

Special Olympics Knows What's Important

Special Olympics athletes, families, volunteers and fans around the world come together around the most important things. We come together to celebrate the joy of sport, the bravery of individual effort, the love of volunteers, the common ground of the human spirit. Joy, bravery, love, spirit: the people of Special Olympics know what's important and we know how to celebrate it! This year marks Special Olympics' 40th anniversary and we are celebrating.

From the beginning, with my mother's vision in our own backyard 40 years ago, we have seen how this celebration of joy, bravery, love and human spirit is transforming millions of lives and communities worldwide. We have seen the spirit build a global family that is brought together and bound by the athletes.

Never was the spirit more clear to me personally than in recent weeks as so many of you called, wrote or spoke to me about my Uncle Ted who is fighting cancer. I knew I was part of a larger family and that, together, the spirit of hope and courage would be given to me whenever I needed it. I couldn't be more grateful.

But my family's challenges are no different than yours, and the generosity of our movement is showered on us all. We've seen the spirit at moments of heartbreak like the recent devastation in Myanmar and China as our volunteers and donors have rushed to support athletes and families affected by disaster. We've seen the spirit when Special Olympics Indiana coach Cindi Hart led her speed skating team to their best individual finish times during the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games. We've seen the spirit when Vuong Thi Hoa, from Vietnam, competed in her first Special Olympics competition and created a whole village full of pride.

These are but a few examples of the lesson that Special Olympics is about all of us. Of course, it is the athletes who are the center—it is their incredible achievement, courage, joy and dignity that is our core. Sport brings it all to life. The power of each of us to be great in our own way is the message. The celebration starts there.

For in the athlete's willingness to risk it all, they enable each of us to take the risk of living our own lives to the fullest, whatever that risk may involve. Try harder, laugh with more gusto, accept yourself more

unashamedly, dream with more hope, leave a little more on the field of life. Whatever inspiration you are looking for, you will find it in the athletes of Special Olympics.

It all comes back to basics. Today, our movement is bigger than ever—close to 3 million athletes, almost 30,000 events per year, 180 countries, nearly 800,000 volunteers. Today, our movement is deeper than

ever—the largest public health program in the world for people with an intellectual disability, a growing program for 2- to 8-year-old children, a robust family support movement, more than 13,300 athletes trained as ambassadors, advocates and messengers of hope. We are on the verge of a tipping point where the sheer scale of our movement could ignite a powerful challenge to intolerance around the

world and greater opportunity for the 190 million people with intellectual disabilities.

A world of inclusion and acceptance for people with intellectual disability is in our future and within our grasp. Yet, getting to that point will require that each of us do just a little bit more. Whether you are a teacher or law enforcement officer; a local supporter or coach; basketball player or simply a fan, we need more of your heart, more of your ideas, more of you to be our messengers of acceptance. Most importantly, we need more of your time—to play, to train, to compete and to celebrate the best in each of us.

"What," you might ask, "will I get in return?" I can't answer that fully, only each of you can. But I can tell you what I've received: a constant reminder of what's important; a wonderfully large and generous family to support me in a time of struggle; the inspiration to believe that, in my own small way, I can try to make the world just a little more peaceful.

Those are gifts I treasure and for which I will always be grateful. May each of you find your own as we work together in the coming years on this great, global team we call Special Olympics.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Shriver". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D.
Special Olympics Chairman