

Social inclusion through Special Olympics Unified Sports Recreation

TURKEY / SPECIAL OLYMPICS EUROPE/EURASIA

The project mission is to implement the new Special Olympics Unified Sports Recreation model in Turkey for children aged 8 to 12 both with and without intellectual disabilities, thus promoting social inclusion while increasing sports skills and knowledge. With support from six local professional football clubs and the Turkish Football Association, Special Olympics Turkey offers children the opportunity to learn about each other as teammates and as friends while overcoming barriers that prevent the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in schools, sports clubs, and society. The 18-month project runs from September 2014 to February 2016.

Problems targeted

In many countries people with intellectual disabilities have few opportunities to participate in physical activities, sports, and play, and almost never with peers without disabilities. If they do have such access, it usually takes place in segregated settings, at separate times or in separate groups. Furthermore, educators, community service providers, and authorities lack knowledge and resources to foster an inclusive environment.

You can improve a child's skills, but a child can't improve in life without an environment that supports their development as valued and respected human beings.

Saban Parladar, Special Olympics coach, Kaysari, Turkey

Solution & Methodology

Through the Special Olympics Unified Sports Recreation model, children are able to participate in an inclusive sports setting based on football. Fifty coaches from special schools and mainstream sports clubs have introduced the model in an inclusive setting, and they have clearly indicated that all children are able to build sports and fitness skills through regular trainings and competitions. The quality of the training is enhanced by conducting activities in professional sports facilities and using club trainers. The Turkish Football Association and the six professional clubs have deepened their understanding of how professional



An inclusive football team from Turkey

sports can contribute to developing opportunities for children, particularly those with intellectual disabilities.

Outlook & Transferability

The project model has universal appeal because it can be easily replicated in schools, sports clubs, or community centre settings. Unified Recreation can be readily implemented within educational systems that are segregated or inclusive simply by recruiting participants both with and without intellectual disabilities (e.g., students, family members, employees, etc.).

FACTS & FIGURES

- 300 children with intellectual disabilities and 300 children without intellectual disabilities have learned new skills, gained new friends, and experienced sports in an inclusive and fun environment.
- 16 sports club coaches have gained an understanding of the importance of sharing their specific skills and knowledge with all children, including those with disabilities.

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