



# Special Olympics Young Athletes™

## Michigan

27,745 participants  
(includes athletes, Unified  
Partners & Unified Champion  
Schools)

2,315 Young Athletes

24 sports offered

6 state-level competitions, district  
basketball tournaments and more  
than 600 competitions statewide.

Year-round sports training and  
competitions

32,867 volunteers

Programs provided at no cost to  
athletes or their families

Budget funded almost entirely by  
private donations

### Sports include:

Alpine Skiing  
Athletics  
Basketball  
Bocce  
Bowling  
Cross-Country Skiing  
Cycling  
Figure Skating  
Flag Football  
Golf  
Gymnastics (Artistic & Rhythmic)  
Handball  
Horseshoes  
Kayaking  
Poly Hockey  
Powerlifting  
Snowboarding  
Snowshoeing  
Soccer  
Softball  
Speed Skating  
Swimming  
Volleyball  
Weightlifting  
\*Plus: Unified Sports®  
Healthy Athletes®  
Young Athletes™  
Motor Activities Training Program

## Overview

- Young Athletes™ is a program designed for children ages two through seven with intellectual disabilities to help improve physical, cognitive and social skills through introduction to sports. Young Athletes™ provides the opportunity for children to get involved before the age of eight, when they are eligible to compete for Special Olympics Michigan.
- The activities the athletes take part in are foundational skills consisting of walking, running, balance, jumping, catching, throwing, striking, kicking and other activities.
- The program focuses on two specific levels of play. Level One includes physical activities focused on developing fundamental motor tracking and eye-hand coordination. Level Two concentrates on the application of these physical activities sharpened through play at Level One.

## History of the program

- In early 2007, Special Olympics created a pilot of the program aimed to get younger children involved with Special Olympics.
- The Young Athletes™ program made its debut in Shanghai, China during the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games.
- To date, Young Athletes™ has reached over 100,000 children in 21 countries and is continuing to expand.

## Benefits

- In addition to the physical aspect of the program, it allows the children to interact with other athletes who may have intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities or some children without disabilities.
- The Young Athletes™ program provides families with the resources and support through Special Olympics Michigan. Another benefit of the program is it provides an opportunity for parents to share information and resources with one another about raising a child with disabilities.

## Why it is important

- Young Athletes™ is a program that emphasizes fun, no matter the athletes' athletic ability.
- Each athlete learns the importance of teamwork and builds self-confidence with each activity they accomplish.
- Additionally, the children learn how to take directions, which is beneficial if the athlete decides to enter Special Olympics Michigan.
- Involvement in Young Athletes™ makes the transition easier on the athlete because they are more familiar with interacting with other athletes.
- The Young Athletes™ program embraces each child's differences and emphasizes it's okay to be different.

## Funding

- Special Olympics Michigan is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization supported almost entirely through corporate funding, individual gifts, and special events. All Special Olympics Michigan programs and activities are available at no cost to Michigan athletes or their families. The generosity of Michigan organizations, individuals, and statewide businesses enable the program to continue.

For more information, contact us through our website at [www.somi.org](http://www.somi.org), by phone at (800) 644-6404 or by mail to Special Olympics Michigan, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859

