Spotlight Session & Special Olympics #10

[00:00:00] What's your story? What does accessibility mean to you?

**Josh:** Hello and welcome to another episode of the special edition of the Inclusion Revolution Radio collaboration with accessiBe Spotlight Sessions. The Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023 have officially concluded. We are so excited to be speaking with a guest today who led the implementation of free health screenings for every athlete at the Games.

My name is Josh Basile. I'm your co host for today's show. I'm a C4/5 quadriplegic paralyzed below my shoulders and a power wheelchair user. I'm the Community Relations Manager at accessiBe, and a passionate disability rights advocate and trial attorney focused on breaking down barriers to access and inclusion for people with disabilities.[00:01:00]

**Novie:** I'm Novie Craven, your other co host for today's show. I'm a proud Special Olympics athlete and employee of Special Olympics International. I play bocce, basketball, and about any other sport you can think of. I love Special Olympics and the work our organization does to promote friendship, respect, and of course, inclusion.

**Josh:** Today, we will be talking with Dr. Brittany Greenwald Routh, Director of Healthy Athletes for the Special Olympics. With over two decades of experience, she championed community based screenings, emphasizing fall prevention for older adults and individuals with disabilities. As Director of Healthy Athletes, she leads nine disciplines and advances global health screenings.

**Josh:** Since 2021, she's overseen Healthy Athletes. Operation at major events, including the 2022 USA Games 2022 Unified Cup and 2023 World Games Berlin. Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Routh, and welcome to the Inclusion Revolution [00:02:00] podcast.

**Brittany:** Thank you for having me.

**Novie:** Can you give us an overview of what Healthy Athletes is and the impact it has on Special Olympics as a movement?

**Brittany:** Of course, Novie. So, Healthy Athletes is a global program that offers Special Olympics athletes and unified partners free health screenings in nine different disciplines. These disciplines include health promotion, audiology, podiatry, vision, physical therapy, dentistry, emotional well being.

**Brittany:** Sports Physicals, and our newest, Pediatrics. People with intellectual disabilities may face access and other barriers to healthcare in their communities, so Healthy Athletes aims to provide screenings in comfortable and tailored ways to best serve their needs. The ultimate goal of the Healthy Athletes program is to identify the health needs of athletes and unified partners and provide them with educational resources and connections to care in their home communities that can meet those needs.

**Brittany:** I've heard the athlete leaders say it best. [00:03:00] The best athlete is a healthy athlete. Additionally, Healthy Athlete serves to train health care providers and health professional students to best care for people with intellectual disabilities in their community practices and hospitals. In partnership with the education and training team at Special Olympics, we offer training in all nine disciplines as well as other health related modules.

**Brittany:** Like communication and best care practices.

**Josh:** That's a lot of disciplines and incredible work.

**Brittany:** It really is

**Josh:** Dr. Routh, what motivated you to join Special Olympics in 202 and what have been some of your most rewarding experiences during your time with the organization?

**Brittany:** That's a great question, Josh. So as a physical therapist, I was searching for a job that enabled me to grow professionally, but also fulfill my desire to contribute to a bigger impact than treating the patients in my home community.

**Brittany:** I found that opportunity through Special Olympics, truly. When I joined the team to [00:04:00] oversee the physical therapy and podiatry disciplines, and even more so now that I've come to serve as the Director of Healthy Athletes over all nine disciplines, as we're growing very quickly. In terms of rewarding experiences, those happen daily here at Special Olympics, but I think one of the most standout to me has to be from USA Games in 2022.

**Brittany:** USA Games was one of our first, if not our first, major event since the COVID 19 pandemic began. It was the first time we were all back together in person, first time. You know, a major games happened and everybody got reunited, first time for a very major healthy athletes programming to resume in person.

**Brittany:** And so I'd been with SO and out of patient care as a PT for about a year at that point, and I was still anxiously awaiting when I'd see that impact that I was searching for in my career change really come to reality. And so enter USA Games, we all went to Florida to [00:05:00] support the athletes that were participating and in just over one week, the Healthy Athletes teams performed over 13,000 health screenings across seven disciplines.

**Brittany:** We served over 3,000 athletes and unified partners that week. It was definitely then that I finally got to see very much firsthand the impact and the reach of healthy athletes, and I think that was probably my first and one of my most rewarding experiences in this role.

**Novie:** I have no words to say about that.

**Novie:** Amazing, congratulations. That is tremendously amazing. You know, when I went for Healthy Athletes in 2018, you guys really showed us how to be healthy. And definitely it was just amazing because you had to go through steps to get a prize. Which, the prize was for shoes, but definitely just being able to understand the information around health.

**Novie:** Because some athletes, like myself, [00:06:00] really don't, sometimes we think, oh. Being healthy again. I can eat junk food for the whole week. Uh, no, you can't. Unless you want to, you know, be better in a sport. You gotta, you know, eat healthy and definitely, being able to talk to you, but also understand the importance of being healthy is a major part of, Special Olympics. So thank you so much for everything.

**Brittany:** Thank you Novie.

**Novie:** Could you tell us more about your role in leading healthy athlete operations at major events like World games?

**Brittany:** Sure, so I have the privilege of going to major games like the World Games to help support healthy athletes programming. My team and I at Special Olympics International partner with the local organizers and the local Special Olympics program to ensure healthy athletes operations are in top shape to best serve all the athletes in attendance.

**Brittany:** There's so much that goes into major games planning. It truly takes all hands on deck. So from the pre [00:07:00] planning, which happens years to months in advance to the right before planning and the week of planning to actually delivering this full scale Healthy Athletes events to thousands and thousands of participants.

**Brittany:** It really takes a village in and I'm thankful to be part of that village to attend major games like World Games.

**Novie:** Awesome. Do you have a favorite moment from World Games that you can share with us?

**Brittany:** Yeah, I think, from the 2023 World Games in Berlin, my favorite moments, the compilation of my favorite moments are shared with athlete leaders. So we had the Sargent Shriver Global Messengers help steward healthy athletes. Tours, which was an awesome experience for me, but also for the tour groups.

**Brittany:** No one gives a tour or hypes up healthy athletes, quite like the athlete leaders who attend the screenings themselves. So for that and then being invited to showcase healthy athletes, well now two podcasts, as a result of the World [00:08:00] Games is definitely an awesome opportunity. And some of my favorite moments that I appreciate from World Games very, very much.

**Josh:** Every time we are, have a chance to raise awareness. It's a good thing. And so, Dr. Routh, what are some of the other ways inclusive health is showcased on a global scale beyond hosting healthy athletes at the World Games?

**Brittany:** That's a great question, Josh. So, Special Olympics Health is a small but mighty team.

**Brittany:** It's comprised of four pillars, all which focus on the promotion of inclusive health through prevention, assessment, training, as well as health system strengthening and advocacy. So, having SO Health, and in my opinion, more importantly, athlete representation at forums hosted by organizations such as the World Health Organization, CDC, Ministries of Health and Professional Associations, is a way that we at Special Olympics have been able to showcase the work of the health team and the greater movement [00:09:00] and promote inclusive health on an international stage.

**Brittany:** Additionally, we have an award both locally and globally called the Golisano Health Leadership Award, and that showcases standout health care providers and organizations who commit to serving SO athletes and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their communities, and contribute to inclusive health practices and showcasing inclusive health in a really big way.

**Josh:** And in your experience, what are some of the challenges and opportunities in promoting inclusive health and wellbeing for people with disabilities?

**Brittany:** So one that really stands out, I think, is the challenge in and around the promotion of autonomy in healthcare and the health journey for people with intellectual disabilities.

**Brittany:** We believe that people with intellectual disabilities can and should have an active role and a voice in their healthcare [00:10:00] journey. And it's something that we're working really hard to ensure through all of our programming. I think this begins with individual and family education to ensure that people are prepared to advocate for themselves and their loved ones.

**Brittany:** I think it also includes the education and sometimes re education and preparation of health professionals and health professional students to actively include people with ID in their care and in their care planning. We look at health as a journey and not a destination, and I think empowering and ensuring that everyone, including and especially those with disabilities, play an active role in their unique journey is a challenge, but it's a challenge that's necessary and worth undertaking.

**Josh:** And then how can individuals and organizations support the advancement and delivery of inclusive health screenings and the services for Special olympics athletes [00:11:00] on a global scale.

**Brittany:** I love this question. So, healthy athletes screenings specifically rely on a volunteer workforce to be successful.

**Brittany:** And rumor has it, once you experience one, you're hooked for life. So from an individual standpoint, my best advice or call to action would be to get involved and volunteer. Whether you have a clinical background or just want to get involved, there's a place at Healthy Athletes and Special Olympics Programming for everyone who wants to volunteer and get involved.

**Brittany:** Healthcare professionals and students can also engage with the SO Learning Portal to enhance their knowledge and their care practices to better serve people with intellectual disabilities in their communities. And as for organizations, I would say commit to practicing inclusion on an individual organizational level. Research, learn, engage people with disabilities in determining what inclusive practices need to be adopted or enhanced within the organization to best [00:12:00] serve the people that need serving.

**Brittany:** Special Olympics Health is really fortunate to have the partnership of multiple organizations who support our health work and our athletes globally. This is definitely the case in healthy athletes. Our screenings and our services like the provision of glasses and hearing aids to athletes at no charge would not be possible without the generous partnership of organizations like the Golisano Foundation, CDC, Lions Clubs International Foundation, and Starkey Cares to name a few.

**Brittany:** No amount of partnership or contribution is too big or too small. We would love to get involved or have organizations get involved. It's awesome to see at major games organizations from the local community send whole teams of their staff to volunteer at Healthy Athletes. So there's a ton of different ways both on the individual level and the organizational level to get involved with Special Olympics, be it in health or healthy athletes, which is super near and dear to my [00:13:00] heart, or generally in the organization as a whole.

**Novie:** I'm literally speechless right now. I'm not, I'm not a person who usually gets speechless, but that just sums it all, and definitely just amazing. What does accessibility and inclusion mean to you?

**Brittany:** So, I'm speaking from the lens of a healthcare provider, I think accessibility and inclusion means that every person is empowered and supported to reach their individual goals in health and also in life.

**Brittany:** To me, this means having a place to go to receive care that's comfortable, that's affordable. That's welcoming. Having providers who are well trained to provide quality care for people with disabilities and to empower them and engage them as actively as possible in their unique health and wellness journeys.

**Brittany:** It is about [00:14:00] providing people with intellectual disabilities. education and resources to be well informed and to feel enabled to guide their care team, guide their families, guide themselves, in their journey in life and in health, so that their unique and individual needs and goals can be met.

**Novie:** Like, that's an amazing answer. Thank you, Dr. Routh, for joining today's episode of the Inclusion Revolution Radio Podcast and Spotlight Sessions collaboration. For all the athletes to be our best, we have to feel our best. And that's just one of the many reasons why your work is so important.

**Josh:** You can learn more about accessiBe, Inclusion Revolution Radio, and Special Olympics by subscribing on YouTube and following us on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

**Josh:** Find us on our handles. At accessiBe underscore Community and at Special Olympics. Thank you all. Thank you Dr. Routh, and [00:15:00] we look forward to the next episode.

**Brittany:** Thank you, Novi and Josh, this has been so fun.