

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, 1921-2009
Executive Vice President, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation
Founder and Honorary Chairperson, Special Olympics



As founder and honorary chairperson of Special Olympics and executive vice president of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Eunice Kennedy Shriver was a leader in the worldwide struggle to improve and enhance the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities for more than three decades.

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, the fifth of nine children of Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Eunice Mary Kennedy received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

Following graduation, she worked for the U.S. State Department in the Special War Problems Division. In 1950, she became a social worker at the Penitentiary for Women in Alderson, West Virginia, and the following year she moved to Chicago to work with the House of the Good Shepherd and the Chicago Juvenile Court. In 1957, Shriver took over the direction of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation.

The Foundation, established in 1946 as a memorial to Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. – the family's eldest son, who was killed in World War II – has two major objectives: to seek the prevention of intellectual disabilities by identifying its causes, and to improve the means by which society deals with citizens who have intellectual disabilities.

Under Shriver's leadership, the Foundation has helped achieve many significant advances, including the establishment by President Kennedy of The President's Committee on Mental Retardation in 1961, the development of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development in 1962, the establishment of a network of university-affiliated facilities and mental retardation research centers at major medical schools across the United States in 1967, the establishment of Special Olympics in 1968, the creation of major centers for the study of medical ethics at Harvard and Georgetown Universities in 1971, the creation of the "Community of Caring" concept for the reduction of intellectual disabilities among babies of teenagers in 1981, the institution of 16 "Community of Caring" Model Centers in 1982, and the establishment of "Community of Caring" programs in 1,200 public and private schools from 1990 to 2006.

Recognized throughout the world for her efforts on behalf of persons with intellectual disabilities, Shriver received many honors and awards during her lifetime, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Legion of Honor, the Priz de la Couronne Francaise, the Mary Lasker Award, the Philip Murray-William Green Award (presented to Eunice Kennedy and Sargent Shriver by the AFL-CIO), the AAMD Humanitarian Award, the

NRPAS National Volunteer Service Award, the Laetare Medal of the University of Notre Dame, the Order of the Smile of Polish Children, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Freedom from Want Award, The National Women's Hall of Fame, the Laureus Sports Award, the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Theodore Roosevelt Award, and the International Olympic Committee Award.

Eunice was awarded a number of honorary degrees as well, including degrees from Yale University, the College of the Holy Cross, Princeton University, Regis College, Manhattanville College, Newton College, Brescia College, Central Michigan University, Loyola College, University of Vermont, Albertus Magnus College, Cardinal Strich University, Georgetown University, and Marymount University.

On March 24, 1984, President Ronald Reagan awarded Eunice the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, for her work on behalf of persons with intellectual disabilities, and in 2005 she was honored for her work with Special Olympics as one of the first recipients of a sidewalk medallion on The Extra Mile Point of Light Pathway in Washington, D.C.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver died on August 11, 2009. She and her husband, Sargent Shriver, are survived by their five children: Robert Sargent Shriver III, Maria Owings Shriver Schwarzenegger, Timothy Perry Shriver, Mark Kennedy Shriver and Anthony Paul Kennedy Shriver.