

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 17, 2018

Special Olympics set to mark 50-year anniversary with Global Day of Inclusion

Communities across the province will be lighting the night sky red on Saturday, July 21 as they join millions around the globe for the start of a year-long celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of Special Olympics.

Officially proclaimed the Global Day of Inclusion by the Province of B.C., Special Olympics BC kicks off the celebration of the 50th anniversary as communities across the province join in by illuminating the night sky red in honour of Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The Parliament Buildings in Victoria will be joined by Rogers Arena, BC Place, the Sails of Light at Canada Place, Science World at Telus World of Science, and Vancouver City Hall to mark the occasion. In total, 22 communities across B.C. have joined the provincial government in proclaiming July 21 the Global Day of Inclusion.

Dan Howe, President & CEO of SOBC, said the Global Day of Inclusion stands for much more than just a one-day awareness campaign. He said for someone with an intellectual disability, the opportunity to live their full potential is one of the greatest benefits of inclusion.

“For the past 50 years, Special Olympics has been enriching the lives of Canadians with intellectual disabilities through the transformative power of sport, but we can’t do it alone – nor can the 800,000 Canadians with an intellectual disability,” Howe said. “In honour of our 50th year, we’re asking you to help ensure Special Olympics can continue transforming lives for another 50 years.”

Howe said the best way to become part of the movement in B.C. and across Canada is to refer a friend or a family member with an intellectual disability to a Special Olympics program, help raise awareness of its mission and shift the focus from disability to ability, volunteer, or make a donation today.

Lisa Beare, B.C.’s Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, said they were honoured to be part of the Global Day of Inclusion ceremonies.

“The sports programs offered by Special Olympics BC provide great opportunities for British Columbians with varying intellectual abilities to get active, make new friends and engage in community events,” Beare said. “Our government is committed to building a better B.C. for everyone and is very proud to support Special Olympics BC. I encourage all British Columbians to support Special Olympians in their communities by celebrating the Global Day of Inclusion.”

Howe said the Special Olympics movement has come a long way since its inception 50 years ago. Led by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, 1,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities took to the expanse of Soldier Field in Chicago on July 20, 1968, and ignited one of the most comprehensive worldwide movements.

That first year, only two countries participated, with the U.S. sending athletes from 26 states, while Canada sent a contingent of 12 floor hockey players under the guidance of Canadian Special Olympics pioneer Dr. Frank Hayden.

Now, as Special Olympics embarks on the next 50 years, Howe said it's incredibly uplifting to see how much the lives of people with intellectual disabilities have improved.

Special Olympics stands as a beacon for inclusion, said Howe. The Special Olympics movement is now 172 countries, includes more than 4.9 million athletes, and more than one million coaches and volunteers.

In Canada, there are more than 45,000 athletes and participants in approximately 3,200 programs delivered across the country. B.C. continues to see strong growth, as there are more than 4,800 athletes and 3,900 coaches and volunteers. Howe said they've come a long way since SOBC first incorporated in 1980, featuring two weekends of events and about 500 athletes.

Tim Hortons will be doing their part for the Global Day of Inclusion. On Saturday, July 21, you can visit your local Tim Hortons, buy a Special Olympics donut and post to social media with #ChooseToInclude and tag @sobcsociety on Twitter, and @specialolympicsbc on Instagram and Facebook.

Communities illuminating for Global Day of Inclusion:

Landmarks lighting up for inclusion include:

1. The Parliament Buildings, Victoria
2. BC Place, Vancouver
3. Rogers Arena, Vancouver
4. Science World at Telus World of Science, Vancouver
5. Canada Place Sails of Light, Vancouver
6. Vancouver City Hall, Vancouver
7. Telus Garden, Vancouver
8. The Civic Plaza, Surrey
9. Squamish Adventure Centre, Squamish

10. City Hall, Maple Ridge
11. City Hall and SkyTrain Guideway Pillars, Coquitlam
12. Victoria Street Bridge, Trail
13. Fraser River Footbridge, Quesnel

Proclamations in B.C.

1. Province of British Columbia
2. Burnaby
3. Campbell River
4. Comox
5. Dawson Creek
6. Fort St. John
7. Kamloops
8. Kelowna
9. Keremeos
10. Kitimat
11. Merritt
12. Mission
13. Nanaimo
14. New Westminster
15. North Vancouver
16. Penticton
17. Port Alberni
18. Powell River
19. Richmond
20. Squamish
21. Trail
22. Vancouver
23. Williams Lake

About Special Olympics BC

Special Olympics BC is dedicated to enriching the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities through sport. In 55 communities around the province, we provide year-round training and competitive opportunities in 18 different sports to more than 4,800 athletes of all ages and a wide range of abilities,



thanks to the dedicated efforts of over 3,900 volunteers. For more information, please visit www.specialolympics.bc.ca and find us on Facebook and Instagram @specialolympicsbc and Twitter @sobcsociety.

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