

**Special Olympics Louisiana was founded in 1972 and today serves more than 15,000 athletes through 10 official sports.** A not-for-profit organization offering year-round training and competition for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

To be eligible to compete in Special Olympics, athletes must be at least 8 years of age and be identified by an agency or professional as having some form of intellectual disability. In 2019, SOLA plans to start a Young Athletes Program for children ages 3-7.

Special Olympics changes lives. The Special Olympics movement celebrates the **abilities and achievements** of a group of people who happen to have a disability. Special Olympics athletes are like any other athletes -- they train and compete, they learn to win and to lose, they strive to do their best and they inspire us. They are true athletes who embrace and often define the true "spirit of sport."

Special Olympics programs enhance physical fitness, motor skills, self-confidence, social skills and encourage family support.

Athletes compete free of charge except those athletes who advance to three state events. There are more than 100 events that are free of charge for our athletes at local area, district and regional levels. There is a minimal assessment for the State Games which allows local programs to support the overall costs associated with planning and hosting a state-level competition. That is why the funds raised through the Law Enforcement Torch Run® are so necessary. The overall annual budget of Special Olympics Louisiana ranges from \$1.8 to \$2.5 million annually depending on which programs are currently being implemented.

Athletes must **qualify** for state competitions in order to attend. They must have earned gold, silver or bronze at an area level competition in the sport(s) of their choice and fulfilled any other qualification standards. Complete requirements for qualification are not the same for each state event. To become qualified, athletes must participate in a minimum of eight weeks of training in the sport of their choice prior to that state event.

Athlete's Oath: Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SPECIAL OLYMPICS**

The Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) partners law enforcement agencies & relationships building between officers & persons with intellectual disabilities to promote awareness. It is the largest grassroots fundraising event and has become the most highly successful public awareness campaign in the history of Special Olympics.

Annually, almost 110,000 dedicated and compassionate law enforcement members carry the "Flame of Hope," symbolizing courage and celebration of diversity uniting communities around the globe. Since inception, LETR has raised over 700 million dollars and changed millions of attitudes.

The Torch Run is endorsed internationally by the International Association Chiefs of Police. The first Louisiana Torch Run began 1985 and has supported it ever since.

Funds raised go toward supporting Special Olympics Louisiana year-round training and athletic competition program.

Throughout the year, agencies raise funds in a variety of ways. All agencies participate in selling shirts. Many fundraising efforts center on special events such as Trivia Nights, Polar Plunges, Over the Edge, Poker Runs, Tip-A-Cop, and dress down days. Others raise funds through donations by contacting local businesses.