

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics is a worldwide program providing year-round sports training and competition for people with an intellectual disability. Sport Canada recognizes the Special Olympics organization as the main provider of these services for people with intellectual disabilities, although some participants may also have physical challenges.

In the early sixties, testing of children with intellectual disabilities revealed that they were only half as physically fit as their non-disabled peers with. It was assumed that their low fitness levels were a direct result of their disability. A Toronto researcher, Dr. Frank Hayden, questioned this assumption.

Dr. Hayden conducted research, which concluded that given the opportunity, people with an intellectual disability could become physically fit, and acquire the physical skills necessary to participate in sport.

Inspired by his discoveries, Dr. Hayden began searching for ways to develop a national sports program for people with intellectual disabilities. His work came to the attention of Eunice Kennedy Shriver of the Kennedy Foundation in Washington, D.C. and led to the creation of Special Olympics. The first sports competition organized under the Special Olympics banner was held at Soldier's Field in Chicago in 1968.

To ensure Canada's representation at the competition, Dr. Hayden called on the renowned broadcaster, successful businessman and humanitarian; Harry "Red" Foster. Mr. Foster accompanied a floor hockey team from Toronto to the competition in Chicago. Mr. Foster saw this as an opportunity to enhance the lives of Canadians with intellectual disabilities and upon returning to home, he set about laying the foundation for the Special Olympics movement in Canada.

In 1969, the first Special Olympics Canada event was held in Toronto. Today, over 17,000 athletes with an intellectual disability participate in Special Olympics' programs across Ontario alone.

Special Olympics
Ontario



SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics Mission

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics Vision

The Special Olympics movement will transform communities by inspiring people throughout the world to open their minds, accept and include people with intellectual disabilities and thereby celebrate the similarities common to all people.

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