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INTRODUCTION

The idea of sport organization for people with intellectual disabilities was born in the early 60s by Mrs. Kennedy Shriver. Subsequently, she organized a day camp in which people with mental disabilities took part in and she observed that these people were better able to participate in sport and physical activities, despite the opposite views of many experts in the field (1, 6).

After this and other similar events, Mrs. Kennedy Shriver organized the first Special Olympics in 1968 in Chicago, USA (6).

The mission of Special Olympics is: a) to offer ongoing opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities in order to develop their natural state, b) to facilitate the participation of children and adults with intellectual disabilities in competitions in Olympic sports, c) to facilitate the athletic training of people with intellectual disabilities throughout the year, d) to participate in the distribution of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community, and e) to highlight the courage and experience from their participation in different sports (4, 5, 7).

The Special Olympics were founded with the idealistic notion that people with intellectual disabilities can, with proper coaching, guidance, and encouragement, learn, enjoy and benefit from their participation in different sports and in teams. One of the guiding principles of this idea is the benefits of participation are more important than victory (3).

SPECIAL OLYMPICS HELLAS

Special Olympics Hellas founded in 1987 to provide training opportunities and offer participation in competitions for people with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the extent of their disability. The Special Olympics Hellas is an athletic and non profit educational organization (8, 9).

The mission of Special Olympics Hellas is to offer participation to children and adults with intellectual disabilities, in a variety of Olympic-type sports throughout the year. Also, offers training opportunities and participation in competitions, and give them opportunity to be physically, mentally, socially and spiritually in an environment of respect and acceptance (3, 5).

The benefits of participating of people with intellectual disabilities, in athletic programs of Special Olympics Hellas are: a) improved physical fitness, b) better cardiovascular adaptations, c) better coordination of movement, d) encouraging decision-making, e) development of sociability as a result of interaction with people without mental problems, f) opportunities for families to discover the capabilities of their child, leading to acceptance, understanding and pride, improvement self-confidence and developed self-esteem and pride, g) communication capabilities and the integration of the individual to society, and i) opportunities to travel and gain new experiences from their visits to new places with different cultures (8, 9, 10).

So far in the Special Olympics Hellas programs throughout Greece, there have been participated more than 12.500 athletes with intellectual disabilities, who train over 920 dedicated volunteers in winter and summer Olympics and participate in European, Mediterranean and World Games. Each year the Special Olympics Hellas, between September to June, in addition to different training programs, organizes Pan-Hellenic, local and regional games (2).

The sports that organized by Special Olympics Hellas are: athletics, swimming, rhythmic and artistic gymnastics, basketball, tennis, football, volleyball, equestrian, table tennis, bowling, canoeing, cycling, weightlifting, golf, judo, volleyball, sailing and four winter sports: cross country skiing, ice skating, snow shoeing and alpine skiing (2).

SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD SUMMER GAMES ATHENS, 2011

The city of Athens was chosen by International Committee of Special Olympics, on June 5, 2007, to organize the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2011.

The Special Olympics World Games 2011, will be held in Athens (Greece), between June 25 to July 4. The event will cover over 3.000 journalists from around the world. In the Games will participate over 7.000 athletes and 2.500

coaches from 180 countries. Also, in this Mega event, will took place over 3.000 judges/referees, 40.000 family members of athletes, and 25.000 volunteers (2).

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