

Participation in sport can be an excellent part of maintaining a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. Sports are a great way to improve flexibility, cardiovascular stamina, muscular strength, agility and more! Most importantly, the fun, friendship and fitness that you will experience by participating in sport will last a lifetime.

As a parent of a child with an intellectual disability, you may not have been aware of the opportunities for your child to participate in sport; however Special Olympics Manitoba provides sport training and competition opportunities to individuals of ALL AGES AND ABILITY LEVELS with an intellectual disability.

Special Olympics Manitoba is the provincial sport governing body responsible for the delivery of sport for people with an intellectual disability in the Province of Manitoba.

SOM's mission is "enriching the lives of Manitobans with an intellectual disability through sport."

SOM's athletes have an intellectual disability. This is defined as "referring to sub-average intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with related limitations in

two or more of the following applicable adaptive skill areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health & safety, functional academics, leisure and work. Mental retardation manifests before age 18." AAMR, 1992. Participants may also have other associated disabilities along with an intellectual disability.

SOM's programs exist in all seven sport regions of the Province. SOM offers the following sports: athletics, swimming, 5 & 10 pin bowling, powerlifting, rhythmic gymnastics, softball, soccer, bocce, golf, floor hockey, basketball, speed skating, figure skating, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and curling.

SOM's competitions are open to all registered athletes. Age restrictions apply as follows: Regional level - 8 years; Provincial level - 10 years; National levels - 12 years, International - 14 years. Additional competitive opportunities are also accessed through generic sport governing bodies.

SOM is currently working with schools and school divisions throughout Manitoba to develop our Special Olympics school-based sport-training program in each and every school possible. This program entitled "**Bridge the Gap**" is one that adapts itself easily to all ability levels.

"**Bridge the Gap**" is a program designed to address some of the barriers of participation by offering students with an intellectual disability a quality athletic and sport experience, as an extra-curricular or in-school activity. Just as there is a school volleyball team and a school basketball team, "Bridge the Gap" is about having a school Special Olympics team.

Everyone's a Winner! The student athlete, the school, the teachers, Special Olympics Manitoba and you the parent! Along with the already documented benefits to sport participation, additional benefits provided specifically by the "Bridge the Gap" program include:

- Young people with an intellectual disability participating in lifelong sport activities and competition
- Schools providing opportunities for all students to experience school spirit and pride

The benefits to your CHILD are:

- Enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- Improved motor skills, coordination, and dexterity
- High quality, regular physical activity within the school
- Incorporation of quality teaching strategies and training guidelines
- Fun and friendly competitive experiences with students in other schools
- Access to information on Special Olympics community evening and weekend programs, increasing the possibility of adulthood involvement.

The benefits to YOU are:

- The opportunity to watch as your child progresses through levels of development in a particular sport or set of sports, supervised by his/her teacher/coach.
- A comprehensive education about Special Olympics and local community evening and weekend training opportunities and competitions.
- The chance for you to get involved in Special Olympics (as a spectator or a volunteer)

Tips for Parents

- Allow your child to be an athlete
- Judge your athlete on their ability
- Respect your athlete's coach
- Encourage your athlete
- Be involved

All children want to know that they belong, but for children with intellectual disabilities many times this feeling of belonging is more difficult to find. Here is what a parent of one of the many SOM athletes in the province had to say

about what Special Olympics Manitoba has done for her son.

Austin's Accomplishments

At the age of two, our son Austin was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Being a young boy, he loved to be with other children and play sports, but his development was not allowing him to participate in community activities due to the delay in his speech and motor skills. He had no sense of belonging, and was always asking to be able to participate.

Then Special Oymics was brought to our attention. Austin debuted in a youth club that he loved, asking right away if he could go back next week. In the five years since then, his sports have included soccer, curling and snow shoeing. He has also competed in the Regional and Provincial track and field games for the last four years.

Now 12 years old, Special Olymipcs is the highlight of Austin's week. The benefits have been immense, giving him the pride to call his family each week and speak of his accomplishments. He is accepted by his new friends and has learned how to be part of a team; congratulating others, doing hi-fives, and cheering for his peers as they compete. His social and motor skills are stronger, while getting regular exercise. He feels good about himself, and has found an atmosphere where he belongs. He's even turned his parents into volunteers and assistant coaches!

Not a single day goes by that we don't see the benefits of his status as a Special Oympian.

Austin is a member of Seven Oaks Middle School Hawks Bridge the Gap Program.



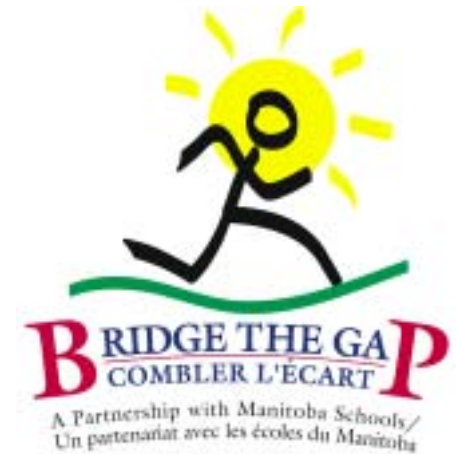
In order to participate in this educational and fun opportunity, your child MUST be registered with Special Olympics Manitoba. There is a registration fee of \$25.00 (if not already registered), which gives your child access to all Special Olympics programs in the region.

If you have any questions about the "Bridge the Gap" program, please call Colleen Lowdon, Bridge the Gap Coordinator at 926-8356 or via email at clowdon@specialolympics.mb.ca.

200 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB R3C 4M2
Phone: (204) 925-5628
Toll Free 1-888-333-9179
Fax: (204) 925-5624

Email: som@specialolympics.mb.ca

Website: www.specialolympics.mb.ca



Parent/Caregiver Information



Bringing schools
and
Special Olympics Manitoba
together as partners
in the provision of
sport programs
for students with an
intellectual disability.