

Special Olympics in Kodiak a Model Program

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

When it comes to Special Olympics in Alaska, Kodiak serves as a model for the rest of the state. Nicolle Egan is the vice president and chief operating officer for the statewide Special Olympics and said Kodiak's strong program has helped advance the entire organization. Egan was in Kodiak last week to meet with various local entities about the local, state, national and worldwide organization. She said more than 170 countries participate in Special Olympics, which provides sports training and competition for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Locally, more than 40 athletes compete year round on behalf of Kodiak.

She said the organization is rooted in sports, but is also shifting in terms of what it provides individuals and communities.

-- (Special O 1 :41 "We're still a sports organization, 150 percent a sports organization, but we're actually working toward health and education as well, and using sports to promote health to our athletes and their families. And using sports to promote education, so for example, unified sports. Playing that is an education in itself. But it gets people that don't have disabilities to participate in the program and they go out and tell their story at the office the next day and it just kind of moves forward like that. But the health and education piece is going to become bigger and bigger and so we're really working on working closely with the volunteers on allowing them to keep continuing the sports but also expand to possibly providing more.")

Unified Sports is a push to put athletes with intellectual disabilities in the same realm of competition and training as athletes without those disabilities. Egan said the program helps break down a lot of stigmas and social barriers toward people with intellectual disabilities. She added that Kodiak has championed some of these efforts already.

-- (Special O 2 :29 "There's a lot of fear about sometimes working with someone with a disability that we're just working day to day to surpass that. Kodiak High School has what's called a partners club and that is a club that puts kids in that school without disabilities together with athletes to get them more engaged in the environment and do sports. In fact, they're about to start unified track, and they're a few special Olympic athletes that will be training with the high school team, that's the goal anyways, they're going to be training with the high school team and competing in high school meets.")

Egan said the shift to include health and wellness teaching in Special Olympics will benefit from a new building that is specifically designed for volunteers and athletes of the organization.

-- (Special O 3 :34

“This spring we’ll be breaking ground for a new building in Anchorage that’s called the Special Olympics Alaska Athlete Training Center and Campus. And the focus is health and wellness for people with intellectual disabilities and their families, through Special Olympics. So it’s going to be a campus basically. We’ve got a full court gym coming in a two lane track up above it, several classrooms to be able to provide classes. And our goal is that it is the resource for people across the state for people with intellectual disabilities and volunteers to come in and get trained and you know we can provide more tournaments and leagues because we don’t have to pay for the facility because we own it.”)

She said funding for the new building came from capitol money. The facility is fully paid off and is now an asset to the organization. Egan emphasized that no operational funds went into the building, so nothing that could have been spent on travel or providing events for the athletes.

The United States will hold national games in 2014, and the next world games will be in Los Angeles in 2015. Meanwhile, Kodiak athletes will compete in the Alaska Winter Games, which start on Friday.

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