

Having fun and making friends on and off the football pitch

Social inclusion through Special Olympics Unified Sports® Recreation in Turkey

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Special Olympics



Special Olympics



- Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Special Olympics Unified Sports® consists of inclusive teams in which all players (“athletes” and “partners”) are equal and have meaningful roles.
- Designed to offer three levels of engagement.

Project Objectives



- 600 children with (“athletes”) and without intellectual disabilities (“partners”), aged 8-12 participate in inclusive football
- 50 coaches (special schools and mainstream clubs) learn to implement an inclusive sports model
- Turkish Football Federation and 6 professional football clubs provide trainers and facilities while developing awareness about what they can offer
- Authorities become aware of an inclusive sports model that benefits local communities

Project Methodology: Simple, Consistent, Focused



- 18 months, 6 cities
- Participants recruited from 32 special schools and 6 sports clubs for children
- Unified Sports training (weekly)
- Friendly competitions (24)
- Youth forums (6)
- Social activities (12)
- Professional football workshops (6)
- Coach seminars (3)
- Project evaluation surveys and focus groups

Results: Children experienced sports in inclusive and fun setting (1)



- ✓ Children enjoyed the training, competitions and social activities (98%)
 - ✓ Learned new skills (97%)
 - ✓ Made new friends (100%)
 - ✓ Indicated that they were helped by their Unified coach to become part of the team (100%)
 - ✓ Indicated it was easy to respect all teammates as equals (98%)
 - ✓ Would like to be on a Unified team in the future (97%)
- *503 respondents out of 600 child participants*

Results: Children experienced sports in inclusive and fun setting (2)



“I like playing football and improving my football skills. I have learned new skills during practices and now I play football much better. Now my friends in the neighborhood take me into their football teams.”

Ali Cicek, athlete, 11, from Kayseri

“I have never been with children with intellectual disabilities. I got to know them during this project and we’ve become friends. It is nice to learn and practice new skills in the trainings together. Now I know how I can build friendships with people with disabilities when we aren’t playing football and I know how to support them.”

Mete Ceylan, partner, 12, and Ali’s team mate

Results: Coaches learned about their role in fostering inclusion (1)



- ✓ Learned new ways to create inclusive activities in their community (82%)
- ✓ Indicated that work/actions will change because they learned new things (80%)
- ✓ Indicated that Unified Sports is a meaningful way to foster an inclusive environment among young people, in clubs and schools, and in the community (100%)
- ✓ Indicated that it was very likely they'd support Special Olympics in the future (97%)

→ *46 respondents out of 50 coach participants*

Results: Coaches learned about their role in fostering inclusion (2)



“As a coach it is great to share my knowledge and skills so that children with and without intellectual disabilities learn to play and live together.”

Ike Nail Yalcin from the Salihli Municipality Sport Club

Results: Families feel happiness and pride (1)



“I have such a happy feeling when I see my son on the football field with his friends. I always support him and want him to be happy and successful at whatever he does in life.”

Mertan Ustan, father of Mertcan, age 12, an athlete, from Zonguldak

Results: Families feel happiness and pride (2)



“The project will make an important contribution in increasing my son’s social responsibility awareness, learning that everyone is equal in life and we all can live together, respecting and supporting differences. My son will be a better individual in the future.”

Hulya Cesur, the mother of Yarkin, age 12, a partner from Salihli-Manisa

Results: Authorities have model to foster inclusion in communities



“We are happy to see children from our community play together and make friendships that will last a lifetime.”

Salihli Mayor Zeki Kayda

Project Sustainability



- ❖ Special Olympics Turkey commits to expanding the Unified experience in 4 more cities (total 10)
- ❖ Project serves as a best practice within Special Olympics internationally
- ❖ 4 more professional clubs will implement regular inclusive sports sessions (total 10)
- ❖ 4 of the 6 local/regional authorities will continue to provide support to Special Olympics
- ❖ Family forums will be organized before competitions

Video





Thank You