



Thurston County
Special Olympics
Young Athlete Program

Young Athletes welcomes children and their families
to the world of Special Olympics.

Special Olympics Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities (ID), ages 2 to 7 years old. Young Athletes introduces basic sport skills, like running, kicking and throwing. Young Athletes offers families, teachers, caregivers and people from the community the chance to share the joy of sports with all children.

Children of all abilities take part, and they all benefit.

Children learn how to play with others and develop important skills for learning. Children also learn to share, take turns and follow directions. These skills help children in family, community and school activities.

Young Athletes is a fun way for children to get fit. It is important to teach children healthy habits while they are young. This can set the stage for a life of physical activity, friendships and learning.

Young Athletes is easy to do and fun for all. It can be done at home, in schools or in the community using the Young Athletes Activity Guide and basic equipment. Through Young Athletes, all children, their families and people in the community can be a part of an inclusive team.

Feedback from those who have participated in the Young Athlete Program.

- **Motor skills.** Children with ID who took part in Young Athletes developed motor skills more than twice as fast as others who did not take part.
- **Social, emotional and learning skills.** Parents and teachers of children who took part in the Young Athletes curriculum said the children learned skills that they will use in pre-primary school.
- **Expectations.** Family members say that Young Athletes raised their hopes for their child's future.
- **Sport readiness.** Young Athletes helps children get ready to take part in sports when they are older.
- **Acceptance.** Inclusive play helps children without a disability to better understand and accept others.

If you are interested in this program, please email Thurston County Special Olympics area coordinator Mark Barker at bballdad11@comcast.net .

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