

Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities Globally

A glimpse into The Special Olympics 'Inclusive Mindsets and Behaviours Framework' and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (SO UCS) ®

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Abstract

The Special Olympics and the EASEL Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education partnered to develop an explicit framework for inclusive mindsets and behaviours that defines the core knowledge, skills, values, and actions that both enable and drive young people to include others, even when it is uncomfortable to do so. This framework provides a foundation not only to build inclusive mindsets and behaviours more intentionally within Special Olympics, but ultimately to galvanize entire communities to be characterized by connection, belonging, and inclusion.

The framework is designed to address the renewed interest in barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The process of teaching and fostering inclusive mindsets (unlike many approaches to DEI) reduces fear and shame among young people who are in the position to be "includers," making them more likely to stand up for the marginalized. The framework also offers concrete solutions for meeting the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by clearly defining and operationalizing the teaching and scaling of inclusion in schools, sports, and other learning settings.

The session will include an introduction to the Framework and its core component and an overview of the Unified Champions schools' model that takes the framework into practical implementation. With sports as the foundation, SO UCS is a school-based strategy that equips young people with tools and training to create sports, classroom, and community experiences that improve attitudes and behaviours among all young people with and without intellectual disabilities. Meaningfully, youth are not just recipients. Instead, they are the architects of lasting change and community building. SO UCS engages students through unique combinations of activities that include three components: Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement.