

MULTINATIONAL STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES*

General Findings and Calls to Action

June 2003

*Various terminology is used throughout the world for intellectual disabilities, including learning disability, developmental disability, intellectual handicaps, mental handicaps and mental retardation.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For many years, the athletes, family members and volunteers of Special Olympics have known that Special Olympics changes attitudes for the better. We also have known that too many people hold negative attitudes toward individuals with intellectual disabilities, and that these attitudes have a detrimental effect on the lives and opportunities of our athletes and others with intellectual disabilities. Most importantly, we have experienced the effect of poor attitudes – in the low levels of interest, support and commitment we too frequently encounter. For our movement to be successful in promoting all the joys of sport, we must challenge the subtle but pervasive fear and misunderstanding that is all too common around the world today.

Because there was no “hard” evidence examining attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities around the world, we were compelled to examine the scope of attitudes and practices that prevent individuals with intellectual disabilities from participating fully in society.

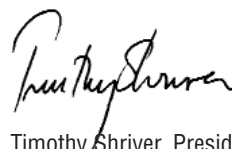
Now, with the release of the unprecedented *Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities*, Special Olympics is poised to continue to grow our life-changing sports training and competition movement while at the same time attacking negative attitudes and the unjust treatment they foster. This unique study documents the range of attitudes and perceptions toward individuals with intellectual disabilities both within and across countries, and demonstrates the relationship between public attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities and the practices within each country that impact the quality of life for these individuals.

With this study – the largest and most comprehensive of its kind ever conducted – Special Olympics has clearly emerged as a worldwide leader, not only in action, but also in research and understanding. Never before has an organization with the global reach of Special Olympics committed itself on such a large scale to the advancement of both understanding and action for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Our hope is that in documenting the need for urgent attention to the concerns and potential of people with intellectual disabilities worldwide, we can help catalyze change.

This study marks the second chapter of Special Olympics’ commitment to taking action based on sound, verifiable data. In 2001, Special Olympics commissioned the first study on the health status and needs of people with intellectual disabilities and presented the findings to a world that had ignored the barriers to care for these individuals. Following the report’s release, Special Olympics staff and volunteers have dramatically expanded the work of Special Olympics’ Healthy Athletes™ initiative, and in so doing, have advocated effectively for major changes in the way countries think about the health of people with intellectual disabilities.

A great deal of progress has been made in the 35 years since Special Olympics was founded in 1968. But much remains to be done to educate and enlighten so that the 170 million individuals with intellectual disabilities around the world can realize opportunities for the joy of sport and for inclusion and acceptance in their communities. Special Olympics has always been about real programs and real change. Through our sports efforts, the public will gain extraordinary experiences and interactions with individuals with intellectual disabilities. In many cases, we believe that these experiences can change stigmatizing attitudes and promote more acceptance and understanding.

To all who helped make this study a reality, I extend my thanks. To all who will help change the conditions it documents, I extend the hand of everyone in the Special Olympics movement. People with intellectual disabilities want acceptance, not pity; understanding not condescension; respect not sadness; opportunity, not charity. I hope many who read this report will join this noble work and help make a difference, one attitude at a time.



Timothy Shriver, President and CEO
Special Olympics

STUDY OVERVIEW

Purpose

The promise of including individuals with intellectual disabilities in the joy of sport and in all aspects of life is continually challenged by the negative attitudes and stereotypes of society. Attitudes and expectations of the public in part determine the degree to which children, adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities are able to learn, work and live alongside their peers without intellectual disabilities. Although inclusion, at least as a philosophy, has become broadly accepted, the full acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities has not yet been achieved.

The *Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities* sets out to understand the attitudinal barriers to inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities worldwide. The study focused on the public's perceptions of the capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities, their beliefs about where they should live, work and go to school, and their beliefs and expectations about the obstacles to and consequences of inclusion.

The study was commissioned by Special Olympics and conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, with support from the Center for Survey Research and Gallup Organization International.

The study was conducted in 10 countries: Brazil, China, Egypt, Germany, Japan, Nigeria, Republic of Ireland, Russia, UK (Northern Ireland) and the

United States. The approximate sample size was 800 of the general public of each country, and 200 people from Special Olympics convenience samples in Japan and the United States. (The sample size for the Republic of Ireland and UK (Northern Ireland) was 400 of the general public of each country. The analysis of those responses has been combined and is presented in the findings under "Ireland.") Sampling of the public was random, and selected from either a nationwide pool or from selected cities. The survey was administered either over the telephone or in face-to-face interviews.

The project began in September 2001. The survey was translated and back-translated to ensure that it captured appropriate cultural meanings. The questionnaire was then pilot-tested in each country. The final version was implemented in the fall of 2002. Data analysis took place in the spring of 2003 and a final report will be completed in the summer of 2003.

This study provides a definitive view of the range of attitudes and perceptions toward individuals with intellectual disabilities, both within and across countries, and demonstrates the relationship between public attitudes toward intellectual disabilities and the practices within each country that impact the quality of life of these individuals. In order to fully interpret the results, cultural context must be taken into account. Apparent similarities or differences across countries, in survey numbers, can have very different meaning in the context of cultural values and practices.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The *Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities* yielded a wealth of information about worldwide perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Following are some of the study's most significant findings.

What are the public's perceptions of the capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities?

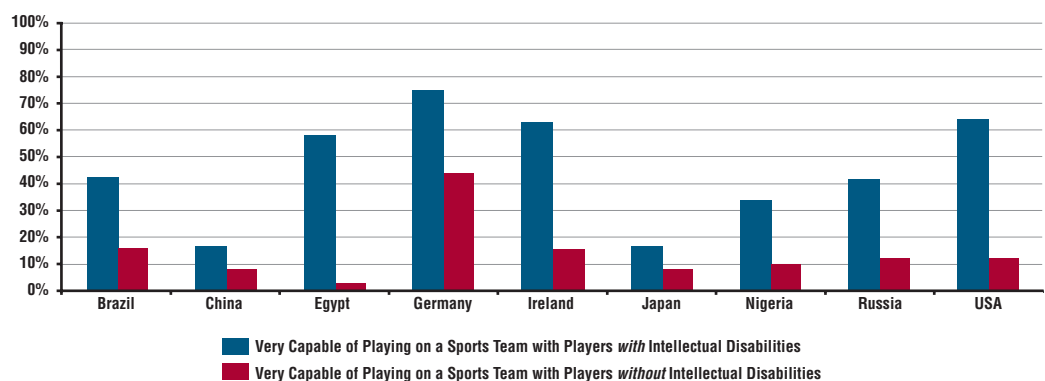
- Worldwide, people in different cultures perceive individuals with intellectual disabilities very differently. In some countries, the public envisions a mildly challenged person, while in other countries the public sees a severely impaired person. These views of individuals with intellectual disabilities are reflected in the public's differing perceptions from country to country of those individuals' capabilities to perform selected activities (as shown in the table below).
- Worldwide, the public perceives individuals with intellectual disabilities as *more* capable of engaging in simple activities such as sustaining friendships and washing and dressing, but less capable of complex activities such as understanding a national news event or handling emergencies.

Public's Perceptions of the Abilities of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (*Selected Capabilities*)

	Brazil	China	Egypt	Germany	Ireland	Japan	Nigeria	Russia	USA
Sustain Friendships	88%	53%	33%	93%	88%	88%	41%	86%	93%
Wash and Dress	59%	71%	13%	84%	75%	81%	47%	92%	85%
Tell Time	65%	73%	19%	87%	81%	80%	47%	83%	83%
Understand News Event	41%	22%	5%	44%	53%	41%	27%	46%	46%
Handle Emergencies	18%	18%	8%	32%	20%	17%	16%	14%	28%

- Worldwide, the public perceives individuals with intellectual disabilities to be only *somewhat* capable of self-determination (making their own decisions on living, working and schooling). The more capable people perceive individuals with intellectual disabilities to be, the more capable they see them at making their own decisions.
- Worldwide, most of the public believes individuals with intellectual disabilities are *very* capable of participating in sports with other players with intellectual disabilities, while few people believe they are *very* capable of participating in inclusive sports.

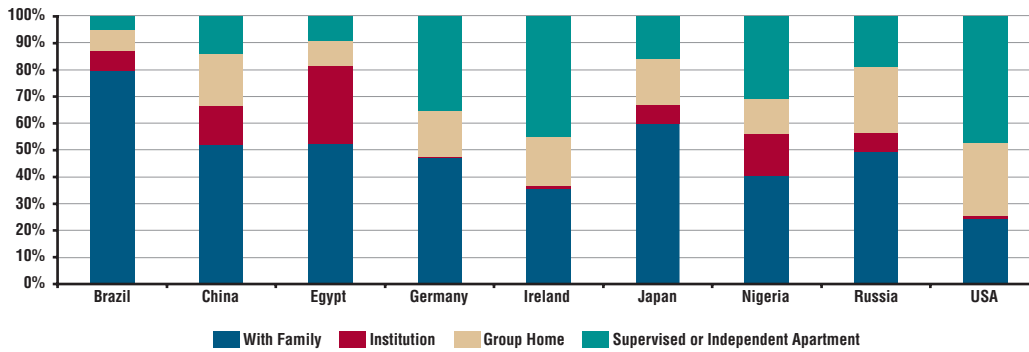
Public's Beliefs about the Ability of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities to Play Sports



Where should they live, work and go to school?

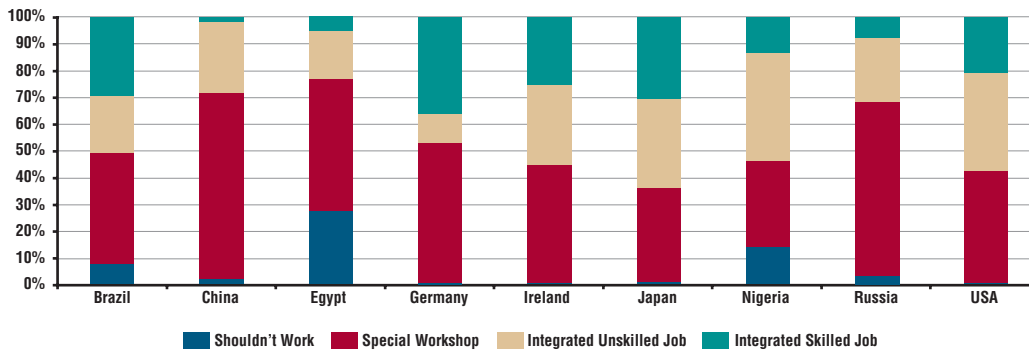
- Across most countries, the public most often believes individuals with intellectual disabilities should “live with their family,” which is likely influenced by the cultural values placed on the family. In those countries that do not favor placement with the family, the public believe individuals with intellectual disabilities should live either in supervised apartments or independently.

Public’s Beliefs about Where Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Should Live



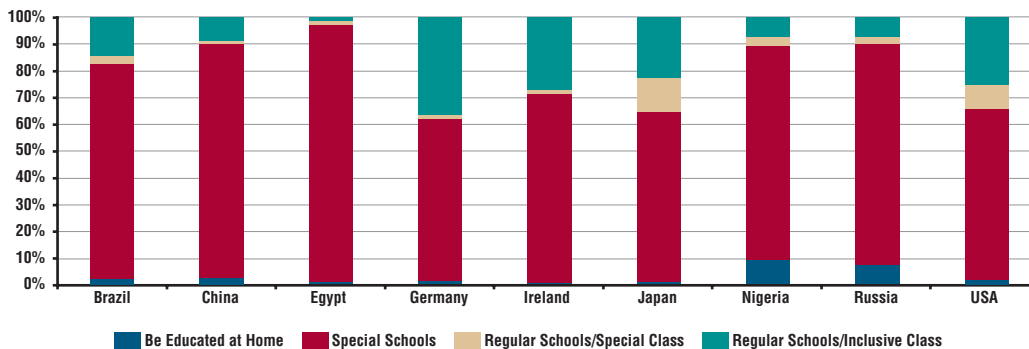
- Across all countries, more than one-third of the public believes that individuals with intellectual disabilities should work in special workshops, not in “mainstream” workplaces.

Public’s Beliefs about Where Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Should Work



- Worldwide, the vast majority of people believe that children with intellectual disabilities should be educated in special schools, separately from other children.

Public’s Beliefs about Where Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Should Attend School

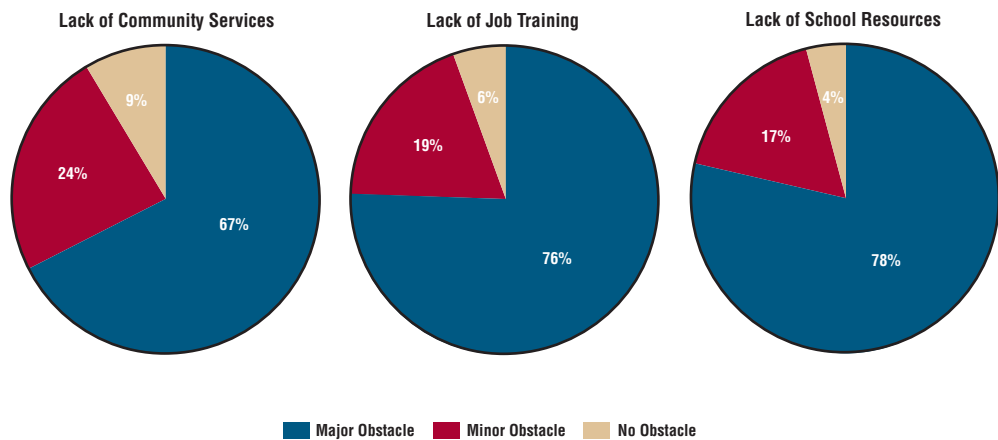


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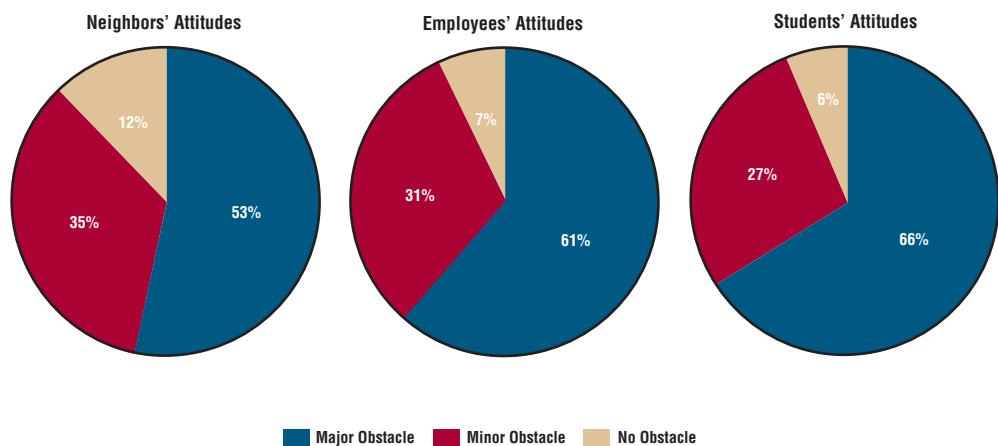
Why aren't they included? Looking at the barriers to inclusion

- Worldwide, people believe there are significant obstacles to the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in society. In particular, the public believes the lack of available supports (e.g., the lack of community services, job training and school resources), the negative attitudes of others and the negative attitudes of the media are major obstacles to inclusion.

Public's Beliefs about Obstacles to Inclusion: Lack of Available Supports



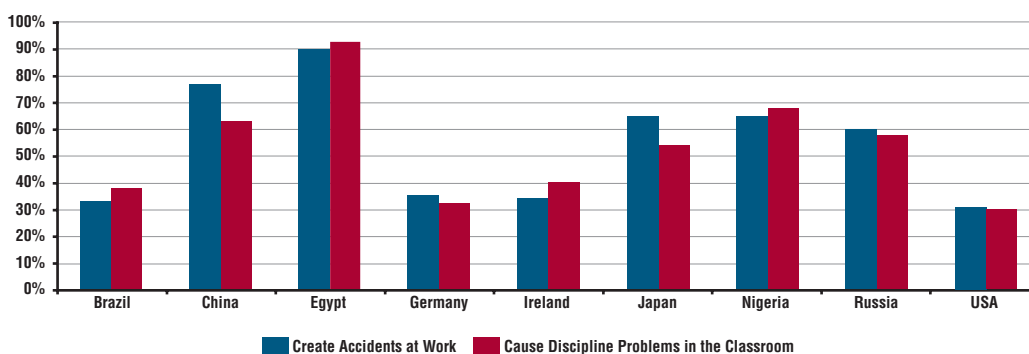
Public's Beliefs about Obstacles to Inclusion: Negative Attitudes



Why aren't they included? Looking at the negative consequences of inclusion

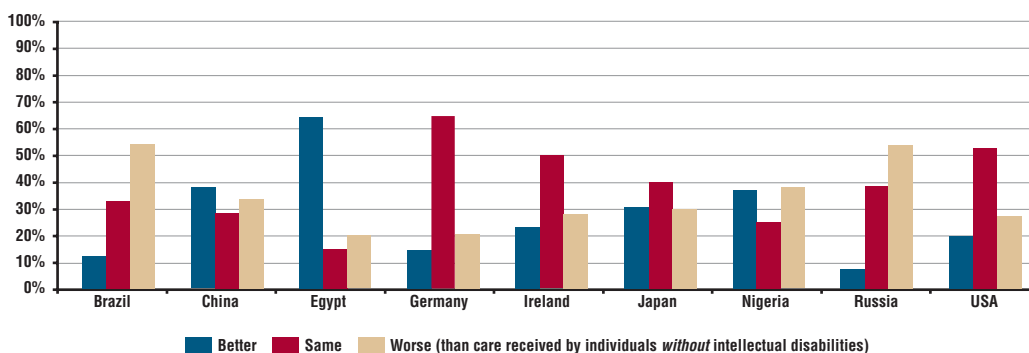
- In many countries, the majority of people expect that including individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workplace and schools will create more accidents on the job, cause discipline problems in the classroom, lower productivity and negatively affect the learning of other students.

Public's Expectations of Negative Consequences of Inclusion: Accidents and Discipline Problems



- While people in various cultures recognize that individuals with intellectual disabilities do not receive needed training and support services in order to successfully participate in society, they are not viewed as lacking proper health care.

Public's Beliefs about the Quality of Health Care Received by Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities



Summary of Findings

Overall, it is apparent that the general public of these countries lacks an appreciation of the range of capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities, and therefore has low expectations of what they can do. The world still believes that individuals with intellectual disabilities should work and learn in separate settings, apart from people without disabilities. The family is seen as the most appropriate living environment for individuals with intellectual disabilities, a function of both cultural values and availability of services. In thinking about the barriers to inclusion, there is unanimous recognition that the lack of resources and services in the community, employment and school are the major obstacles to inclusion. In addition, the world sees the negative attitudes of others, including the media, as standing in the way of inclusion.

Perceptions of capabilities make all the difference in where people believe individuals should work and learn, and in the obstacles and impacts of inclusion. People who perceive individuals with intellectual disabilities as *more* capable support inclusion in work and school, believe the existence of obstacles are not too large and expect few negative outcomes of inclusion.

CALLS TO ACTION

Individuals with intellectual disabilities represent a wide range of personalities and capabilities. They are athletes, friends, colleagues, students, family members. Inclusion in society is harmful to no one. Indeed, segregation is often more detrimental because it limits a person's quality of life and potential to contribute to society, and perpetuates stereotypes. While the theme of diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, cultural, gender) has emerged so strongly around the world, intellectual disabilities have been largely excluded. Therefore, Special Olympics organizers around the world are calling on young people, volunteers and community leaders to renew their efforts to promote acceptance through Special Olympics Get Into It™, promote understanding through Special Olympics Unified Sports® and promote a culture of welcome in all aspects of community life.

Following are some steps you can take to help make a difference, one attitude at a time.

Self-Advocates

- Join Special Olympics. Better yet, become a leader in the movement by signing up for Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs) training.
- Participate in your community. Don't sit at home and wish you could be in a club; go join one.
- Assume that people will accept and welcome you; they most likely will follow your lead.
- Speak up for yourself! Become a self-advocate and make it a point to research policies and practices that impact your life; then let people know your ideas on how best to support you.
- Look how far you've come! Stop to see what new skills you have gained or what impact you have had on the community where you live.

Families

- Start a Family Support Network and reach out to new families to share the benefits of Special Olympics.
- Volunteer for Special Olympics events at the local level or year-round.
- Demonstrate pride in your family member with intellectual disabilities. Talk openly and frequently about his or her abilities, not disabilities.
- Educate community members and hold leaders accountable for meaningful inclusion of family members with intellectual disabilities in community activities and all aspects of community life.
- Advocate for the same educational opportunities, employment opportunities and quality of health care for your family member with intellectual disabilities.

School Systems, Educators and Administrators

- Start or expand a local Special Olympics Program in your school.
- Educate students and model behavior around the themes of awareness, understanding, inspiration and involvement using the Special Olympics Get Into It™ service-learning curriculum.
- Promote awareness and acceptance by educating students about the possibilities and challenges of individuals with intellectual disabilities and encouraging students to work and play with students with disabilities.
- Encourage colleagues in your school and other schools to teach and model the same lessons.
- Participate in research to measure the impact of your efforts on people's attitudes and behaviors.
- Develop and implement professional development activities to prepare teachers to work with students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings.

Youth

- Join a local Special Olympics Unified Sports® team and/or volunteer for Special Olympics.
- Promote awareness among friends that all people with intellectual disabilities are different, with unique talents, interests, skills and personalities.
- Demonstrate to other students how they can include friends with intellectual disabilities in school and community activities.
- Talk with your friends about ways they can become involved in activities with individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Challenge adults and teachers to join you in efforts to include friends with intellectual disabilities in school and community sports activities.

Health Care Professionals

- Gain experience serving this population through training programs such as Special Olympics Healthy Athletes™.
- Ensure your practice, clinic or hospital is open and welcoming to persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Educate yourself and your colleagues about the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Hold high health expectations for persons with intellectual disabilities and include them as partners in making decisions about their health.

Employers

- Contact your local Special Olympics Program to offer your company's support as a sponsor or to find out how to provide your employees with meaningful volunteer opportunities within the movement.
- Educate yourself about the skills and contributions of workers with intellectual disabilities and what they can contribute to a business's success and work environment.
- Review your workforce to determine whether you are an open and welcoming employer for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Actively reach out to persons with intellectual disabilities when recruiting employees.
- Use sound business thinking in designing jobs for persons with intellectual disabilities that challenge them to grow and develop new skills, not just perform mundane, uninspiring work.
- Be a leader by example to other businesspersons in overcoming stereotypes and prejudices that have kept persons with intellectual disabilities from having gainful employment and careers.

Service Providers

- Become educated about intellectual disabilities and the needs of this population and take steps to educate your constituents (including health professionals, social service providers) and others.
- Evaluate your current programs and efforts on behalf of this population in terms of impact and modify and increase your commitment in order to meet these needs.

- Include persons with intellectual disabilities in your activities in a meaningful way, so that they can achieve self-determination and serve as leaders and role models.

Sports, Recreation and Community Organizations

- Provide quality coaches and officials training to Special Olympics Programs.
- Encourage trained coaches and officials to volunteer with Special Olympics Programs.
- Integrate Special Olympics into sports training and competition activities.
- Open sports venues to people with intellectual disabilities.
- Provide inclusive participation opportunities to help expose the general public to the talents and skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Become an advocate within your organization by providing and encouraging access for individuals with intellectual disabilities to all aspects of sports and recreation programs.

Government Leaders and Agencies

- Assess the services and supports available to persons with intellectual disabilities and the impact of government and other programs (e.g., Special Olympics) and policies in meeting those needs.
- Advocate for the rights and equal treatment of individuals with intellectual disabilities by including this population in your diversity/anti-discrimination laws.
- Develop data and reports that accurately describe the population with intellectual disabilities (numbers and location), their educational, social, housing and employment needs, as well as the status of inclusion and self-determination.
- Develop and implement policies and programs that provide for the range of needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities, expand their access to inclusion and educate the public about intellectual disabilities.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Special Olympics is an international organization dedicated to empowering children and adults with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society through sports training and competition. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics offers individuals with intellectual disabilities free year-round training and competition in 26 Olympic-type summer and winter sports. More than 1 million athletes in 150 countries around the world currently participate in Special Olympics (there is no charge to participate in Special Olympics). The movement has launched a quality growth campaign to reach 2 million athletes worldwide by 2005.

The Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston (USA) is an internationally recognized research institute that focuses on the social aspects of disability, particularly children with learning and behavioral problems and their families. Committed to the link between research and practice, CSDE has developed programs to improve the social skills and quality of life of children with intellectual disabilities. For more than 25 years, CSDE has been involved in attitude research, developing programs instruments that have been used worldwide. Several of the studies dealing with attitudes of service providers have led to improvements in the distribution of care to individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The Center for Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston assisted in the design of the survey questionnaire and statistical analyses.

The Gallup Organization, an international polling agency, assisted in the translation of the survey questions and in carrying out the interviews in eight of the 10 countries. Research and Evaluation Services of Northern Ireland carried out the interviews in the Republic of Ireland and UK (Northern Ireland).

A full study report is being prepared and will be available in the summer of 2003 from Special Olympics. In addition, further study and analysis will be carried out as Special Olympics continues to expand its role as a leader in documenting the issues and challenges facing people with intellectual disabilities, as well as acting on them. The final study report will assist Special Olympics in its role as an emerging leader of social change, both in policy and in practice.

Principal Investigator Gary N. Siperstein, Ph.D.
Center for Social Development and Education
University of Massachusetts Boston

Co-Investigators Jennifer Norins
Center for Social Development and Education
University of Massachusetts Boston

Stephen Corbin, D.D.S., M.P.H.
Special Olympics

Timothy Shriver, M.S., Ph.D.
Special Olympics

For more information about the *Multinational Study of Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities*, contact Stephen Corbin at Special Olympics (scorbin@specialolympics.org) or Gary N. Siperstein at the Center for Social Development and Education (gary.siperstein@umb.edu).

Special Olympics
1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005 USA
+1 (202) 628-3630
www.specialolympics.org

Center for Social Development and Education
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125 USA
+1 (617) 287-7250

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Special Olympics
1325 G Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005 USA

www.specialolympics.org

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