

Healthy Athletes Screening Day returns for third year

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 22, 2013

On February 23, Special Olympics BC (SOBC) is teaming up with UBC students to host the third annual SOBC Healthy Athletes Screening Day for individuals with intellectual disabilities in the Lower Mainland.

Set to be held at Notre Dame Regional Secondary School in Vancouver, this Healthy Athletes event will offer opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to receive free screenings from health professionals in the fields of audiology, dentistry, optometry, and podiatry, which will help identify and address medical issues in a welcoming, supportive environment. Nutrition and wellness tips will also be shared in fun health promotion stations.

The Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program addresses the issue that many people with intellectual disabilities have unique issues around health care and communicating their needs. The issue is twofold: first, many individuals with intellectual disabilities have trouble realizing or expressing their health concerns; second, many health professionals have not had the opportunity to receive specific training, or are not familiar enough with this population, to know the best questions to ask to draw out the issues.

International Special Olympics research has found that people with intellectual disabilities have a 40 per cent higher risk for health issues, and that only one in 50 primary care physicians have received clinical training that qualifies them to treat people with intellectual disabilities.

The professionals who lead Healthy Athletes screenings, including those in Saturday's event, have received specific training to help them ask the right questions, and their interactions with Special Olympics athletes lead to referrals back into the health care system that ensure the individuals will get the treatment they need.

Many athletes and caregivers have been surprised to go through the Healthy Athletes screenings and find health issues that have gone undiagnosed through regular health channels. The Budzegan family found that happened for son Carson, an SOBC – Langley athlete. Eye examinations from medical professionals at the 2011 Healthy Athletes Screening Day in Vancouver led Carson and his family to seek more tests that showed the then-22 year old was at a critical risk from cataracts. Thanks to these interventions, Carson, an aspiring photographer, was scheduled for surgeries that would help save his sight. Carson's family diligently cares for him and all his medical needs, but the Healthy Athletes screening helped bring to light a problem that had gone unvoiced until that moment.

The 2012 Vancouver Healthy Athletes Screening Day saw 170 individuals with intellectual disabilities, including roughly 150 appreciative SOBC athletes, participate and benefit from the screenings.

SOBC – Coquitlam athlete Conrad Tyrkin was amazed by the scope of the 2012 event and grateful for all that he received, including a thorough check-up of his mouth health in the Special Smiles screening and flexible glasses he can wear while playing floor hockey.

“Everyone’s been dedicating their time, and that’s what stood out for me the most. I can’t believe this is happening, all these people putting in their time and effort doing this – this is a lot of work,” he said fervently.

SOBC is working hard on athlete health initiatives such as the Healthy Athletes screenings because we know that if we can encourage individuals with an intellectual disability to become healthier, health costs will decrease, and their physical abilities, athletic performances and overall quality of life will improve.

The 2013 Vancouver Healthy Athletes Screening Day will be fun and welcoming for all, and will provide individuals with intellectual disabilities with valuable medical and health advice as well as plenty of great free giveaways.

The event is benefitting from the volunteer efforts of 40 UBC students from the Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Dentistry, School of Nursing, and Faculty of Pharmaceutical Services, who will assist with the screenings on Saturday. Several UBC Faculty of Medicine students have also been working with SOBC staff for months to help organize the day, carrying on a much-appreciated three-year-old tradition of UBC student leadership with this event.

More than 100 individuals with intellectual disabilities are already registered to participate in Saturday’s event. Others looking to participate are welcome to contact Joanna Verweel, SOBC Manager, Health and Sport Science, at jverweel@specialolympics.bc.ca or 604-737-3081.

Event details:

Date: Saturday, February 23

Time: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Location: Notre Dame Regional Secondary School, 2880 Venables St., Vancouver

Healthy Athletes background:

<http://www.specialolympics.bc.ca/healthy-athletes>

About Special Olympics BC

Special Olympics BC is dedicated to providing individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to enrich their lives and celebrate personal achievement through positive sport experiences. In 55 communities around the province, we provide year-round training and competitive opportunities in 18 different sports to more than 4,100 athletes of all ages and abilities, thanks to the dedicated efforts of over 3,200 volunteers. For more information, please visit www.specialolympics.bc.ca. Find us on Facebook and Twitter: www.facebook.com/specialolympicsbc | @sobcsociety.

Media contact

Megan Grittani-Livingston

SOBC Manager, Communications

T: 604.737.3077 | E: megan@specialolympics.bc.ca