

Participant Development Pathway

Intended outcomes

A unified Special Olympics Australia participation pathway that provides maximum opportunity to increase the number of Australians with an intellectual disability participating in physical activity and sport.

A verifiably sound framework to guide critical decision-making, planning and the allocation of resources across all elements of the pathway and the delivery network.

Club, participant, coach and official development programs and competition frameworks that are considered excellent practice and not merely the outcome of accumulated tradition.

Cohesion within the Special Olympics Australia community, in relation to how to support participant engagement and development and the growth of our sport across all elements of the pathway.



Multiple Pathways

While most traditional participant pathway frameworks have been concerned primarily with the development of high performance athletes, the Special Olympics Australia model is designed to cater for participants of all levels of ability and inclination.

A Common Foundation


All participants with an intellectual disability will engage with physical activity and sport via the same foundational stages (i.e. EXPLORE and PARTICIPATE). Progress into the development stage of the pathway occurs over time, according to the motivations and aptitude of each participant.

Permeable borders

At any age, it is critical that the opportunity exists for a participant to move up, or down within the pathway. There is always a place for everyone in Special Olympics Australia.

Graduated Progression

Participants have the opportunity over time, to move through a series of logical steps, each of which is an increasingly closer representation of their preferred level of involvement.



Participant Development Pathway (PDP) Characteristics

Inclusion

Any Special Olympics Australia participation initiative or competition can be positioned in the PDP in a way which clarifies its status and primary function. This assists with the planning of new initiatives and the assessment of existing ones, but also allows an individual to accurately identify and choose the nature of his or her current, or preferred Special Olympics Australia engagement experiences.

Defined Transitions

The achievement of milestones at each stage of development is clear. Movement throughout the pathway is not defined by age, rather it is defined by demonstrated skills, capacities and participation motivations.



What we Believe

✔ PARTICIPANT'S NEEDS COME FIRST

All decisions about a Special Olympics Australia participant's development are informed by an understanding of their physical literacy (physical, psychological, social, cognitive) and sport specific skill development needs, both in the short term and the long term.

✔ WORKING TOGETHER FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

All partners (including parents and carers) put their own interests aside, align policies and practices and collaborate in the best interests of the participant.

✔ EFFECTIVE PATHWAYS

Special Olympics Australia pathways are simple, clear, accessible and underpinned by evidence.

✔ CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Continuous learning and a growth mindset underpin success for the participant, for the people who support them and for the organisations that enable them.

✔ QUALITY COACHING

High quality coaching is critical to long-term participant involvement and success of the Special Olympics Australia movement.



Dispelling the Myths

✘ EARLY SPECIALISATION IS GOOD

Conventional wisdom often suggests that the earlier athletes choose their sport and focus on it, the better. And there are some examples that convince us that this is true. In fact, earlier is not necessarily better. Burn-out, over-use injuries and declining motivation: these are the more likely outcomes of early specialisation. What we now know is that when young people, be those with intellectual disabilities or otherwise, have diverse sporting experiences, they develop transferable skills, greater creativity and better decision-making capabilities.

✘ CHILDHOOD SUCCESS LEADS TO ADULT SUCCESS

Conventional wisdom is that talent can be identified early. Again, it's not necessarily so. It's true that some athletes' gifts are obvious from childhood, but every athlete is different and progress is non-linear. Some only develop and emerge much later. What we now know is that how someone performs at a young age is not a reliable predictor of their future potential.

✘ SUCCESSFUL ATHLETES FOCUS ON WINNING

Conventional wisdom often suggests that you get what you think about, so think about winning. In fact, the most successful athletes, teams, coaches and administrators don't focus on winning at all. Instead, they focus on their development: what they need to do to perform when it counts. And they regard winning as an outcome of being the best they can be, every day.