

How through the support of Special Olympics young people's lives are changing for better, and abilities are flourishing?

Distinguished Guests, it is an honour to be here. My name is Inge Maiberg and I am a Special Olympics athlete and Athlete Leader from Estonia. Special Olympics is a sports organization for people with Intellectual Disabilities. I joined Special Olympics as a swimmer seven years ago.

Now, I am an athlete leader and I teach other athletes to be leaders at school, clubs and in the community. As an athlete leader, my role is to support fellow athletes by providing guidance on social skills. We focus on teamwork, patience, and interview skills to prepare for future job prospects. Above all, I encourage them to take risks and step outside of their comfort zone.

Thanks to the Special Olympics I have a very strong support network. I have participated in many conferences and projects that promote inclusion. It has made me more brave and have more trust in myself. Everyone around me is very welcoming and accepting, we have a strong sense of unity.

The coaches are very patient and kind and are working to make all athletes feel secure and confident. During competitions, everyone is making sure that the athletes feel proud of themselves. Based on my own experience, I can say coaches provide great comfort and don't make me feel bad about losing. Every loss is a chance to learn and get better.

Aside from training and competing, Special Olympics athletes also have a chance for self-improvement. Athletes have the opportunity to take part in different classes that teach good leadership skills, how to give constructive feedback and how to analyse themselves to make the most of their strengths and improve their weaknesses.

In Special Olympics every athlete is given a chance and everyone's feelings are accepted. Thanks to the Special Olympics the athletes can show the world their strengths, not their weaknesses or differences. We never give up even when it gets hard for us. The athletes are given a platform to say what they think and their words are heard.

Special Olympics prove to the whole world that while we may be different, we remain equal. Thank you again for this opportunity.