

**Special
Olympics**
Michigan



Family Handbook

WHAT IS SPECIAL OLYMPICS?

Special Olympics Michigan Inc. (SOMI) is an accredited program of Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI), which is a global non-profit organization providing sports training and competition to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics programs are patterned after the Olympic Games. In fact, Special Olympics is one of three organizations authorized by the International Olympic Committee to use the word "Olympics" in its corporate name. Like the mainstream Olympics, SOMI truly has a statewide presence with programs in all counties in Michigan.

The organization serves more than 208 million athletes and 750,000 volunteers who take part in nearly 30,000 Special Olympics games around the world, involving 30 summer and winter sports. In Michigan, Special Olympics serves nearly 21,000 athletes and has a volunteer base of just under 30,000 individuals.

MISSION

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

VISION

Sports will open hearts and minds towards people with intellectual disabilities and create inclusive communities throughout Michigan.

VALUES

Equal Opportunity, Diversity and Openness
Health, Well-Being, and Quality Athletic Experience
Sportsmanship and Integrity of Sport
Dignity, Self-Esteem and Kindness
Family, Volunteer, Community Participation/ Culture of Welcome

The values SOMI lives by create an environment of integrity where winning is more than coming in first.



Testimonials

"Special Olympics has fully accepted and valued our son. The other athletes embraced him and took him under their wing. I think of SOMI as a big family!"

-Sherrie Sponseller, parent

"My daughter has gained independence, sportsmanship qualities, and new friends. She and our family love Special Olympics!"

-Marilyn Zerbe, parent

"I started to coach in college and quickly learned that it was not the athletes that would be learning from me, but rather it would be me that would be receiving numerous lessons from the athletes."

-Jackson Seedott, coach

"SO is my daughter's social life, especially as she gets older. The program has been a big part of our family!"

-Carol Postma, parent

ATHLETE BENEFITS

Participation in sports brings significant benefits to people with intellectual disabilities of all ages and abilities. The following also reflects benefits of sports for everyone:

PHYSICAL: Physical fitness, increased coordination, cardiovascular fitness and endurance.

MENTAL: Knowledge of rules and strategy, along with increased self esteem, self-confidence and pride.

SOCIAL: Teamwork, interaction with people without cognitive disabilities, family pride, opportunity to travel, explore new places, and interests, as well as increase community awareness and acceptance.

This results in a richer, more rewarding life, improved skills and increased confidence in school, work, home and social life.

These benefits have been verified by Dr. Elisabeth Dykens and Dr. Donald Cohen in their study entitled "Effects of Special Olympics on Social Competence in Persons with Mental Retardation," which was published in the Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in February 1996.

FAMILY BENEFITS

A study recently conducted by the Special Olympics Global Collaborating Center, in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts, Boston entitled "The Positive Contributions of Special Olympics to the Family" found qualitative facts that were confirmed by those partaking in Special Olympics.

First, Special Olympics serves as a powerful engine for families of athletes to connect by providing opportunities for families to forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones.

Second, the organization provides athletes and their families with normative life experiences that are critical to healthy development. These enriching experiences can be found at all levels of the organization, as families naturally network in SOMI. They lean on each other for support, share experiences and cheer each other's athletes on.

Eligibility for Participation in Special Olympics

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the Special Olympics General Rules.

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics competitions. However, no child may participate in a Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday. The Young Athletes™ program is for children ages 2 – 7.

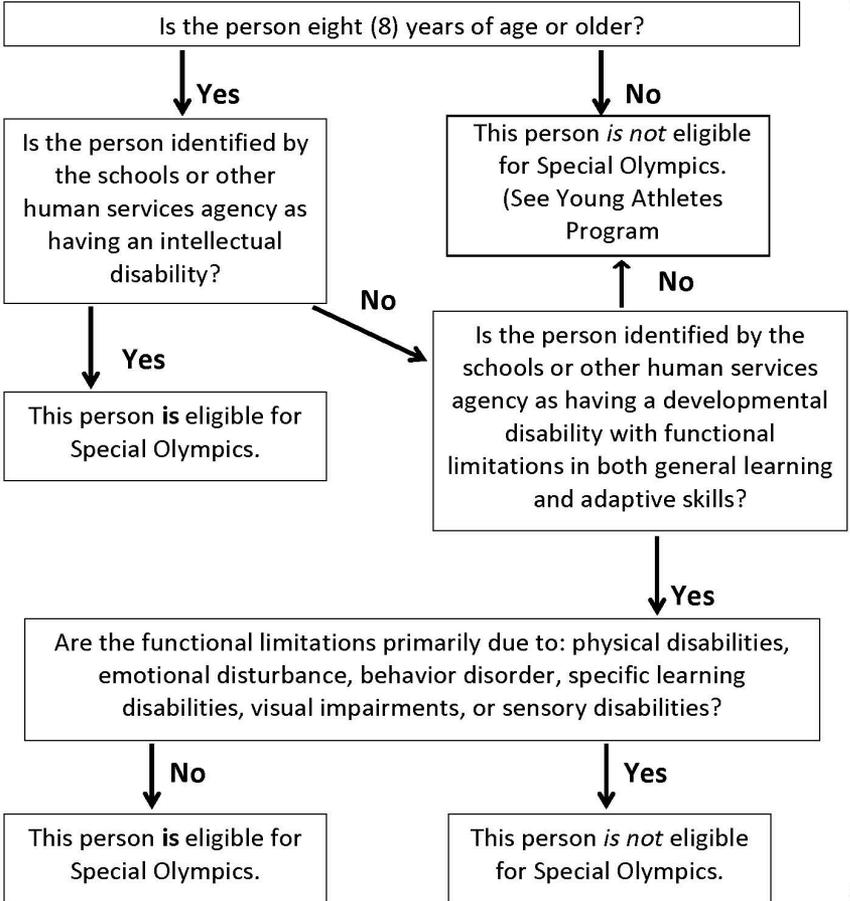
Participation in Special Olympics Michigan is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities regardless of the level or degree of that person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities.

A person is considered to have intellectual disabilities (for the purposes of determining eligibility for Special Olympics participation) if that person meets any one of the following requirements:

- The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities;
- The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures, which are generally accepted within the professional community in the U.S. as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay;
- The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely-related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care). However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes.

One of Special Olympics' founding principles is that "Special Olympics must transcend all boundaries of race, gender, religion, national origin, geography, and political philosophy, and offer sports training and competition opportunities to all eligible persons with in accordance with uniform worldwide standards."

Who is Eligible For Competition?







- 1.** Contact the SOMI office at 800-644-6404. They will provide you with a contact name for your local Area Program as well as your Regional Special Olympics office.
- 2.** Obtain and complete the official SOMI Application for Participation before they attend a practice. The athlete cannot participate until the completed form is on file. (Athletes with Down syndrome may need to complete the Special Exam Form.)
- 3.** Return your form(s) to the local Area who will then turn in your forms to the State office before they are allowed to practice.

Why are Medical Forms necessary?

Medical deadline dates are strictly enforced. Please work closely with your local area director to make sure medical deadlines are met. It is your responsibility to maintain a valid medical form with the State office. The Medical Forms are similar to those required for any other sports programs. Medical forms provide:

- 1.** Necessary medical information, including a health history, health insurance information and emergency contacts, including physician, parent or guardian.
- 2.** Insurance coverage by Special Olympics Michigan, Inc. as a secondary policy.
- 3.** Emergency medical treatment in the event that a parent or guardian cannot be reached.
- 4.** Athlete release forms also allows SOMI to use photos/videos captured of the athlete in marketing efforts.

For more information about medical forms, visit: www.somi.org

How Do I Join?

Athlete Participation

Special Olympics aims to provide a variety of competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities by offering official events of various degrees of difficulty and challenge. Athletes can participate in specially modified events such as the 25-meter Assisted Walk or the 15-meter Flotation Race (Aquatics).

Events for Athletes with Physical Disabilities:

There are also events for athletes who use wheelchairs. Athletes who are not yet ready to play team sports can participate in Individual Skills competitions. For example, athletes can earn medals for performing such skills as dribbling in basketball.

Motor Activity Training Program:

Athletes with severe challenges who do not yet possess the physical and/or behavioral skills necessary to participate in official Special Olympics sports may participate in the Motor Activity Training Program (MATP), a noncompetitive program.

Unified Sports®:

Athletes with and without intellectual disabilities can participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports®, a program designed to bring together equal numbers of athletes with and without cognitive disabilities on the same team. Efforts are made to match ability levels and age-appropriate peers.

Global Messenger Training:

This is an opportunity for athletes to practice talking in front of their peers to tell their own stories. We have amazing athletes with many talents. The training starts with introducing another person, then through several practice sessions adding more information each time. By the end of the training they have their story to tell. These are the athletes chosen to speak at games, check presentations or other community groups.

Participation in Other Programs:

Special Olympics athletes may participate in other sports programs while participating in Special Olympics (e.g. Special Olympics softball team and a city league softball team).

However, sports governing bodies, such as the Michigan Interscholastic Athletic Association, leagues and schools may have rules prohibiting athletes from participating on more than one team per season. Coaches should encourage their athletes to participate in all sports programs, but they must be careful to protect their athletes' eligibility.



Sports Seasons

Special Olympics Michigan offers training and competition in a wide variety of sports. Ask the Area Director in your county what sports are available in your local area program. SOMI, per SOI recommendations, allows athletes to compete in one sport per season listed below:

Winter (December-February)

Alpine Skiing	Speed Skating
Cross Country Skiing	Snowshoeing
Figure Skating	Snowboarding

Spring Sports (January-March)

Basketball

Summer (April-June)

Aquatics (swimming)	Horseshoes
Athletics (track & field)	MATP
Bocce	Powerlifting
Bowling	Volleyball
Gymnastics	Weightlifting

Fall (June-November)

Bowling	Poly Hockey
Cycling	Softball
Flag Football	Soccer
Golf	

Year Round Sports

Bowling	Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)
Unified Sports®	

****Areas may provide sports at different times of the year***

Athletes

In order for an individual or team to participate in competition, the athlete or team must be involved in an eight-week training program and receive training and competition opportunities. A minimum 10 hours of training must occur before a culminating event. Training usually consists of 1-4 hours each week for eight weeks.

Although it is the desire to include every athlete that is training in all the games we offer, due to the many athletes we have competing in the state, it is not always possible. That is why we offer area, regional and a variety of state events to give all the athletes quality competition opportunities.

Please note that if an athlete is a no-show for an event, the area is still charged for the event.

Coaches

All coaches are volunteers. SOMI requires all coaches, volunteers and chaperones to submit a Volunteer A form and have a background check prior to their involvement. Coaches must also complete concussion training and the coaches application. Special Olympics Michigan trains coaches through sports training schools conducted year-round throughout the state.

To become a certified coach, volunteers must watch the General Orientation video, Protective Behaviors video, and attend a sports-specific Certified Training School.

Certified Training Schools are taught by knowledgeable, experienced clinicians who train coaches to work with athletes of all ability levels. In addition, Special Olympics Michigan provides a variety of resources to ensure all athletes receive safe, quality sports training.

Please note that the coach is not responsible for divisioning - it is done by the tournament director.

Home Training

No matter what your ability level, family members can help train their athlete at home. You can attend a training school or order sports training materials.

Something as basic as taking a walk together conditions your athlete. Home training not only helps your athlete, but it can help you. Best of all, it's fun!

How Does Divisioning Work?

What makes Special Olympics different than other sports organizations is divisioning. As outlined in the Special Olympics Sports Rules Books, athletes are seeded into competitive divisions based on their age, sex, and ability. Divisions are established so they are “even.”

An “even” division is one in which all participants, based on training and competition performance records, have a reasonable chance of winning. In situations where there are not enough competitors to hold competition in a certain age or sex group, the athletes are combined within the same ability range. This division is then called an “open division.”

Because the goal for each Special Olympics athlete is to do his/her best, every athlete receives either a medal or a ribbon for competing.

Why Are There Rules?

Special Olympics Inc. follows the national Governing Body rules for each sport to ensure the athlete’s safety during trainings and competitions. It also creates a fair atmosphere during each tournament and throughout advancement.



Athletes, coaches, spectators, and volunteers can expect the same rules at every level of the organization. Failing to enforce the rules is unfair to the athletes who have trained and competed properly within the rules.

Sportsmanship

It is expected that everyone abides by their respective code of conduct—including athletes, spectators, volunteers, and staff because Special Olympics believes “sportsmanship makes winners”!



Who Qualifies for Competition?

Special Olympics Michigan stresses the benefits of training and competition at the local level. Athletes train a minimum of eight sessions over a recommended two months at a time to qualify for an Area or Regional competition.

Note: Due to facility limitations, some State competitions have quotas which limit the number of athletes who advance from Area competitions. Registration is determined by each area based on participation. Higher level competition such as National and World Games are based on SOI General Rules.



How is SOMI Organized?

Special Olympics, Inc., founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968, is the organization which governs all aspects of Special Olympics. SOI gives states and other nations the right to use the name "Special Olympics," and provides guidelines for them to follow.

SOMI is accredited regularly by SOI to ensure strict compliance to these guidelines. SOMI is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors which appoints and consults with a President/CEO who develops and implements the overall state program.

Local programs register annually with SOMI and are coordinated by Area Directors who report to their field service staff. Athletes and families are the foundation of the organization.

How is Money Raised?

SOMI is a nonprofit organization 501(c)(3). Contributions from individuals, organizations, government/restricted grants, corporations, foundations and special events provide the resources necessary.

Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR) is the largest grass-roots fund raiser for Special Olympics. What started in Wichita, Kansas in 1981 as a one-day run has now expanded to include 35 countries and is a year-round fundraising program. Michigan's Torch Run is one of the top in the world involving nearly 1,500 officers from 200 law enforcement agencies raising over \$1.5 million in their local communities. The LETR is managed by voluntary law enforcement and SOMI staff.

Throughout the year, LETR can help raise funds for SOMI and their own agencies at the following events:

Polar Plunge®

Tip a Cop

Dodgeball Tournaments

Motorcycle Rides

Truck Pulls

Support Programs

Healthy Athletes®

Healthy Athletes® is designed to help athletes improve their health and fitness, leading to an enhanced sports experience and improved well being. Athletes receive a variety of health services through screenings and instruction conducted at Special Olympics events by volunteer professionals including dentists, hygienists, physicians, pharmacists, podiatrists, nurses, optometrists, opticians, dietitians and audiologists.

Products, equipment and cash donations from local, national and international companies and organizations help to support these free programs. We invite all Special Olympics Michigan registered athletes to attend the screenings even if they are not competing at the tournament where the Healthy Athletes discipline is offered. The following programs are available at upcoming State competitions:



Special Smiles®: Offers oral health screenings and education, personal preventive products and, if the athlete competes in a contact sport, a free mouth guard as well as referral advice for follow-up care.

Fit Feet: Screens athletes' total feet and ankle health and also checks for proper shoes and socks. Athletes are educated on general foot care.



Healthy Hearing: Offers hearing tests by audiologists and referral advice for follow-up care.

Health Promotion: Offers education in healthy eating, lifestyle choices, fun ways to increase physical fitness, tobacco avoidance, sun safety and skin care. Athletes also receive their Body Mass Index score, Bone Mineral Density and Blood Pressure results.



FUNFitness: Offers comprehensive physical therapy screenings and is designed to assess, improve and educate participants on flexibility, functional strength and balance.

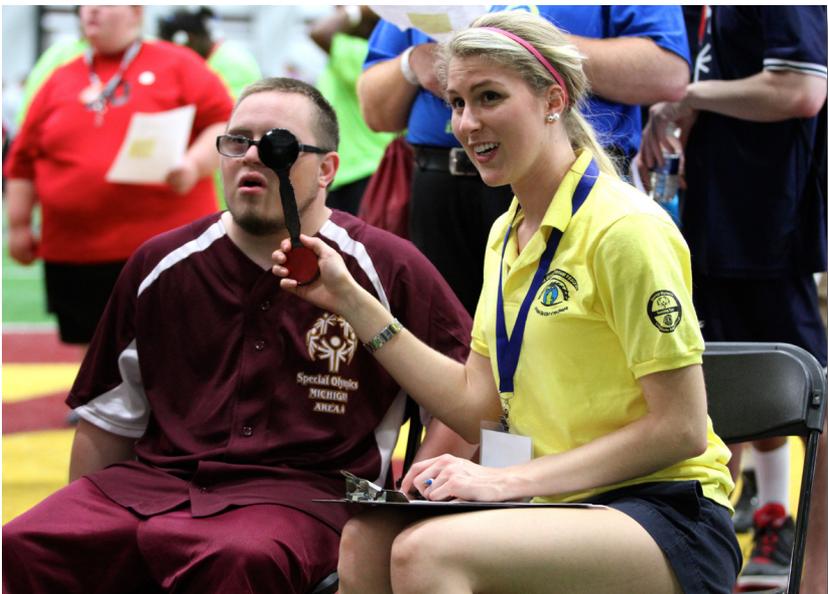


MedFest®: Provides athletes and potential athletes with a free comprehensive physical exam, giving them clearance for participation in Special Olympics. Preregistration is needed to participate in MedFest and new athletes are welcome if the Special Olympics Release Form is completed ahead of time.

Opening Eyes®: Offers extensive vision and eye health tests, refraction for those requiring further screening, free prescription eyeglasses and protective sports eye wear, and referral advice for follow-up care.



We have built a partnership with MSU Extension to provide trainings to make better eating habits. Check our website for phone numbers to the MSU Extension offices statewide. They do trainings in each county.



Athlete Leadership

Special Olympics **Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs)** train athletes to serve in meaningful leadership roles other than or in addition to that of “competitor.” They offer athletes an opportunity to participate as partners in all aspects of the Special Olympics movement in Michigan. Currently, Special Olympics athletes are serving as officials, Athlete Advisory Council members, Board members, Global Messengers and mentors.

ALPs allows athletes to have self-determination, puts athletes in meaningful positions of influence and leadership throughout the organization, provides training to give them the tools they need to be successful in these new roles, and maximizes their potential both on and off the playing field.

Project UNIFY®

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® is an education-based project that uses the sports and education programs of Special Olympics to activate young people across the U.S in order to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics believes that through sports young people can make a difference in friendships, schools and communities.

Project UNIFY® is made up of 3 main components:

Youth Leadership and Advocacy

Inclusive Sports

Whole School Engagement - Anti-bullying



R-Word Campaign

The R-Word Campaign is a campaign to “Spread the Word to End the Word™” in an effort to raise the consciousness dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the R-word (retard or retarded) and encourage people to pledge to stop the use of the R-word and replace with the word respect.

This campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to rally and pledge to stop the use of the R-Word at www.r-word.org. Events take place year round, however many activities are centered annually on the first Wednesday of March which has been proclaimed by many as “Spread the Word to End the Word™” Day. To learn more about how you can start the campaign in your community, please visit: www.somi.org

What can you do to help?

Get Active!

Families and friends of Special Olympics athletes are encouraged to play an active role in their community Special Olympics program, to share in the training of athletes, and assist in the public education efforts needed to create greater understanding of the emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Choose one or all. It's your choice!

- Cheerleader
- Driver
- Home Trainer
- Spokesperson
- Local Area Management Team Member
- Coach
- Project UNIFY®

Gifts That Keep Giving

Memorial Programs invest in the Future of Special Olympics Michigan. Give a gift to SOMI in remembrance of a friend or loved one that assists in providing year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for nearly 21,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

This expression of love through a Memorial Gift furthers our mission by giving people with intellectual disabilities continuous opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship.

For information or to give a memorial gift please call 800-644-6404.

Each Memorial Gift is acknowledged to your loved one's family or others with a card sent according to your wishes. Gift amounts are confidential.

State Office:

Special Olympics Michigan
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859
Office: (989) 774-3911
Toll-free: (800) 644-6404
Fax: (989) 774-3034
somi@somi.org

Southwest Regional Office:

1239 76th Street SW, Suite E
Byron Center, MI 49315
Office: (616) 583-1202
Fax: (616) 583-1635
somi@somi.org

Southeast Regional Office:

4084 John R Road
Troy, MI 48085
Office: (248) 688-9603
Fax: (248) 688-9567
somi@somi.org

Social Media:

Facebook: Special Olympics Michigan
Instagram: @SpOlympicsMI
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