

Straight from the Heart(land) *by Clint Armistead*

2006 USA National Games Youth Summit makes a lasting impression on two youths from Kansas

Bryan Anthon, a Special Olympics athlete, and I, Clint Armistead, a Special Olympics volunteer and Unified Sports® partner, are two teenagers from Kansas, “America’s Heartland.” We have worked with the local Special Olympics Program in our high school for many years. Until recently, we were content to just play games, have fun and be friends. Then, our lives got a little more complicated and a lot more important.

In the summer of 2006, we attended the Special Olympics USA National Games Youth Summit as the Kansas delegates along with our special education teacher, Michele Boeding. Youth Summits have delegates, both with and without special needs, come together from vast distances to discuss issues troubling persons with special needs. We shared information with each other and audiences via presentations, newspapers and the Internet about acceptance, inclusion, bullying, the “r-word” (expression for “retard”) and posed possible solutions to these problems.

That event became a great learning experience for us all. Anthon acquired confidence in social interactions and was soon nicknamed “Mr. Popular.” The Summit opened my eyes to a need for a change that I am willing to devote time to. Boeding saw the importance of educating our general education students about Special Olympics athletes. The Summit made a marked impact on the Kansas delegation.

Because of our experience at the Youth Summit, Special Olympics invited us to the Youth Service Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana (USA), from 4-7 December 2006 to represent the movement. To our surprise, we each received a President’s Volunteer Service Award. Our job there was to inform other youth service organizations, like The Boys and Girls Clubs of America, of the programs Special Olympics offers. We handed out fliers and pamphlets about Special Olympics; we spoke personally with many others to describe its programs, such as Unified

Sports® and SO Get Into It®, a kindergarten through 12th grade educational program that teaches students that everyone is different.

We all found our experiences with Special Olympics so rewarding, we decided to give back. In the summer of 2007, Blue Valley Northwest High School will host a National Youth Summit of our own at the National Association of Student Councils Conference. The Conference brings 2,000 student leaders together and, hopefully, with our presentations, they will return home with an understanding of Special Olympics—just as we did. We invited Special Olympics Chairman Timothy Shriver to be the keynote speaker. Hosting our own Youth Summit will be quite a task. Luckily, with Special Olympics’ support and the excellent Youth Summit Planning Guide they provide, we know we can make an impact on these delegates. While we may only be high school seniors, we know how to reach people, for we speak straight from the heart.



Special Olympics Unified Sports partner Clint Armistead (left) and Special Olympics athlete Bryan Anthon of Special Olympics Kansas (USA) proudly display their President’s Volunteer Service Awards they received at the Youth Service Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo: Michele Boeding)