

**COLUMBIA PARKS AND RECREATION
SPECIAL OLYMPICS
VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES**

GENERAL INFORMATION

The ultimate goal of Special Olympics is to help people with mental disabilities to live as productive and respected members of their communities.

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people eight years of age and older, with mental disabilities.

Currently in Missouri there are 14,000 Special Olympic athletes participating in 18 different Olympic-type sports. The state is divided into nine areas: Kansas City, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, St. Louis, Special School District of St. Louis, Central and South Central. The Central Area covers 16 counties including Boone County. There are over 40 agencies within the 16 counties. Columbia has two agencies: Columbia Public Schools and Columbia Parks and Recreation.

Columbia Public Schools offers Track & Field to eligible junior high and high school athletes. Columbia Parks and Recreation offers 11 different sports for athletes 8 and over. The sports offered are: Aquatics, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Golf, Powerlifting, Soccer, Softball, Tennis, Track & Field and Volleyball.

The following is a general guideline of when the sports seasons run for Columbia Parks and Recreation:

January – Aquatics and Powerlifting (runs through May)
March – Bocce, Tennis, Track & Field (runs through May)
May – Softball (runs through August)
June – Golf (runs through August)
July – Volleyball, Soccer (runs through October)
August – Bowling (runs through December)
November – Basketball (runs through March)

There are five state tournaments that Columbia Parks and Recreation Special Olympics athletes compete at in Missouri: Basketball Classic, Summer State Games, Outdoor Classic, Fall Classic and Indoor Classic. The Summer State Games are the biggest tournament encompassing six sports: Aquatics, Bocce, Powerlifting, Team Handball, Tennis and Track & Field.

There are many levels of volunteer opportunities available with Special Olympics: state, area and local. To volunteer at the state level call the Special Olympics Missouri Office (SOMO) at 1-800-846-2682. To volunteer at the area level, contact the Central Area Director, Diane Brimer, at (573) 256-6367. To volunteer at the local level, contact the Columbia Parks and Recreation Special Olympics office at (573) 874-7312.

All Special Olympics athletes are required to practice 8 weeks before competition. They are also required to complete assessments which are basic skills for the sport they are competing in. These assessments are used to division athletes and teams for competition at tournament play. Athletes are also divisioned by age and gender.

Columbia Parks and Recreation uses the assessments to assign teams and coordinate practice schedules. To volunteer with Columbia Parks and Recreation, it is helpful to have a sports background as you will be interacting with the athletes during practices.

A typical practice for us includes 10-15 minutes of stretching the athletes out, 30-45 minutes working on skills and team play, 10 minutes of running and 5 minutes cool down. Volunteers can assist with showing the athletes the proper stretching form (some athletes need assistance in straightening out legs and arms) or encouraging the athletes as they stretch. During the skills and team play, they can assist the coaches by demonstrating skills, ensuring the athletes are doing the skill correctly, encouraging the athlete and keeping the athletes focused on the task at hand. During team play, volunteers are welcome to play against the athletes. This challenges the athletes and improves their skills. This is the part that the athletes look forward to the most.

Patience is the most important thing when dealing with our athletes. These athletes thrive on repetition. You may have to repeat yourself several times or demonstrate a particular skill over and over until they understand. Always encourage them.

EXPECTATIONS

- Work with the athletes in one-on-one and team situations
- Develop sports skills of athletes
- Help coaches keep track of equipment
- Assist in keeping athletes focused
- Demonstrate stretches and skills for athletes
- Encourage athletes