

Supporting families of Special Olympics athletes during COVID-19

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This inclusive research project explored: **How can Special Olympics support families of athletes during COVID-19, and what are the expectations of the families from the organization?** This research will help Special Olympics International (SOI) update their Family Engagement Strategy. Surveys and interviews were conducted with family members of Special Olympics athletes to inform recommendations.

RESULTS

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS FAMILIES?

- During COVID-19, 40% of families worried about their own **socio-emotional connections**, 42% were concerned about their own **mental health**, and 67% worried about **socio-emotional connections for the athlete in their family**.

"I can't talk about COVID-19 without getting anxious about [the individual with ID in my family]. I'm worried that they have no opportunities to socialize. Their stress is my stress."

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS FAMILIES FROM SOI?

- **Families of Special Olympics athletes expressed their need for social connectedness**
- Family members placed social connectedness as their most urgent need that SOI can fulfill with an average ranking of 1.96. On a scale where 1 was ranked as the most important need and 7 was the least important need.

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES OF THIS RESEARCH?

- **Literature Review:** focus on disability as the sole experience, instead of as a form of diversity, and lack of Easy Read material
- **Survey and interviews:** virtual research left out those without access to technology
- **Survey:** lack of demographic data from respondents

"We didn't hear from a few of the other families in our program during COVID because they weren't high-tech and didn't have strong internet."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 **Prioritize social connectedness through further funded outreach**
- 2 **Expand inclusive research projects**
- 3 **Conduct family research on a larger scale**
- 4 **Expand intersectional research**
- 5 **Continue research post COVID-19**

