

## **All The Things You Wanted To Know About The Special Olympics, But Were Too Afraid To Ask**

By Jenna Hill (With assistance from Christine Sandoval)

I have never participated in the Special Olympics, but I am sure like everything, you get out of it what you put into it. This is new ground, the world as we know it is not familiar with us “special” people, so we are to enlighten society about Special Olympics. You have to respect someone for trying to make the most out of this gift we have been granted. I asked the Director of Development, of Special Olympics of New Mexico, Christine Sandoval, a few questions about the basics and these were her answers.

**Question #1**           How long has Special Olympics been around?

**Response:**           “Special Olympics was founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, but came to New Mexico in 1972.”

**Question #2**           Are there certain types of people that seem to excel at Special Olympics?

**Response:**           “Any athlete who participates excels, because they have a venue to participate in. The athlete Special Olympics oath is, “Let me win, but if I cannot win; let me be brave in the attempt.”

**Question #3**           Do you have to be disabled to participate in the Special Olympics?

**Response:**           “Not all of our athletes are physically disabled. The requirement is that the individual must be diagnosed as being mentally challenged.”

**Question #4**           Is good sportsmanship required in The Special Olympics?

**Response:**           ”Absolutely!”

**Question #5**           Is there a limit of times you can participate in The Special Olympics?

**Response:**           “Special Olympics is a year-round program. A Special Olympics athlete can participate the entire year if they wanted.”

**Question #6**           How many sports can one participate in?

**Response:**           “Special Olympics New Mexico offers 14 Olympic-type sports. An Athlete can participate in as many as they would like as long as the sport does not overlap. (i.e. Basketball and bowling run concurrently, so it would be impossible for an athlete to participate in both. The same goes with swimming and unified softball.)”

- Question #7** Who can elect you to be in the Special Olympics?
- Response:** “An athlete does not have to be elected to participate. If the athlete qualifies we will find a place for him/her.”
- Question #8** Do the judges give leeway, if so how much leeway?
- Response:** “Special Olympics follow all rules set forth by each governing body. This is a legitimate sports organization and all rules set forth are followed.”
- Question #9** Is adaptive equipment allowed in Special Olympics?
- Response:** “There are some sports that do have adaptive equipment. This equipment is typically used for those individuals who are diagnosed to use such equipment.”
- Question #10** Do you think the way people have stigmatized the participants in the Special Olympics has changed recently?
- Response:** “We believe that people are starting to recognize that Special Olympics athletes can and do bring worth to their communities and to the world. The more Special Olympics break down those barriers, the more people will see their value.”
- Question #11:** What are some of the barriers one might come across participating in the Special Olympics? How are these barriers resolved?
- Response:** “We believe that one of the major barriers is people do not recognize the value of a person who is mentally challenged. Fear of the unknown is expected, but once a person works with them, they realize their value. We don’t think that everyone will recognize this, but the more we give the non-disabled people opportunity to see it, we hope that they will see potential.”

With what we have learned about The Special Olympics, maybe there were some changed views out there, maybe not. The choice is ultimately the individual’s. The Special Olympics oath says it best “Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt” says it all, we want the opportunity to do whatever we choose to do. Of course we want to win, everybody wants to win. But maybe, it’s being given the chance to succeed or fail in whatever we chose to try. That’s what it’s all about, if given the chance.