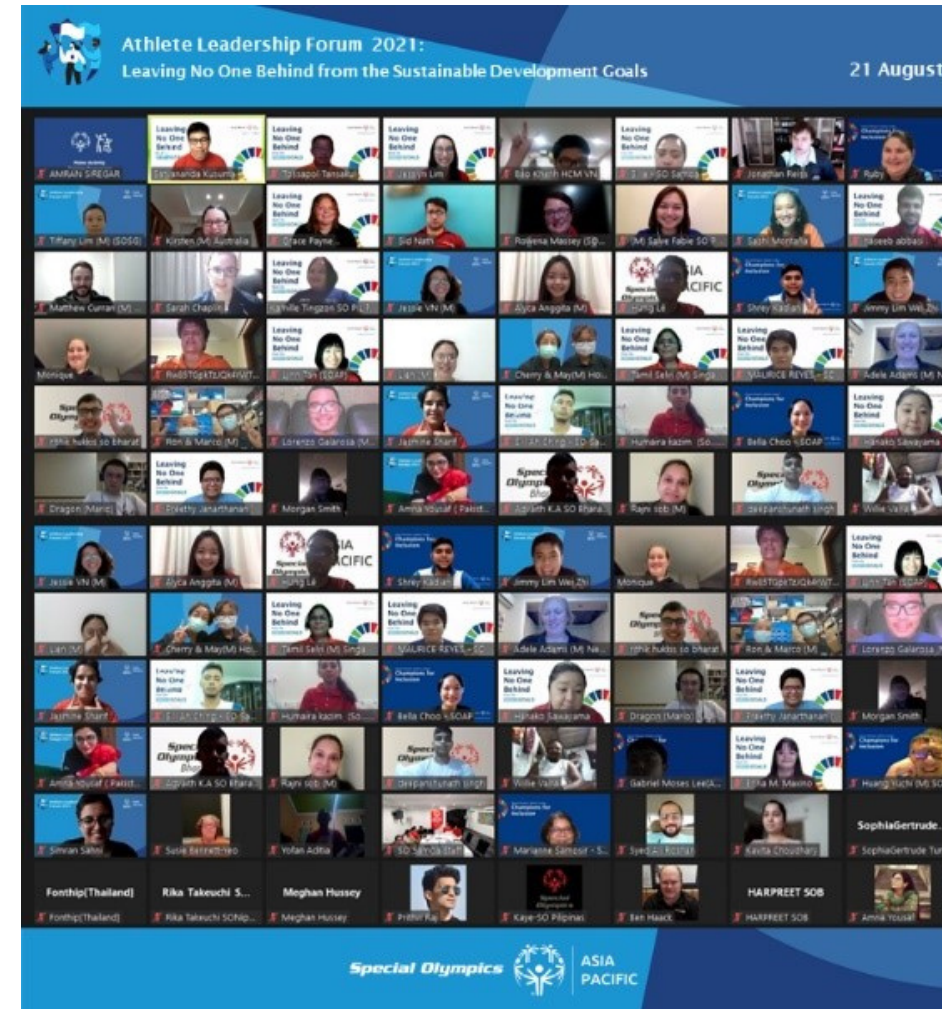
With the virtual forum, we sought to provide these athlete leaders with an opportunity to demonstrate and further develop their capabilities as leading advocates for our movement and for people with intellectual disabilities (ID).

With the theme of 'Leaving No One Behind from the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs), the forum aimed to provide athlete leaders with a platform to come together and discuss the inclusion of people with ID in the SDGs. Specifically, we focused on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The current pandemic situation calls for an increased awareness and attention to wider issues related to education and work that are being discussed with more urgency in the global arena, as well as for a virtual, interactive means of engagement that can bring everyone together despite the COVID-19 challenges and restrictions faced.

The event saw a healthy turn-up rate, with an average of 90 participants across Day 1 and Day 2. These attendance numbers include athlete leaders, mentors and staff from 13 Programs, SOAP and SOI, including Australia, Bharat, Hong Kong, Indonesia, New Zealand, Nippon, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Pilipinas, Samoa, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

During the event, athlete leaders got to know each other through fun icebreakers that were delivered by their peers. Opening speeches by Regional President and Managing Director, Dipak Natali, as well as Board Member (Special Olympics International) and Advisor to the RAIC, Ben Haack, set the scene by helping athlete leaders understand why they were gathered.



Videos introducing SDGs 4 and 8 were screened. Featuring members of our RAIC, this helped athlete leaders better understand and connect with the conversation on SDGs.

Participants then had the opportunity to hear and learn more about SDG 4 and 8 from a variety of speakers, including members of the RAIC and external speakers from partnering organizations.

Overall, it was an interactive and engaging learning experience for everyone. Athlete leaders had a chance to learn and talk more about the SDGs, whilst Program Leaders were able to observe how they can potentially engage more Athlete Leaders at the local level on similar discourse.

UNDERSTANDING THE SDGs



INTRODUCTION TO THE SDGs



INTRODUCTION TO SDG 4
(QUALITY EDUCATION)



INTRODUCTION TO SDG 8
(DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH)

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN FOCUS

YOUTH TAKE THE LEAD

Special Olympics Asia Pacific's Youth for Inclusion Summit returned for its second run as it sought to empower young people with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) across the region to be advocates for inclusion.

The virtual event was attended by over 800 youth with and without ID, alongside experts from Kantar Public Singapore, Asian Development Bank, Bank of America, UNICEF Malaysia, United Nations Development Programme, Plan International Asia Pacific, Teach for India and International School Manila – all with a common purpose of learning and discussing a disability-inclusive future using SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

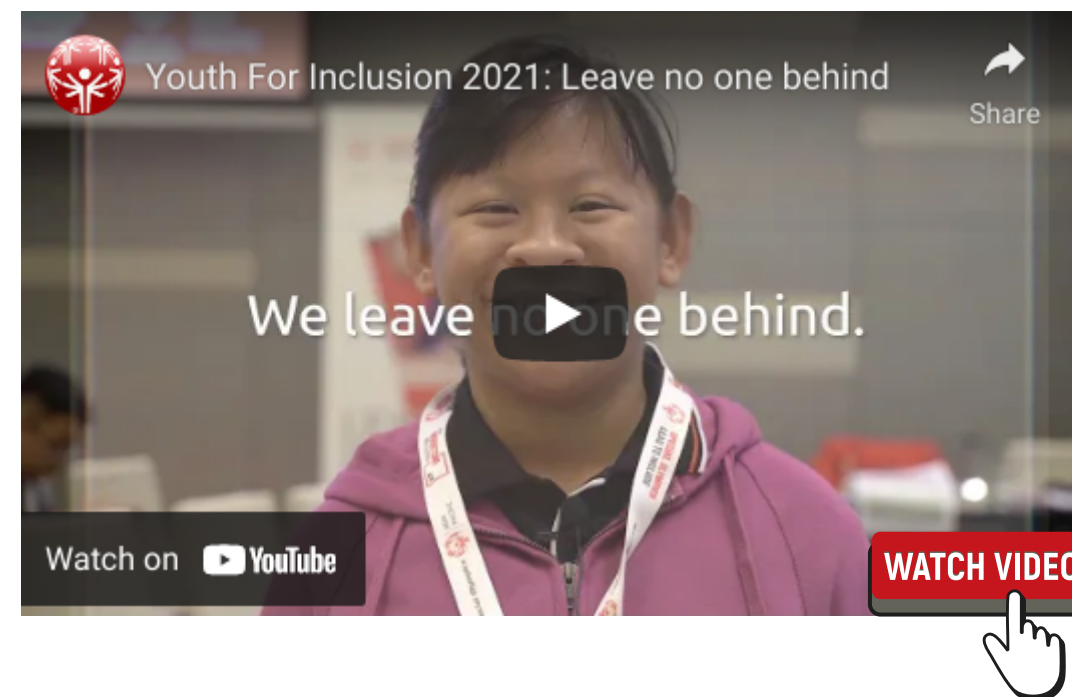
Youth leaders from Youth for Inclusion Summit 2019 and the SOAP Regional Athlete and Youth Input Councils took on lead roles as emcees, panelists, moderators, facilitators and performers. Participants included youth leaders from and new to SOAP, including a delegation from sister region SO MENA and 31 youth from Plan International Papua New Guinea.

The flexible format of the Summit allowed for a range of audiences to customise their personal experience, registering for any sessions that they would like to attend.

The engaging 6 days of learning inspired 95% of participants to feel confident of playing a part to support inclusion in their community, and 98% of participants sure of their pivotal role in the attainment of the global Sustainable Development Goals. Innovation Grants were awarded to 12 teams to implement their ideas to make their communities more inclusive and accessible in their contributions to the SDGs.

A SERIES OF EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

To allow for sustained engagement and learning beyond the event, a series of educational videos was also launched on Facebook and YouTube.



While we were not able to gather in-person to film, our Regional Athlete Input Council members 'time travelled' as we envisioned an Inclusive World in 2030 in the series of 4 videos. The video series aimed to educate the public on what the SDGs mean for people with intellectual disabilities in an easy-to-understand manner, with our youth with intellectual disabilities sharing about what the SDGs, in particular, SDG 4 and SDG 8, mean to them.

A social media campaign was also launched before, during and after the Summit. Over a period of 2 months, we achieved a reach of over 10.8 million, 20.1 million impressions, and a conversion of 1,040 responses to the event on Facebook and Instagram, as well as 2,716 views and 7,294 impressions on LinkedIn.

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When we are empowered with easy-to-understand resources for better decision-making in an inclusive and equal environment, every person with ID will not be left behind.

– Arden Asuncion, Youth Leader,
Special Olympics Pilipinas

YOUTH FOR INCLUSION 2021



SDG 4 (QUALITY EDUCATION)



SDG 8 (DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH)

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP: STORY OF CHANGE

LEADING THE WAY IN AN INCLUSIVE WORLD

GRACE PAYNE, REGIONAL ATHLETE INPUT COUNCIL CO-CHAIR, SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW ZEALAND

Meet Grace Payne, a Special Olympics New Zealand athlete leader with autism who competes in basketball, football, and powerlifting. She has been a passionate advocate for creating inclusive environments that allow people with intellectual disabilities to lead their best lives. Want to be a better ally and create a more inclusive world? Grace shares some answers.

Q: What is a typical day like for you?

A: I wake up, have breakfast, which is usually oats and protein because it tastes great and is good for my health. I follow a diet plan given to me by my coach. I love taking time out to do some activities that make me happy, like painting my nails or making tie-dye shirts, I also love to do makeup from time to time!

Q: What was school like for you?

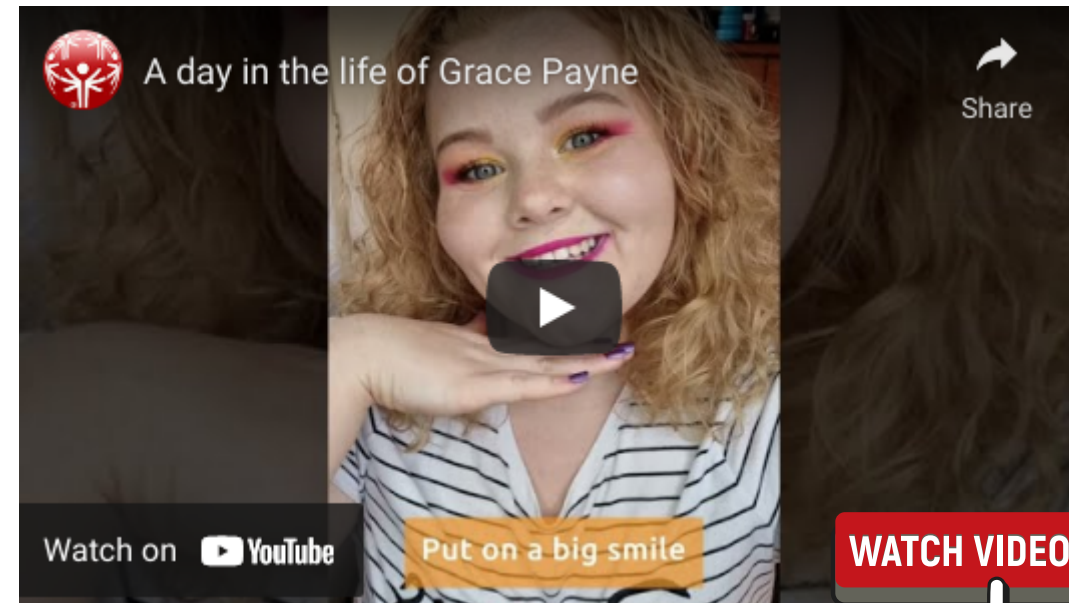
A: I quite liked school. I know a lot of people didn't, but it was different for me. I have attended mainstream schools as well as schools for children with special needs. My favorite subjects were music and physical education. I also loved the Individual Evaluation Program, where each student has individual goals that he or she aims to achieve. Speaking of least favorite subjects, honestly, I don't think I had any!

Q: How are mainstream schools different from schools for students with special needs?

A: One of the primary differences in schools for students with special needs was that they make learning as visual as possible. The timetables, mode of teaching, stories - all of it is visual.

Q: What were some challenges you faced at school?

A: Finger-pointing children, questioning "what's wrong with you?", "Are you pregnant?" it's just hurtful. I wish people would stop doing that. As someone who faced bullying during childhood, I think the best advice I have for people who might be going through something similar in their life is- please talk about it. I didn't, but I should have. Talk to people you trust.



“

Some people may take longer than others to do things, and that's okay.

Q: What did you pursue in higher education and what did you like most about your education?

A: I've studied Early Childhood Education to fulfill my dream of becoming a teacher for children with and without intellectual disabilities. During my education in Early Childhood studies, I grew particularly fond of the subject 'Cultural Partnerships', where the cultures, ethnicities, and religions of students across the world are taught to aspiring teachers. I believe it's an important subject because, in my opinion, everybody needs to learn a little bit about different cultures, to make the world more inclusive.

Q: What are common misconceptions about people with intellectual disabilities?

A: People often tend to believe that those with intellectual disabilities can't be independent and rely on others to live their lives. A lot of us can live independently, like everyone else. We can work, we can go to school, we can carry out tasks. Some people may take longer than others to do things, and that's okay. We all adapt differently.

Q: What do you wish people knew about autism?

A: The first thing is, people are born with autism. They do not develop it. It's a neurological disease. The second thing is - all people with autism are different. One person might not have the same symptoms as another. People think of autism as a spectrum, somewhat linear in nature. I like to see it as more of a wheel with different colors, where each color represents a different facet, like communicative abilities, sensory needs etc. While I might be able to communicate properly, I can have trouble driving. Likewise, someone else might be able to drive with ease, but have difficulty in communication.

Q: How do you build awareness about people with intellectual disabilities?

A: I like social media. I use it as a medium for raising awareness. One thing we all can and must do is help our families and friends understand intellectual disability better. The cycle doesn't stop with one person. You educate your friends; they educate theirs and so on. Another thing I do is visit schools or organizations and talk about intellectual disability. I think it's imperative to educate children, so that they grow up to ask the right questions. People can be curious, but they tend to overlook the need to word their questions properly. Instead of saying "what's wrong with you", the question should be "what's your disability?"

Visit [Humanrace.asia](https://www.humanrace.asia) for more stories of change

ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS

RALLYING THE VOICES OF THE MOVEMENT

People with intellectual disabilities face stigma in their everyday lives. With the world believing and dictating what they can or cannot do, here at Special Olympics, we constantly find ways to show that they are beyond a statistic and the limitations set by society.

Continuing from our successful campaign, #BreakMyNorm in 2020, we launched #WalkforInclusion in 2021 featuring the Young Athletes across the region and their family members to celebrate the various milestones met by the youngest in our movement. The campaign aimed to touch hearts and minds, building positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities across the region.

“

*I have a disability, but it does not define me.
My future is bright. The sky's not the limit,
it's only just the beginning!*

**– Gongpop Kumyang, 10, Young Athlete,
Special Olympics Thailand**



ADVOCACY IN FOCUS

THE YOUNG ATHLETES GLOBAL #WALKFORINCLUSION

The six-month #WalkforInclusion campaign was launched in July 2021, during the Global Week of Inclusion. Through the campaign, we invited our community and members of the public to join us in celebrating the achievements of every child, no matter their ability, and meet the leaders of tomorrow - our Special Olympics Young Athletes.



The awareness campaign targeted parents, educators and the wider public, encouraging them to not only read and share the stories of our young athletes on our microsite, but to also film themselves taking virtual walks and share them on social media to help spread the word, with each step symbolizing a child's key milestone.

The microsite featured stories of resilience and grit of young athletes, their families and coaches across Asia Pacific, alongside a digital counter - where every video uploaded, page load, walk and run in support of #WalkforInclusion was counted and added to the total steps. The public was also encouraged to also play the #WalkforInclusion AR Filter game, share their game results on social media, and donate towards the cause.

Over the course of the campaign, people across the region showed their support by walking for inclusion, including India, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Samoa, Australia, Singapore, and New Zealand. In all, the public walked over 2.8 million virtual steps in support of inclusion, and the campaign achieved a unique reach of 8 million and 21.3 million engagements region-wide.



CAMPAIGN MILESTONES

- 21.3m engagements
- 8m unique reach
- 2.8m virtual steps



COMMUNICATIONS IN FOCUS

REGIONAL MEDIA OUTREACH

In July, BCW came onboard as SOAP's first-ever low bono PR agency partner, supporting us with a consolidated media strategy and outreach plan. Dedicated pitches were made to both regional and local media showcasing the work of Special Olympics in the region.

Media outreach efforts have centred around the Global Week of Inclusion, #WalkforInclusion and Young Athletes, as well as Inclusive Health and Technology.

Media pitches have been successful and varied including radio, print, online, and included in-depth Q&As in both mainstream and trade publications.

Interviews were primarily helmed by Dipak Natali, President & Managing Director of Special Olympics Asia Pacific, alongside local key opinion leaders across the region.



We had Live Radio interviews (also published on social media channels) in Singapore's top English (FM98.7) and Chinese (FM95.8) stations. A significant piece of coverage was a feature on ABS-CBN (Philippines), which published an in-depth piece on the health and social issues faced by people with intellectual disabilities.

There was also extensive coverage on regional marketing and biz-tech publications like Marketech Asia on the #WalkforInclusion campaign, and a Q&A in Biztech Asia which focused on how SOAP has leveraged on technology during the pandemic.

For Inclusive Health, there was a 4-page print feature and online piece on InfoMed, a trade publication which reaches out to medical professionals and policy makers. The final piece of coverage for the year was a radio interview on FM93.8, a Singapore news channel targeted at PMEBS.

Special Olympics Asia Pacific's media coverage reached close to **21 million** people across the region in six months, and hit a PR value of approximately **\$3.4 million**.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



FM98.7



WATCH VIDEO

FM95.8

#WALKFORINCLUSION: STORY OF CHANGE

AT MY OWN PACE

JOACHIM ISAAC, YOUNG ATHLETE, SPECIAL OLYMPICS PILIPINAS

“ 'This is not a playground, please teach your child some discipline.' A stranger said to my mother and walked away before my mom Joan could explain that I have autism. With tears in her eyes, my mom left with me in hand, without completing her shopping.

My name is Joachim Isaac, lovingly known as 'Akim', and this is my story.

I spoke my first word after 3 years old, and soon after was diagnosed with autism. Growing up, my parents constantly worried about me because I was slower than others, and had trouble following instructions. You could ask me to stand in a line, and I would jump, and flap my arms as though I'm flying! The other kids would laugh when I randomly ran around the classroom. My family soon learnt that I also had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

At 4 years old, my mom brought me to my first Special Olympics Young Athletes session. I was SO excited that I could not stop running, jumping, tripping, falling all around. I was in love with the throwing and catching exercises. Finally! Something I was good at!



My favourite activity of the day was the morning obstacle course run in the field. I could quickly run over all the obstacles. It made me so happy!

I also love meeting and greeting people, so whenever I see a new face, I push them and jump on them out of excitement. I met so many people at my swimming class too and just enjoyed splashing water on them. My teachers sometimes get tired of trying to teach me, but my parents believed in me and always encouraged me, letting me continue learning at my own pace.

Last year, I swam an entire lap all by myself. I am truly a water baby. Today, I also know how to do the breaststroke and front crawl. I never thought I would be able to swim so well, but as they say, never give up!

Every night before sleeping, I ask God to bless me, my autism and ADHD. I truly believe that the universe listens to me and my family's prayers. As long as we have faith, fate will always find a way for everyone and all our unique talents.

Today, besides swimming I also love painting, sketching and singing. I love expressing my thoughts and emotions in pictures and songs. Today I know that life is filled with colours for me to explore and create, and to achieve my own milestones, in my own time.



Visit [Humanrace.asia](https://www.humanrace.asia) for more stories of change

LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

FOCUS ON QUALITY

The Special Olympics Asia Pacific Organizational Development team, formed in 2020, continued its work aimed at enabling Program leaders and empowering the staff and key constituents to deliver their work effectively.

From providing customer service to the Programs on the topics of compliance, which include Program Accreditation and annual Census data collection, to strengthening national Boards and building intra-regional communication processes, the Organizational Development team is dedicated to quality growth of the Programs in the region.

Highlights of the year included the virtual Regional Leadership Conference which gathered the national leaders across the region to share best practices; a Grant Management and Storytelling for Impact workshop led by Will Schermerhorn, founder of Blueberry Shoes Productions and with the support of Rituu B. Nanda, from Global Fund for Children, to help leaders share the results of their work more effectively; a 4-part workshop that focused on fostering partnerships for sustainability; as well as the introduction of 'Coffee with NDs', a platform for Program leaders to come together to discuss solutions to common pressing issues.

A Planning & Budgeting workshop was also conducted with the support of pro-bono consultant Rodolfo Siles from PM4Dev (Project Management for Development). The training helped Programs evaluate external factors in the ecosystem (political, economic, social) to guide their annual and long-term planning.

“

Empowered people and an enabling working environment are crucial factors that determine the success of our Programs and promote excellence in sports, health, youth and leadership work.

We must improve how we recruit and work with diverse staff, coaches and volunteers, and ensure they have the tools and skills necessary to achieve commitment to excellence in program delivery.

**Special Olympics
Global Strategic Plan**



LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN FOCUS

SHARING BEST PRACTICES

SOAP COFFEE WITH NDs SERIES

Wednesday, February 24
10:00am – 11:15am Singapore time

TOPIC: "CONDUCTING VIRTUAL SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROGRAMMING"

Please join your SOAP Program colleagues to discuss common challenges and learn best practices for conducting virtual SO Programming.

Coffee with NDs discussion structure:

- Ice-breaker
- Conducting virtual competition: SO Thailand experience
- Best practices sharing
- Next topic selection

DISCUSS

SHARE

LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

ZOOM LINK: <https://bit.ly/3dkBJBZ>

Special Olympics Asia Pacific's newly-formed Organisational Development team launched 'Coffee with NDs', a platform for Program leaders to come together to share best practices, discuss challenges and brainstorm solutions.

Through the year, a total of three sessions were conducted, on the topics of: Virtual Programming, Fundraising in the new environment, and Expanding Programming through Partnerships.

The sessions saw leaders from Thailand share learnings from their very first multi-sport virtual games, Philippines presenting how partnerships helped sustain and see the organization through a board restructure, as well as leaders from Pakistan, Australia, Bangladesh, and the Marshall Islands sharing fundraising ideas and best practices.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

While many in-person events have been on hold due to the pandemic, the team focused efforts on capacity building, particularly in fostering sustainable partnerships.

A 4-part series "Partnerships for Sustainability Building" was conducted, that equipped Programs with skills and tools to build partnerships in support of their work. This training was developed in collaboration with colleagues from Special Olympics International and Special Olympics Asia Pacific as well as external pro-bono supporters, including Mei Kok, Partnership Consultant, John Shearer, Sr. Development Manager at BWF, Steve Carey, Founder & Chairman of Potomac Strategic Development Co, and Priya Nath, Sr. Advisor for Equality, Inclusion & Rights at WaterAid.

The sessions covered different programmatic areas including building sustainable Government relations, sport partnerships, health partnerships and partnership mapping.



IMPACT STORYTELLING

A workshop "Grant Management and Storytelling for Impact" was conducted, with the goal of developing storytelling skills among Program leaders so that we as a region, are better equipped with highlighting the powerful impact of our work. The workshop and follow up sessions were made possible thanks to Will Schermerhorn, the founder of Blueberry Shoes Productions, as well as internal and external experts on the topic.

Through the workshop, Program staff and volunteers learnt the concept and importance of impact reporting, and picked up valuable tips and skills on effective storytelling.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE: STORIES OF CHANGE

STORIES OF CHANGE FROM THE "GRANT MANAGEMENT AND STORYTELLING FOR IMPACT" WORKSHOP

SPECIAL OLYMPICS SERENDIB: A LIFE TRANSFORMED



Lahiru Prasanna, who has autism, comes from a very poor family. His father left the family when he was a little boy. His mother also left him soon after, as she couldn't cope with the pressures of caring for him as a single parent. He was left in the care of his grandmother.

He used to loiter around the town, getting involved with several street boys and often getting into trouble with the law. His grandmother was too frail to look after him, or give him the attention he craved and the guidance he needed.

He was discovered by a staff member of Special Olympics Serendib, who found him on the streets and recognised his condition. He realised how neglected the boy was. SO Serendib coaches provided him with food, drink and clothes to wear. He was also invited to play simple games with the other athletes who were then training with SO Serendib. He was given sports equipment and sports attire.

It was the first time he had been treated with such kindness and respect, and accepted unconditionally. It marked the start of his Special Olympics journey, and he began attending sports training regularly. Lahiru was also referred to a hospital by SO Serendib's healthcare assistant for a series of health screenings. He was diagnosed and treated for several health conditions.

Now he is a full-fledged athlete and is even team captain for several sports. He no longer hangs out in the streets, but goes home to look after his grandmother as soon as he finishes sports training. His hope now is to have a full-time job, so that he can earn enough to take care of his grandmother. His mother has also since returned to the family. She recently reached out to the staff of SO Serendib, thanking them for transforming Lahiru's life.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE: STORIES OF CHANGE

STORIES OF CHANGE FROM THE "GRANT MANAGEMENT AND STORYTELLING FOR IMPACT" WORKSHOP

SPECIAL OLYMPICS PALAU: STORY OF EMPOWERMENT

Trang Kabino, 18, is a role model for many young people on the island of Palau. Many remember her as the 'always nervous girl' during the initial days when Special Olympics Palau staff reached her island to do the recruitment campaign of athletes in 2018.

Since joining Special Olympics, she has not looked back. She made many friends through Unified games and other sports activities. Over the years her peers and coaches have witnessed the immense amount of confidence she has built.

She represented Palau at the 2019 Abu Dhabi World Summer Games and continues to train regularly.



Trang got her High School Diploma and was accepted in the Palau Community College to pursue vocational studies in Agriculture.

This year she graduated with honors and awards in her 2021 Graduating class.

Her coach says, "It was her dream to pursue Agricultural studies but now she has a plan. She has set goals for herself to pursue higher education in the same field."

When she's not in the classroom, Trang accompanies SO Palau in islandwide recruitment of athletes.

She continues to train with the team and her friends.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS THAILAND: FOR THE LOVE OF SPORT



Surisa Thakaeng, aged 17, is an athlete in the SO Thailand's Women's Team A. She comes from Rachaburi province (west of Bangkok on the border of Myanmar).

Surisa is an orphan who started playing Football since she was 12.

She really loves the sport, and in 2018 she was a member of the SO Thailand's Women's team competing in the Southeast Asia Unified Football Tournament, in Singapore, winning the gold medal.

The SOAP Virtual Unified Football was another challenge which she took on eagerly, practising hard while also helping her team mates during training.

Winning the gold medal again this time made her even more excited and happy, simply because she could play the sport she loves and be recognized for her abilities.

REGIONAL REACH

Athletes
337,564

Youth Leaders
2,816

Family Leaders
3,694

Athlete Leaders
1,952

Competitions
3,118

Coaches
30,882

Unified Schools
865

Volunteers
29,444

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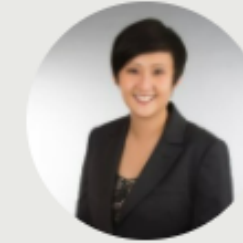
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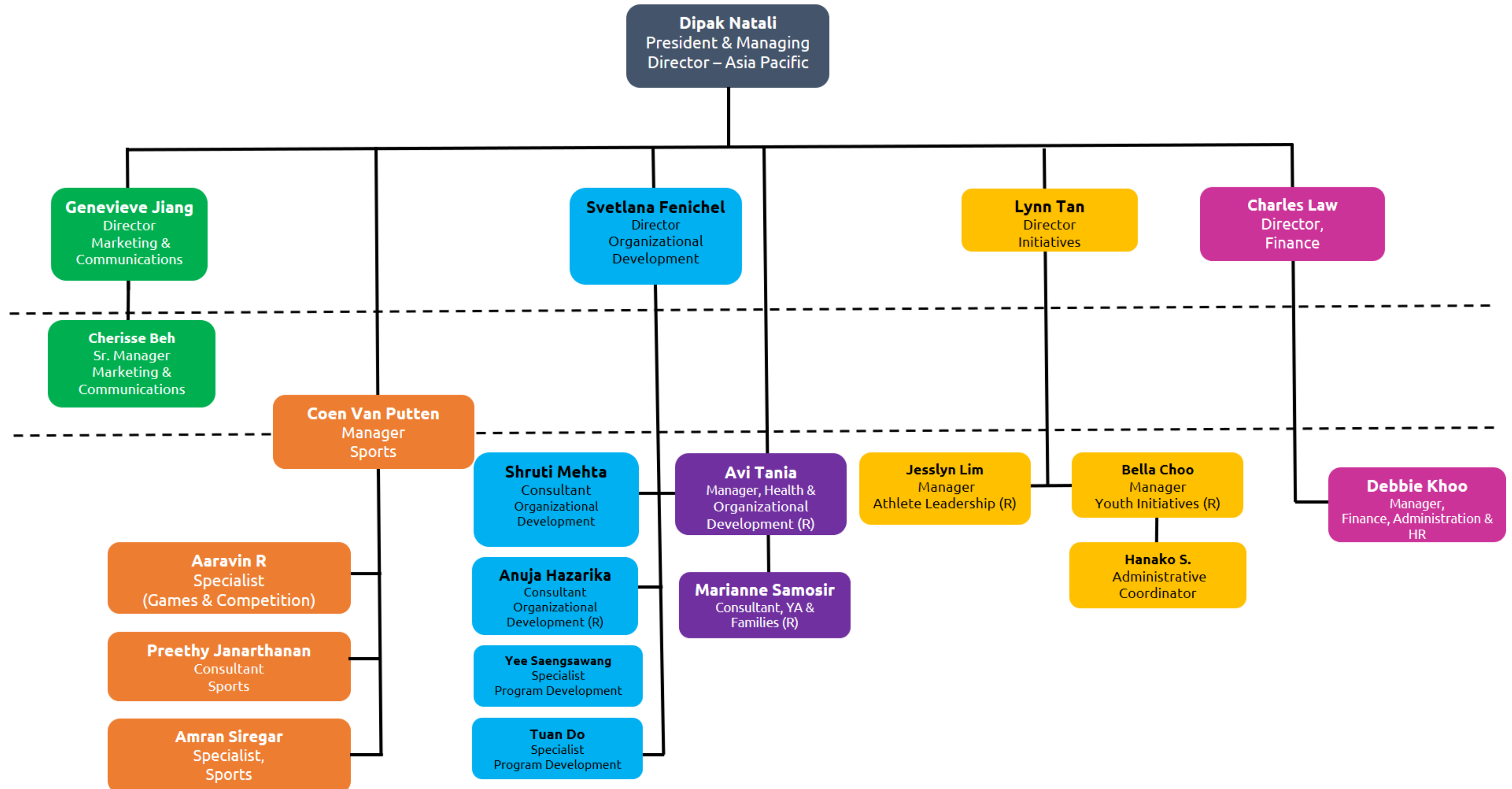


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