



## SPECIAL OLYMPICS SWIMMING

South Hills near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Program by Special Olympics of Pennsylvania (SOPA)



## Mission Statement of Special Olympics Pennsylvania

The Mission of Special Olympics PA is to provide year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.

## Mission Statement of Special Olympics Swim Team

Create an inclusive and positive environment toward developing competitive swimming skills to build confidence and friendships for our special Olympian athletes. The goal is for each athlete to make a meaningful relationship with their volunteer coach as they work together to grow the swimmer's abilities and confidence in the water. The program is designed to fit the individual needs of each athlete in hopes of creating long-term success for each athlete in the program.

## SPLASH BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Our program was started by an athlete parent and the local high school swim coach. He volunteered to be the SOPA Head Coach of the program and came up with the plan to engage high school swimmers as volunteers to create a unique learning environment where the teen students could pass on what they know about swimming to someone else. During the time with the athletes, bonds and friendships were formed. The 2022 -2023 season was our first year and it was a fantastic success with 35 Athletes and 28 high school volunteers participating. During the inaugural year we picked a team name and an athlete parent created our logo. Special Olympics PA provided gear for all the athletes and volunteers including swimsuits and T-shirts. All athletes were recognized at an end-of-season party by receiving a certificate signed by the volunteers that worked with them.

## ROSTER FOR 2023 – 2024 SEASON

Our plan is to support 40(+) Athletes with 20+ Student Volunteers and Coaches. We anticipate we may have a waiting list to start the year.

## SEASON DURATION

The swim season is set up around the annual school calendar year. The season will begin in the fall after the high school volunteers are in school. The season will be focused on the Special Olympic Local and Regional Championship meets, typically held at the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. The season concludes following these meets which usually take place in April each year. At this time, we do not plan on attending the State Meet at Pennsylvania State University held in June.

## PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Our practices will be on **Sunday afternoons**. To maximize our program's volunteer-to-athlete ratio, practices are divided into two (2) sessions. The hope is to maintain one-to-one volunteer-to-athlete ratio. Our practice times will be as listed unless otherwise communicated prior to the practice. Session 1 will be from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm and session 2 will be from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. **All athletes are to arrive about 10 minutes prior to their scheduled practice time and to come ready in swimsuits.**

(Dependent upon coach, volunteer and facility availability, a second weekly practice may be considered. If possible, this may facilitate accommodating more interested athletes.)

Practice sessions will occur weekly with some exceptions for holidays.

Any necessary changes to the schedule will be communicated via email by the coordinator. Please check your e-mail weekly within 24 hours of any scheduled practice.

## FACILITY POLICIES

### Locker Rooms and Bathrooms

- Locker Rooms are for **Volunteers only**. (These are for High School Swimmers ONLY. For the protection of all involved, please respect these rules.)
- 3 – Auxiliary **full bathrooms** are for the Special Olympian Athletes
  - Parents/Guardians are permitted to help their athletes in the auxiliary bathrooms and are not allowed to use the high school locker rooms.
  - It is suggested that athletes arrive and leave the facility in their swimsuits.

### Facility Rules

- All athletes are to be accompanied by a parent or guardian upon arrival at each practice.
- Upon Entry into the facility, only exits leading to the parking area should be utilized during the duration of practice time.
- Coaches reserve the right to uninvite any swimmer who does not comply with the general pool rules as listed behind the diving board and designed for swimmer safety.
- No swimmer is to ever enter the water without direct supervision and permission from the head coach or their direct volunteer.
- Swimmers are to maintain general healthy habits to ensure the health of themselves and other athletes.
  - If the athlete is not feeling, please skip practice.
  - Usage of restrooms and washing hands

- Covering mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Maintaining proper attire during the duration of swim practice

For the health and safety of Special Olympic athlete and volunteers, SOPA will continue to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance regarding communicable diseases and public health emergencies.

## VOLUNTEER CLASSIFICATION

Our Volunteers will be both Class A and Class B Volunteers. All our High School student volunteers will be Class B volunteers under the direct supervision of Class A volunteers. Those Class A volunteers are the head coach as well as other guardians and Special Olympic coordinators who have registered, trained and submitted to background checks and fingerprinting.

## TEAM ROSTER

The Team Roster is created and upheld during the entirety of the program. This is to ensure the proper athlete-to-volunteer ratio, but also to monitor the guests within the facility (*Upper Saint Clair High School Pool*). The roster will always be kept at the facility in case of any emergencies. This roster will also encompass all volunteers associated with a particular season of the program. Volunteers can be added at any time, only after they have completed the Class B volunteer credentials.

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS APPLICATION FOR ATHLETE PARTICIPATION

A binder will be maintained by the coordinator with an up-to-date Special Olympics Medical (Application for Athlete Participation in Special Olympics) form for all athletes that wish to participate in our program. A current completed form, signed by a Physician, is required prior to getting in the water. Forms are considered valid by SOPA for 3 years from the date of Physicians signature. This binder will be at all practices, and any swim meets in which the team is participating.

## ATHLETE AGES

South Hills Splash Special Olympic Athletes are welcome beginning at age 7. There is no age limit.

## BEFORE PRACTICE GUIDELINES

For all practices, Guardians should accompany the athletes to the facility. This ensures that all athletes get to practice on time and without worry. Special Olympic Athletes and guardians are permitted to use the three auxiliary bathrooms located around the pool. **The locker rooms are off limits for our athletes and families.**

We will take attendance at every practice and event. Please make sure you sign in or check in with the volunteer and let them know you are here. We will also log the volunteer's attendance to assist in keeping track of our ratios.

It is recommended that all athletes bring the following to each practice:

- WEAR your swimsuit to practice.
- Towel
- Goggles & Swim Caps – These are options but recommended for athletes. The swim cap is often used for those swimmers who have hair that can get in their faces while swimming.
- Safety straps for eyeglasses worn in the water.
- Deck Shoes – These are often great for swimmers to ensure safety on deck. Crocs are an example of pool shoes. Your swimmers are permitted to wear “water/pool” specific shoes in the water but cannot also be functioning as regular shoes.
- Water Bottle – These are important for our athletes who will be swimming and exercising while at practice. It will be a great opportunity for the volunteers to explain the importance of hydration and water in recovery.
- Log Book – This is an option but is something your athlete and volunteer can use to log and make notes for each practice. This would help your athlete to see their progress and improvements.
  - This will also be great in working with your athlete on goal setting and for the volunteers to have insight into how to help develop the athletes' skills.

All Valuable and personal belongings should be left with their guardians or be with their belongings on deck during practice time. Items should not be left in the auxiliary bathrooms within the facility. All items should be gathered in the designated bleacher area.

\*Special Olympics PA, South Hills Splash, Coaches and Volunteers, and the pool facility (Upper St. Clair High School) are NOT responsible for any missing items.

## DURING AND AFTER PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The practices are run and executed by the Special Olympics Volunteers. The Volunteers are to ensure all athletes have an assigned volunteer and athletes are properly attired for the practice. The volunteer may ask if the swimmer would like to use goggles or a swim cap, but it is not required. The volunteers will use available equipment with the athletes to build water skills and swim stroke development. The equipment is included within the facility but cannot be taken home. The equipment includes, but not limited to, Kickboards, Fins, Pool Noodles, swim belts and Aqua Joggers. During the hour of practice, please encourage your swimmers to challenge themselves with their volunteer and to give their volunteer coach their undivided attention. We want our swimmers to build great friendships with the volunteers and grow their confidence. If your swimmer needs to leave the water before the end of practice time, please communicate with the head coach and your swimmer's direct volunteer prior to the beginning of practice.

Swimmers are to exit the pool within five minutes of the practice closing time. The last five minutes of practice will be a small wind-down and will give the swimmers time to gather their items and have a nice practice conclusion with their volunteer. The practices will begin light with a level of fun to get the athletes into the water. However, the practices will be structured around building the swimmers skills to their personal ability levels.

## RELATED ACTIVITIES

Special Olympics holds many fundraising events throughout the year. Two of them are suggested for participation by South Hills Splash.

The first is the Pittsburgh Polar Plunge, typically held in February of every year. There are two parts to the Polar Plunge. There is a Plunge on Friday for Cool Schools and some groups then on Saturday is The PLUNGE the dates for 2024 are Feb 23 and 24<sup>th</sup>.

<https://give.specialolympicspa.org/event/2024-special-olympics-pittsburgh-polar-plunge/e490377>

The Second event is the UNCathalon is a Unique team challenge that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power of teamwork, bringing awareness to Special Olympics Pennsylvania. It is a UNified event held in October. This year it is taking place October 1, 2023, at Peters Township High School. These teams will include at least one or two Special Olympic Athletes. (See coaches and volunteers for additional information.)

<https://specialolympicspa.org/pittsburgh-uncathlon-info>

## TEAM CONTACTS

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