



***Special
Olympics***

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

SPECIAL OLYMPICS LATIN AMERICA



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MISSION

Special Olympics provides 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.

MESSAGE FROM AN ATHLETE LEADER

Inclusion means two stories becoming one



My name is Julio César Barrera. I'm 29, and a Special Olympics athlete, as well as an Athlete Leader. But before Special Olympics, I was very different. You can't see my disability with just a glance. It was hidden, and you would think this made life easier, but it didn't. Living a lie is a burden. There are already enough obstacles in life to add your own.

Obstacles abound. Not only in Panama, but in all of Latin America, the employment rates for those with disabilities are too low. As a Special Olympics Athlete Leader, and a representative for the Latin American region, part of my responsibility is having these discussions and fighting for greater inclusion, in society and the workforce.

When I got my current job at an airline, I could not believe it. Later, after the interview, training and selection process was over, I asked the person who hired me why they chose me, among all other applicants, some highly qualified. And she said 'Honestly, I chose you because I saw your drive and desire for growth. I saw discipline. And I saw all you could teach us, and we are still learning from you.'

That's why I can personally tell you how important Special Olympics is in the lives of the athletes. It is not just a foundation, not just a program—it's a school, teaching values, discipline and independence, inspiring me to be a better person and lead by example. And through Unified Sports, it showed me the life-changing power of inclusion, for those with and without intellectual disabilities. We can no longer think that way, about things being separate. 'Choose to include' means that to me: two individual stories becoming one, and that will become the pillar of our joint future.

I ask that you let me learn from you, and try to learn from me. Don't focus on the sadness of my story, but be inspired by our shared drive and determination. Join our inclusion revolution so that we can shape our world, together.

Julio César Barrera
Panamá City, Panamá

Since its foundation in 1968, Special Olympics has built its reputation through the results of concrete actions, including empowering athletes through sports and providing a safe, fertile ground for them to blossom, physically, mentally and emotionally. And in those years, the athletes have shown us the true meaning of strength, resilience and dedication.

Now, on the verge of our 50th anniversary, our focus will shift outward, into the world the athletes live in outside the playing field. A world that we will reshape, through awareness, public policies and initiatives. A world where athletes are not merely accepted, but included in each aspect of society: education, healthcare, workforce and community leadership. We will achieve this by aligning and reinforcing our objectives to global efforts, such as the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our mission has not changed; we still seek to provide sports training and athletic competition to people with intellectual disabilities, so they can develop their physical fitness, therefore empowering them to take agency over their lives and growth. Rather, our mission has evolved. In 2017, Latin American athletes competed in global and regional events in larger numbers than ever before. Parallel events gained greater importance and renown, with Athlete Leadership, Healthy Athletes and community-building events becoming core, necessary components of our inclusion, awareness and empowerment efforts. Our strategic alliances increased in scope and reach, no longer limited to a local or even regional focus.

We are proud of what we have accomplished, regionally and globally. But there's always more work to be done; it is time to replace the thorny weeds of segregation and isolation with the seeds of inclusion. With *your* help and the unshakeable determination of our athletes, we *will* build a more inclusive, unified society.

Be a part of that. Join our **revolution**.

Claudia Echeverry
Regional President and Managing Director
Special Olympics Latin America

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

To shape our TOMORROW, we need a revolution TODAY



2017 REGION REACH REPORT SUMMARY

SPECIAL OLYMPICS
LATIN AMERICA



ATHLETES

360,166

UNIFIED PARTNERS

20,373

TOTAL

380,539



TOTAL

2017

UNIFIED PARTNERS

20K

ATHLETES

360K

2011

1K

299K

2006

2K

243K

2002

745

101K

HEALTH PROGRAM

HEALTHY ATHLETES CLINICS

175

ATHLETE SCREENINGS

23,233

HEALTH VOLUNTEERS

7,669

COUNTRIES OFFERING
HEALTHY ATHLETES

13

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

RECOGNIZED
PROGRAMS

2

PROGRAMS
IN PROGRESS

7



UNIFIED SPORTS

TOTAL TEAMMATES

47,142

UNIFIED ATHLETES

26,769

UNIFIED PARTNERS

20,373

2016-2017 CHANGE

+13.7%

+5,671



TOTAL YOUTH TEAMMATES

AGE 8-25

21,008

UNIFIED ATHLETES

11,584

UNIFIED PARTNERS

9,424

2016-2017 CHANGE

+41.5%

+6,159

YOUNG ATHLETES

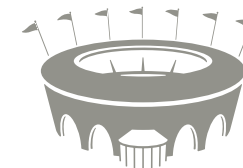
15,316

COMPETITIONS

6,707

UNIFIED

2,327



18 COMPETITIONS / DAY
1 COMPETITION / HOUR

REGIONAL FOOTPRINT

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

20

COUNTRIES

20



ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

ATHLETE LEADERS

2,553

2016-2017 CHANGE

-28.63%

-1,024



PROGRAM LEADERS

PROGRAMS WITH PAID LEADERSHIP

14

STAFF WITH ID

PAID STAFF WITH
INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES

21

UNPAID STAFF WITH
INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES

153

VOLUNTEERS

64,058

YOUTH

21,399



COACHES

28,303

COACH TO
ATHLETES
RATIO

1:13

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

YOUTH LEADERS (AGE 8-25)

2,187

2016-2017 CHANGE

+18.5%

+342



FAMILY LEADERSHIP

FAMILY LEADERS

2,134

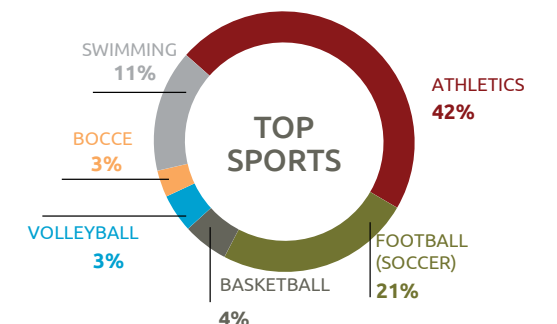
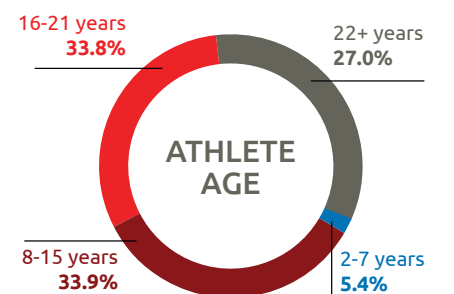
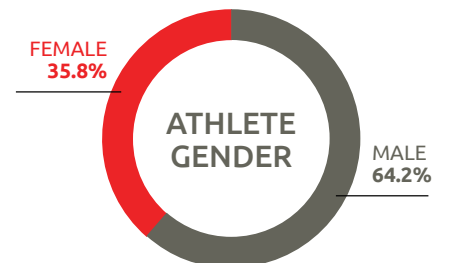
2016-2017 CHANGE

-38.1%

-1,313

REGISTERED
FAMILY MEMBER

88,382





SPORTS



12,663
NEW ATHLETES
FOR A TOTAL OF
360,166
in the region

834
NEW COACHES
FOR A TOTAL OF
28,303
in the region

“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.”

Sports are the focus of empowerment efforts at Special Olympics. Every year, we organize around 7,000 competitions in Latin America, in 39 sports disciplines. These sports events serve various functions for the benefit of our athletes: by honing their physical skills, athletes strengthen their self-esteem and independence. By forming bonds with others, they experience the joy of friendship and community. And by taking on leadership roles, they get a rewarding sense of purpose and responsibility.

Sports Partnerships

Sports partnerships between Special Olympics Latin America and regional sports federations strengthen inclusion efforts and increase competition opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

These partnerships serve our athletes and our cause by providing training and certification for coaches, sports facilities for practice and competitions; accredited refereeing and other joint activities that promote our partnership and empower our athletes by acknowledging their status as real sportspersons, driven by the same passion and bound by the same rules as their peers.

Currently, **20 programs are in partnership with 21 local sports federations.**

Regarding regional sports confederations, we have strengthened our long-standing relations with them, which resulted in regional workshops and grants, and increased visibility and representation for our athletes throughout Latin America.

Finally, **14 of our programs** have partnerships with **National Olympic Committees**, and in **2017 we have approached ODESUR (South American Sports Organization)** to discuss and analyze future collaborations. These partnerships strengthen athlete preparation and coach training for a variety of disciplines, improving the level and quality of competitions and trainings provided.



“I never imagined being a referee for so many famous players”

Hassam Zogaib, Athlete Leader from Special Olympics Paraguay, was appointed lead referee for the South American Football Confederation's (CONMEBOL) 'Tournament of the Stars'.



Soccer workshops for Special Olympics Mexico athletes, made possible by a joint effort from, Special Olympics and the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF).



Thanks to our tennis partnerships with the South American Tennis Confederation (COSAT) and the Central American and Caribbean Tennis Confederation (COTECC), initiatives such as the Special Olympics Tennis Day, celebrated on the fourth week of November, and the 'Tenis Somos Todos' program have boosted the number of participating Special Olympics Tennis athletes by 350% since its creation in 2006, likewise increasing competition opportunities in the region with special events like the Special Olympics Pan American Tournaments, three Latin American Games and two Central American Games.

UNIFIED PARTNERS AND REGISTERED ATHLETES

UNIFIED SPORTS TOTAL
47,142



Unified Athletes
26,769



Unified Partners
20,373

Unified Sports

Special Olympics Unified Sports, which brings together people with and without intellectual disabilities, emphasizes another of our goals: changing attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and fostering an inclusive mindset in new generations. In Latin America, Special Olympics Unified Sports have recruited **2,732 new Unified teammates**, for a **grand total of 20,373 in the region!**



The América soccer club (Club de Fútbol América), one of the most popular top-tier soccer clubs in Mexico, created the first soccer team for children with intellectual disabilities, with plans to create a second one during the next school cycle.



In Chile, the San Luis de Quillota soccer club, in alliance with Special Olympics Chile, launched the first team for people with intellectual disabilities, where players with and without intellectual disabilities will practice and play together.



Our regional alliance with the Inter-American Scout Region increased participation of Scout members in Special Olympics events, further strengthening our Unified Sports initiative. In turn, Special Olympics Latin America offered awareness, inclusion and human rights talks as part of the Scout events throughout the region.

Young Athletes



Special Olympics Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2 through 7. With Young Athletes, children learn how to play with others and develop important skills, which help them in family, community and school activities.

In 2017, we strengthened Young Athlete's presence in Latin America with a regional Youth Activation and Unified Schools workshop, meant to support the implementation of this program in schools and communities in the region.

Video material was also produced through our partnership with Y&R; these videos were used to present this initiative to the public and potential partners, including NGOs, government institutions, education and childcare centers, among others.



NEW YOUNG ATHLETES
5,429
Total Young Athletes
15,316



HEALTH

Special Olympics has become the largest global public health organization dedicated to serving people with intellectual disabilities.

175

Healthy Athletes Clinics

23,233

Exams and Check-Ups for Athletes

7,699

Clinical Volunteers

13

Countries Offering Healthy Athletes Screenings



Inclusive Health

Everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and this includes medical services, sanitation, adequate food and housing, among other things. This means, of course, that people with disabilities have the rights to healthcare services such as immunization and the treatment of other conditions and illnesses from infancy, and sexual and reproductive health services during adolescence and onward.

Access to such basic services is equally important. Inclusive health seeks to guarantee that children, teenagers and adults with disabilities enjoy the rights and access to these services, just like everybody else.

Healthy Athletes

Healthy Athletes is a Special Olympics Health program, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, that provides health screenings and services to athletes in 67 countries. The Healthy Athletes health screenings are divided into eight different areas: **Fit Feet** (podiatry), **FUNFitness** (physical therapy), **Health Promotion** (better health and well-being), **Healthy Hearing** (audiology), **MedFest** (sports physical exam), Special Olympics-Lions Clubs International **Opening Eyes** (vision), **Special Smiles** (dentistry), **Strong Minds** (emotional well-being).

HEALTHY ATHLETES IMPACT IN LATIN AMERICA

In 2017, Healthy Athletes held health screenings in 13 countries in Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

In Peru, the Stomatology (oral medicine) School of the Universidad Científica del Sur, a partner of Special Olympics Peru, won the Golisano Health Leadership Award for educating hundreds of odontology students on treatment for people with intellectual disabilities. This is the highest honor awarded to Special Olympics partners in the health field, and was bestowed upon only seven healthcare organizations and professionals worldwide.

The partnership with ABC Amistad Clinic, in Mexico, has yielded excellent results in the areas of medical attention, health screenings, nutrition and general medicine. The Clinic also supports the Family and Health Forms, Healthy Athletes and Special Olympics Healthy Communities program.

In Colombia, healthcare professionals and volunteers got together to provide health screenings for 300 children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities in the Special Smiles, Opening Eyes, FUNFitness, Health Promotion and MedFest areas.

And Special Olympics Venezuela developed the First Fitness Challenge, a year-round initiative that measured the impact of a healthy lifestyle, nutrition and physical preparation for people with and without intellectual disabilities.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Healthy communities is a model Special Olympics program that ensures year-round access to health care and prevention programming. Through our partnerships, which include NGOs, the private sector, universities and government institutions, Healthy Communities paved the way for inclusive health in 2017, with notable actions in Costa Rica, Paraguay, Panama and Venezuela.

FAMILY HEALTH FORUMS

The Special Olympics Family Health Forums are designed to engage families and their communities to broaden their knowledge of health and wellness as they related to those with intellectual disabilities. The goal is to offer an environment where individuals can gain direct access to health information, resources and support. And in 2017, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela were able to benefit from these forums!





EDUCATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Special Olympics envisions a world in which all people are valued for their unique contributions to their community and are respected, included and welcomed in society regardless of their different abilities. Young people with and without intellectual disabilities are critical to creating this world. They are more open to inclusion – they understand and embrace it.



A UNIFIED GENERATION

Together with Special Olympics, young people are being empowered to lead a dignity revolution, to change social norms and create a lifetime of acceptance, appreciation, and inclusion for people with differences. In 2017, Special Olympics Latin America has engaged thousands of young people in traditional and Unified Sports programs, which bring together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sports team, to create experiences and opportunities for inclusion and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics Latin America hosted a regional Youth Activation and Unified Schools workshop, where **18 programs** from the region learned about the impact Unified Schools have on future generations, and how to successfully implement this initiative in their respective countries. To date, **2941 Unified Schools & Universities have been developed in the region.**

As a result of these efforts, millions of young people around the world are driving change to create communities in which all people are included and accepted as valuable members of society.

IADB UNIFIED SCHOOLS

Special Olympics Latin America developed the **“Unified Schools: Inclusive Sports & Education as a Development Tool in Panama,”** a joint project with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). The project will be implemented in **60 schools, reaching 18,000 students during its 3-year duration,** and seeks to eliminate school bullying and exclusion, fight stereotypes and involve students in activities that lead to a more inclusive, improved school environment. The resulting data will help government officials with the creation of public policies supporting inclusion for people with disabilities. The project will spearhead the expansion of Unified Schools through Latin America.

NO MORE BULLYING

Over 200 people attended the anti-bullying workshop “¡Basta Ya! No Más Bullying”, featuring the participation of Dr. Marisa Azaret, CNN en Español host and collaborator.

The workshop, made possible with the support of Guatemala’s Ministry of Education, focused on the consequences of bullying, both in and out of the school environment, and reinforced Special Olympics’ mission of inclusion. The event included other renowned speakers, like Special Olympics Guatemala Ambassador Tuti Furlán.



GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Building an INCLUSIVE WORLD

In many parts around the globe, people with intellectual disabilities still face rejection, abandonment and even confinement.

Special Olympics works ceaselessly to stand up and fight against negligence, injustice and intolerance. Our efforts with governments and communities ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are not only accepted, but allowed to become valuable, productive members of their communities, which leads to a more inclusive, respectful society for all of its members.



INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND AGREEMENT SIGNING

With the backdrop of the **III Latin American Regional Games in Panama**, and thanks to the funding of the Inter-American Development Bank and the support of the Government of Panama, Special Olympics Latin America organized an **International Forum on Sport for Development; “Inclusive Strategies for Equity.”** Leading representatives from social organizations, the private and public sector, sports federations and other opinion leaders were among the renowned speakers at the Forum. They all agreed on Latin America and the Caribbean’s commitment to the thorough, full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

To conclude the **International Forum on Sport for Development** and with the presence of the **President of the Republic of Panama, his Excellency Juan Carlos Varela**, and **First Lady of the Dominican Republic Candida Montilla de Medina**, the participants of the Forum made a public declaration in which they committed to **SUPPORT** the inclusion of people with disabilities; to **CHALLENGE** societies to expose inequity and exclusion involving people with intellectual disabilities; to **UTILIZE** sports to develop and emphasize the abilities of people with disabilities; and to **PROMOTE** the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in mainstream sporting activities. Additionally, they agreed to cooperate and collaborate in order to support the exchange of information, experiences, training programs and best practices.



COMMITMENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The First Lady of the Dominican Republic, Cándida Montilla de Medina, witnessed first-hand the effort and commitment of Special Olympics during the **III Special Olympics Latin American Regional Games** in Panama. As a result, her office pledged to become the host institution for two global events celebrating our **50th anniversary, in 2018: The World Tennis Invitational and the Special Olympics Global Athlete Congress.**

DIEGO MARISCAL

U.S. EMBASSY

"Disabilities are not a problem. It's not something we have to hide. It's not something we have to 'cure.' If we can't be included in a society, people with disabilities are not to blame; it is the government or society's responsibility to have the necessary infrastructure to support people with disabilities."

-Diego Mariscal, CEO & Chief Disabled Person, 2Gether

Thanks to the support of the United States Embassy in Panama, Special Olympics Latin America was proud to have Diego Mariscal, a young leader, entrepreneur and motivational speaker with cerebral palsy, addressing Special Olympics athlete leaders and community members during the III Latin American Special Olympics Games in Panama. Diego's words strengthened the resolve and determination of our Athlete Leaders and their families.



LUCY MEYER

U.S. FUND FOR UNICEF
AND SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Lucy Meyer, the official spokesperson for the partnership between the U.S. Fund for UNICEF and Special Olympics, visited Brazil this year. Lucy, an 18-year old Special Olympics gold medalist swimmer, represents everything people with disabilities are capable of, if given the opportunity. She was born with cerebral palsy, and has traveled around the world, reaching out and inspiring thousands of young people that face isolation, abuse and other injustices due to their disabilities. She has raised over \$250,000 for UNICEF programs for children with disabilities.

"I want all children to have the same opportunities in health, education and sports that I have had. Acceptance and inclusion for children with disabilities should not depend upon where you are born, but should be a right for all the world's children."

-Lucy Meyer, spokesperson for partnership between the U.S. Fund for UNICEF and Special Olympics.

INCLUSIVE LEGISLATION / CHILE & COLOMBIA

Many Latin American countries are taking a firm stance on inclusion for people with disabilities. In Chile, the Senate of the Republic unanimously passed a bill that fosters inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce.

In Colombia, a new decree that regulated education availability and access for people with disabilities is breaking down existing barriers that prevent youth with disabilities from enjoying equal education opportunities, and therefore leveling the playing field towards a more inclusive, richer world.

These are the kind of breakthroughs Special Olympics strives for and encourages in society and their governments. If we are to achieve a better, more inclusive tomorrow together, public policies must reflect that commitment, and enforcing those policies should be a priority.



ATHLETE LEADERS

"An Athlete Leader is the one that sends a message of hope and motivation to society and inside the Special Olympics organization. Athlete leaders go beyond expectations, not only for being a sports athlete but also for being an example to all society"

-Julio Barrera, Special Olympics Panama

In 2017, the first Global Athlete Input Council was created, composed of seven Special Olympics athlete leaders that represent each one of the Special Olympics regions and their athletes. They provide feedback and information on a series of pertinent topics for the Special Olympics Global Leadership Team and the Board of Directors. Julio Barrera, from Special Olympics Panama, was chosen to represent Latin America.

ATHLETE LEADERS – AUSTRIA

Athlete Leaders Stand Out!



Latin American Athlete Leaders in the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games won big outside of the playing field too!



Nitzeida Gálvez, Athlete Leader from Special Olympics Panama and Global Messenger for the region, participated in **Healthy Athletes** events, meetings with other Global Messengers and a dance contest. Together with her Unified Partner, **Nicole Balta from Special Olympics Peru**, she talked about the importance of dance, the joy of music and how this artistic expression bonds people together, creating inclusive communities.



Branko Stojakovic, Athlete Leader from Special Olympics Peru, was invited to be a member of a panel on the **Global Youth Leadership Summit**. He shared his ideas and experiences as an Athlete Leader with more than **40 young people** with and without intellectual disabilities, and their **26 mentors**. Participants represented **24 Special Olympics programs in 18 countries**.



Regional Athlete Leaders Congress

"Athlete leadership means to me the voice, a voice in our future, and the future athletes to come after me, and all the other athletes. Now we're doing everything right by taking the advice of athletes and making it a better program. And a bigger family."

-Ken Melvin, Special Olympics Indiana, USA

The Regional Athlete Leaders Congress allowed for the empowerment and training of Special Olympic Athletes as leaders, as well as providing a space for socializing and team-building between peers.

"I am glad I got to know other countries, other cultures, and share my experiences. You come back different, and look forward to sharing with everyone in your own country" said **Ryan Evans**, Special Olympics Uruguay athlete, at the end of the Congress.

Athletes participated in workshops and shared their perspectives on the development of the organization. Being a Special Olympics athlete is a life-changing experience, as **Catalina Cervantes** can confirm; the Special Olympics Costa Rica athlete claims she is not only a more secure, happy individual since she joined seven years ago, but also mentions that *"We are proof that it can be done...We learn to be brave, disciplined, to want to be better every day, and we also make good friends while we're at it. The most important thing: we learn to respect ourselves and each other always, even with our differences."*

Capacity Building



LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS PLAN THE NEXT 50 YEARS FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS

On November, Special Olympics Latin America held its **Annual Leadership Conference** in Panama City, attended by Presidents, Executive Directors and leaders of the 20 Special Olympics Programs in the region, as well as three Athlete Leaders that are part of our regional council. Besides reviewing 2017's achievements and next year's strategic plan for the **50th anniversary**, the group elected new members of the **Regional Leadership Council for 2018-2020**. Special Olympics Latin America also organized the **Youth Activation and Unified Schools Workshop**, right after the leadership meeting.



TRANSFORMING OUR VISION OF INCLUSION INTO REALITY

"Leadership is the ability to transform vision into reality." This phrase by **Warren Bennis** inspired leaders from Special Olympics Latin America who, for the second consecutive year, met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the second edition of the **Leadership Academy**. In order to improve the organization's global impact, attendees received leadership materials and training as well as support tools. The academy was possible thanks to our partnerships with renowned companies specializing in best practices and performance: **American Express Foundation, CEB Global, Goldman Sachs, Lions Club International, and Skillsoft.**



A BRIGHTER FUTURE THROUGH COOPERATION

On August 28 through 31, Special Olympics Latin America hosted the **II Fundraising Academy in Bogotá, Colombia**, a workshop for programs in the region. The Academy included the insight and expertise of **Next Fundraising**, a consulting firm specializing in fundraising, communications and philanthropy for the strategic sustainability of civil society organizations. The Academy sought to support programs through improvements in their fundraising strategies and their dealings with governments, the private sector, international cooperation and other key players, in order to diversify donation sources.



GAMES & COMPETITIONS

*'Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt,'
Special Olympics Athlete Oath*



SOLA in the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2017

¡HOLA, AUSTRIA!

The 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games, held in Austria from March 14 through March 25 of 2017, was **the biggest sports & humanitarian event of the year**. The event took place in the cities of Graz, Schladming-Rohrmoos and Ramsau.

For seven days, **over 200 athletes hailing from eight countries in the Special Olympics Latin America** region showed us their mettle, accompanied by trainers, delegates and family members cheering them on. Athletes from **Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay** and **Venezuela** showed their prowess in these Winter Olympic sports: Ice Hockey, Floorball, Figure Skating, Speed Skating, Snow Boarding, Alpine Skiing, Snowshoeing, Stick Shooting and Nordic Skiing.

Besides the competitions themselves, other events included a demonstration of the **Special Olympics Motor Activities Trainings Program (MATP)**, designed for athletes who are unable to participate in official Special Olympics sport competitions because of their skill and/or functional abilities. The Motor Activity Training Program is designed to prepare athletes -- including those with severe or profound intellectual disability and significant physical disabilities -- for sport-specific activities appropriate for their ability levels.



Ariel Ary. Guardian of the Flame of Hope, Austria 2017

TORCH RUN – AUSTRIA

Ariel Ary, Special Olympics Costa Rica athlete, was chosen as one of the Guardians of the Flame Hope for the 2017 Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg for the Special Olympics World Winter Games. The Torch Run began with the lighting of the Flame of Hope in Bregenz, on March 9, after the Flame of Hope arrived in Austria all the way from Greece. Law enforcement officers, together with Special Olympics athletes, carried the Flame of Hope throughout Austria, finally reaching Graz on March 17 and officially inaugurating the event on March 18. Ariel Ary proudly represented the Latin American region, stating that 'It was very important for me to light the Olympic Cauldron to mark the beginning of the competitions and represent all of Costa Rica, Latin America and people with intellectual disabilities around the world'.

The III Special Olympics Latin American Games, Panama 2017



'FIND YOUR INSPIRATION'

In April 2016, the President of the Republic of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela, announced Panama would host the III Special Olympics Latin American Regional Games. The following year, from April 20 through April 28, thousands were inspired and enlightened by this international sports event, with over 800 participating athletes hailing from 21 countries in the region, competing in nine Olympic sports.

THE FLAME OF HOPE BURNED BRIGHT ACROSS PANAMA

On March 24, hundreds of Panamanian law enforcement officers began a journey across the country carrying the Flame of Hope, announcing the arrival of the Latin American Games to Panama. On April 21, the Flame of Hope reached the Rommel Fernández stadium and lit the Olympic Cauldron, marking the official beginning to the games.

OPENING CEREMONY

A crowd of thousands, which included athletes, trainers, family members, government officials, volunteers and artists, witnessed the opening ceremony for the III Special Olympics Latin American Regional Games in Panama. The event celebrated the joy of inclusion and unity, with millions tuning in to enjoy the spectacle from all around the world.



COMPETITIONS

Special Olympics athletes competed in 9 Olympic sports, with four of them being Unified Sports, throughout various venues in Panama City. They gave the best they had, representing and honoring their countries. The strength and determination shown in the field were an inspiration to many.

"Special Olympics has been greatly inspiring, because it has shown me the enormous potential my daughter has, as an athlete and as a human being."

—Ángeles Sanabria, mother of Special Olympics Mexico athlete Mildred Benitez Sanabria



YOUNG ATHLETES: DEMONSTRATION AND MY FIRST SPORTS EXPERIENCE (ATHLETICS AND BASKETBALL)

The Special Olympics athletes of tomorrow participated in a demonstration of the Young Athletes and My First Sports Experience programs, filling everyone's hearts with joy. These events are meant to develop the skills and abilities of children with and without intellectual disabilities, aged 2 through 7 years old.

AMBASSADORS

Noel Schajris, singer-songwriter is an Ambassador for Special Olympics Latin America. This year he participated at the 2017 SOLA Regional Games. "The experience with athletes is amazing. It is my honor to be part of a movement of inclusion. We are one ... it's inspiring to see the enormous capacity for love we have as human beings" Noel said.



Noel Schajris, Special Olympics Latin America Ambassador with Fatima Espinoza, SO El Salvador athlete, during the SOLA Regional Games Opening Ceremony.

ATHLETE FESTIVAL

For three days, the Athlete Festival offered a safe, healthy environment to all delegations to relax and mingle with one another. The festival had three themes: Panamanian-styled 'Folklore Day', 'Carnival Day' and 'Artist Night.'

FAMILY FORUM

"Let's look for ways society can listen to our children and know what they feel and how they can express themselves"

—Claudia Peña, Regional Family Leader for the Special Olympics Latin America Region

The Family Forum: "The road towards an independent life. Adaptive skills" was hosted during the III Special Olympics Latin American Games. Experts on Intellectual disability participated in the event, along with hundreds of family members of people with intellectual disabilities.

HEALTH FAIR

Healthy body, healthy mind. Special Olympics has the largest health care program for people with intellectual disabilities in the world. During the Latin American Games, over 800 athletes participated in the Health Fair, where they received medical attention and health screenings to stay in the best possible physical and mental condition.



Omar Alfanno, renowned Panamanian singer-songwriter and Special Olympics Regional Ambassador did the first Honor Roll.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" to serve. You don't have to know the Second Theory of Thermal Dynamics in Physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

-Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1968.



A huge, heartfelt 'Thank You!' to the thousands of volunteers, sponsors and every other kind soul who shared their talents, time and experience so that Special Olympics could continue its mission of inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities.

The doors and hearts of Special Olympics athletes are forever open and waiting for future collaborations with you.

Let's walk together towards a more inclusive world for everyone!

OUR FOUNDER



"My mother knew one thing, that the athletes of Special Olympics deserve the same glory as any athlete competing around the world. Special Olympics athletes are not a cause. They have power. Follow their leadership. Learn from them, and when in doubt, choose to include!"

-Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics

EUNICE SHIVER

The life's work of our founder, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, transcended the world of sports. For this reason, on July 12, 2017, she was posthumously awarded with the prestigious "Arthur Ashe Courage Award" in the 25th edition of ESPN's ESPYS Awards. Timothy Shriver, one of her five children and Chairman of the Special Olympics International Board of Directors, received the award on her behalf, which was presented by the former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama.



OUR REGIONAL PARTNERS

Our deepest gratitude to our sponsors and partners. Without their boundless, unconditional support to Special Olympics athletes, our inclusion revolution would not be possible:

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