

**Special
Olympics**
Northern California



30 Celebrating
Thirty Years

IMPACT REPORT

2025



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF *Impact* | 1995–2025

CELEBRATING 30 years of *Impact*



2025 marks 30 years since Special Olympics Northern California began its journey to promote unity and empower children and adults with intellectual disabilities through the power and joy of sports.

Photo: Summer Games 2025 Opening Ceremony at Santa Clara University



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

To our Special Olympics Northern California family,

This year, we are celebrating 30 years of Special Olympics Northern California after Special Olympics California was officially split into two chapters in 1995. In that time, we've grown in both scale and connection with communities all across our footprint, spanning from the Oregon border to Tulare County. With sports as a foundation, our work has been proven to reduce bullying, build healthier lifestyles and open doors for inclusion.

I have had the honor of being the President & CEO of Special Olympics Northern California for the last 10 years. In that time, we've navigated global pandemics, economic uncertainties, natural disasters and numerous obstacles that we face every day in pursuit of our mission. But through all of that, we've built a legacy. A legacy of inclusion, of medals and ribbons, of empowerment, of relationships, and of family. A legacy of Special Olympics that will continue for the next 30 years and beyond.

I encourage you to take a look at our life-changing work in the following pages and I hope to see you at an event or competition next year.

Thank you for supporting Special Olympics Northern California.

With Gratitude,

David L. Solo
President & CEO
Special Olympics Northern California



HISTORY OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS: A Bold Vision that Swept Across the Country



1968

Special Olympics is founded as a nonprofit organization by Eunice Kennedy Shriver. The first Special Olympics Games are held at Soldier Field in Chicago.



1970

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized to use the term "Olympics" in the US.



1989

Special Olympics officially launches Unified Sports, a new initiative aimed at bringing together people with and without intellectual disabilities to compete on the same team.

1960

1970

1980

1990



1969

The first Western US Regional Games are held at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Olympic decathlon gold medalist Rafer Johnson subsequently co-founds the California chapter of Special Olympics.



1981

Wichita, Kansas, Police Chief Richard LaMunyon launches the Law Enforcement Torch Run, which later grows into the largest grassroots fund-raising group for Special Olympics worldwide.



1995

Special Olympics California officially divides into **two chapters**—Northern California and Southern California—to better serve local communities and expand outreach efforts.

HISTORY OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS: A Bold Vision that Swept Across the Country



1996

Special Olympics Northern California hosts its first Summer Games.



2012

Special Olympics surpasses 4 million athletes throughout the world.



2023

First-ever multimedia brand campaign, ***Do Something Special***, launches. The award-winning campaign stars Special Olympics NorCal athletes and redefines what it means to be 'special' within our movement. Reached 100M+ impressions in NorCal and was later syndicated nationwide.

2000

2010

2020

2025



2007

Special Olympics Northern California launches the Schools Partnership Program, designed to promote unity in schools for students of all abilities.



2022

Rebounding from the COVID-19 pandemic, Special Olympics Northern California offers 11 different sports, impacts more than 100,000 students, pushes for more unified healthcare and trains athlete leaders to advocate for the mission.



2025

Special Olympics Northern California celebrates its 30th Anniversary. Now operating 4 regional offices with dedicated staff across its 41-county footprint.

2025: A YEAR OF IMPACT



39,000+
Program Participants

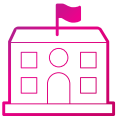
2025 Summer Games featured two powerhouse keynote speakers to inspire our athletes at the Opening Ceremony. U.S. Olympians Kerri Walsh Jennings and Ruthie Bolton shown here with Athlete Leaders Evan, and Jennifer.



23,000+
Volunteers



9,400+
Coaches



600
Schools Participating
in Unified Champion
Schools program



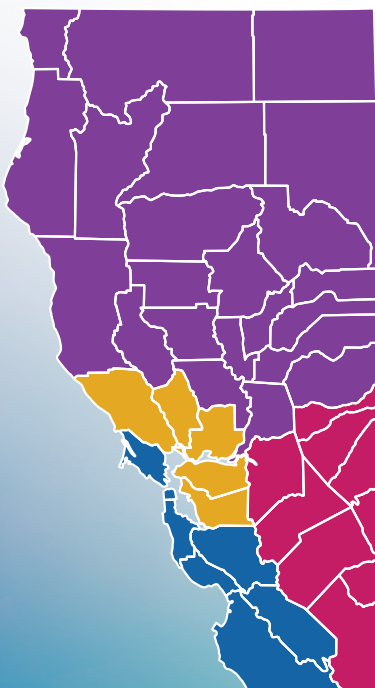
200,000+
Students
Impacted



4,700+
Health & Wellness
Activities



1,300+
Health
screenings



4 Regional
Offices Serving
41
Counties



100+
Athlete Leaders



380+
Competitions



ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT

30+ Years of Games & Growth with Special Olympics Northern California

Teralyn P. is a proud Sonoma County resident and dedicated Special Olympics NorCal athlete for an incredible 38 years. Over nearly four decades, Teralyn has competed in a wide range of sports—including basketball, bocce, bowling, softball, swimming, tennis, and track & field—demonstrating her remarkable versatility and commitment.

A Santa Rosa Junior College graduate and current business major, she continues to inspire both on and off the field as an Athlete Leader and Health Messenger, having spoken at the State Capitol, Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) events, and other statewide gatherings.



Meet Teralyn

The accompanying photos highlight her extraordinary journey: On the left, Teralyn is seen winning an award in 1994; on the right, she stands proudly at this year's Athlete Leadership Program (ALP) Summit celebrating 30+ years of leadership, growth, and unwavering dedication to the Special Olympics movement.

Tell us about your Special Olympics experience?

“ I’ve been in Special Olympics since I was 13. My favorite moment was when I went to the Summer Games at UCLA. I took gold in the backstroke.

What's your favorite part about Special Olympics?

The competition and cheering my teammates on.

How has Special Olympics changed your life?

It's changed my life where I have made a lot of friends.

– Teralyn P.
Sonoma County



SPORTS

Special Olympics Northern California Mission-In-Action

Athletic events are the heart of Special Olympics NorCal, enabling our athletes to improve their physical fitness, build friendships, and discover their fullest potential. In 2025, total athlete participation for Special Olympics NorCal sits at **28,572** athletes—a growth of nearly **13%** over last year!

2025 Sports Highlights

- Grew athlete participation in our Community Sports program by **13%** over last year, and increased overall program participation by **25%**, which includes athletes and their Unified Partners.
- Organizing our chapter's largest delegation ever—nearly **100 strong**—to compete at next year's USA Games, which takes place every four years bringing together thousands of athletes from all 50 states, plus Washington DC and the Caribbean, to compete on a national stage.
- Hosted **43** sports competitions across all regions including Spring Games, Fall Games and our flagship Summer Games which brought together **805** athletes from **34** counties.
- **New** this year! Pickleball, cornhole, and floorball were demonstrated at the Summer Games, with some being offered as pilot programs during the year.
- Hosted exciting events throughout the year in connection with leading pro sports organizations—including a basketball showcase in partnership with **Jr. NBA** and **Jr. WNBA** during the 2025 NBA All-Star Weekend, a Unified Flag Football game alongside the **San Francisco 49ers**, and a floor hockey scrimmage with the **San Jose Sharks**—allowing our athletes to compete and meet sports icons.



ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT

From Fear to the Fast Lane

At eight years old, Gerard T. was terrified of the water—clinging to the stairs and screaming during swim lessons, convinced that sharks lurked beneath the surface. However, with unwavering support from his parents, patient coaches, and the dedicated Special Olympics Northern California team, Gerard's story took a remarkable turn.

Today, at 25, Gerard is a proud competitor with the San Francisco Sea Lions Swim Team, where he trained regularly leading into the 2025 Summer Games. His coaches, Greg McKinney—who has been training Special Olympics NorCal athletes for 22 years—and Donna Kepner, worked patiently and consistently to help him overcome his fears.

Starting as a beginner learning to stay afloat, Gerard's coaches now consider him an elite swimmer. Gerard himself remains humble and grounded, saying he'd be proud to earn "a gold medal, or even second or third place," adding to his previous gold medal achievements.



Meet Gerard



“I’ll do my best—
one race at a time.”

– Gerard T.
San Francisco County



For Gerard and his coaches, however, the journey is about much more than medals. His coaches often note that as athletes like Gerard gain confidence in their sport, they also gain it in life—setting goals, taking initiative, and believing in themselves.

Now, Gerard is channeling that same determination beyond the pool. With newfound confidence, he's working toward finding a job and achieving greater independence. In his words, "I'll do my best—one race at a time."

VOLUNTEERS & COACHES

Changing Lives, One Event at a Time

Athletes are **why** we exist—and our **volunteers** are **how** we exist. This year, we relied on the expertise and dedication of more than 23,000 volunteers. They do it all—whether on the field coaching our athletes in 11 different sports, behind the scenes ensuring events run smoothly, raising funds or gathering support within our communities.

Honoring Volunteers:

- Approximately **3,400** volunteer shifts were filled by about **2,600** volunteers across events and programs.
- **Coach Michele Carmichael** (pictured to the right), a long-time volunteer in Fresno, was recognized for **55 years** of service with Special Olympics California.
- We presented **23** President's Volunteer Service Awards to Special Olympics NorCal volunteers for their 2024 volunteer service; an additional 18 participants were added this year, for a total of **41** to be awarded for their 2025 service.
- Special Olympics NorCal Schools volunteer Jennifer Rincon was selected as **Special Education Teacher of the Year** by the San Andreas Regional Center for their Service Above Self Awards.



Coach Spotlight

Meet Chris Gonzales, a Coach of the Year for Special Olympics NorCal who's been volunteering in Santa Clara County for nearly a decade. Athlete Leader Devon asked him about his favorite coaching experiences and what makes him come back year after year.

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You build such a camaraderie with all the athletes. They come in and give you hugs. They're just so happy you're there to help them.

99

– Coach Chris G.
Santa Clara County

SCHOOLS

Creating Unity through Inclusive Sports & Leadership

Our Unified Champion Schools help ignite friendship and belonging between students with and without disabilities. Our programming spans Pre-K to Transition and includes Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement resources for educators. Together, we help celebrate acceptance and inclusion in school and the whole community.

2025 Schools Highlights

- Grew our Schools Partnership Program and Unified Champion Schools by nearly **10%** over last year
 - > **124** Districts
 - > **253** Unified Champion Schools (20 added over the past year)
 - > **600+** Schools Participating in Unified Champion Schools program
 - > **770** inclusive events in 2025
 - > **200,000+** students reached
- Additionally, **28** high schools and **150** Unified Partners and Unified Athletes competed in CIF Unified Track & Field competitive postseason; Unified Teams from three Northern California sections were represented at the California High School State Track & Field meet.



Spotlight on Pittsburg Unified School District

Special Olympics Northern California proudly spotlights the Pittsburg Unified School District for its inspiring commitment to inclusion and community.

Pittsburg students and athletes shared that, through the Unified Champion Schools Program, they've made new friends and built stronger connections.

Educators and administrators have noticed a powerful ripple effect across campus: more empathy, less bullying, and a deeper understanding and appreciation for each other's differences. It's truly a win for the athletes, a win for the families, a win for the volunteers, and a win for the entire school culture.

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Connections are being made. The school has seen less bullying, students have more patience and they understand the differences we all have.

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– **Paul Fox**

Pittsburg Unified School District Coordinator
for Special Olympics NorCal

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Promoting Holistic Health through Year-Round Programming

Dedicated to supporting the overall well-being of athletes and their families, we partner with healthcare professionals, fitness experts, and local universities to provide free year-round programs and resources catered specifically to individuals with intellectual disabilities. Whether it's free health screenings, unified fitness seasons, virtual programs, nutrition education, game day preparation, we help the athletes be the healthiest version of themselves.

- Reached nearly **4,800** Health & Wellness activations from 95 program opportunities, a **16%** increase over last year.
- Invited caregivers and supporters of the Special Olympics NorCal intellectual disabilities (ID) community to a **Family Health Forum**, highlighting mental health tips and strategies while fostering connection and community among participants and facilitators.
- Hosted Healthy Athletes screenings at Summer Games, delivering **1,500** screenings in 8 disciplines (specialties) completed by **208** health professional and aspiring health professional volunteers.
- Inspired more than **2,600** participants to get moving through **Walking Clubs** and in-person meetups, community strength and conditioning programs, as well as interactive Performance Stations at competitions that teach athletes about hydration, nutrition, and warm-up techniques.
 - > Brought together **105** participants for a Walking Club meetup at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, encouraging movement, exploration, and social engagement.
 - > Launched the Walking Club for the greater disability community at the Summer Games, which brought together **75** participants who walked through the tennis, swimming, and bocce venues—cheering on competing athletes and engaging in wellness activities such as box breathing, physical activity, and nutrition games along the route.



LEADERSHIP

Athletes in Action – Leaders Beyond the Field

Athlete Leaders are ambassadors for Special Olympics NorCal and benefit from meaningful roles, both on and off the field, in our organization and throughout the greater community. Our Athlete Leadership Program provides training for children and adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) to become advocates for Special Olympics NorCal and the ID community. Athlete Leaders have the opportunity to learn about public speaking, speech writing, and a variety of professional development skills that help them excel in their everyday lives.

2025 Leadership Highlights

- Athlete Leaders helped to plan and execute many aspects of the athletic events throughout the year.
- Athlete Leaders met with legislators and presented at the State Capitol to help Special Olympics California secure continued state funding.
- Athlete Leaders conducted more than a dozen interviews with sports icons and community leaders at the Bay Area and San Jose Sports Halls of Fame, Dwight Clark Legacy Series, State Capitol Day, and more. Aired in our original web series, **The Special Report**, this year's episodes featured conversations about inclusion with U.S. Olympians Kerri Walsh Jennings, Brandi Chastain and Ruthie Bolton plus many Bay Area sports legends such as Sergio Romo (pictured below), Rollie Fingers, Keena Turner and more.



Meet Esteban

Esteban M., pictured above with Assembly-member Stephanie Nguyen, is a proud Special Olympics NorCal Athlete Leader, and advocate who joined NorCal through the San Jose Quakes Unified Soccer Team. In 2024, he went on to represent Special Olympics NorCal and the Quakes at the MLS All-Star Week in Ohio, and this year carried his voice of advocacy to the State Capitol as an Athlete Leader and Health Messenger.

Reflecting on his experience, Esteban shared, *"Before joining Special Olympics NorCal, I faced the daily challenges of living with an intellectual disability. It often felt like a barrier, isolating me from opportunities to connect, compete, and belong."*

Esteban is a passionate advocate for the movement's broader mission. To supporters and partners, he has a heartfelt message:

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Your commitment allows athletes like me to experience the joy of sports and the power of community. You've given us a platform to shine, to grow, and to be seen—not just on the field, but in life.

– Esteban M.
Stanislaus County



REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT: SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA & SILICON VALLEY

Go Pro! Community Partners Deliver Powerful Gameday Experiences for Special Olympics NorCal Athletes

The South Bay Region brought back-to-back-to-back unforgettable experiences to our athletes with three professional sports teams.

Special Olympics NorCal athletes participated in the experience of a lifetime thanks to the **San Francisco 49ers** and **Dignity Health**. Dozens of athletes were invited to Santa Clara to play a fun exhibition flag football game alongside 49ers players and received customized jerseys, a locker room experience and more. Athletes were then invited back to watch a 49ers game at Levi's Stadium. What's more, two NorCal athletes have been invited to **Super Bowl LX** at Levi's Stadium!



Hockey & Heart

The **San Jose Sharks** showed their support of **Special Olympics NorCal's Floor Hockey** program by providing a unique Sharks gameday experience to our incredible athletes. San Jose Sharks players, as well as Sharks Head Coach Ryan Warsofsky and Sharks broadcasters, ran an athlete scrimmage with all the facets of a Sharks game at SAP Center in San Jose. The Sharks Foundation and Kaiser Permanente also presented Special Olympics Northern California with a \$30,000 Community Assist Grant.



Quakes Unified Soccer Team—a partnership between Special Olympics NorCal, the San Jose Earthquakes and MLS Works

Local Special Olympics athletes & Unified Partners without intellectual disabilities play together on the same team, fostering inclusion and friendship. The **Quakes Unified Team** competes in matches against **Unified Teams** representing other **Major League Soccer clubs** during the season. An athlete and Unified Partner from our Quakes squad even got to attend **MLS All-Star Week** to compete with others from across the country.



REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT: SACRAMENTO & NORTH

The Power of Unification: Bringing Together Community Leaders, Corporate Partners & Athletes

The Sacramento & North Region is home to a doubleheader marquee event: Fall Games and Guardian Games.

Guardian Games was introduced in 2024 as a Unified opportunity to bring our community together with Special Olympics NorCal athletes for a fun and active experience. Teams of eight comprised of business/community leaders, two Special Olympics NorCal athletes and one Law Enforcement Torch Run representative compete in a variety of sports and activities. As their charity of choice, local law enforcement agencies support Special Olympics throughout the year and local personnel serve as the “Guardians of the Flame” for the Special Olympics NorCal Torch.



Competitive athletic events at Guardian Games included cornhole, rubber axe throwing, football toss, and tug-of-war.

Athletes in Action

At the UC Davis campus is **Fall Games**, a signature sports competition sponsored by Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, that brings together athletes, families and volunteers. More than **250** competing athletes across Northern California take part in soccer matches throughout the day. The event also features health performance stations designed to educate and activate athletes on nutrition, hydration, hygiene, gameday mindset, and self-pledges. New this year were a Pickleball Expo and Youth Soccer Clinic, hosted by **Sacramento Republic FC**. “Producing these two events in tandem gives the community a first-hand view of our mission-in-action and the joy it brings,” says CEO David Solo.



Flyers Energy’s Impact on Special Olympics NorCal Soars Beyond 25 Years

Flyers Energy has supported Special Olympics NorCal for more than 25 years and is the longest-running and among the largest corporate partners in the history of the organization. Flyers raises funds annually through the Flyers Fall Classic golf tournament and employees volunteer at local events and even take the Polar Plunge.



*Steve Kossuth
Senior Vice President
Commercial & Industrial
for North America Land,
World Kinect Corporation*

“*Flyers Energy has gone above and beyond to benefit our athletes, and has made an indelible impact on our organization.*”

– David Solo
President & CEO, Special Olympics NorCal

REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT: CENTRAL VALLEY

Growth in the Heart of California: Central Valley's New Home in Clovis

This year Special Olympics NorCal celebrates the one-year anniversary of opening its Central Valley location with a dedicated staff to serve athletes and families in the region.

Aptly located at the intersection of Sunnyside and Tollhouse, the bright new office is a testament to the growth of the organization and allows local staff to further connect its sports, schools, leadership, health & wellness programs to the community.

In recognition of its Grand Opening, the City of Clovis declared May as “**Special Olympics NorCal Month**” said Mayor Lynne Ashbeck.



“Having a physical space in the heart of the Central Valley allows more access to programs and services, resulting in a more inclusive community for all.”

— Lynne Ashbeck
City of Clovis Mayor



New Partnership with Adult Day Programs

In **Stanislaus County**, we've piloted a new partnership with **14 Adult Day Programs** that are enrolled in Special Olympics NorCal—from bowling to bocce, many athletes and ages are enjoying year-round fitness programs.

Badges with Buckets

Starbucks locations across the Central Valley continue to open their stores—and hearts—to our athletes and law enforcement community. Starbucks has been hosting **Badges with Buckets** events in partnership with local law enforcement in support of Special Olympics NorCal for 4 years. Since its inception, the event has generated over \$100,000 for Special Olympics NorCal.



REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT: EAST BAY & NORTH BAY

Delivering Impactful Competitions & Events for Special Olympics NorCal Athletes, Schools, and Community

The 16th Annual Bike the Bridges drew broad community participation, plus support from our Law Enforcement Torch Run.

Considered one of the best charity bike rides in the Bay Area, this year's annual **Bike the Bridges** drew over **700 riders** and raised over \$166,000 for Special Olympics NorCal programs. Riders chose from four scenic routes and pedaled with local cyclists, businesses, community groups, and Special Olympics NorCal athletes. At the finish line, attendees celebrated with live music, food and drinks at Bands & Brews.



Quest Foundation Supports Schools Partnership Program in Contra Costa & Alameda Counties

For nearly a decade, **Quest Foundation** has supported our **Schools Partnership Program** in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Quest focuses on supporting education and youth-development initiatives across the United States, with a particular emphasis on strengthening pathways for young people. Their long-standing partnership with our organization allows us to invest in our NorCal School Partnership Program which supports youth development, creates more unified school climates, reduces bullying, and empowers students of all abilities.



East Bay Regional Softball

Pleasant Hill is home to the **East Bay Regional Softball Tournament**, sponsored by Venardi Zurada LLP. The popular event welcomes **400** softball athletes from **10** counties and **175** volunteers for one of our biggest and most exciting competitions.



“Supporting Special Olympics NorCal is about celebrating and supporting a community built on inclusion, perseverance, and heart. These athletes inspire all of us to push forward, support one another, and win on & off the field.”

– Mark Venardi
Partner at Venardi Zurada LLP



BETTER TOGETHER

Our Amazing Community

It takes a powerful village to help Special Olympics Northern California provide all of our programs and services free of charge. **Companies** like Safeway, Jersey Mike's, and dozens of others are instrumental in not only supporting Special Olympics NorCal financially, but also through meaningful employee involvement and volunteerism.



We're also grateful for the support of local community groups, colleges, universities, and professional sports teams; individuals; and of course, our **dedicated coaches** and **volunteers**. Our inclusive movement has sparked change at the highest levels, including multi-year support from the **State of California** and **local counties**. Special Olympics NorCal is also at the grassroots level with fundraising and volunteerism from **law enforcement**, who have raised more than \$1 billion for our athletes worldwide since 1981.

2025 Community Highlights

- Secured multiyear funding from the State of California that ensures 30% of our annual operating budget for Special Olympics Northern California and Southern California
- Federal funding for 2025 was awarded for Unified Champion Schools and Health & Wellness
- Renewal of San Mateo County Measure K funding for fiscal year 2025–2026
- Launched the Gold Medal Society to recognize donors who have left Special Olympics NorCal in their estate plans
- Garnered \$300,000 in multi-year support for our sports programs from individuals and local family foundations
- Law Enforcement Torch Run brought together 265 agencies who ran the Flame of Hope across Northern California and raised over \$400,000 for Special Olympics NorCal programs.

California State Treasurer Fiona Ma joins NorCal Athlete Jennifer H. along with Thomas Martin of CalABLE, and Connie Chan and Christian Daly of California State Treasurer's Office, at 2025 Summer Games.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Get in the game

We rely on support from individuals, corporations, and foundations to keep life-changing programs FREE for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. To impact athletes and their families across Northern California, consider being a supporter of our movement.

Businesses interested in learning more about events and corporate sponsorship, contact Development@sonc.org.

Individuals looking to donate, or to consider including Special Olympics Northern California in your Will or Estate Plan, contact Plannedgiving@sonc.org.

ANNUAL PARTNERS



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MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Celebrating
30
Years

Playing today for a more inclusive tomorrow

#OneNorCal