

Special Olympics Isle of Man – Berlin Tournament Report.



The World Games in Berlin was the largest sporting event in the world in 2023. 7,500 athletes competed from nearly 200 countries. 5,000 coaches and support staff, 20,000 volunteers and a global audience of millions.



With an opening ceremony at the Olympic Stadium to the Closing Ceremony at Brandenburg Gate. And in between 30 different sports competed in over the course of ten days. It was a truly unforgettable experience for who had the privilege to be part of the

experience.

The Special Olympics Isle of Man squad consisted of 18 athletes supported by a team of coaches, the Head & Assistant Head of Delegation and medical support staff.

The athletes competed in the sports of swimming, bocce, bowling, athletics, cycling and gymnastics. And returned to the island with a total of 19 medals, and many personal best performances across all the sports participated in.

This was an amazing achievement from the whole squad. And away from the sporting events the athletes proved to be inspiring ambassadors for the Isle of Man. Competing with grace, determination and dignity. And just as importantly making sure that they had fun and made friends along the way. Showing their resilience over two weeks of travel, new experiences and elite competition was a medal-winning achievement unto itself.

Away from the showcase World Games, the Special Olympics (SO) movement encompasses over 6 million athletes worldwide with learning or intellectual disabilities, competing in hundreds of competitions annually. The Special Olympic World Games like it's counterparts the Olympics and the Paralympics are about sporting endeavour and achievement. But unlike it's sister events it is about much more than just sport.

Behind the competitive events themselves is an organisation that is



striving to champion the cause for a more inclusive society for people



with learning or intellectual disabilities. Through education, empowerment and real change the Special Olympics flies the flag for equality, inclusion and representation. There are programs, schemes and organisations under the SO umbrella which aim to radically improve the position that people with learning disabilities

currently occupy within our societies. Along with endeavours designed to help improve health and wellbeing.

The Special Olympic movement also provides real opportunities for inclusion for people with learning disabilities. The Athletes Leadership programme ([Athlete Leadership \(specialolympicsgb.org.uk\)](https://specialolympicsgb.org.uk)) has been developed to promote and facilitate the chance (through training, education and awareness, and leadership positions within the organisation) to ensure that athletes are not only recipients of opportunity but contributors. Athletes are enabled to gravitate beyond their role of competitors into the realms of job opportunities within the movement, and seats at decision-making tables.

An experience in Berlin which was particularly inspiring to all was in regard to the volunteers who helped the Games to happen (and without which it really wouldn't happen- volunteers are heroes in every sense of the word!). As mentioned there were 20,000 volunteers recruited- and it was observed that many of the volunteers were adults with learning disabilities themselves. Working independently or with support from others.



Greeters, Food & Drink operatives, Information & Direction providers. People with learning disabilities supporting and playing their part in a global event of importance. Germany is a world leader with regard to making inclusion not just a goal but an achievable reality. It was inclusion in a real way, and a great inspiration.



The motto and message of these Games was 'Unbeatable Together and Co-existence For All'. A very valiant and prescient message. And not just for those 7,500 athletes chosen to represent their countries in Berlin, nor the 6,000,000 athletes within the Special Olympics family- but the estimated 200 million people with learning or intellectual disabilities around the world.



The Special Olympics Isle of Man squad once again excelled at a World Games, not just in performance but in the quality they showed in representing the Isle of Man. Proving once again to the world that the Manx spirit and determination are forces to be reckoned with. Congratulations to all of the squad, athletes and coaches and support staff. And to those who volunteer in supporting the athletes throughout the year, from regular training sessions to fund-raising- without your support the athletes in Berlin would not have been able to do what they do.