

SO Inclusive: A Special Olympics Inclusive School Program

What is Special Olympics?

Special Olympics is a not-for-profit sport organization dedicated to providing year-round sport opportunities to individuals with intellectual disabilities. In the 1960s, children with an intellectual disability were found to be half as physically fit as their peers without an intellectual disability. Suspicious that this phenomenon was not entirely due to having an intellectual disability, Dr. Frank Hayden (a Toronto researcher) discovered that given the opportunity, people with an intellectual disability could become physically fit and acquire the physical skills necessary to participate in sport. Hence the seeds were sowed for the birth of Special Olympics (SO).

Our mission is to provide individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to enrich their lives and celebrate personal achievement through positive sport experiences. These sports opportunities provide athletes with far more than the physical benefits of improved health and athletic ability. Participation in sports provides opportunities for athletes to develop social skills, build friendships, feel respected and accepted, strive for and achieve goals and increase their self-esteem – enabling them to keep up with their peers in both structured and unstructured activities in the schools.

Today, over 3,900 athletes participate in Special Olympics BC sports programs in 55 communities across British Columbia. Special Olympics BC offers year-round programs in 18 sports and 3 youth programs, as well as local, provincial, national and international competitive opportunities. To provide quality programs and competitions for our athletes, we raise funds through corporate sponsorship, special events fundraising and private donations. Even though the government is a huge supporter and contributor to Special Olympics, we still rely heavily on fundraising and volunteers who help us conduct our programs.

What is SO Inclusive?

The goal of the SO Inclusive Program is to assist schools in creating inclusive learning environments for students with intellectual disabilities. To achieve this, Special Olympics BC has developed a manual in collaboration with existing teachers to closely match the curriculum and mandate of the Ministry of Education in British Columbia: that all students have equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in *all* aspects of their educational programs.

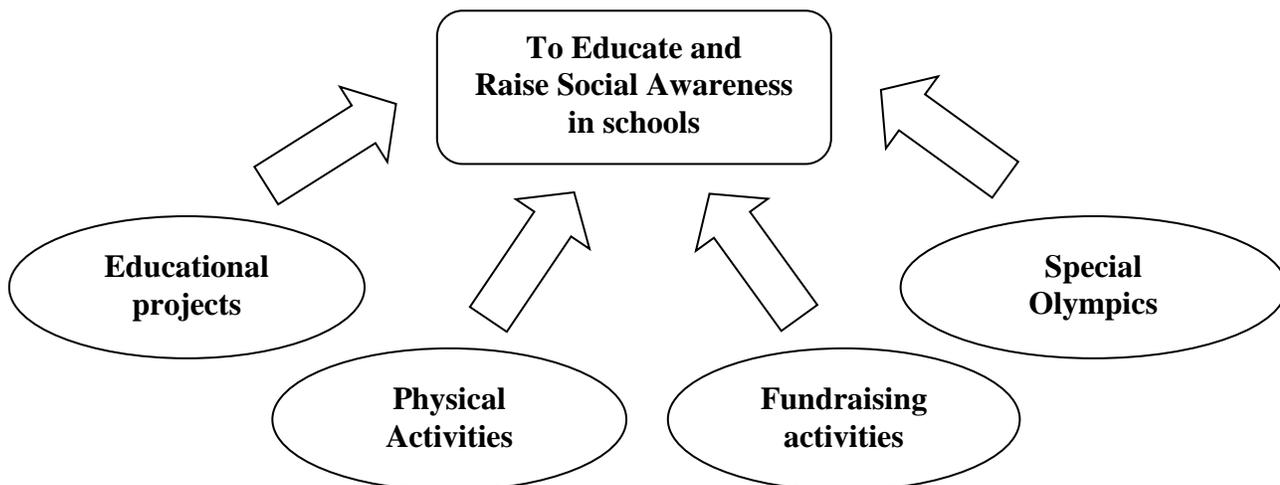
Although students with and without intellectual disabilities (and other special needs) have been integrated in the classrooms, the reality for most students with intellectual disabilities is exclusion¹. Not many youth without an intellectual disability reported having contact

¹ See: http://resources.specialolympics.org/research-toolkit/Perceptions_About_Inclusion.aspx

with people with intellectual disabilities, resulting in a lack of information and understanding and negative beliefs and attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. These perceptions create barriers to inclusion.

SO Inclusive manual

We encourage educators, community leaders, adult volunteers and student groups to adopt some of the lessons and activities presented in the SO Inclusive manual in their respective classes and school communities. The manual is packed with ideas for lessons and activities with the objective of educating our youth and raising awareness about intellectual disabilities and the Special Olympics movement.



As illustrated above, lesson and activity ideas are grouped by topics/subjects:

- 1) Educational projects
 - a. Leadership (PE Leadership, Health/Career)
 - b. Arts (English, Visual Arts)
- 2) Physical Activities
- 3) Fundraising activities
- 4) Promoting Special Olympics programs and volunteerism

Although the full manual was written specifically for secondary schools (see: <http://www.specialolympics.bc.ca/manual/so-inclusive-school-program/so-inclusive-school-program>), forms may be adapted for use in elementary and post-secondary schools. Abridged versions of the manual are also available as sample lessons and activities for *elementary*, *secondary* and *post-secondary* schools.

**** If you have utilized any of the activities/lessons presented in the SO Inclusive manual, please email Nicole Ong (nong@specialolympics.bc.ca) about your experience and attach a photograph of the activity to receive a \$50 Staples gift certificate from us!***