

# Athlete Leadership



**Special Olympics**  
Ireland



## ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

Through participation in Special Olympics sports, athletes gain confidence, self-esteem and personal skills. With this new confidence, some athletes wish to pursue other opportunities within the Special Olympics programme either in addition to their sport or as a follow on from past participation.

Athlete Leadership encourages athletes to develop skills which will empower them to be advocates for all athletes and act as a Leader for Special Olympics.

Becoming involved in Athlete Leadership provides athletes with many new and different opportunities. Training is provided to athletes who wish to become Athlete Leaders. The training helps athletes to build on their confidence and self-esteem and encourages them to contribute to the organisation in a wider context. It also gives athletes a voice in spreading the word about the positive change Special Olympics can bring to individuals and families.

### Who can be part of Athlete Leadership?

Any athlete, with the assistance of a mentor, can participate in Athlete Leadership. Athletes must be over 16 years of age, while mentors must be over 18 years of age. Both the athlete and the mentor must be registered members of Special Olympics.

Mentors may support one, two or more athletes at the same time, depending on the level of support the athlete may require.

## Key elements of involvement

There are many ways in which an athlete may be a part of Athlete Leadership. A number of key opportunities are offered in the following areas:

- Ambassadorial Roles
- Volunteering Roles
- Committee Work
- Awards Scheme



### Athletes as Ambassadors

Special Olympics athletes are superb ambassadors for the programme. Through Athlete Leadership, training is provided in a range of areas including public speaking, presentation skills, photography and media work. This training gives athletes the confidence to share and express their views and ideas and to represent themselves and their fellow athletes.

Opportunities are provided for athletes to engage at various levels of the organisation, including club and regional level. This may lead to involvement in Special Olympics media campaigns and interviews, helping to spread the message of Special Olympics to the general public.



### Athletes as Volunteers

Through volunteering, athletes are provided with additional opportunities to develop their skills and give their time to the organisation. With planning and support from their mentor, athletes can volunteer at their Special Olympics club or in their local community. There may also be opportunities to volunteer at various levels within the organisation. .



### **Athletes as Team member on a Committee**

As Special Olympics athletes gain confidence in new skills, they often seek new challenges and as they develop, a better understanding of how the organisation operates. Opportunities exist for athletes to serve on different committees and teams within the organisation. Through attendance at workshops and training, athletes and mentors learn the values of representing their peers at various levels of the organisation

Through training, athletes learn about committee roles, committee structures, election process and decision making and what is required should they be appointed to a committee or team



### **Awards Scheme**

For athletes who are both ready and wish to take on an additional challenge, Special Olympics Ireland has established an awards scheme which necessitates athletes to complete various projects and tasks, with the support of their mentor, in order to achieve an award. There are three levels of award: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

Athlete participation in workshops and other elements of training will enable them to decide on the various projects required at each level.

The athlete/s and mentor will agree the activity and time commitment prior to undertaking the award. Participation in the awards scheme is not compulsory for any athlete who wishes to become a leader in the Special Olympics programme.

For further information please contact the Regional Development Officer Clubs