

## **Special Olympics and VOSH/International: Serving the visual needs of people with intellectual disabilities**

*"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." –  
Special Olympics Motto*

### **President's Insights**

#### **Hector Santiago**

VOSH/International is proud to establish a historic agreement allowing our chapters to collaborate with the Special Olympics (SO). This agreement will enable optometrists and students in the region to partner with local Special Olympics organizations to serve people with intellectual disabilities.

### **The Origin of Special Olympics**

The Special Olympics originated in the work and inspiration of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who started Camp Shriver in 1962, a summer program that provided children with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to participate in athletic activities. The initiative allowed the participants to express their excellence, challenging the perceptions of intellectual disability.

The success of Camp Shriver catalyzed the inaugural International Olympic Games in Chicago in 1968, with the participation of nearly 1,000 athletes from the United States and Canada. By the 1970s, the movement expanded to Europe and Asia. A decade later, the organization was recognized by the International Olympic Committee.

### **Opening Eyes Program**

The Special Olympics has a Healthy Athletes program, with an Opening Eyes component established in partnership with the Lions Clubs International Foundation. This program has provided more than 430,000 eye examinations and the distribution of more than 260,000 eyeglasses worldwide. Globally,

almost one of every four Special Olympics participants never had a previous eye exam, while 35% needed new eyeglasses. Companies like Saffilo provide frames, and the OneSightEssilor Luxottica Foundation provides lenses for eyeglasses. The generous support of the Golisano Foundation, Coopervision, and Optometry Giving Sight Foundation also supports the program.

### **VOSH International/ Special Olympics MOU**

We recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding between VOSH/International and Special Olympics Latin America. The agreement will allow Special Olympics to provide our chapter members with the necessary education and training to serve the visual needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. Our chapters can participate in Special Olympic events throughout the region. The chapters will also collaborate to increase awareness about the eye care needs of this population.

VOSH/International thanks Dr. Gonzalo Larrabure, the Latin American Director of the Special Olympics health programs, for supporting this collaborative effort.

### **The future**

This MOU is the first step in our relationship with the Special Olympics organization. Its success will allow us to extend the agreement to all the regions where we have chapters. VOSH/International is faithful to our belief that persons with intellectual disabilities deserve to enjoy the freedom to see.



Inter American University of Puerto Rico SVOSH Chapter member, student Génesis Domínguez, examines a patient during the Special Olympics Opening Eyes Event on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025