

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment can be defined as feeling, acting and being in control of one's own life as much as possible, and involves having the power to make choices and decisions about your own life.

Athlete Empowerment Components

- The athlete is personally responsible for his/her actions
- The athlete is able to speak up for him/herself
- The athlete feels that they are a person with valuable thoughts & opinions
- The athlete can actively problem-solve and make decisions
- The athlete feels they are an active participant in their own life



**Special
Olympics**
Ontario



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Athlete Leadership Program



EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

Empowerment within Special Olympics Ontario

Special Olympics Ontario is committed to ensuring that athletes participate in all key areas of the organization through athlete empowerment initiatives. Athlete empowerment is not a new concept to Special Olympics Ontario. In fact, supporting athlete empowerment initiatives simply expands Special Olympics Ontario's commitment to athlete development. In 1965, Frank Hayden proved through research that individuals with intellectual disabilities have the ability to reach optimal levels of health and deserve opportunities to participate in sports. From the beginning, Special Olympics Ontario has been committed to helping athletes reach excellence in sports. Empowerment is meant to develop the inner excellence of an athlete's character by giving them the opportunity to foster their drive for self-achievement. All across the province, athletes are demonstrating athletic ability combined with leadership skills. Whether volunteering at school competitions, as athlete committee members, as community council representatives, as volunteer coaches or public speakers, they are proving that people with intellectual disabilities are vibrant, active, talented members of the Special Olympics Ontario clubs and communities in which they participate.

Special Olympics Ontario provides opportunities for an athlete to realize empowerment through

- Experiencing greater control over their lives
- Allowing athletes to provide critical feedback for programming
- Putting their thoughts into action
- Interacting within the Special Olympics Ontario environment in an empowering manner
- Exercising personal responsibility within the Special Olympics Ontario community

Athlete Leadership Committee

This is where we apply empowerment to the roots of our organization. This empowerment taskforce consists of 12 Athlete Ambassadors, one representing each region, who will be responsible for ensuring that the voices, concerns, issues, and ideas of athletes in their local communities are being heard and acted upon at the provincial level. As well, the committee will engage in short and long-term goals and will develop projects to empower their fellow athletes to be the best that they can be!



Ambassadors are also engaging in self-empowerment in the process by:

Athlete Empowerment Components

The athlete is personally responsible for his/her actions:

exercising personal responsibility within the SOO community through your committee duties.

- The athlete is able to speak up for him/herself: **providing critical feedback for programming.**

- The athlete feels that they are a person with valuable thoughts & opinions: **being able to put your thoughts and ideas into action.**

- The athlete can actively problem-solve and make decisions: **working in the committee to solve the issues of their fellow athletes and come to agreeable solutions.**

- The athlete feels they are an active participant in their own life: **by experiencing greater control over SOO.**

Initiatives



The Athlete Ambassadors will be representing athletes at the organizational level, as well as acting as a communicator between the organization and the athletes. With this, they will come across a variety of questions, complaints,

complements, and so on. It will be up to their discretion, with the support of staff, to decide on what to do with this information and how they will deal with the knowledge they are gaining from the athletes, whether it be recommending new sport training, solving a sport club problem, or proposing the implementation of new sport policy. On top of this, they will be in charge of creating new initiatives that will help empower the athletes of Ontario. The ambassadors will also be representing Special Olympics Ontario at public speaking events at schools, group homes, special events, to sponsors and volunteers.

Initiatives - outreach and empowerment through:

- An athlete website and online community to share information and facilitate networking between athletes, staff and volunteers across the province.
- The development of an athlete e-mail address to allow for a quick and non-threatening means of appeal, information gathering, and support.
- Establish a direct ideas, complaints and appeals mechanism for athletes within Ontario.
- E-letter
- Online videos ("How To")