

SPECIAL OLYMPICS TURKEY



“Let me Win. But if I Cannot Win, Let Me Be Brave in the Attempt.”

Special Olympics Athlete's Oath

The Issue

Please summarize the change you want to make by also touching upon the questions below. (i.e. you can summarize by giving facts etc.) Why is your story important? Why is the social problem you focus or the change you want to make is important?

- Do you know a disabled person?
- Have you ever been friends with a mentally disabled person?
- Can you build a conversation with her?
- Can you go to a movie with him?
- Can you play with her?
- Can he do sports?
- Can she dance?

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Questions follow one another...

It is nearly impossible for the mentally disabled person(s) to get out of their narrow environment and socialize, to find themselves a place in the society. As it does against other disabled groups; the society has prejudices against the mentally disabled. For example, among many people we asked, there was no one who had a mentally disabled friend. Because mentally disabled individuals are mostly being kept behind closed doors. However, their share in the population can in no way be underestimated.

As Special Olympics Turkey, we try to take the mentally disabled individuals from their narrow chambers back into the flow of daily lives. By bringing them together with other people in sporting and social events; we aim to give them the opportunity to become productive individuals in the society who are treated with respect. Besides, by expressing that everyone is different but equal; we also aim to break down the prejudice against the mentally disabled people and to show that they are an important part of the society.

We need to stress that members of all disability groups should be able to exist and take active part in the society. Thus, although we are organizing events for the mentally disabled people, we target all disability groups indirectly.

Background

What is the reason of existence of your institution / venture that is supporting the topic at hand? What kind of work is being done in Turkey in this field?

There are several projects made for the education and rehabilitation of the mentally disabled groups. But they are far from enough in terms of providing the inclusion of the mentally disabled people and their families to society. Both the mentally disabled people (we call them special athletes) and the families are driven out of the society through unjust suffering. They cannot provide for many of their social needs. One of our departure points as the Special Olympics is this situation; socialization of mentally disabled individuals and their families, their emancipation from the narrow spheres they live in, their interaction with other people and blending into the society.

Goals

What is the contribution that you are making / aiming to make to the issue and the solution of this problem? What is (are) your longer term goal(s)?

As Special Olympics Turkey, by bringing the mentally disabled individuals with other people in a sporting event and providing opportunities for proper training in different sport branches, we aim to help them:

- Improve their physical conditions and motor skills,
- Show their courage,
- Have the satisfaction of success
- Take part in social life through events other than sports, in which they improve their relationship with the society.

We are trying to reach as many mentally disabled people as possible through local, regional, national events and projects. Our target group includes mentally disabled individuals from every age, economic and social group. Additionally, we aim to raise awareness about the special athletes among other people.

Bringing together mentally disabled and other individuals in events where they can spend time and become friends should diminish the prejudice. With relationships developed, mentally disabled individuals can be able to take part in society, where they can represent themselves.

Our long-term goals include reaching more disabled individuals in a wider variety of cities-regions, bringing them more frequently together with other people, even making their situation completely normal from society's point of view, explaining to other people our raison d'être, raising more awareness about the issues we are working on.

Public Coverage

How this issue has played out in the public? How do you evaluate public and media approach to the issue / problem?

The attitude of the public and the media towards the Special Olympics Turkey and mentally disabled people in general, is positive but short-term. Hence, if there is a big event going on and if the agenda is not so busy, the media and the public may be interested in our work. Unfortunately, apart from this, we are standing in a place where the society doesn't want to know about us much. Sustaining interest is nearly impossible.

Additional Info

Are there any facts or data that you think would be useful for the creative team to know? Specific Hooks, concepts to play with (i.e. suggestions for creative materials or creations)

Terminology: We never call our target group mentally disabled. Instead, we use the term 'special athlete'. For non disabled people we use the term 'partner' or 'partner athlete'.

As known, sport clubs and events cannot survive without sponsorships. These days we are trying to plan the regional construction, we have to get real support. We organize events in 81 cities, getting the support of local stakeholders is extremely important.

Other:

- Special Olympics is an entity, which reaches 4,4 million people through 225 establishments in 170 countries, one of which is our branch.
- Our legal status here in Turkey is that of an association.
- Every single special athlete, who takes part in our event gets a medal. The aim is by no means winning, but it is giving them a unique experience under the unifying power of sports.

Our Motto: Play Unified: Mentally disabled (*Special athletes*) and other individuals (partner athletes) are brought together by training in the same team, competitions and social events, which are organized in the fashion we mentioned earlier.

Essentials of '**Play Unified**' understanding are that;

- Special athletes and partner athletes share the same atmosphere,
- They develop long-lasting friendships with partner athletes,
- They develop their skills through trainings and competitions, in which they take part together with their partners,
- They feel stronger courage and self-confidence by feeling belonged to a group,
- They take active part in social lives through social activities (cinema, theater, picnic,, etc).

The red ball symbolizes our motto 'Play Unified'. Thus, we use in team competitions our red ball and say '**Live together, play together**' #livetoegether #playtogether



Final Word: As it does all over the world, our association develops and achieves success with the support of NGOs, public enterprises, volunteers, families, universities and private sector. Special Olympics Turkey aims to reach more mentally disabled people in a wider variety of sport branches and in a greater geography. More support means reaching more special athletes, touching their lives, and important changes for both them and us. In any way, there is something to do for everyone.

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