



# Impact Report 2024

**Special Olympics**  
Great Britain





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CEO Reflections

# My Journey as Special Olympics Athlete Leadership Team Chair: A 2024 Reflection

The year of 2024 has been one that demonstrates growth, overcoming challenges, and some remarkable moments.

As Chair of the Athlete Leadership Team, I've experienced a journey that has been both personally transformative and incredibly rewarding.

The first National Winter Games in Folgaria, Italy, was a pivotal moment for me.

Rather than just being a competitor, the experience of also being Athlete Leadership Team (ALT) Chair brought a new dimension to my involvement. Suddenly, I found myself being followed by the media in attendance, explaining our movement to athletes, and representing something much larger than myself.

I'm very proud of the way that this came across in the BBC Sport documentary, Special Olympics: Five Days in Folgaria.

Despite my leadership role, I remained committed to competing and participated in athletics, badminton, table tennis, and other competitions in 2024. I wanted to prove that having a leadership position doesn't mean stepping away from what you love. I've always believed that you can be a leader and still be a competitor.

One of my favourite moments of 2024 was speaking live on stage at the ICAP Charity Day Impact event. Here, alongside my fellow ALT member James Wyatt, we had the nerve-wracking but exciting opportunity to be interviewed by television legends Ant and Dec.

It was a moment that showed how far I've come; just a few years ago, I wouldn't have had the confidence to do something like that.

Meeting such celebrated personalities as Ant and Dec, Adam Peaty and of course Dr Tim Shriver during my time as ALT Chair has been surreal. Each interaction reinforced our mission to spread awareness of Special Olympics GB and showcase the talents of our athletes.

Celebrating these talents in November at the Athlete Leadership Forum was particularly meaningful.

Seeing over 80 athletes now involved in leadership - compared to just seven when we started - was inspiring. We've created a platform where athletes' voices are not just heard but celebrated.

As I prepare to hand over the Chair to Mitch, I'm filled with pride and hope.

Our team has broken down barriers, created opportunities, and shown the world that athletes with intellectual disabilities can be powerful leaders and incredible competitors.

**To every athlete out there: continue believing in yourself, push your boundaries, and never let anyone limit your potential. Our voices are powerful, and together, we can create meaningful change.**



# We are Inclusion In Action

Special Olympics GB is more than sport, it transforms lives.

Through the power of sport, we enable people of all ages and from all backgrounds living with intellectual disabilities to make friends, learn social skills, feel part of a community, increase their confidence and self-esteem, realise their potential, develop physical fitness and mental wellbeing, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and pride.



We operate across England, Scotland and Wales and have a growing network of all-ability, inclusive sports accredited programmes and partners. We offer 27 different sports across those programmes – delivered by an amazing team of thousands of volunteers supporting thousands of athletes.



Special Olympics Great Britain is part of the global Special Olympics International organisation which is the largest disability sports organisation in the world. As a global movement, Special Olympics reaches 3.6 million athletes across 200 countries.



We are the largest provider of year-round sports participation, training and competition in summer and winter sports for children, young people and adults with intellectual disabilities.



Our focus is on ability not disability. We provide opportunities for our athletes to compete with others at similar levels both at home and overseas – from recreational weekly sessions, to regional, national and international competitions we have a competitive pathway to support our athlete's development.



Together, through the programmes we have created, we want to inspire real change by raising awareness of intellectual disability, ending discrimination, and building an inclusive world for all.

# What is intellectual disability?



**An intellectual disability is more widely known in the United Kingdom as a learning disability.**

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complex information and interact with other people.

Source: Mencap

## In the United Kingdom:

01.

1.5 million people have an intellectual disability.

02.

More than 80% of adults with a learning disability do not do enough physical activity to benefit their health.

03.

People with an intellectual disability are 2.5 times more likely to have health problems than any other group.

04.

50% of people with an intellectual disability experience chronic loneliness, compared to 15-30% for the general population

05.

74% of people with an intellectual disability have no form of employment.

06.

31% of people with intellectual disability live in poverty, compared to 18% for the general population.

# 2024 highlights

Our highlights   Sport   Education & Training   Partnership & Funding



# Folgaria 2024 Special Olympics GB National Winter Games

In late January 2024, the town of Folgaria, Italy, played host to a truly unforgettable moment in Special Olympics Great Britain history—our first-ever National Winter Games.

Building on the success of previous National Alpine Skiing competitions, Special Olympics GB partnered with Inclusive Skating to introduce a figure skating competition within the week-long event for the first time.

The Games were made possible thanks to the fantastic support of Special Olympics Grampian, which served as the host club for this inaugural edition. Seventy-Four athletes attended, enjoying world-class conditions on Folgaria's renowned Alpine slopes, while the figure skating competition lit up the local ice rink with energy, grace, and enthusiasm.

In addition to supporting the athlete selection process for the Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin 2025, the event provided a powerful platform to showcase the transformative impact of inclusive sport.

BBC Sport's Joe Wilson and Rasheed Speede were on-site throughout the week, producing a 25-minute documentary titled *Special Olympics – Five Days in Folgaria*. Premiering on BBC Breakfast and later released on BBC iPlayer, the film told the inspiring stories of athletes and highlighted the life-changing work of Special Olympics GB.

Laura Baxter MBE, CEO of Special Olympics GB, said:

**"These Games weren't just about medals. They were about celebrating every athlete's journey, fostering friendships, and demonstrating the power of inclusive sport. Watching our athletes perform on a national stage with pride and passion was truly inspiring."**

The success of the 2024 National Winter Games would not have been possible without the incredible support of families, volunteers, partners, and the entire Special Olympics GB community. Together, they created an event that will live long in the memories of all involved—and inspire the next generation of Special Olympics GB athletes.



## Folgaria 2024: Fundraising & Corporate Support

### Gallagher

Leading global insurance brokerage, risk management, and consulting firm Gallagher has been a partner of Special Olympics International since 2020, and joined forces with Special Olympics GB to help deliver the first National Winter Games in Folgaria.

### Dreams

After becoming a Special Olympics GB corporate partner in 2022, following partnerships with Team GB and ParalympicsGB, Dreams made the National Winter Games its primary brand activation during its three-year term—helping bring the Games to life for athletes and supporters.

### Sure

As part of its Sure Breaking Limits programme, Sure partnered with Special Olympics GB for the National Winter Games and used its social media platforms to tell the inspiring stories of several participating athletes.

### Kukri

Continuing its Official Kit Supplier Partnership, which was agreed ahead of the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Berlin, Kukri provided bobble hats to participants, whilst organisers and volunteers also got hoodies from the inaugural National Winter Games.



# Competitions

Special Olympics GB delivered an extensive competition and events programme across 20 sports in 2024.

The 75 competitions represented a 17 per cent increase on 2023 and provided opportunities for more than 2,200 athletes. However, these opportunities were only delivered with the support from more than 2,000 volunteers.

New events included a Table Tennis competition hosted by Special Olympics North Devon and a football competition at Somerset House in central London, which was created to celebrate the city's hosting of the UEFA Champions League Final. The competition programme also saw the return of the National Indoor Athletics Competition, at Lee Valley, and the badminton competition hosted by Derbyshire All Stars was upgraded to a national event.

The athletics event at Lee Valley and badminton event in Derby were two of the six competitions that held national status in 2024.

Additionally, following its successful launch in 2023, Special Olympics GB was able to provide funding to support the delivery of 36 events through its Competition Support Grant. Here, competition organisers were able to apply for funding of up to £500 to support event costs, such as venue hire, catering and equipment.



# Sport for Development

## National Sport Advisors (NSA)

Special Olympics Great Britain has appointed experts from grassroots sport to drive forward competition, training, and coach development programmes in its most popular participation sports.\*

NSAs are individuals actively involved in their sport—whether as senior coaches, athletes, volunteers, or professionals working within governing bodies. All NSAs are volunteers who contribute to their respective summer or winter sport working groups, helping to create growth plans, support competition development, and establish clear pathways for athletes—from local events to the Special Olympics World Games.

Special Olympics GB's new sport tiering system helps focus investment into the 27 sports most played by athletes. NSA appointments are a key part of this, identifying new opportunities for coaches and strengthening training provision.

\*Special Olympics GB has categorised its 27 active sports into three tiers based on athlete participation numbers from the 2023 Census.



NSA Appointments

Special Olympics Great Britain has appointed experts from grassroots sport to drive forward competition, training, and coach development programmes in its most popular participation sports.\*

Alpine Skiing

Aquatics (Swimming)



Liam de Vanney      Bob Thow      Dave Harman      Emma Inglis

Athletics

Badminton

Boccia



Janet Arkwright      Clint Gardner      James Wyatt      Jamie Newnham

Basketball

Gymnastics (Artistic)

Gymnastics (Rhythmic)



Jazz Owen      Jon Stonebridge      Alex Row      Caitlin Duff

Table Tennis



Dennis Beach      Peter Millar

Tennis



Matt Chilvers      Paul Singleton      Mel Whitehead

### Topgolf UK

Following a successful pilot in late 2023, more than 30 athletes participated in a free golf programme at four Topgolf venues in England and Scotland.

The programme provided recreational sporting opportunities and concluded with an invitation-only global tournament at Topgolf Glasgow. In partnership with Special Olympics International and Topgolf venues in the US, the event welcomed over 600 athletes across 25 locations as part of a sanctioned Special Olympics event.



### School Games

Funded by Sport England and managed by the Youth Sport Trust, the School Games offer young people the chance to learn through physical activity and competition while striving for personal bests.

Special Olympics GB remains a key partner, working alongside Youth Sport Trust, National Governing Bodies, and National Disability Sport Organisations to increase engagement with schools and provide many young people with intellectual disabilities their first experience of our support.

Resources for both the Motor Activity Training Program (MATP) and Unified Sports formats are delivered nationally through the School Games Organiser network.

### National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs)

**Special Olympics GB continues to strengthen partnerships with NGBs across our 27 sports**, with many now recognising us as a key partner in expanding opportunities for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

By leveraging existing sporting infrastructure, we are enhancing opportunities for athletes, volunteers, and coaches, while aligning competition structures with established sporting calendars.

A key example is our work with The FA, where we contribute to the Disability Football Strategy 2024–2028 and act as one of only three official Disability Partners, alongside Cerebral Palsy Sport and Wheelchair Football Association.

### Motor Activity Training Programme (MATP)

Designed for children and adults of all ages with profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex support needs, MATP provides a vital pathway to inclusion for individuals who often have little or no access to physical activity, sport, or wider community engagement.

In 2024, MATP supported 10,110 children and adults across the UK. This included 355 delegates who attended MATP Introductory Training Sessions, and 105 delegates who participated in Tutor Training, empowering them to deliver training within their own settings.

Following on from the launch of the MATP Quality Mark in 2023, three gold, one silver and one bronze awards were presented to organisations delivering MATP throughout the year.



## Football Development Programme 2024

### FA National Partner

In 2024, The FA funded the full-time role of Conor McBrearty as Special Olympics GB's Football Development Officer. This has enabled the FA's Grassroots Disability Team to engage more people with intellectual disabilities through football.

Supported by The FA, Special Olympics GB introduced the Comets programme—for children aged 5–11—at six accredited clubs. Four additional clubs are now part of the FA's Just Play initiative for men and women aged 16+ of all abilities.

### Competition Pathway in Collaboration with The FA and County FA Network

We aim to deliver the strongest possible competition pathway for our athletes. In May 2024, we ran two pilot competitions, engaging 120 athletes.

To date, 20 Special Olympics GB clubs have supported our Football Development Group and helped shape key ambitions:

- Establish five Regional Action Groups aligned with County FA structures
- Host three annual regional competitions to sustain engagement
- Develop a structured and sustainable competition pathway for players with intellectual disabilities
- Deliver a national football event in 2026, leading to international opportunities

### Coach Education & Volunteer Development

Special Olympics GB is actively working with The FA's Disability Coach Mentor Team and contributing to the Coaching Disabled Footballers Course.

We are also co-developing a new CPD resource, Learning Disability in Football, with Mencap and The FA, having delivered four football-specific workshops to date.

Additionally, we are supporting 17 coaches through their FA Introduction to Coaching Award (FA Level 1).



# Athlete Leadership

## Athlete Leadership Training – 2024

Athlete Leadership continued its momentum into 2024, empowering even more athletes to lead and represent Special Olympics GB.

This year, we trained 36 new Athlete Leaders, bringing the total number of trained Athlete Leaders to an impressive 83.

## Building on Success – Athlete Leadership Team (ALT)

2024 marked a pivotal year for the Athlete Leadership Team (ALT), with the appointment of new Chair Mitch Camp (Special Olympics St Albans) and Vice Chair James Wyatt (Special Olympics Derbyshire).

Mitch and James, who began their roles on 1 January 2025, were elected through a democratic voting process open to all qualified Athlete Leaders at the Athlete Leadership Forum in London.

[\[Read the news article here.\]](#)

An autumn recruitment campaign welcomed seven new members from across the UK, expanding the team from 10 to 12. Existing ALT members played a key role in the competitive interview process, ensuring a diverse, representative group. This growth strengthens the ALT's ability to reflect the voices, experiences, and aspirations of athletes across the country.

[\[Read more about the expanded ALT here.\]](#)

With 83 Athlete Leaders trained, the ALT is well-positioned to expand its impact and create even more opportunities for athlete empowerment in 2025 and beyond. The ALT continues to showcase the transformative power of athlete-led leadership within Special Olympics GB.



## Shop Unified

In collaboration with Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, Athlete Leaders participated in a Unified Business Challenge to design bespoke Special Olympics GB merchandise and raise funds.

This innovative initiative saw athletes create and launch custom-designed T-shirts, blending leadership with creativity and entrepreneurship.

In December 2024, Special Olympics GB proudly launched its first-ever online shop, featuring athlete-designed merchandise. Read more about the project [here](#).



## First Face to Face Athlete Leadership Forum

In November 2024, Special Olympics GB hosted its first in-person Athlete Leadership Forum, uniting Athlete Leaders from England, Scotland, and Wales to collaborate on strategies for club development, fundraising, and future competition opportunities.

The forum provided a dynamic platform to amplify the athlete voice and drive meaningful change across the movement. Additional details can be found [here](#).



## Athlete Story

# My Tennis Journey around the world: Olly Beadle



Tennis wasn't something I planned, but it's taken me around the world. From Upminster to Los Angeles, Melbourne, Kazakhstan and even Wimbledon!

It started when I was about seven years old, watching my brother play at our local tennis club. My parents thought that I might enjoy having a knock, and they were right.

After participating in a few group lessons in Upminster, I attended a tennis camp in Wrexham organised by the Tennis Foundation. My coach noticed something and recommended to my parents that I start taking one-on-one lessons.

From there I started playing in regional LTA Learning Disability tournaments, which is how the opportunity came about with Special Olympics GB.

I was invited to represent the Eastern region at the National Summer Games in Bath in 2013. I was only 14 and little did I know where it would go.

Whilst this was only my first major tournament, I really enjoyed the challenge, made lots of friends and won gold in my division in the men's singles and the mixed doubles!

From there I was invited to join the LTA's Performance Development Group and was encouraged to apply to represent Team Special Olympics GB at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles, USA in summer 2015. I had no expectation to be selected and was over the moon when I found out that I was in the team.

The Special Olympics World Games changed everything. Here I was playing in an overseas tournament, getting interviewed on TV and playing at an amazing facility like the UCLA tennis centre – I had to pinch myself. But I was able to put my game face on for the tournament and won gold in the singles and mixed doubles.

Representing Team SOGB was incredible and so much fun – the team spirit, the competition, the training. I was determined to improve and started training more seriously.

I played at the Special Olympics National Summer Games again in 2017, winning gold in the singles and bronze in the mixed doubles in Sheffield. Just after that I was invited to join the LTA's national squad. I was incredibly proud as I would then have the chance to be selected to play internationally for GB at Virtus events. Then, just over a year later, I was selected for the 2019 Virtus Global Games in Brisbane, Australia.

Here I was up against the best tennis players in the world with a Learning Disability, so it was a different level. I remember my coaches telling me to just enjoy the experience, that it was my first Virtus event and not to expect too much! However, I came fourth in the men's singles and played at 3rd/4th play off against the world no 1 and won some games against him, which I'm very proud of. I also got the silver medal in the men's team event.

The covid pandemic was so tough. My fitness went down, and I even lost my serve, which has always been one of my biggest strengths. I had also missed my tennis mates who I would come up against in the LTA tournaments throughout the year.

It felt like starting again when I was able to get back on the courts, but I felt so relieved and it soon all came back.

When competitions resumed, I grabbed every opportunity – little did I realise how big some of those would be...

First up it was an opportunity to play in an exhibition tournament at the Australian Open in Melbourne in 2023. I was one of six male players invited to play at this inaugural tournament. That's now become the Australia Open Persons with Intellectual Disability Championships, which the top eight men's and eight women's players are invited to and I've been there every January for the last three years

Later in the year came the opportunity to play at Wimbledon through the LTA Play Your Way to Wimbledon tournament.

I've always loved watching Wimbledon on the TV and have even been along to watch a few times. I had never played on grass before though, and even had to order a pair of special grass court shoes at the last minute! I found out that grass is one of my best surfaces and won the inaugural competition for LD players!

I played at Wimbledon again last year, coming runner up, but the best opportunity came in June 2024 when six players, including two internationals, were selected to take part in an exhibition tournament during the cinch Queens Club tournament. I won the doubles and shared the players' lounge with the top players and met many players and commentators there. It was the most amazing and inclusive experience and has motivated me to work even harder.

I was also able to round off 2024 by winning both the singles and doubles titles at the LTA Learning Disability Tennis National Finals at the Bolton Arena."

I love my tennis. Not just for the competition, but for the friendships and laughs that we have on and off the court. I've got tennis friends in the US and Australia, and we regularly keep in touch outside of our event.

My goal? On the court I would love to win a men's singles final at an international event. T but The standard is incredibly high in men's LD tennis and it seems to get harder and harder but I'm determined to keep getting fitter and stronger and to keep improving.

Off it, I've been studying hard at college for the last few years and want to start my career. I've been successful applying for roles and will be starting with a train operating company as a Customer Service Assistant later this year.



**To anyone with a dream - keep pushing, keep believing and don't let your learning difference stop you from achieving your goals. My journey shows that with determination, hard work and belief in yourself, anything is possible.**

# Volunteering & Coaching

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Special Olympics GB, holding vital roles across areas such as safeguarding, coaching, first aid, event management, finance, fundraising, athlete eligibility, and administration. The ongoing, fantastic work that our clubs do to support athletes—through events, competitions, and weekly training sessions—would not be possible without their dedication.

In 2024, we welcomed 237 newly registered volunteers, expanding the Special Olympics GB volunteer network to nearly 6,000 individuals who invest their time, energy, and expertise to support the development of our athletes. Special Olympics GB is incredibly fortunate to have each and every one of them.

At the beginning of the year, a team of more than 100 volunteers—including delegation members, event-specific roles, and Games Organising Committee personnel—played a central role in delivering the first-ever Special Olympics GB National Winter Games in Folgaria.

Using feedback from our membership, we continued to improve our processes throughout 2024, making it simpler for individuals to start volunteering with one of our clubs or programmes.

We also introduced the new Training and Development Calendar—a dedicated resource for volunteer development and a central hub for training and CPD opportunities delivered by Special Olympics GB and external partners.

The commitment of Special Olympics GB volunteers continues to create life-changing experiences for our athletes. Their efforts not only enhance sporting opportunities but also help drive a culture of inclusion, respect, and empowerment. We remain committed to expanding our volunteer network and celebrating their invaluable contributions.

Thank you!



## Toyota Coaching Grant

Thanks to the support of corporate partner Toyota (GB), we launched the Toyota Coaching Fund in 2024 to provide greater support for our athletes and volunteer coaches—while also enhancing sports training and competition standards.

The fund gives Special Olympics GB volunteers across England, Scotland, and Wales access to coaching courses and qualifications in our 27 competition sports. It also aims to attract new volunteer coaches into the movement, helping to provide even more sporting opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

With funding extended into 2025, Special Olympics GB athletes, volunteers, and coaches can [still apply for funding here](#).



## Sure Breaking Limits Programme

The Sure Breaking Limits Programme in 2024 successfully engaged 100 young coaches and leaders, providing them with foundational knowledge to help structure accessible and inclusive sports sessions.

Each module was designed to enhance participants’ understanding of inclusion in sport, equipping them with practical tools they can implement in their own coaching environments.

A significant success of the Sure Breaking Limits Programme in 2024 was the expansion of the volunteer base at two of our accredited clubs. Graduates of the programme at Portland College and Eccles College went on to take active roles as volunteers with Special Olympics Nottingham and Special Olympics Greater Manchester, respectively.



## Learning Disability and Sport Workshop

In response to the growing demand for enhanced coach development opportunities, we continue to collaborate with Mencap to deliver Learning Disability and Sport Workshops. This training equips those delivering sports sessions with the knowledge and confidence to truly engage people with an intellectual disability.

This training has supported volunteers, coaches, teachers, and students across a wide range of organisations, including sports centres, local councils, faith centres, SEN schools, youth centres, and universities.

Attendees benefit from:

- Increased confidence in working with individuals with an intellectual disability
- Ability to deliver more inclusive activities
- Deeper understanding of how to structure sessions to make them safer, more enjoyable, and better suited to participants’ needs
- Improved knowledge of how to promote activities effectively to reach individuals with an intellectual disability
- Clearer understanding of competition pathways, enabling them to encourage greater participation



# Why I Coach?

By Barry McFarlane

Having played basketball for so long as a Special Olympics Great Britain athlete, I wanted to give back—and it's so rewarding when you do.

However, if you'd told me years ago that coaching would become such a big part of my life, I'm not sure I'd have believed you. But today, as well as being a proud athlete who has experienced success at the Special Olympics World Summer Games and multiple National Games, I'm also a proud coach with Glasgow Eagles.

Like many Special Olympics GB clubs, at Glasgow Eagles we're more than just a team—we're a family. It always felt like a natural progression for me to become a coach when I stopped playing, but the opportunity came sooner than expected, and I said yes.

I got my first experience of working with a team at the 2017 National Summer Games in Sheffield. Alongside competing, I helped support the 3x3 women's basketball team as a coaching assistant.

That seemed to go well—the team won gold!

I held my Level 1 basketball coaching qualification a couple of years earlier after a recommendation from our club secretary, and Glasgow Eagles legend, Alec Watt. He asked if I'd be interested, and after a chat with my coaches, Alastair Cameron and his dad, the late Willie Cameron, I said yes. It turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made.

The athletes bring energy, determination, and a sense of humour that make every session a joy to be part of. Watching someone master a new skill, or even just smile because they feel part of something — that's what it's all about for me.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that coaching isn't just about teaching. It's about listening, encouraging, and creating an environment where everyone feels valued. Our athletes might need extra support or a different approach, but they have the same dreams, the same drive, and the same right to shine. Supporting that journey is a privilege.

While I still love being an athlete, I'm keen to keep developing as a coach and work towards my Level 2 qualification. I just need to balance that with my job as a gym instructor, which is also a form of coaching.

The best advice I can give to any athlete thinking about becoming a coach is: try it. Just jump in as you'll learn so much. If you love your sport, there's every chance you'll enjoy coaching too.

It's been an amazing experience and something great to have on your CV. Coaching shows leadership. You'll gain far more than you give, and you'll be part of something incredibly special. For me, coaching with Special Olympics GB is more than sport — it's community, it's purpose, and it's home.



# Network Development

## Clubs & Network

Our incredible network of local accredited clubs and programmes who deliver year-round inclusive sport and activity sessions, seven days a week, is the heart of Special Olympics GB. It is here where athletes come together to train, compete, and feel part of a team, driven by the power of our outstanding volunteer network.

## Highlights

Throughout 2024, we supported circa 100 accredited clubs and programmes across England, Scotland, and Wales. Thanks to the dedication of our staff and volunteers, we saw network stability and exciting growth:

- 6 new clubs accredited
- 20% increase in athlete registrations in 2024 compared with 2023
- Similar increase rate in volunteer registrations
- More athletes taking part in multiple sports (over 1 in 3)
- Increased athlete participation in coaching, leadership and volunteering roles – increasing year on year
- Increased female and youth participation
- Clubs remained strong and consistent in supporting weekly activities, year-round
- Increased engagement in areas with limited reach such as in the central belt of Scotland, and in England's Northern, Greater London and in the South East regions
- 300+ enquiries to join the Special Olympics GB Network
- Increased strength in club compliance integrity and sustainability
- Enhanced guidance and resources – from webinars to comprehensive guides and templates

## Digital, Data & Process Development

Special Olympics GB invested in the development of its data and central systems with the support of key partnerships, which unlocked the subsequent improvement of club processes. This made member-facing processes more effective, including accreditation and registration, through to communication/feedback, safeguarding/compliance and reporting, as well as the deployment of more targeted development based on insights.

We still have a lot of work to do in 2025 and beyond to continue to improve other key processes such as those in health, event volunteering, youth and in member consultation.

## Partnerships

Special Olympics GB benefited from the valuable partnerships it holds in the sector in order to enhance the presence and support for members from a local grassroots level and beyond. These partnerships range across the sector, including National Governing Bodies and Active Partnerships.

One key partnership which has proven hugely valuable and extended from 2023 right into 2025 is that with Active Norfolk.

The purpose of this partnership is to provide people with intellectual disabilities in Norfolk access to safe, meaningful sporting opportunities through local infrastructure strategic and operational collaboration.

- **Timeline:** September 2023-December 2024 (and successfully extended into 2025)
- **Reach:** 178 people (127 athletes, 51 volunteers) across 6 sports
- **Social Wellbeing Value:** £45 wellbeing value for every £1 invested

## The Model in Action

Some of the key support Active Norfolk provides includes:

- Local relationship building
- Awareness raising
- Process implementation
- Strategic connection

## Future Focus

key areas for development in this project next phase include:

- Expanding regional connections
- Strengthening safeguarding standards
- Growing local clubs and sports offerings
- Enhanced marketing and visibility
- Securing long-term funding

This partnership demonstrates a transformative and replicable model for inclusive sports delivery that addresses systemic barriers and changes lives.



## The Challenge

- Only 20% of people with intellectual disabilities meet recommended activity levels
- Disabled people are twice as likely to be physically inactive
- Volunteer-led programmes struggle with sustainability and resources

## Key Achievements

1. **Increased Participation:** New athlete registrations and events
2. **Improved Opportunities:** New sports developed and competition pathways supported
3. **Strategic Integration:** Stronger connections between organisations
4. **Greater Efficiency:** Key processes supported and improved for members and prospects

## The Network Development Journey – Learning and Development

The Network Structure Development Strategy represents our ambitious roadmap to create sustainable and aligned governance across Special Olympics GB to unlock further development and growth.

In 2024 we continued our plans to revolutionise how we connect in the sector, breaking down barriers to participation from a grassroots level through to the global stage. Throughout this journey consultation has been crucial– we have actioned on feedback in a variety of areas around accreditation pillars, but are still on our journey for deeper change.

In 2024 we continued to strengthen fundamental processes, seeing huge success in strengthening club foundations. Next, we shift our focus to regional and national governance reviews, with the long term aspiration to implement new accreditation and membership frameworks to reach more people across England, Scotland and Wales.



### Athlete Impact

*"It has changed my life completely... Before skiing I did not know what I would be doing in the future, but now I have ambitions that look and feel achievable."*

– Annabelle Lamb, Athlete



# Running Beyond Limits: My Journey with Lloyd

By Ceri Hooper



When Lloyd was born, I never imagined that one day we'd be standing together at the start line of a marathon. As a keen runner myself, I've always loved the sport, but for Lloyd, running was never something we envisioned. He was energetic, flexible, and strong, but the idea of him being a runner? That wasn't in our plans. And yet, here we are, with Lloyd holding not one, but two Guinness World Records to his name.

Our running journey started small, with local Parkruns. At first, Lloyd would walk some of the route, but he enjoyed the atmosphere.

Over time, though, something shifted. He started completing the course with more enthusiasm, finding joy in the movement, in the camaraderie, and in the simple act of crossing the finish line. That was when I saw the potential for something more.

We decided to set a goal: Lloyd would train for a marathon and the opportunity presented itself at London thanks to the relationship that was developing with Special Olympics GB.

It wasn't about proving anything to the world, it was about spending quality time together and helping Lloyd develop confidence in his abilities. We carefully structured his training, making sure he ran no more than three times a week, increasing his distance gradually to avoid injury. Some days were tough and he encountered plenty of blisters, cold weather, fatigue, but Lloyd never wavered. Rain or shine, he was ready and prepared to give his best.

Lloyd has always loved Guinness World Records. He's spent years flipping through their books, fascinated by the people who push past limits to achieve the extraordinary. So, we reached out to them to see if Lloyd's marathon journey could set a record. That's when we discovered he could be the Youngest Person (Male) (II2) with an Intellectual Impairment to Complete a Marathon. It became our new mission.

In 2024, Lloyd not only completed the London Marathon, but he also conquered the Great North Run, earning a second Guinness World Record in the II2 Male category. These weren't just personal achievements; they were milestones that shattered misconceptions about what people with Down Syndrome can accomplish.

People often assume what individuals with disabilities can and cannot do. I've heard all the doubts, all the low expectations. But Lloyd's determination has proven those assumptions wrong. Every time he laces up his trainers, he isn't just running, he's breaking barriers, redefining possibilities, and proving that no dream is too big.

When Lloyd runs, his confidence grows.

Sport has empowered him in ways we never imagined. It has shown him, and the world, that he is strong, capable, and limitless.

My message to other parents is simple: never let anyone tell you what your child can't do. Every milestone Lloyd has reached has been a testament to the power of perseverance, support, and belief. He has shown us that, with the right encouragement, individuals with intellectual disabilities can achieve the extraordinary.

Lloyd isn't just my son; he's an inspiration. And together, we will keep running towards new goals, new challenges, and a future without limits.



# Corporate Partnerships

Special Olympics GB continued to grow its Corporate Partnership Programme in 2024, delivering new activation projects and developing more staff engagement opportunities.

## Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CEP)



CCEP has continued to make a meaningful and lasting impact through its long-standing partnership with Special Olympics GB, championing inclusion both on and off the field.

In 2024, CCEP staff joined athletes at five Unified Sports events, competing side-by-side in football, boccia, basketball, indoor golf, and more. These events, hosted at accessible venues, demonstrated the power of sport to break down barriers, foster connection, and promote mutual respect.

Off the field, CCEP strengthened its commitment through Unified Business programmes, helping athletes develop workplace and leadership skills. Five collaborative projects have been delivered to date, including the design and production of drinks bottles, lanyards, snoods, and Christmas gift boxes. Some of which supported the Berlin 2023 Special Olympics World Games and the 2024 National Winter Games.

Most recently, 12 athletes co-created Special Olympics GB's first athlete-designed merchandise line, as highlighted in the Athlete Leadership section.



## Fuller's Pubs & Hotels



As a long-term partner, Fuller's continues to make a huge impact across the organisation.

In 2024, the third annual Bridge Walk followed a 21-mile route along the Thames, from The Bell & Crown (Chiswick) to The Conductor (Farringdon). It brought together over 140 Fuller's staff, Special Olympics GB athletes, volunteers, and staff. The event raised an impressive £28,500.

Additionally its fifth Unified Football Tournament, at Surrey Sports Park, brought together 32 teams, each featuring at least one athlete from Special Olympics Essex or Ascot United Warriors. The tournament raised over £21,000.

Another key activation was the launch of Fuller's Inclusive Recruitment Guide, created in partnership with Special Olympics GB and LVS Hassocks, a specialist school for children with autism. This resource sets a benchmark for inclusive recruitment, providing support on the requirement of candidates who are neurodiverse or have an intellectual disability. It includes guidance on inclusive language and visual cues throughout the recruitment, interview, and induction process.



## Toyota (GB)

In its second year of partnership, Toyota (GB) launched the Toyota Coaching Fund, aiming to help at least 50 members of the Special Olympics GB family gain new coaching qualifications (detailed further in Volunteering & Coaching).

Toyota (GB) also sponsored the National Indoor Athletics Competition at Lee Valley Athletics Centre in November, one of the year's largest events, with 125 athletes from eight clubs. Toyota staff supported on the day with athlete registration and medal presentations.



OFFICIAL  
MOBILITY PARTNER



## Mitsubishi Electric UK (ME-UK)

A long-standing partner, ME-UK hosted its first Unified Football exhibition at the University of Hertfordshire, in April, bringing together 18 colleagues and 12 athletes from Special Olympics Essex in a 5-a-side tournament.

Following success in 2023, Special Olympics GB was again invited to deliver a Lunch & Learn session at ME-UK HQ. Athletes Robbie and Matt from Special Olympics St Albans led a boccia session and participated in a Q&A with volunteers Sue and Dani. The session was also live streamed to ME-UK staff nationwide.

ME-UK further supported Special Olympics GB by volunteering at local competitions, including the National Indoor Athletics Competition and the Special Olympics City of Birmingham & Worcestershire Athletics Event.



## Ocean Outdoor

Ocean Outdoor continued to celebrate athlete achievements in 2024. Shortly after the National Winter Games, it featured a digital creative on its flagship Leicester Square screen, congratulating athletes on their performances.

In April, the same screen spotlighted athlete Lloyd Martin, celebrating his Guinness World Record as the youngest person with Down syndrome to complete the TCS London Marathon.

Ocean also supported a campaign to celebrate the election of new Athlete Leadership Team members, with screen placements in cities including Dundee, Birmingham, Manchester, Southampton, Leeds, and London. Mitch Camp and James Wyatt were also recognised for their appointments as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.



## Topgolf

Following its 2023 launch, the Topgolf partnership continued to grow. Athletes enjoyed free sessions across four UK venues (see Sport for Development), and in September, Special Olympics GB participated in the Topgolf Pro-Am Tournament, where athletes, families, and corporate partners came together to raise funds and play Unified golf.

As part of its commitment to raise £25,000 for Special Olympics GB, Topgolf UK donated £1 for the sale of each signature Double Smokehouse Burger.



## Dreams

In addition to supporting the National Winter Games, Dreams hosted Special Olympics GB athletes during Learning Disability Week, recording a feature that highlighted their journeys and achievements.

The visit also included a Lunch & Learn session to help educate Dreams employees and strengthen the partnership's impact.

Dreams

## UPS

UPS strengthened its support in 2024 through its sponsorship of the DOSportUK x Special Olympics GB Basketball Series.

More than 120 athletes competed in events in Manchester, London, Leicester, and Nottingham. UPS funded key costs such as venue hire and medal production, and staff volunteers were present at multiple events.



## CNA Insurance

As a partner of Special Olympics International, CNA Insurance welcomed athlete Kiera Byland BEM, who is also a Special Olympics GB Board Member and Chair of the Global Athlete Congress, to host a virtual Healthy Minds session for CNA staff.

CNA also supported our activations at the Topgolf Pro-Am and at the International Series England hosted by Special Olympics GB Chair Paul Richardson and athlete Warren Clark.

CNA

## CTM Sport

CTM Sport, which is the specialist sports travel division of CTM, joined the stable of Special Olympics GB partners in a new two-year agreement that aims to streamline travel arrangements. As a partner it hopes to support the delivery of travel plans for overseas events, whilst supporting domestic travel arrangements for staff.

ctm

## Alirity

Special Olympics GB partnered with digital transformation specialists Alirity to help develop the most efficient and secure data system possible. This principally focuses on enhancing the Salesforce software, which Special Olympics GB has been using for the last four years, and will create a more user-friendly and efficient data management system to better serve its clubs.

Alirity



# Fundraising

## BGC Charity Day

Special Olympics GB was proud to be named one of the partner charities at the annual BGC Charity Day 2024 on 11 September.

On the day, Team GB diver Noah Williams, who won a bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, and former England and Wasps rugby star James Haskell joined Special Olympics GB athletes Taylor MacKenzie and Lloyd Martin on the trading floor to raise valuable funds supporting Network Development.



## ICAP Charity Day

On 11 December, Special Olympics GB athletes Katie Day and Lloyd Martin were joined by Team GB gold-medal-winning rower Emily Craig at ICAP Charity Day, helping to raise funds in support of the Athlete Leadership Programme.

Special Olympics GB was named as one of the official charity partners of ICAP Charity Day for the second consecutive year.

Earlier in the year, Katie Day was joined by James Wyatt at the ICAP = Impact event, where they were interviewed live on stage by Ant & Dec.



## Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) Scotland

The Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) is a global movement dedicated to raising awareness and funds for Special Olympics programmes.

In Scotland, the relationship continued to grow with the introduction of new fundraising events, including a charity rugby match in November, followed by a successful fundraising auction.



## The International Series

In August, the International Series made a generous \$25,000 donation to Special Olympics GB during the International Series England event—an Asian Tour-sanctioned competition hosted at Foxhills Club & Resort in Surrey.

The tournament, which forms part of the pathway to the LIV Golf League, also provided a playing opportunity for Athlete Leader Warren Clark, who participated in the Pro-Am alongside American golfer Michael Block and Team GB hockey Olympians James Albery and Sam Ward.



## Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

In December, legal firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP invited three Special Olympics GB athlete leaders to its central London offices for a 'lunch & learn' session where they told staff about the transformational impact that sport had played in their lives.

The firm made a generous donation to Special Olympics GB to support this activity.



**Special Olympics GB also wants to express its thanks to the following organisations who made a donation in 2024:**

- Bank of America
- Brambles
- Lions Clubs International
- United Airlines
- WJL Partners LLP

**Also the support from Charitable Trusts and Foundations:**

- Bruce Wake Charitable Trust
- The David Family Foundation
- The David Solomons Charitable Trust

**Many thanks to all individuals and groups who fundraised to support our work in 2024**

**Special Olympics GB is incredibly grateful for the support and its System Partnership funding from Sport England**



## Hometown Foundation

In August, Athlete Leadership Team members Mitch Camp and James Wyatt were part of the Dream Ride Experience automotive festival in the US, thanks to the Hometown Foundation.

James and Mitch got to experience both New York City and Boston before joining other Special Olympics athletes from around the world at the Dream Ride festival in Farmington, Connecticut.



# CEO Reflections – Laura Baxter MBE

As I reflect on the achievements of Special Olympics Great Britain in 2024, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the incredible progress we have made, thanks to the dedication of the athletes, volunteers, staff, partners and supporters. This year has been one of growth in a number of senses, resilience, and further transformation to ensure sustainability for the future.

Our inclusive programming continues to break down barriers, offering more opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to engage in sport. Whether on the track, in the pool, or on the court, our athletes and volunteers are demonstrating what it means to strive for excellence, and their stories continue to motivate us all.

Our athletes have excelled on both the local and national stage, with remarkable sporting performances throughout our competition pathway and at our first National Winter Games held in Folgaria, Italy. We are proud to celebrate the success of our athletes who have tried something new, grown in confidence, made friends, become World Record holders, brought home medals, gained academic achievements, set personal bests, and proving that the sky is the limit when opportunity and support are provided. These successes not only elevate our athletes but also showcase the immense sporting talent, transferable skills and potential within the Special Olympics community in Great Britain.

This year, we've made significant strides in raising awareness about the importance of inclusion, with a number of our campaigns reaching new audiences across the UK. Through collaborations with local, national and international organisations, and community groups, we've been able to spread the message that sport is for everyone. Our volunteers have played a pivotal role in this, by sharing the knowledge, experience and passion which further strengthens our sense of community and collective effort.

In 2024, Special Olympics Great Britain continued to empower athletes by expanding its Athlete Leadership Programme and Unified Business as well as hosting the first Athlete Leadership Forum. This initiative has provided more athletes with the opportunity to take on leadership roles in their local communities, inspiring their peers and promoting the values of inclusion.

Our success throughout 2024 was driven by the commitment and expertise of our dedicated volunteers, whose knowledge and experience play a vital role in our operations. We launched the first Special Olympics GB Toyota Coaching Grant to further support their growth, which enabled our volunteers to gain valuable coaching qualifications, enhancing their skills and impact.

We are grateful for the continued support of our partners, and in 2024, we secured new corporate sponsorships and pro bono support that helped us to sustain our offering in a challenging fundraising landscape. These partnerships are instrumental in ensuring that our athletes and volunteers have access to the resources they need to succeed. Additionally, we've forged valuable collaborations with schools, local councils, active partnerships, national and grassroots sports organisations across Scotland, England and Wales, ensuring that more individuals across the country can take part in our transformational opportunities.

The growth throughout the last year is not merely about numbers, it encompasses the strides we have made in enhancing our organisational excellence. We have implemented significant improvements that ensure we are well-equipped to meet the growing demand for our network. This includes bolstering key areas such as operations, safeguarding, wellbeing, and compliance, all of which are essential to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of our services and reaching new audiences through compliant structures. These strategic developments enable us to provide more personalised support to our athletes and volunteers to ensure the sustainability of our programmes for years to come.

This year, we achieved notable progress in advocating for our ambition to bid to host a future Special Olympics World Summer Games which is centred around a 10-year change accelerator for people with intellectual disabilities driving systemic societal change. Our ongoing efforts to challenge societal attitudes and promote equality are central to everything we do.

As we look ahead to 2025, I am confident that Special Olympics Great Britain will continue to grow, innovate, and inspire through ambition with athlete and volunteer voice at the centre of developments supported by the unwavering commitment, knowledge and experience of volunteers, staff and partners. Together, we are proving that when we embrace inclusion, everyone wins.

Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey through 2024.



**For more information and to get involved:**

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