



**PERCEPTIONS
OF THE
SPECIAL OLYMPICS
EXPERIENCE**

**2003 SPECIAL OLYMPICS
WORLD SUMMER GAMES**

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1. Introduction

In June 1996, following an approach by the Board of Special Olympics Ireland, the Irish Government established an Interdepartmental Group to examine the feasibility of making a bid to host the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2003.

The group identified all the main issues involved in hosting the Games and their report, completed in December 1996, recommended that a bid be prepared. A Bid Steering Committee was established, comprising representatives of relevant Government Departments, Special Olympics Ireland and the Irish Council of People with Disabilities.

In March 1999, Ireland's success as the host for the next World Summer Games was announced, and preparations began in earnest.

The 11th Special Olympics World Summer Games were held in Ireland in June 2003. It was the first time this event was held outside the United States of America. It was also the largest sporting event to be held in the world this year and was the largest sporting or cultural event ever held in Ireland. The Games were not only a significant milestone in international sport; the staging of the event provided a challenge and opportunity for the people of Ireland.

A full impact study has not yet been carried out; the purpose of this document, in the interim, is to outline some of the key facts and statistics related to the Games and provide an insight into the perceptions that each of the key constituent groups had of the Games experience.

2. Overview

- **7,000** Athletes.
- **3,000** Coaches & Officials.
- **8,500** athlete family members and supporters.
- **21** sports.
- **23** sports venues in the greater Dublin area and in Belfast.
- **26** accommodation venues.
- **160** delegations, with all continents represented.
- **52** languages; **6** official languages: English, Russian, French, Spanish, Arabic and Mandarin Chinese.

2.1 School Enrichment Programme

- **4,200 primary schools** and **1,100 post primary schools** received an education pack around the island of Ireland.
- **20 universities and colleges** are teaching a case study about the Games.

2.2 Government & Political Parties

- The Irish Government **contributed €13 million** to the organisation of the Games.
- The European Union **contributed €6.25 million** to the organisation of the Games.
- Provided assistance in the area of **protocol and visas**.
- Public service employees were **facilitated greatly in signing up as volunteers**, with time taken matched, day for day, by the public service employer.

2.3 Volunteers

- **31,000** volunteers in total from the **32** counties on the island of Ireland and abroad:
 - **11,000** host town volunteers.
 - **20,000** Games volunteers.
 - **1,000** on waitlist that were never used.
- **540 international** volunteers.
- **98%** of all volunteers rated their Games experience as ‘very good’ or ‘good’.

2.4 Law Enforcement Torch Run

- **103 Police officers** from all over the world participated in the Torch Run
- **10 Special Olympic athletes** participated.
- **150 towns were visited**, 130 of these were planned in advance (all host towns) but because of TV and radio coverage (in particular local radio requests) at least 20 unscheduled stops were made.
- **Over 250,000 people** saw the torch by either standing on the streets to greet the torch or attending the Torch Run ceremonies in their Host Towns. Crowds ranged from about 30,000 in Bangor to about 300 - 400 in the smallest villages in Ireland.
- **Tens of thousands of school children** built their own torches and in every single town in Ireland where the torch went through, children lined the streets holding the torches they had made.

2.5 Host Town Programme

- **177 towns** involved.
- **500 families**.
- **12,000 people** attended **orientation** sessions in 10 different locations.
- **9 Regional Committees** with an average of 30 people on each.
- **35 county councils/boroughs; 6 city councils; 97 town councils** supported the HTP financially and otherwise.
- **€ million** raised through fundraising
- **€1 million** counted in change by local committees.

2.6 Families

- Approximately **8,500** athlete family members registered with the Games.
- The Host-A-Family Programme received **1,350** applications from **local** families. **440** athlete families were actually matched and stayed with a local family representing approximately 1,000 individuals from the athlete families who came.
- The Family Ambassador Programme received **246** applications from **local** families. **228** families were actually matched and met up with their local family.

2.7 Healthy Athlete Programme

- **3,500 athletes** attended **9,974 screenings**. The breakdown was as follows:
 - **2,373** Opening Eyes.
 - **2,201** Healthy Hearing.
 - **2,918** Special Smiles.
 - **1,468** FUNfitness
 - **1,014** Health Promotion.

2.8 Website and Publications

- **13** issues of ‘**Countdown**’ newsletter produced in advance of Games.
- **80,000** World Games **Commemorative Programmes** produced.
- **47** different **Coaches and Officials manuals** produced in **6 languages**.
- **5** issues of ‘**Heartbeat**’ volunteer newsletters produced.
- **8** issues of the **daily ‘Games Gazette’** produced at Games time.
- A series of **9 School Enrichment Programme** text books produced in English and Irish.

2.9 Media and Communications

- **98%** awareness of Games by January 2003.
- **1,427 international and domestic media** accredited prior to and during the Games.
- **874 accredited media** collected accreditation and reported from the Games.
- **40** countries broadcast the Opening Ceremony live.
- **1.5 million** TV viewers in Ireland watched the Opening Ceremony live.
- Over **30 volunteer photographers** supplied **1,906 official images** worldwide.

2.10 Sponsorship and Fundraising

- **€2 million** was raised in Corporate Sponsorship for the Games.
- Over **€8.5 million** was raised through the **Support an Athlete Campaign**.
- **Schools** all over the country, both Primary and Secondary, raised in **excess of €1 million**.

2.11 Spectators

- Over **2,000 calls a day** into the Spectator Hotline.
- Spectator Numbers – Estimate

	Venue Name	Viewing Capacity	Total spectators per day based on estimated number of crowd rotations	Number of days of operation	Estimated Spectator Total
1	ALSAA, Dublin Airport	180	360	8	2,880
2	Athletic Union League, Clonshaugh	1,000	1,000	8	8,000
3	UCD, Belfield (BBAL)	280	560	6	3,360
	UCD, Belfield (FBAL)	1,500	1,500	8	12,000
4	David Lloyd Riverview, Clonskeagh	390	780	7	5,460
5	Dublin City University, Glasnevin	190	380	7	2,660
6	Elm Green Golf Centre, Castleknock	150	300	5	1,500
7	ESB Arena, Tallaght	620	1,240	8	9,920
8	Glenville Pitch & Putt, Old Bawn	250	500	4	2,000
9	Kill Equestrian Centre	808	1,212	7	8,484
10	Kings Hall Belfast	440	880	4	3,520
11	Leisureplex, Blanchardstown	170	510	7	3,570
12	Loughlinstown Leisure Centre	390	780	7	5,460
13	Morton Stadium, Santry	4,000	8,000	8	64,000
14	Badminton Centre, Baldoyle	290	580	7	4,060
15	National Show Centre, Cloghran	390	780	7	5,460
16	Phoenix Park	400	800	7	5,600
17	National Aquatic Centre, Abbottstown	1,920	3,840	8	30,720
18	Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links	200	200	5	1,000
19	Royal Dublin Society, Ballsbridge				
	Main Hall (T/Tennis)	708	2,124	8	16,992
	Festival	1,000	3,000	7	21,000
	Serpentine Hall (Mot.Act)	211	633	4	2,532
	Concert Hall (Power Lift)	400	1,200	7	8,400
	Bocce (Area 1)	676	2,028	8	16,224
	Gymnastics (Area 2)	748	2,244	8	17,952
20	Royal St. George YC, Dun Laoghaire	250	500	5	2,500
21	Salmon Leap Canoe Club, Leixlip	125	250	4	1,000
22	Sportslink, Santry	30	60	7	420
23	Croke Park Opening & Closing Ceremonies	80,000	80,000	2	160,000
24	Torch Run	30,000	30,000	9	270,000
	TOTAL ESTIMATED GAMES SPECTATORS				696,674

3. Perceptions

3.1 Schools

The School Enrichment Programme was designed to promote awareness within schools and colleges around the 32 counties of Ireland about people with learning disabilities and the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games. The Programme was developed with the full support and co-operation of the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and is unique insofar as it was the first time the Departments came together to initiate a common teaching and learning programme in both jurisdictions.

- Teacher Unions were asked to endorse the programme and consequently bought into the awareness aspect of the Games.
- Curriculum Development Boards approved and recognised the need for such a programme (Dept of Education and Science launches its own pamphlet in October for European Year of People with Disabilities entitled 'Share the Feeling-Share the Future').
- Recognised by Education Departments in Northern Ireland and in the Republic as a cross border initiative that addressed the issue of learning disability in a non-political sense.
- Reinforced the awareness of the Games and disability through informal opportunities in the home or among family and community, particularly in the Host Towns.

3.2 Government & Political Parties

An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, established a high Profile "Council of Patrons" and held an annual briefing event at which members of the Council offered assistance to the Games Organising Committee where needed. The list of Council members consisted of influential individuals from all walks of life including entertainment, business, religion and politics. Members lent their support to the launch of various programmes, volunteer training and other events, in addition to supplying facilities, finance and expertise.

President Mary McAleese was unstinting in her support for the World Games and for Team Ireland from the outset. From the Torch Run and participation in the Opening & Closing ceremonies to visiting sports and entertainment venues at Games time, her support did much to heighten public awareness, not just for the Games but for the talents and abilities of people with a learning disability.

- "We have wrung the word proud dry this week and if we have, it is thanks to you and that inspirational team you gathered, galvanised and led. You must have had great faith in Ireland's ability to deliver the organisation and the spirit Special Olympics demands. That faith was surely vindicated many times over and with it came the chance for so much goodness or do its work, unimpeded by the barriers of bureaucracy, cynicism, lack of structure or lack of initiative. This was a time of true transcendence. It was a privilege to be a tiny part of it. Thank you for that flood tide of happy memories and for the hope they bring of more inclusive, more caring times ahead." *President Mary McAleese*

- “The 2003 Summer Games have left all of us with a treasured legacy. It has demonstrated what we as a people can do when faced with a challenge. It has brought out the true spirit of generosity that still exists here, despite what some may say. The Games brought out the best in all of us.” *An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD*
- “The 2003 World Games was one of the best things that ever happened in this country.” *Charlie McCreevy TD, Minister for Finance*
- “It is my intention to do whatever limited work I can to ensure that the legacy of this week penetrates the political system, North & South, in terms of services for disabled people and their families, and the legislative underpinning of their rights...” *Gerry Adams MLA, Sinn Fein*
- “This event has certainly served to change many attitudes and has re-ignited the great spirit of volunteerism, which our country has always been proud of. I regard it as a very great honour to have witnessed and taken part in this wonderful occasion.” *Ivor Callely TD, Minister of State*
- “I firmly believe that the Games have left an indelible mark, not just on those of us involved but also on the country as a whole. I am certain they will lead to greater developments in the future.” *Brian Crowley, MEP*

3.3 Volunteers

The Volunteer Programme was a “call to action” for the 30,000 volunteers required to ensure the success of the Games, all of whom became part of ‘TEAM 2003’.

- “It’s very difficult to put in writing the euphoria I experienced working on the Special Olympics World Games. The buzz and feel good factor which surrounded the RDS was breathtaking and I can safely say it’s one of the best things I have ever done. What really touched me was the affection these athletes showed, not just to each other, but to all of us involved. They were not afraid to show their emotions and their smiles and affection touched the hearts of every volunteer. I for one was very proud to have been part of such an amazing event.” *Helena Turley, Volunteer*
- “2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games was a life-changing experience for me and would honestly say one of the best -if not the best thing- I have ever done. I still cannot adequately express what it all means to me to have been part of the whole set-up but what I can say is that anyone who missed out on the opportunity, certainly lost out on a lot. The reward for volunteering knows no price. Nothing could have paid those two weeks as much as the athletes and the whole experience did, but especially the joy that came from the athletes. Every achievement was shared and was celebrated. To me it seemed that this was what sports was all about. In the forthcoming European Year of Education through Sport, I reckon the best example we could offer anyone is the sportsmanship that is shown in Special Olympics. I certainly have every intention of staying involved and doing as much as I can to promote the Special Olympics movement here and with my colleagues in Europe.” *Marie Heraughty, DAL Ecuador*

- “I was working as a volunteer in language services during the Games. I enjoyed it very much. It really changed my life. 'Let me be brave in the attempt'. It's not only for the athletes, it's for me too.” *Xueyan Jiang, DAL China*
- The volunteer experience provided each volunteer with a sense of collective belonging to wider group focused on the positive ideal of organising the Games. Each volunteer’s contribution to TEAM 2003 generated a feeling of empowerment that individually they were making a difference, ensuring a successful project and undertaking responsibilities of their own volition.
- The European Voluntary Service project, although small in terms of the overall voluntary workforce (170 volunteers from 12 countries), has had a wider impact on policy influencers within the European Commission and parliament through giving the event an enhanced European dimension.

3.4 Law Enforcement Torch Run

The Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg (LETRFL) preceded the 2003 World Special Olympic Summer Games. It was a series of relays run by police officers who carried the Special Olympic Torch, the ‘Flame of Hope’, from Greece to the Opening Ceremony in Dublin via four routes throughout Ireland. The Law Enforcement Torch Run fostered a strong spirit of cooperation, exemplified by the way it tied together diverse groups such as schools, security forces and businesses to provide a fitting welcome reception in communities throughout the island. It also linked these groups with local disability services in an inclusive manner never seen before.

- A good example is the primary schools education programme – delivered by the Gardai and PSNI in the run-up to the Games – to promote involvement in the Torch Run, the Games and the Special Olympics movement. Over 30,000 children participated in the programme, resulting in a high level of awareness of the Games and a greater appreciation of athletes with disabilities. The children were encouraged to build torches to support the Run as it came to their community and form a Guard of Honour for the Runners, a phenomenal success with some schools turning out in full uniform on a Sunday morning as the Run arrived! No matter where they went, the runners were amazed at the effort the children had put into the torches and the details they had learnt about disability and the delegations visiting.
- According to the PSNI, the Torch Run broke down a lot of barriers from a policing standpoint because they got to meet and enhance their relationship with all sections of the community. PSNI officers who travelled right around the island stressed that the reception they received was exceptional, as people were so pleased that they were working together with the Gardaí on such a good cause. Both forces now have larger Law Enforcement Torch Run committees, and hope to take their experience to other Special Olympics programmes across Europe.
- There are many other examples of community groups who contributed to Torch Run preparations, such as choirs, dancers and chambers of commerce. The net result of involving everyone is that disability service groups have been inundated with volunteers. It has also opened new doors as awareness increases – in Carlow, for example, six new

jobs were created in supported employment, and people with disabilities, including athletes, were asked to speak at a Toastmasters' Convention for the first time. The same athletes are in demand to speak at local schools, raising prospects of true social inclusion for people with disabilities to a new level.

3.5 Families

Athletes' families play an integral part in Special Olympics, so a programme of services and activities, not available to the public, was put in place to enhance their enjoyment of the Games, as reflected in letters received after the Games:

- “I and my wife had the unique opportunity to attend the World Summer Games held in Dublin in June 2003... I would like to express my admiration for the excellent organization of the programmes and the outstanding services of the over-dedicated volunteers whom I felt them as... my shadow, willing to offer their assistance at all times, either at the competition areas or even at the streets of Dublin... we collected unforgettable precious memories...” *Carl Papadopoulos, Family Member of Special Olympics Hellas (Greece)*
- “We have just returned home from the Special Olympics 2003... where our son was powerlifting... The way families, friends and athletes were looked after was superb and the facilities provided were brilliant. Ireland really did “Share a very special feeling” and I’m sure the lives of everyone involved will be changed forever. Once again, thank you all.” *Barry & Joan Wilson, England*

The Host-A-Family Programme reflected the style of event, with a unique approach of opening homes to visitors for the purpose of support and solidarity with people with a learning disability and their carers.

- Host families had a greater understanding of learning disabilities as a result of their involvement with families and carers of the athletes.
- Some communities e.g. Malahide wished to be identified as a host community to visiting families where host families joined to demonstrate collective responsibility towards their visitors by organising local events for their guests. The Host-A-Family Programme awoke and enriched community life in a suburban setting by providing a focus for a desire to support and reach out to those with a learning disability and their carers.

3.6 Athletes

There are an estimated 27,000 people on the island of Ireland with a learning disability and of these, some 12,000 participate in Special Olympics activities. It is envisaged that more athletes will join Special Olympics Ireland in the wake of the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games.

- Oliver Doherty, competing in golf in his first World Games commented that this was a dream come true for him to represent his country: “It may never happen to me again, but I would love it to!”
- Footballer John Leavy said “when I first came to Special Olympics the thing that kept me going was to represent my country and when I did it was like a dream come true”, and for athletics competitor Aine Lawlor “it was a great honour and a great experience to meet new people”.
- Shauna Bradley and Liz Bradley participated in the Special Olympics Officials Programme for Athletes in the sport of Tenpin Bowling. Shauna also represented all Officials at the Opening Ceremonies by taking the Officials Oath on their behalf. Shauna spoke of the confidence and the pride she felt walking out onto the stage at the Opening Ceremony in Croke Park. Commenting on her role as an official, she stated that she knew what she had to do and made sure the job was done. The days were long and she felt quite tired each evening but was ready and willing each day to carry out her duties. She also felt very important wearing her officials’ uniform.

Special Olympics not only provides sports training to people with a learning disability, it also endeavours to facilitate integration and social interaction and instils in members feelings of pride and achievement.

3.7 Delegations

160 delegations travelled from every continent to the Games, which offered them a unique opportunity to experience a different country, its’ people, and the challenges involved in hosting a major international event. Two delegations from whom feedback was received were Canada and Great Britain, both led by individuals with long experience in Special Olympics.

- The effect of the Games on society at large was immediately commented on, noting that “the Games evoked from the Irish press a series of moving reflections on the values influencing contemporary Ireland... and apprehension about what might be revealed of the Irish people in its treatment of the ‘other’.” In addition to making people think more deeply about their attitudes to people with disabilities, it also made them act, and for one delegation their stay in the host town was “an astounding experience of human connectedness that will abide with them forever.” This related not only to the host town committees who looked after the delegations but also to the wider business community, a good example being the shopfront competition amongst local businesses to welcome the GB delegation to Galway.
- According to the Canadian delegation, “the task is to create a grass-roots sport environment congenial to people with mental disabilities”, and for this reason the Games volunteers also drew comment. What the delegations noticed is that, contrary to being patronising, the Games volunteers were knowledgeable in critical areas such as disability and ethnic differences because of their training and involvement with the Games.
- Both groups were anxious to emphasise the importance of an event like the Games for the future activities and success of Special Olympics programmes at national level. For the

GB group, parents have come home and are enthusiastic and want to be even more involved in the programme. They also want to build on coverage at home during Games by enhancing their position in the community, and see ideas like the schools programme and the daily Games Gazette as excellent food for thought to help with raising awareness.

- The benefits and challenges this entails were best summed up by the President of Special Olympics Canada: “This world-wide movement, which as we have witnessed, can hearten and enrich whole countries, is chronically under-funded everywhere in the world, and is nowhere realising its promise. Countries that moved mountains to send a team to Dublin will return to corporate indifference, governmental neglect and public apathy, unable to build reliable service delivery systems. Anyone who has seen a Special Olympics athlete perform needs no explanation. Deeds are the language of valour; it is a universal language and the inarticulate, especially, speak it most persuasively. So the further task is this; to nurture these singular moments of enlightenment, these best moments such as Dublin 2003, and root them in our habits of mind and in our public policies so that there is a playing field, a coach and some mates for every athlete out there.”

The net effect of a positive Games experience is that there was a renewed enthusiasm and a set of ideas that could be applied locally by the delegations, thereby improving services for those with learning disabilities and enhancing their social integration.

3.8 National Governing Bodies

The Games Organising Committee enlisted the cooperation and expertise of the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of the major sports organisations in Ireland. The strategy was symbiotic; GOC tapped into single sport expertise and NGBs gained project management experience of a world class event. The long term aim is that NGBs will work with disability groups, facilitate integration into existing structures and develop special needs programmes.

- 21 NGBs were involved in the Games, providing support in a wide range of sports such as aquatics, athletics, badminton, cycling and football. All are at different stages of development in terms of athlete development and numbers, levels of competition, paid staff or volunteers, office space or working from home.
- While some would have had an involvement in a world level event it was on a single sport basis and they found the level of detail in the planning a tremendous learning curve.
- NGBs have had their ‘eyes opened’ to the possibilities of integrating athletes with a learning disability into their sport and in team sports are committed to working with Special Olympics Ireland in the development of Unified sports™. In addition, they would not have been familiar with or considered the possibility of the Special Olympics Officials Programme for Athletes and view it as a further opportunity for athlete involvement.
- One NGB had a very limited number of personnel trying to run it at the stage of contact by the GOC three years ago, but such was their level of commitment and enthusiasm to making their sport a success, following the Games, they have now employed a full time Administrator and have renewed energy and professionalism going forward. This positive turn-around for their sport is, they feel, as a direct result of their involvement in the Special Olympics World Summer Games.

3.9 Staff

The Games Organising Committee had 243 staff members, 77 of which were seconded and 22 were unpaid staff. As the senior management team demonstrated total commitment and dedication to the objective of the GOC namely to ‘*host the best Special Olympics World Summer Games ever,*’ the culture was one of trust where each individual was respected in their own right for their experience, knowledge and ability.

- “I started here when there was just three other people working with the GOC and watched the staff and workload grow together. Obviously there were times of stress but they were far outweighed by moments of joy and the sense of achievement that we as a team attained. To quote the cliché I've always wanted to be involved in something like this - something that I could hold my head up high and say I was part of that! I feel now that I have achieved something in my life and have a sense of fulfilment. I've met people from all professional walks of life who will be friends for a long time. I will stay involved with Special Olympics in some way either as a volunteer or do a coaching course. Most of my family were volunteers in one way or another and it gives us all a common bond that will never be forgotten.” *Cathy Elliott, Business Operations Department*
- “It was a time where you felt exhausted, exhilarated, excited and proud of what you had achieved. When thousands of volunteers streamed into The Point for General Orientation; when travelling around the country with Host Town Orientation people were there with eagerness to hear all they could and left saying that it was the best show they had ever been to; working in the Volunteer Depot, physical work every day for five weeks from 7:00am – 11:00pm at night, with no food, but living on adrenaline! Working with athletes in various different ways, and seeing their excitement and joy; so many aspects of the Games made me proud to be involved. It was the hardest I have ever worked over the longest time – I would do it again in a heartbeat. Now I feel proud to have been involved, people know me at home as having worked on it and are proud of me!” *Siobhan Grant, Projects Manager, Support Services and Volunteers Departments*
- “Sometimes the pressure was intense but the overall worthiness more than compensated. Being part of such a major successful event, meeting all kinds of interesting fellow employees, volunteers, sponsors, Board members, etc. added to the rich cocktail of being involved. The people I met added to my life and I was delighted to be associated with part of Irish history and an event the whole country will always be proud of. I will always have a softer spot in my accountant’s heart for charities and particularly people with special needs. As I had a brother with special needs, I was always aware of the joy they bring to our lives. This was very much reaffirmed during the last two years.” *Matt English, CFO, Business Operations Department*

3.10 Corporate Ireland

The trend in corporate sponsorship towards taking on social responsibility meant that all levels of sponsors came on board a tiered sponsorship programme offering different levels of support. Leverage of sponsor activity around the Games was also adopted as a marketing strategy with all communications adhering to the Games brand identity and messaging. As a result €22 million in sponsorship was raised, there was 98% awareness of the event and over €8.5 million was raised through the Support an Athlete campaign.

- “I have been astounded by the responses of staff to our Special Olympics sponsorship – numerous expressions of gratitude for the opportunity to be involved, pride in Bank of Ireland for its support for the Games, and a desire that we won’t let the feeling evaporate, that we find a way to remain involved. It has been a wonderful team effort with everyone united in pursuit of a shared goal. It’s been a good time for each of us individually and for the Group.” *Mike Soden, CEO, Bank of Ireland, Premier Sponsor*
- “There is a huge amount of pride and good feeling created amongst the team at dcoy design. Personally I think that it’s been an education for the team as they might not have known about the legacy of the Games and their impact on the people of Ireland. The legacy of the Games for us will be the pride of being involved. To know that when we look back, further down the line, we were part of it.” *Niall Kerrigan, dcoy design, Official Design Supplier*

3.11 Celebrities

Many celebrities were invited to participate in the Guests’ Programme of the Games so as to endorse the Special Olympics movement and raise awareness of athletes with a learning disability. Throughout the Games, celebrities made impromptu visits to venues in order to meet athletes and became personally involved in the Games. This in turn created publicity and aided in creating awareness. As a result of their attendance at the Games, some celebrities have pledged to keep involved and help promote the movement.

- “I saw the opening ceremony on television and it was impressive but to see the competitors in action, this is fantastic. To see how brave they are and how hard they try at their sports, this is fantastic for them, but also is a great motivation for everyone around the world. This is the first time I have been involved with Special Olympics but my impression is that it is a fantastic movement, these are great athletes and I am happy to be part of the many volunteers who can help to make it so successful.” *Seve Ballestaros, Golf Player*
- “Few things in life could have given me greater pleasure or brought me more honour than to be associated with the Special Olympics. I regard myself privileged to be here on this occasion. Special Olympics is a testament to the indestructibility of the human spirit. Many of you have suffered great disadvantage in your lives.....you serve as an example and inspiration.” *Nelson Mandela*
- “Every day has been so amazing. I’m really glad I’m around to support these athletes. It’s been a great week here in Dublin and I’m just having a blast meeting the athletes. The whole Games has been fantastic. It’s just brought out so much love in Dublin. I’ve seen kids in school uniforms and athletes together, making friends and talking about their dreams with each other. It’s just been magic.” *Colin Farrell, Actor*
- “It’s very fulfilling to be part of this glorious event. I was in the right place at the right time – I happened to be in Ireland and am more than happy to be involved. Ireland has shown itself to be a shining light in staging these Games and it has made an indelible mark on the athletes and their families.” *Pierce Brosnan, Actor*

3.12 Disability Service Providers

Organisations involved in providing services for people with disabilities naturally took a keen interest in the Games and, in many cases, took part through providing secondees, facilitating volunteers and attending the various events.

- “Seeing the Special Olympics being held in Ireland was an uplifting experience for clients, staff and families. Since the events took place our Community Integration training module is stronger, there is a greater scope to integrate with the community, both in encouraging people to come into the organisation and an acceptance of our clients in social and work environments. Fundraising, which a lot of our funding comes from, has increased dramatically. Long term relationships between clients and recreational groups have been fostered. Personally, I was overwhelmed by the inclusion of the motor activities event in the Special Olympics World Games. This was a first, long may it continue.” *Eddie Denihan – Stewarts Hospital Services Ltd.*
- “Footsteps (Down Syndrome Ireland) has noticed an increase in people contacting us to volunteer in our fundraising and events. There was a summer camp organised this year and we put a piece in the paper looking for volunteers; more people volunteered this year and we feel that it was because of Special Olympics. These people are now involved in fundraising for Footsteps. It has also been noticeable that more people ‘say hello’ to people with Down Syndrome on the street.” *Cora Purcell – Footsteps.*

3.13 General Public

While the true impact of the Games on the perceptions of the general public can only be understood through a full research study, it was nevertheless possible to gauge some of the reaction through asking a small number of people about their experience of the Games and the effect it had on their local community.

- The Torch Run and Host Town Programme were many people’s first contact with the Games. Depending on the extent to which a town got involved, the programmes raised awareness and brought the general public in contact with people with learning disabilities, as one person described: “I know more about the personal side of Special Olympics, the sacrifices people make...coaches, volunteers, staff etc.... but also about the success stories of athletes and their families and about what it means to people to be involved. The look of achievement on athletes’ faces and pride on their families’ faces made the Games so much more than a sporting occasion.”
- The Opening Ceremony had a huge impact in that it reached a wide audience and made a positive impression because, as one person put it, he “never thought it possible for Ireland to pull off an event of that magnitude”. For some, they only saw or heard occasional radio and news snippets and the Games did not impact them directly, but for others the Ceremony kicked off an event that had a profound effect because it “opened up to a much wider audience and was done in a really good way... so many charities play on the negative / tragic element of whatever their cause is...World Games let people see that Special Olympics is a charity about success, and people overcoming any difficulties they have through belonging to something really positive.”

- There was a unique atmosphere as “the whole country seemed especially smiley for the week” and a heightened sense “that really no one can be held back”. A legacy theme emerging from those spoken to was a reduction in fear of disability, and awareness that a healthy, active lifestyle can benefit anyone with a learning disability. One lady said “if I ever had a child with special needs I know there’s an organisation there which would help my child fulfil his or her potential” and another added that “it was a humbling experience and made me wake up to what's important in life versus what's not and appreciate that disability is not a negative thing. It was a truly amazing event that seemed to touch most people both young and old in Ireland and it would be great if events could be organised off the back of it to continue the momentum.”

4. Conclusion

Despite the major challenges posed even prior to the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games through the SARS epidemic and the advent of war in the Gulf, the event went extremely well and was seen as a success both nationally and internationally. The knock-on effect, as outlined in this document, was a positive impact at every level of society and a rewarding experience for the many different constituent groups who were involved.

Activities related to the Games have raised the profile of those with learning disabilities to such an extent that, in contrast to the past when they were seen as 'charity', communities are now proactively working together to include and involve them in everyday life. There is a very real sense of constructive change, epitomised by a succession of Government announcements, a reinvigoration of the spirit of 'volunteerism' and demonstrable steps forward in the development of sports opportunities for people with disabilities:

- Following the Games, the Government announced a €50 million grant to disability services in Ireland, which was seen as direct result of the World Games.
- On 16th July, the Minister for Education & Science introduced 'The Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill 2003', which will provide the structure to ensure that the education system meets the needs of children with disabilities, and in doing so allow them to leave school with the skills necessary to live independent and fulfilled lives.
- It was also announced that a Disability Rights Bill will be passed in Ireland in 2003.
- A number of the National Governing Bodies for sports such as Badminton and Bocce have already initiated programmes for people with disabilities that had never been in place before.
- A significant number of volunteer applications have already been received by Special Olympics Ireland.
- Many of the other voluntary groups in Ireland have noted a tangible increase in the number of people interested in volunteering.

The Games raised awareness of disability to new heights, and while the intensity of the effect naturally varies depending on people's personal experience, there can be little doubt that the event had a profound influence through reducing the 'fear factor' and bringing people with disabilities closer to the mainstream within communities. As Mary Keogh of the Forum for People with Disabilities put it, "People with special needs have come out in the open, and they aren't going back!"

Appendices

Appendix A – Press Cuttings

Appendix B – Radio & T.V. Transcripts