



***Special
Olympics***
Ontario

Athlete Leadership Program

Athlete Manual

Welcome!

Welcome to the Athlete Leadership Committee! You have been chosen to represent the athlete population in your region, with your purpose being to build a stronger athlete voice in the Special Olympics Ontario Organization and to empower your fellow athletes to do the same. This information guide will offer you an introduction to empowerment and your new role within SOO, as well as explain some of the short and long-term goals of this initiative. The basis of our committee will revolve around the themes found in this manual, and we will be referring back to it throughout our work together. Get excited for the empowering work we are about to begin within the Special Olympics Ontario communities!



What is Empowerment?

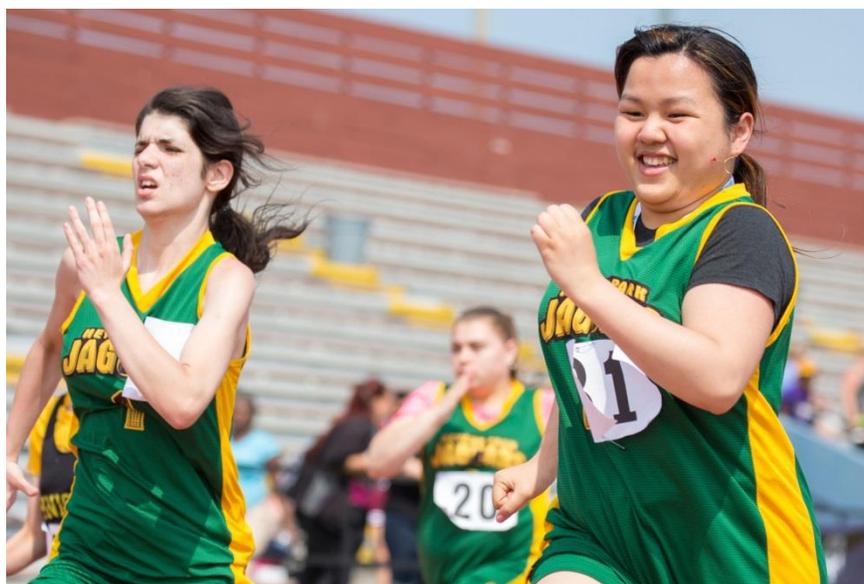
Empowerment can be defined as feeling, acting and being in control of one's own life as much as possible, and involves having the power to make choices and decisions about your own life.

Special Olympics Ontario wants to foster an environment where all athletes feel, act, and are empowered! Each and every athlete should have the utmost confidence in their capacities and our Athlete Leadership Committees' goal is to ensure that athletes feel that they can have confidence in their abilities, and show them how they already do!

How does empowerment apply to everyday 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



Empowerment within Special Olympics Ontario

Special Olympics Ontario provides a supportive environment for athletes to realize their goals of empowerment. For example, Special Olympics Ontario provides opportunities for an athlete to realize empowerment by:

- Experiencing greater control over their lives
- Allowing athletes to provide critical feedback on sports training
- 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

But how does this empower?

SOO Athletes Experience Greater Control over their Lives

Special Olympics Ontario, through sports training, aids athletes in their efforts to take control of their own lives. Empowered athletes make choices that affect them physically and emotionally. Empowered athletes make decisions that affect their participation in sport at all levels, in practice and during competitions. For example, empowered athletes make choices about attending practices regularly, or who to pass the ball to in a basketball game, and why. Taking control involves making choices about eating healthy foods, and properly warming up and stretching before a game.

Athletes Provide Critical Feedback on Programming

By having Athlete Ambassadors in each region, as part of the Athlete Leadership Committee, Special Olympics Ontario athletes will have a direct empowerment link across the province. They will have an established network for getting questions across communities and relaying information back.



SOO Athletes Put their Thoughts into Action

The Special Olympics Ontario oath, "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt," is a great example of empowerment in action. Empowered athletes know what it takes to be a winner. While medals are won through hard fought competition and athletic commitment, there are many other ways to win. All SOO Athletes are winners when they follow their oath. They have the power to be winners in the truest sense through sportsmanship and believing in their oath, "If I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt". When athletes follow their oath, they try their best and encourage/respect their fellow athletes in training and participating. Our athletes have been recognized internationally because they embody this oath. They truly support each other and play sports the way sport is meant to be played, with passion, courage and dedication.

SOO Athletes Interact within the SOO Environment in an Empowering Manner

Empowerment is determined by the relationship between an individual and his/her environment. Special Olympics Ontario encourages the continuing empowerment of athletes through a supportive environment. It is important that athletes understand their rights within Special Olympics Ontario.

An Athlete Rights and Responsibilities document has been created by athletes for athletes. It is important that Athlete Ambassadors are well read in this area because it is a key empowerment tool for athletes in communities. These Rights and Responsibilities are included below this section.



SOO Athletes Exercise Personal Responsibility within the Special Olympics Community

The last part of empowerment is accepting and taking personal responsibility for your actions and behaviour. Rights never exist without balancing responsibilities. Every individual with an intellectual disability has the right to join Special Olympics Ontario. Every member of SOO has the responsibility to uphold the athlete oath. You cannot have one without the other. As ambassadors, you have to explain and help maintain this balance.

Take a look at the Athlete Rights and Responsibilities. You will find that they are fair and the responsibilities are balanced equally. Athlete empowerment is about sharing power. As athletes realize the power they have, they will also be held accountable with responsibilities. Athletes created these responsibilities along with their rights.

Let's take a look at the Athlete Rights and Responsibilities...



A Guide to Assist Athletes in Knowing their Rights and Responsibilities as a Special Olympics Ontario Athlete

Special Olympics Ontario ATHLETES RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

1. I have the RIGHT to belong to Special Olympics Ontario (SOO). It is my RESPONSIBILITY to uphold its Oath & be dedicated to my sport & my team.
2. I have the RIGHT to be treated fairly & equally. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to know the rules, follow the rules & accept the consequences of ALL my actions.
3. I have the RIGHT to speak & be heard. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to communicate with others respectfully, & not to use any foul language or unkind words or gestures.
4. I have the RIGHT to a qualified & dedicated coach who will respect my rights as an athlete. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to work together with my coach, & respect his or her rights as a coach.
5. I have the RIGHT to enjoy my sport in a safe place & in a safe way. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to tell my coach, or another person I trust, if I feel unsafe.
6. I have the RIGHT to be united in sportsmanship & fair play. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to treat others fairly, encourage sportsmanship & fair play.
7. I have the RIGHT to bring to events my personal items & my sports equipment. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to look after my sports equipment & report any theft or damage of my sports equipment to someone I trust. I will not take another person's property.
8. I have the RIGHT to be respected on & off the field, or wherever I play my sport. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to respect others on & off the field.
9. I have the RIGHT to be the best I can be & to receive recognition for my successes. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to encourage & support others to do their best.
10. I have the RIGHT to win, & if I cannot win, be brave in the attempt. It is my RESPONSIBILITY to have fun & participate in the sport of my choice in a safe & positive way.



Athlete Leadership Committee

This is where YOU come in, and 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 develop projects that will empower their fellow athletes to be the best that they can be!

By being a part of this committee you are developing the tools necessary to help empowerment grow in your community, and you 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 sport training**
- 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.**

The Athlete Leadership Committee is a place for you to participate in an important role in the organization of which you are already a part of. It is your chance to have a say and speak on behalf of the athlete community. You are now in a position where you are able to empower other athletes through whichever means you see fit. You are a valuable asset to this organization and bring with you a very important voice!



Why me?

You have been chosen to represent the athletes in your region because we feel that you embody the spirit and mission of Special Olympics Ontario. We see you as fitting into each of these requirements:

- Registered as a Special Olympic athlete
- Has a desire to represent fellow athletes
- Has good leadership skills
- Is well respected by fellow athletes and committee members
- Is a role model for fellow athletes
- Can voice their opinion in an appropriate manner
- Is able to take athletes ideas and concerns to the Committee independent of their own opinion
- Has the ability to communicate effectively (listening and speaking skills).
- Has a general understanding of how the Committee functions
- Available to attend meetings and do some ground work between meetings.



What will we be doing?

Athlete Leadership Committee Initiatives

As Athlete Ambassadors you will be representing athletes at the organizational level, as well as acting as a communicator between the organization and the athletes. With this you will come across questions, complaints, compliments, and so on. It will be up to your discretion to decide what you want to do with this information and how you will deal with the knowledge you gain from the athletes, whether it is proposing the creation of a new sports training, solving a sport club problem, or recommending the implementation of a new sport policy. On top of this, you will be in charge of creating new initiatives that will help empower the athletes of Special Olympics Ontario, some of which have already been posed by the organization. You will also be representing Special Olympics Ontario at public speaking events at schools, group homes, special events, to sponsors and volunteers. It is your job to let people know about Special Olympics Ontario and all your personal experiences from being a part of this organization.

Communication (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 nonthreatening 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")

As this committee grows we will be able to brainstorm new ideas and solve problems already existing in programs. The most important part of your role is to remember that you are now representing all athletes from your region, and you need to ensure you represent them in the best manner possible following the Rules and Responsibilities outlined above at all times.



Will we really have a say?

Yes! One of the biggest accomplishments of the previous committees' was the creation of the Athlete Rights and Responsibilities, which we now use as a key document within our organization. The committee created a video, as they felt it was the best medium for delivery. We will watch this video so you can see just what capacity you will have at SOO.



ATHLETE COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE AGREEMENT

As an Athlete Representative, I agree to the following:

- I will contact athletes in my region and let them know about any important information I have gathered from my committee meetings.
- I will let athletes know about upcoming events & share information
- I will attend all Athlete Committee meetings as scheduled
- I will represent the voice of all athletes in my region
- I will treat ALL athletes, coaches, & volunteers fairly & with respect
- I will be a good ambassador for my region & for Special Olympics Ontario
- I will remind athletes about the Special Olympics oath & the Athlete Rights & Responsibilities
- If I do not live up to my responsibility as Athlete Committee Representative, I agree to be replaced by another athlete who will fulfill this role
- I agree to lead by example, & display good sportsmanship towards ALL athletes, coaches, & volunteers

I, _____, agree to be a responsible Athlete Leadership Committee Ambassador of Special Olympics Ontario for 1 full year.



