



Special Olympics



Lions Clubs International Announces Historic Expansion of Partnership with Special Olympics

Increasing Funding, Member Activation and Programming to Benefit Those with Intellectual Disabilities Worldwide

HAMBURG, Germany, 8 July 2013 –Lions Clubs International Foundation is pledging \$7.8 million to Special Olympics, expanding worldwide efforts to support the inclusion and well-being of people with intellectual disabilities.

Building on the organizations' 14-year history of collaboration, this pledge is part of a new multi-year partnership plan that will strengthen ties between Special Olympics and Lions Clubs International at the country and the community level. The partnership is providing health services, engaging youth and encouraging family support to benefit the global population of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The announcement was made on stage during the 96th annual Lions Clubs International convention in Hamburg, Germany, by Special Olympics Board Member Yao Ming, Special Olympics Chairman and CEO Timothy Shriver, Special Olympics Australia athlete Ben Haack, Special Olympics-Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Founder Dr. Paul Berman and Lion Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) Chairperson Tam Wing-kun.

"Just five months ago at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Korea, Special Olympics convened world leaders for a Global Development Summit focused on ending the cycle of poverty and exclusion that people with intellectual disabilities face around the world. Lions Clubs did more than participate in that gathering -- they committed to action," shared Yao Ming. "With this remarkable commitment, they're putting the funding and strength of their global grassroots organization in direct service for one of the world's most marginalized populations. There's no greater service organization than Lions, and the athletes, families, volunteers and fans of Special Olympics worldwide are proud to stand with their members in service to others."

Lions Clubs International has been supporting Special Olympics with a focus on health through the Special Olympics-Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes vision screening program. Now, this five-year renewal and increased support will create leadership opportunities for Special Olympics athletes, increase the health work of Special Olympics, conduct outreach to families for additional support and allow for both organizations to reach more young people through inclusive sports and advocacy programs in an effort to achieve full acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in their communities.

“Lions Clubs International is honored to serve as a global partner of Special Olympics,” said Chairperson Tam. “For many years, we have worked side by side in the field of vision care for those with intellectual disabilities, and we are so excited to expand the scope of our collaboration to meet additional needs in our communities. This expanded global partnership provides an opportunity for our Lions and Leo members to engage in new service opportunities like hearing health, family support, inclusive sports, membership development, and much more.”

As part of the partnership announcement, Lions Clubs International Foundation Chairperson Dr. Tam Wing-kun made Yao Ming an honorary Lions Clubs member for his dedication to serving children throughout China.

Since 2001, Special Olympics and Lions Clubs International have screened more than 325,000 Special Olympics athletes, and with the help of global suppliers Essilor International and Safilo Group, have provided more than 100,000 athletes with high quality prescription eyeglasses. The expanded partnership will utilize the proven collaborative model exhibited through Opening Eyes, with the focus on creating additional health and social impacts to empower individuals with intellectual disabilities, their families, and their communities.

In addition to empowering people with intellectual disabilities to achieve their best both on and off the playing field, the partnership is designed to highlight the global and community leadership offered by Lions Clubs International, the largest service organization in the world, and a global leader in humanitarian service.

“Thank you Lions Clubs for your continued support, but more importantly for your belief in people like me,” said Ben Haack, Special Olympics Australia athlete. “Your support will allow us to reach more young people and empower our athletes to be leaders. We are so excited to work closely with Lions Clubs throughout the world to bring your mission, ‘We Serve’, to every corner of the Special Olympics Movement. These actions will help build understanding and break down barriers and bullying and will create communities of acceptance everywhere.”

In 2001, Lions Clubs International Foundation awarded Special Olympics the first grant in a multi-year, multi-million dollar commitment in the expansion of the Opening Eyes vision screening program. Since then, the Foundation has provided over \$15 million to provide vision and health-related services for a population long denied access to quality health and social services.

The commitment will continue to be more than just financial. Lions Clubs International has supported the Opening Eyes program with more than 20,000 volunteers in more than 80 countries, as well as helping to build capacity for increased disability programming in communities throughout the world.

About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is an international organization that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports every day around the world. Through work in sports, health, education and community building, Special Olympics is addressing inactivity, injustice, intolerance and social isolation by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, which leads to a more welcoming and inclusive society. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to more than 4.2 million athletes in 170 countries. With the support of more than one million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics is able to deliver 32 Olympic-type sports and more than 70,000 competitions throughout the year. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org. Engage with us on: [Twitter @specialolympics](https://twitter.com/specialolympics); fb.com/specialolympics; youtube.com/specialolympicshq, and specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com.

About Lions Clubs International Foundation

Lions Clubs International Foundation is the charitable arm of Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization in the world with 1.35 million members in 208 geographic areas and countries. Through LCIF, Lions have helped to save or restore the vision of more than 30 million people worldwide. Learn more online at www.lcif.org.

Contacts:

Kirsten Seckler, Special Olympics
+1-202-715-1147; kseckler@specialolympics.org

Allie Stryker, Lions Club International
[Allie.Stryker@lionsclubs.org](mailto>Allie.Stryker@lionsclubs.org)