

Greetings from Special Olympics Bharat

Celebrating diversity and shaping a unified generation



With Diversity and Inclusion as the theme, the fifth edition of the National Youth leadership Summit was held from 29 November to 2 December 2023 at the Amity University, UP, NOIDA. Approx 60 youth with and without Intellectual disabilities representing 21 states of India converged in the Delhi NCR (National Capital Region) to share experiences, shed inhibitions, and join the revolution for a unified future.

The officials preparing to mentor them too opened their hearts to new learnings, attempting to build up the motion through their experience and support. The discussions combined stakeholders from diverse areas into to jointly drive Inclusivity in educational spaces through the power of sports and engagements beyond. Enlightening the participants on the various Government schemes, Ms A Srija, Economic Advisor to the Education Ministry (Govt of India), encouraged the states to avail the provisions of the Government's Khelo India scheme and the residential schools run by the Govt, dotting the country. The Summit demonstrated the tenets it talked about, in as much as being largely planned and executed by an inclusive group of youth (below the age of 25yrs).

Sharing the perspective of Special Olympics, Dr Mallika Nadda, President SO Bharat said, "Unified Sports was a concept spoken about some ten years back, by Special Olympics International. Since then, inclusion is an important part of sports and all our activities." She is leading the endeavours of SO Bharat in reaching out to the education department of the Govt of India, to make unified sports a part of Inclusive education, having the youth to engage & lead.

Unified Cricket for social change supported by the Lions Clubs International Foundation



Against the backdrop of the ICC Cricket world cup in October & November 2023, the Special Olympics Bharat West Bengal Chapter conducted another version of India's favourite sport- Unified Cricket. The event was held at the Merlin Rise Cricket Stadium in Kolkata, West Bengal on 14 November. Supported by the Lions Clubs International Foundation, and following the 20/20 format two teams (mixed gender) of 23 Athletes and Unified partners played Unified Cricket.

The Chief Guest Ms Manisha Agarwal, District Governor Lions Club graced the occasion, along with the Guest of honour, Mr Chris Pardey, Sports Committee member, Special Olympics International and other distinguished guests including Mr Manish Agarwal, Cabinet Secretary, Lions and Mr Bibek Bardhan, Senior member, SO Bharat West Bengal State Chapter.

Explaining the objective of the event, Mr Dipak Natali, President & Managing Director, Special Olympics- Asia Pacific Region said, "Cricket holds a special place in the hearts of many within the Special Olympics Asia Pacific region and is one of our most popular sports. Over the last 18 years we have made huge strides in developing cricket in many of our countries and we have a steadfast vision to make it a part of the list of sports available for participation in the future World Summer Games. The event demonstrates the unifying power cricket has in the region to bring people with and without intellectual disabilities together"

In the words of Dr Mallika Nadda, President, SO Bharat, "Cricket is a passion in India. It has also, connected many nations who share the same excitement that surrounds it. Several of our Athletes, even those who have won medals in other sports, get thrilled at the mention of cricket. If Cricket is added as a Special Olympics sport, it will enhance the participation of Athletes, enabling Special Olympics to make its way into the remotest of the regions in India.

Celebrating the International Day of Disabilities



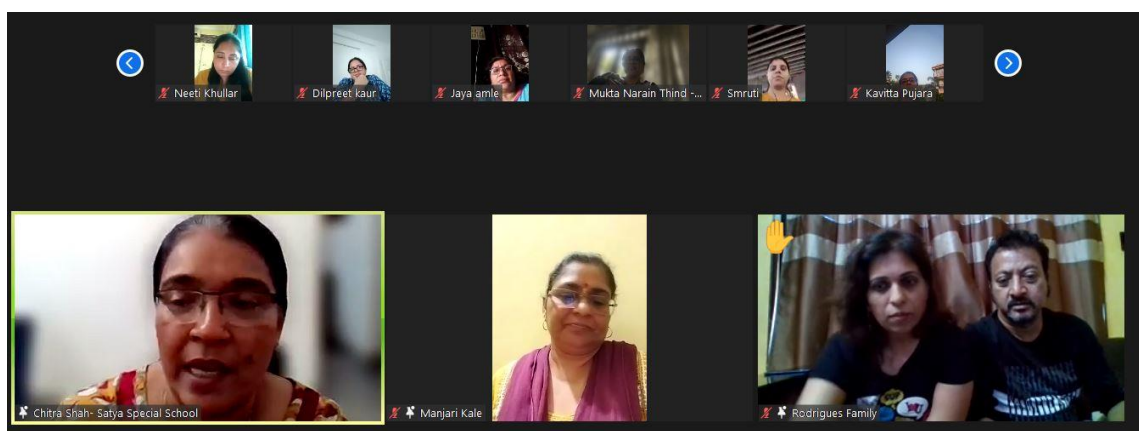
Unified Cultural Performance



Performance by a sibling pair

160 athletes from six special schools along with 50 students from mainstream schools jointly celebrated the International Day of Persons with disabilities in Chandigarh. The program had an estimated presence of 250 persons, including the Athletes, Coaches, families, officials, and guests. Sh.Nirmal Singh, the Chief Guest at the event, lauded the abilities and confidence of the special athletes and emphasized that, they deserve a bigger platform to showcase their hidden talents. In this vein he appreciated Special Olympics which is successful in bringing out one of the most marginalised populations and promoting their Inclusion.

Discussion on the role of the family in Athlete employment, at the Café



At the Family Café session, Ms Chitra Shah, Vice-President, SO Bharat addressed the often-eluded role of a parent in making the Athlete's job performance a success. Ms Chitra Shah, speaking on the role of parents in stabilising the Athlete in his/her workplace, " If we want others to treat special athletes

like everyone else, they need to do the same as well. It is a good practice to sit together and discuss the achievements and challenges of the employed athletes by the parents, regularly” said Chitra. The session witnessed a free-flowing conversation with the parents speaking candidly about their experiences and approach. It was overwhelmingly expressed by one of the members, how Intellectual Disability comes with additional challenges, to the others. Each time it may not be a wrong approach of persons and working environments but just a lack of awareness.

Another Café member volunteered to lead the last session of the year with options of working from home as well, for persons with Intellectual Disabilities. The Café concluded at a positive note with more members to explore and exchange further more options of work, and the usual ice-breaker that plunged everyone into energised mental stimulation

INCLUSIVERSE within the Christ University ensures whole school engagement



The Christ University in Pune (Maharashtra) recently developed a club called ‘Inclusiverse’ that implements all the Special Olympics initiatives. Formed in July 2023, it held a festival in October 2023 inviting 26 special athletes from three special schools. So determined were they to hold the program that they ran a two- month fund-raising drive through several activities, including screening a movie. The day-long event included Bocce, and several recreational segments like, lemon and spoon race, tug of war, ball-in-the-kit along with unified painting as well.

They very often carry out awareness drives through skits, presentations etc. The initiative "INCLUSIVERSE" was taken by Avichal Sharma who led the unified champion school programming in the state of Chattisgarh, and has now shifted to Pune, Maharashtra. He has formed a core team of 30 youth who support him with the Special Olympics events, having raised sufficient awareness within the University campus, to support SO Bharat. He has recently received an expression of interest by the university for developing communication software that would be sensitive to the needs of persons with different abilities. Avichal is currently, an assistant professor, Economics. They are also working on the theme of "a different kind of school" led by Prof Pallavi Pandey, youth mentor from Chhattisgarh and already prepared a promo video to bring sensitization among students and public.

Building Capacity, to introduce & sustain Unified Sports in Govt Schools in Delhi



In a follow up to the MoU signed between SO Bharat Delhi and the Education department of the Govt of the Delhi NCT, the first in a series of seven Coaches training was held a month back. 110 Coaches and Special Educators from 107 schools located in the South West cluster got trained in Unified sports. Following the 2-day training the trainees have been given a six-week task of conducting unified sports in their respective school/s, that is being monitored by the SO Bharat Delhi Chapter.

‘Reclaiming our Reach’ held centre stage at the Asia Pacific Regional Leadership Conference



Themed around ‘Reclaiming our Reach’ the Special Olympics Asia Pacific Regional Leadership Conference 2023, held in-person after 2019, opened thought provoking discussions around building back the strength of the program and reclaiming the reach, lost to the pandemic. The sessions were designed to discuss strategies and approaches that would allow for outreach and engagement in parallel, ensuring we reach those in the most remote areas. Over 100 participants from over 28 countries were present. The SO Bharat

team was led by Dr Mallika Nadda, President, who along with all the others, deep dived into a wide range of programmatic areas including Sport, Health, governance and many more.

Pinning importance to the application of the learnings, Mr Bradley Few, Director of Organisational Development, Special Olympics Asia Pacific Region said, “What happens after this conference, is crucial. If we carry back with us a sense of purpose, new knowledge to build capacity, and the ability to make change, this will be a successful conference”

Walking down the memory lane with Patrick Gomes



As the year comes to an end it is just a thought to slow down and give an ear to what Patrick Gomes has to say. He is perhaps, one of the oldest Athletes who witnessed the inception and growth of the movement in India. How much he had to strain his mind to bring back memories of a distant past, unknown to many, and quell the curiosities of people around him. He easily brushed off a question that asked him, if not Special Olympics the what! At 49 yrs now, and having first participated in Special Olympics in 1991, he just could not figure anything but Special Olympics and sports. He is disconnected with his family, embracing Special Olympics as his identity and companion. In 1991 he participated in Athletics held in Madras, Tamil Nadu, running 100mtr, 200mtr and 400mtr. In 1995, then a student of the Okhla Centre of Learning and Development Delhi, he was selected in football for the Special Olympics World Summer Games held at Connecticut, USA. His initial years with Special Olympics, is a fuzzy memory but surely became a milestone, changing his life forever. [Read More](#)

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