

Making History with Special Olympics

A new chapter in the history of the LSU School of Dentistry (LSUSD) has begun with the launch of Special Olympics Day, a first-ever clinic that caters to the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. "This is the first time that a dental school and Special Olympics have collaborated in this way," said Jennifer Hew, RDH, MSHCM, clinic director. "It's very exciting."

Hew also leads the year-round Special Olympics program called Special Smiles that conducts screenings at competitions. Volunteer teams of students, faculty members and community dentists use the protocol established by Special Olympics. It is a non-invasive screening with a flashlight and mirror. In the past 12 months, 598 athletes were screened at six events around Louisiana. From this number, 28 were selected for follow-up care during the history-making Special Olympics Day. Each athlete received a comprehensive exam, x-rays, cleaning and instructions on personal dental hygiene. Dental services were provided pro bono by 31 senior dental students and 36 senior dental hygiene students. LSUSD paid for the supplies as well as the services.

Follow-up care, funded by Special Olympics, will be available through the student clinics at the dental school or by referral to the general practice residency clinic at University Hospital. "This is a great way to train and educate our students as well as give back to those in need," Hew said. "As clinic director, it was great to observe such a high level of teamwork."



Clinic director Jennifer Hew and Special Olympics athletes Matthew and Joseph Guichard with their mother, Laurie Guichard.

Backyard in Maryland

What we now call Special Olympics started 49 years ago in the backyard of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of President John Kennedy. The inspiration was their sister, Rosemary, who had developmental disabilities. Mrs. Shriver believed sports would enable adults and children with disabilities to explore their potential. Thus, she organized a day camp in the backyard of her home in Maryland. The idea caught on so quickly that just six years later the first international games were held in Chicago.

Compared to people without disabilities, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities have a 40% greater risk of preventable secondary health conditions such as obesity, poor fitness, nutritional deficits, untreated or poorly treated vision, dental, hearing and podiatric problems. These facts led to the creation of the Healthy Athletes initiative which has provided more than one million health screenings to Special Olympics athletes since 1997. Healthy Athletes has the world's largest database of health data for people with intellectual disabilities. Through the program, more than 90,000 health care professionals have been trained on the health concerns faced by people with intellectual disabilities. Any individual aged seven and up with intellectual and developmental disabilities can participate in the games.

"The screenings are a fun and supportive way to learn about the needs of the special athletes," Hew said. "It's easy to volunteer. You don't have to be a health care provider. The athletes love to be cheered. I can assure anyone who comes out that they will receive more than they give." For more information, e-mail her at JHew@lsuhsc.edu.



Dental hygiene student Ashley Bellerino and dental student Chase Dronet care for a special athlete.