



# WORLD WINTER GAMES TURIN 2025

## IMPACT REPORT



**Special  
Olympics**  
Ireland





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# Letter from Matt English, Chief Executive Officer



As the CEO of Special Olympics Ireland, I am both proud and humbled to introduce our first World Games Impact Report following this year's incredible World Winter Games. These Games, held in March 2025, provided our athletes with the opportunity to showcase their extraordinary talents on the global stage and create memories that will last a lifetime. The dedication, skill and resilience demonstrated by our athletes were truly inspiring and a testament to the power of inclusion and the limitless potential of people with intellectual disabilities.

The World Winter Games were not just about competition; they were about community, connection and empowerment. They offered a platform for our athletes to not only shine, but to also break down barriers, challenge perceptions and inspire people around the world. At Special Olympics Ireland, we believe that sport is a powerful force for good – a way to celebrate the incredible achievements of our athletes and provide a further valuable space for them to realise their fullest potential.

Reflecting on the achievements of the Games, I am filled with pride as we consider not only the medals won but also the friendships forged, the confidence gained and the voices that were amplified. For our athletes, every moment at the World Winter Games was a victory – a victory for courage, a victory for perseverance and a victory for inclusion.

This Impact Report offers us a moment to pause and reflect on the extraordinary journey that brought us to these Games, and the lasting impact they will have on Special Olympics Ireland and the global Special Olympics movement. It is a celebration of the athletes, coaches, volunteers, supporters and strategic partners who have made these successes possible. It is also a reminder of the work still ahead. We will continue to push for a world where every person, regardless of ability, is given the opportunity to live, learn and succeed in a community that embraces them.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together, we can build a more inclusive world, one where every person is valued, respected, and celebrated for who they are.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt English".

Matt English  
CEO, Special Olympics Ireland





# Letter from Margaret Turley, Sargent Shriver Global Messenger



Dear Friends of Special Olympics,

As we reflect on the Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin 2025, I am filled with immense gratitude for the incredible experience we have shared. Whether you were with us in person, cheering from the stands or supporting from afar, your commitment to inclusion and the athletes of Special Olympics has made a lasting impact. Thank you for celebrating the remarkable abilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities and for creating an atmosphere of encouragement and support.

As an athlete myself, I know first-hand how powerful it is to compete in front of a crowd that believes in us. Having proudly represented Team Ireland at the 2023 World Games in Berlin, I understand the dedication it takes to reach this stage—dedication not just from the athletes but also from their families, coaches, volunteers and local clubs. The energy and enthusiasm you brought to these Games, whether in person or from home, honoured that journey and inspired us all to strive for our best.

As you reflect on these Games, I encourage you to keep the spirit of inclusion alive. The impact of Special Olympics does not end with the closing ceremony—it continues in our communities, in our schools, in our workplaces and in our daily lives. Whether it's supporting Special Olympics programmes, advocating for greater opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, or simply fostering a more inclusive world, each of us has a role to play in ensuring this movement continues to grow.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for championing inclusion. Together, we are making a difference—one athlete, one game and one moment at a time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Turley".

Margaret Turley

Sargent Shriver Global Messenger







# WORLD WINTER GAMES 2025 FAST FACTS

ATHLETES & UNIFIED PARTNERS

1,500

DELEGATIONS

100

WINTER SPORTS

8

COACHES & DELEGATION OFFICIALS

1000+

FAMILY MEMBERS

2,000

VOLUNTEERS

2,000





# WORLD WINTER GAMES 2025 TEAM IRELAND FAST FACTS

TEAM IRELAND ATHLETES

14

*\*\*Including floorball team of 8 male athletes.*

% FEMALE ATHLETES

21%

NO. WINTER SPORTS



COACHES & MANAGEMENT TEAM

9

FAMILY MEMBERS & SUPPORTERS

87

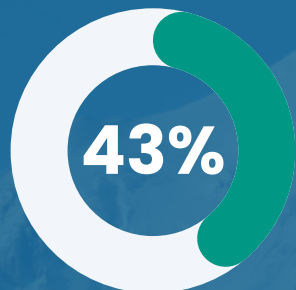
FUNDRAISING VOLUNTEERS

42



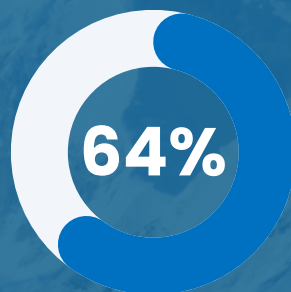
# TEAM IRELAND ATHLETES

## The Games Experience

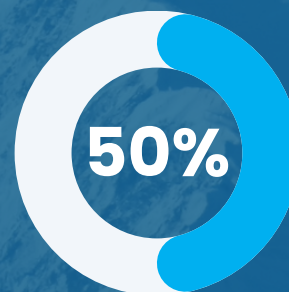


of Athlete's first time at a World Games

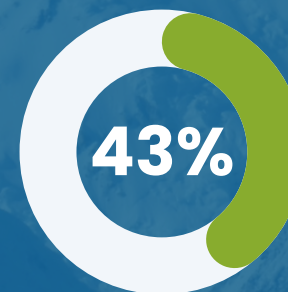
Athlete's were most looking forward to....



Competing in their sport



Travelling to a new place



Making new friends





# TEAM IRELAND ATHLETES

## Fitness Training Preparation



At Team Ireland's first training session in June 2024, athletes participated in fitness assessments to establish baseline levels of aerobic capacity, muscular strength and muscular endurance. Based on the first round of fitness assessments, individualised fitness programmes were developed for each athlete on the team to help physically prepare them for the World Winter Games.

**Athletes followed these tailored fitness programmes for a 7 month period and during the reassessment phase demonstrated measurable improvements in ....**

AEROBIC CAPACITY  
SHUTTLE RUN TEST

7.6% ↑

MUSCULAR STRENGTH  
HANDGRIP ASSESSMENT

16.4% ↑

MUSCULAR ENDURANCE  
SIT UP TEST

16.4% ↑





# TEAM IRELAND ATHLETES

## Health and Wellbeing



The Stronger Minds, Happier Lives mental health promotion programme was delivered to Team Ireland to help them mentally prepare for the World Winter Games including developing coping strategies to help manage stress and anxiety. This programme is co-delivered by health partner, Mental Health Ireland and Health Messengers, Special Olympics athlete leaders.

89%

of athlete's felt the programme helped them to manage difficult or challenging emotions they experienced during the Games

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION  
SESSIONS DELIVERED

5

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKITS  
PROVIDED

14



100%

of athlete's would recommend the Stronger Minds, Happier Lives programme to future athletes attending a World Games



# TEAM IRELAND ATHLETES

## The Games Experience



100%

of athlete's report that attending the World Games has made them feel more confident in their abilities

89%

of athlete's are very motivated to return to training and continue playing their sport after the World Games



## MEDAL TALLY





# ATHLETE IMPACT STORY



## **‘Never give up, keep fighting’ – How Wicklow woman Lorraine Whelan survived a serious car crash to ski for Ireland**

In 2018, Lorraine Whelan from Delgany, Co Wicklow, was struck by a car near her workplace in Dublin, sustaining severe leg injuries.

At the time, she was an accomplished skier, having represented Ireland at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria.

Determined to return to the sport she loved, Lorraine resumed skiing just a year after the accident. Her perseverance led her to qualify for the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Italy, where she once again represented Ireland.

*Lorraine's journey exemplifies resilience and determination, embodying her motto: "Never give up, keep fighting."*





# ATHLETE IMPACT STORY

## Gavin Bourke - Captain, Floorball Team

In a shining example of team spirit and compassion, Ireland's floorball captain Gavin Bourke made a selfless gesture ahead of their bronze medal match against Switzerland at the World Winter Games.

Noticing that a teammate was upset after the narrow semi-final loss to Costa Rica, he handed over his captain's armband as a symbol of trust and encouragement. It was a quiet, powerful moment that reflected everything this team stands for — unity, empathy and lifting each other up when it matters most.

This gesture demonstrated the true power of Special Olympics: a movement rooted in inclusion, friendship, and believing in one another. That same spirit carried them to a brilliant bronze medal, celebrated with pride and emotion by the whole team.



*"Special Olympics to me is togetherness. There is no judgement, there is no discrimination, we are all one. It is an amazing organisation and I'm so proud to be part of it"*



# FAMILIES & SUPPORTERS



100%

of parents are **incredibly proud** of their **athlete's participation** in the World Winter Games, for their achievements both on and off the field



Joe Joe has come out of his shell. Before going away with Team Ireland, he wouldn't talk too anybody. Over at the Games, I was shocked when I saw him speaking with reporters!



We are proud of our athletes achievement before the World Games and after they were selected.



It was a fantastic occasion for our daughter Máire and our family, made even more special by her winning Gold and Bronze medals. It has contributed a lot to Máire's development and confidence and created memories we'll treasure forever.

73%

of parents feel **very connected to the Special Olympics community** after their athlete's participation in the World Winter Games



# FAMILIES & SUPPORTERS



88% of family members feel that this experience has changed how people in their local communities interact with and support their athlete

“The local community has embraced Lucy and are having a reception to celebrate her achievements

“Extended family were in awe of the competition and the extremely high standard of skiing in Donals divisions. A whole new level of respect for Donal

“Jack has been treated like a hero since he came home, a lot of people are very proud of him!





# ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

## George Fitzgerald - Assistant Floorball Coach



*"It was an honour to represent Ireland as an assistant coach. I loved supporting the team, helping with training and cheering them on. Being part of their journey was something I'll never forget."*

George Fitzgerald, an accomplished Athlete Leader from Waterford, made history at the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games by taking on the role of Assistant Coach for Team Ireland's floorball squad — a powerful example of athlete leadership in action.

At the World Winter Games in Turin, George stepped into a coaching role, supporting the floorball team both on and off the rink. His leadership was instrumental in fostering team spirit, guiding warm-ups, and offering motivation during high-pressure moments. George's presence on the coaching bench not only showcased his own growth as a leader but also symbolised the inclusive philosophy at the heart of Special Olympics — where athletes can lead, coach, and mentor others.

George's journey is a shining example of what's possible when athletes are empowered with responsibility and respect. His success as an Assistant Coach highlights how Special Olympics is not only changing lives on the playing field, but also creating meaningful pathways for athletes to lead at the highest levels.



# ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

## Margaret Turley - Sargent Shriver Global Messenger



Margaret Turley, a dedicated athlete from Kilkenny, was appointed as a Sargent Shriver Global Messenger (SSGM) for Special Olympics Europe Eurasia (2024–2027) — one of the highest honours an athlete can receive within the movement. This role recognises exceptional leaders who use their voices to advocate for inclusion, equality and the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.



At the 2025 Special Olympics World Winter Games, Margaret took on a prominent leadership role. She helped welcome sponsors from around the world by providing tours of the Healthy Athletes venue, participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony and delivered a powerful speech to open the Healthy Athletes programme. Most notably, Margaret was selected to give the main address at the Closing Ceremony, where she represented athlete voices on the global stage with confidence and pride.



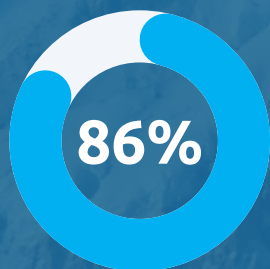
Margaret's journey is a testament to the power of athlete leadership — showing that when given the platform, athletes can lead, inspire and drive meaningful change within and beyond the Special Olympics movement.



# VOLUNTEERS

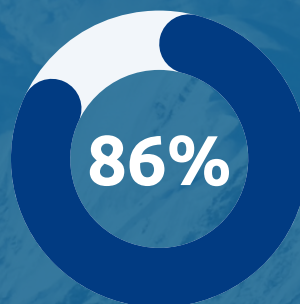


of volunteers who attended the World Winter Games had **NEVER volunteered** with Special Olympics Ireland before



had **no specific connection** to a Special Olympics athlete when they registered to volunteer at the Games

Volunteers key motivations included.....



**Making a difference in athletes lives**



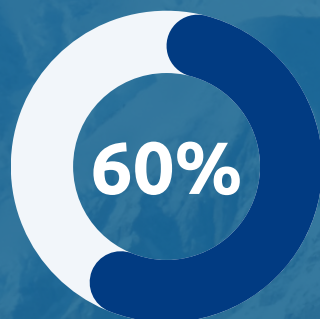
**Supporting Special Olympics Ireland**





# VOLUNTEERS

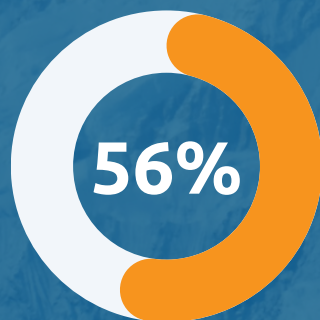
Volunteers were asked how their experience contributed to their personal growth. Across a number of areas volunteers reported significant increases in their,



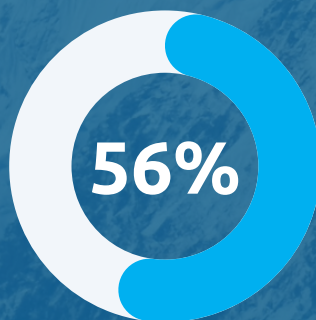
Empathy and Compassion



Self Confidence



Leadership Skills



Cultural Awareness





# VOLUNTEERS

88%

of volunteers are now **very likely to advocate** for Special Olympics and/or people with intellectual disabilities in their community after their experience at the World Winter Games

96%

would **recommend volunteering** with Special Olympics to others

100%

**hope to volunteer** with Special Olympics **again**





# CORPORATE PARTNERS IMPACT STORY

## James Aherne - eir Volunteer

James Aherne, a corporate volunteer from eir, joined Team Ireland at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin to honour his late father — a passionate supporter of the movement and a key figure in bringing floorball to Special Olympics Ireland.

Arriving as a volunteer, James quickly became an integral part of the team. Whether offering behind-the-scenes support, lifting spirits, or cheering with the athletes, he brought heart and humility to every moment. His role in floorball, a sport so deeply connected to his father, made the experience all the more personal. Welcomed warmly by Team Ireland — many of whom had known his dad — James carried forward a legacy with pride and purpose.

Beyond the Irish team, James worked alongside international delegations, embracing the spirit of global inclusion that defines the Games. His journey reflects eir's deep commitment to community and shows the power of corporate support when employees are empowered to give back.

At Special Olympics, volunteers like James are the heartbeat of our mission. They remind us that inclusion is more than a goal — it's a journey we take together. Thanks to partners like eir evo, we know we're not walking it alone.



*"In terms of the experience, it has been amazing. It is one of the best things I have ever done. I love sports. If you want to see people who are passionate about sports, passionate about competing and being part of something, I highly recommend volunteering with Special Olympics at least once in your life! You won't regret it!"*



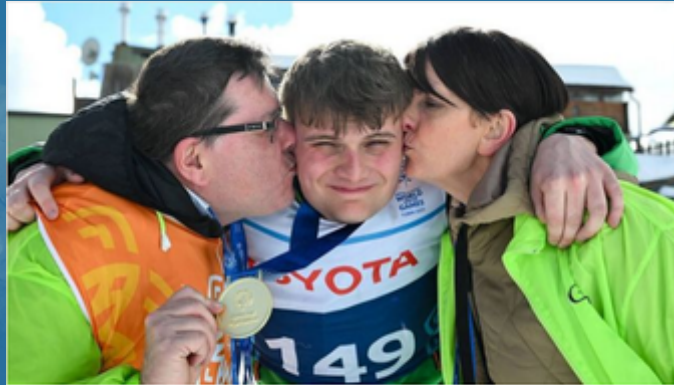


### Henry McKean reports from the World Winter Games Special Olympics in Turin

Up on the Italian Alps the Special Olympics World Winter Games is in full swing. 14 Athletes ar...

nt Newstalk / Mar 13

# MEDIA COVERAGE



### 'Time of our lives' - history-making Ireland claim five medals on day 1 of Winter Special Olympics

On an emotional opening day for the Irish in Turin, Caolan McConville made history.

Irish Examiner / Mar 13

NEWS PROGRAMMES

### Six One News (Web)

Broadcast on: March 13th, 2025



RTÉ News

TV PROGRAMMES ▾ RAC

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## Team Ireland Highlights!



### 'We did it' - jubilant scenes as Ireland's floorballers take bronze medal at Special Olympics world Winter Games

It may have been Gold Cup Day at Cheltenham, but bronze was the metal of choice in Turin as jubilant scenes followed Team Ireland's victory over Switzerland...

Irish Independent / Mar 14



### Four Mallow players push for floorball glory at Special Olympics - as Tim Shriver teams up with Irish goalkeeper...

It was the first golden day for Team Ireland as they scooped up medals galore on the slopes to give lift-off to the Special Olympics Winter Games in Italy...

Irish Independent / Mar 13



### Trailblazing Special Olympian George Fitzgerald is still a leading light for Team Ireland, but now as a coach

George Fitzgerald is on the sideline, issuing instructions.

Irish Independent / Mar 11



# MEDIA REACH



Over 75 News Pieces - Published and Broadcast



14 National and 30 Regional News Articles



15 National Broadcasting Pieces On Air

## NATIONAL MEDIA REACH

National Media Reach Print and Broadcast + 1 Regional Larger Paper	Readership/Audience	Parameters	Volume Published
Irish Independent	500,000	Daily	12
Sunday Independent	700,000	Weekly	2
Newstalk	244,000	Daily	4
BBC NI - Regional	40,000	Daily	2
UTV	17,500	Daily	2
Belfast Telegraph	143,311	Daily	3
RTE 6 One News	654,000	Daily	3
RTE News Online (Including App)+F31	850,000	Monthly	3
Irish Examiner	250,000	Daily	1





SPECIAL OLYMPICS  
**WORLD  
WINTER  
GAMES**  
TURIN 2025



**Only 1% of athletes reach this level of competition on the world stage!**

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the coaches & clubs who put in years of work & training with athletes helping them reach this calibre. We also want to thank our supporters, volunteers, funding bodies, patrons and valued partners for helping our athletes to achieve their dreams!



Aer Lingus 



Rialtas na hÉireann  
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**RETHINK  
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