



*“Special Olympics breaks down barriers and acts as a catalyst for social change around the world, and our Global Messengers are among our most powerful advocates as to what can be achieved through inclusion and acceptance.”*

Special Olympics Chairman  
Timothy Shriver

# New Global Activists

***The class of 2007-2009 Special Olympics International Global Messengers are not only visionaries; they want action***

Every two years, Special Olympics selects 12 athlete spokespersons from around the world to serve as International Global Messengers.

While maintaining their regular sports training and competition schedules, Global Messengers serve a two-year term, and address audiences of government officials, business executives and the general public, sharing their personal stories of triumph with Special Olympics and communicating the powerful declarations of hope, acceptance, dignity and courage of Special Olympics athletes around the world.

The newest class of International Global Messengers (2007-2009) was chosen from nominations of more than 300 Special Olympics athletes from 60 Special Olympics Programs. Athletes were evaluated on their history of advocacy, public speaking aptitude, sportsmanship, personality, willingness to travel and enthusiasm for the Special Olympics movement.

# Meet the Class of 2007-2009 International Global Messengers:

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## **Adil Asif Visram, 39**

**Special Olympics Pakistan, Asia Pacific**

**Sports:** *Table Tennis, Badminton, Athletics, Cricket*

Adil Asif Visram has competed in Special Olympics for 15 years, is also an assistant coach and, since 2002, has served as a Global Messenger in his country.

Labeled “pagla,” the Urdu word for a male who is “mad,”

Visram fought to overcome preconceived stereotypes of

persons with intellectual disabilities. He works for Special Olympics Pakistan, performing general clerical duties. He said he times himself while he’s working to see if he can get the job done faster. Special Olympics Pakistan leaders call him “a perfect role model.”

As an International Global Messenger, Visram’s goals are to change the world’s attitudes toward people with intellectual disability and increase the number of athletes in Special Olympics. He would also like to advocate for increased opportunities and employment for people with intellectual disabilities.

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## **Andrew Robert Williams, 23**

**Special Olympics Australia, Asia Pacific**

**Sports:** *Basketball, Golf, Athletics, Softball, Swimming, Bowling*

Andrew Williams was a notoriously rambunctious youth who was often sent to the school headmaster’s office. It was suggested that he join the local Special Olympics basketball program to let off some steam. One year later at 13, he was named to the state basketball team to compete in an invitational game. This provided him with a sense of accomplishment and boost of confidence that changed his life for the better at school and in his relationships.

In 2002, Williams was selected as a member of the country’s national basketball



team, but before he got the chance to compete in the Special Olympics Australia National Games, he was sidelined with a broken leg while playing in an exhibition game. While recuperating, Williams completed coursework to become a basketball coach.

Williams is passionate about changing attitudes, especially youth, around the world toward people with intellectual disabilities. He also plans to speak with students who have similar challenges to those he had in school.

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## **Chen Cong, 21**

**Special Olympics China**

**Sports:** *Athletics, Roller Skating and Basketball*

Chen Cong’s tenacious work habits and desire to teach others with intellectual disabilities how to get the most out of life make her a role model for all Special Olympics athletes. She joined Special Olympics in 2000 as a hard working, but shy, track and field athlete. Through training and competition, her personality blossomed. Chen credits her coach for much of her personal growth. “Be brave,” he encouraged. She worked hard to become a good athlete and overcome her nervousness of public speaking.

Chen is now a prominent spokesperson for Special Olympics China. She encourages students and teachers to provide more opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to show their talent, to promote understanding between those with and without intellectual disabilities and to help improve the standing of people with intellectual disabilities in society.





**Dustin Plunkett, 25**  
**Special Olympics Southern California,**  
**North America**

**Sports:** *Basketball, Softball, Bocce, Golf, Speed Skating, Roller Skating, Snowshoeing and Snowboarding*

Special Olympics Southern California athlete and Board Member Dustin Plunkett is a born leader and public speaker. In the fourth grade, he had to give a speech in class. It was so impressive he was later asked to give the speech to the entire school. He got a rousing ovation from his schoolmates and teachers for speaking with such clarity and confidence—no easy task for a boy with a speech impediment and a cleft pallet condition. Plunkett relishes each opportunity he can get to reach people

and share his own story of success over adversity in order to inspire others to do the same.

During his term as an International Global Messenger, Plunkett will focus on recruiting new coaches for Special Olympics. As more athletes join the movement, Plunkett contends that expanding the number of coaches is crucial to this growth. He feels that almost anyone can be a coach. We must get the word out, so even those who might not normally coach may choose to do so,” he said.

**Hareb Ahmed Al Jasmy, 21**  
**Special Olympics UAE, Middle East/North Africa**

**Sports:** *Athletics*

Hareb Ahmed Al Jasmy knows there are misconceptions about people with intellectual disabilities, including their hopes, dreams and abilities—and in Al Jasmy’s case, it’s his linguistic abilities. In addition to his native language, he speaks French, Chinese and English. Al Jasmy’s life is a testimony to the success and value of someone with an intellectual disability. One of his goals is to change public perception, and he is leading by example.

Al Jasmy is employed by the World Trade Center, Dubai. He has earned a Dubai driver’s license, which is no easy task, and is the proud owner of a car. Al Jasmy has achieved a level of independence and



prosperity that surpasses many of his peers, with or without intellectual disabilities. His accomplishments prove to others that it is possible to overcome adversity and to be seen for what you can do rather than what you cannot do.

**Ioana Ciobanu, 25**  
**Special Olympics Romania, Europe/Eurasia**

**Sports:** *Table Tennis, Athletics*

Ioana Ciobanu first heard of Special Olympics in Targu-Mures, where a Special Olympics team came to give a presentation about its activities and events. She knew right away she wanted to be part of the movement.

“My first coach was Zoli. I think I will never forget him,” said Ciobanu.

Zoli coached table tennis and in addition to teaching her about the skills and rules of the game, he emphasized a proper health regimen. “Special Olympics helped me meet new friends and stay fit through sports,” she said.

“For me, these are the most important aspects because they improved my social life as well as my health.”

Ciobanu and her new friends played table tennis every spare moment they could, and while the game was fun, it was the life lessons that really made an impact. That feeling of camaraderie and accomplishment is something she wants to pass on to others so that she might play a role in improving their lives.

**Jessica Crook, 26**  
**Special Olympics Indiana, North America**

**Sports:** *Cheerleading, Golf, Bowling, Basketball, Aquatics, Athletics*

Jessica Crook is eager to help with the support and growth of Special Olympics. “If anyone needs someone to give a speech or interview, I’ll be there.”

Over the last seven years, the Special Olympics Indiana (Area 5) Athlete of the Year and member of the Athlete Leadership Programs has been true to her word. Crook has an honest style that is direct and especially sincere. “I am a very good public speaker,” she said. “I get my point across.”



Crook's goal as an International Global Messenger is both to promote and "live by" the ideal of acceptance. She feels that acceptance is important for everyone but realizes it is often difficult to come by for those who are different in any way. She hopes that everyone can experience the encouragement she felt while training at her local "Y" for the 2006 Special Olympics USA National Games. People trained with her and gave advice to help her be successful. "I think they came to realize that I'm just as 'normal' as anyone else," Crook said. "We all have hopes and dreams, problems and challenges."

### **Joshua Agare, 28**

**Special Olympics Kenya, Africa**

**Sports:** *Athletics, Team Handball, Football, Equestrian*

Joshua Agare has been a member of the Special Olympics Kenya Board of Directors for two years. At Board meetings, his contributions are principled and courageous. He expresses his feelings and opinions on important issues and stands by them even when his opinion is contrary to others. As an International Global Messenger, Agare believes he will become a better leader so that he can motivate other athletes, share ideas and help speak for them around the world.

As a full-time employee of Special Olympics Kenya, Agare would like to see the issue of Special Olympics athletes' rights addressed with the equivalent respect and attention paid to other global human rights issues.

He also wants to encourage the general population to experience Special Olympics, support the athletes, volunteer their time and services and share their resources. Multilingual, Agare speaks English, Luhya and Kiswahili.



### **Juan Jose Estevez, 21**

**Special Olympics**

**Argentina, Latin America**

**Sports:** *Athletics and Golf*

Juan Jose Estevez has been an athlete for seven years. When he became involved in the Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPS) he began to shine despite struggling emotionally with the death of his father. ALPS fascinated Estevez. As a result of his participation, he showed marked improvement in his work habits, self-esteem, capacity to express himself and ability to relate to others.

These skills gave him the confidence he needed to become a public speaker at important events, give presentations and radio interviews. He also assisted coaches during sports courses and basic Special Olympics presentations to volunteers. One of the most exciting opportunities for Estevez was starring in the role of the protagonist in a Latin America regional video entitled, "Brothers."

Estevez wants to help lead the expansion of ALPS to local Programs to give other Special Olympics athletes the same opportunities in life that he was fortunate to have.



### **Martha Hill, 27**

**Special Olympics Wisconsin, North America**

**Sports:** *Aquatics, Basketball, Bocce*

Martha Hill is passionate about altering stereotypes. "I want to lead a parade of athletes to change the way people feel about individuals with intellectual disabilities."

Hill also exudes a mix of aspiration and responsibility. "We have been given a torch to hold high," Hill said. "I feel the training and opportunities given to me through Special Olympics were an investment in me, and I need to use my abilities to help champion the rights of all those with disabilities."

Hill is a polished speaker and an accomplished athlete, who handles victory and defeat with dignity. She has been active in Special Olympics for 12 years and has spent the past seven as a Special Olympics Wisconsin Global Messenger.



She has participated in an Athlete Leadership Conference, taken sign language courses to better communicate with deaf customers at her place of employment and participated in a selective team-building exercise for the Kohler Company.

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### **Patrick Brehmer, 29**

#### **Special Olympics Germany, Europe/Eurasia**

**Sports:** *Alpine Skiing, Aquatics*

Patrick Brehmer has been a Special Olympics athlete for 10 years. The movement is so much a part of Brehmer's life that, although he wasn't a competitor, he used his vacation time (he is a full-time gardener for a landscaping firm) to attend the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Ireland to cheer on his friends from Special Olympics Germany.

Because of his enthusiasm, he has inspired other family members to get involved with the movement—most recently, his teenage cousin, who competes as a Special Olympics Unified Sports® partner in swimming. She had so much fun, she invited two of her friends to join.

Brehmer wants to increase participation of families in the Special Olympics Family Support Network and encourage fellow athletes to become more involved in all of the activities Special Olympics has to offer, particularly Athlete Leadership Programs.



### **Tam Wai Yip, 25**

#### **Special Olympics Hong Kong, East Asia**

**Sports:** *Aquatics*

Tam Wai Yip has a resume as full of leadership experience as he has Special Olympics medals in aquatics. While he's won multiple medals for his hard work and dedication to his sport, he is equally dedicated to Special Olympics off the field. Wai Yip has participated in Global Youth Summits and was a delegate at the 2005 Global Athlete Congress in Panama.

Much of Wai Yip's experience has stemmed from the Athlete Leadership Programs. He is a Master of Competition, has trained young athletes, helped organize corporation Christmas parties and served as a School Sports Ambassador. He has also served as Grand Marshal for a Special Olympics Hong Kong competition. In addition, he has completed the Global Messenger Graduate and Beginner courses and a sports seminar on The Spirit of Sport Participation.

Wai Yip would like to use his term as an International Global Messenger to focus on the public promotion of Special Olympics and its mission.

