



In The Field

Special Smiles has demonstrated remarkable success in its mission to increase access to dental care for Special Olympics athletes, and educate dental professionals as to the oral health problems people with disabilities face. Today, Special Smiles is considered a leading advocate on standards of care and quality of care issues for children and adults with developmental disabilities. It provides dental examinations, personal oral hygiene instruction, sport mouth guards to help prevent dental injuries to athletes competing in contact sports, and fluoride varnish treatment for tens of thousands of athletes worldwide.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT:

Special Smiles examinations have found that a large percentage of our athletes are unaware of the condition of their oral health.

47% have periodontal conditions

37% have untreated tooth decay

14% are in need of urgent care

14% have dental pain

GOALS:

1. Increase access to dental care for Special Olympics athletes, as well as all people with intellectual disabilities.
2. Raise dental professionals' awareness of the oral health concerns of people with special needs, including difficulties involved in accessing care.
3. Develop a body of knowledge about the oral health care needs of children and adults with disabilities.
4. Provide a list of regional dental professionals who care for people with special needs to all athletes who participate in Special Smiles.

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Devin Hohl's story is one shared by Special Olympics athletes everywhere. She suffered from a chronic infection in her mouth, requiring a root canal and crown, but lost her dental insurance when she turned 21 and had been unable to find a dentist willing to work with people with disabilities. At the dental college at A.T. Still University, Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health, however, faculty and students working with the Special Olympics Special Smiles program welcomed her. Volunteers devoted their time and efforts to perform a multitude of dental care procedures to athletes in need – all free of charge. The services provided to Devin would normally cost \$2500.

“It was inspiring to see the dental students, teachers, and mentors come together to relieve the athletes from the pain that has been bothering them,” said Isaac Sanft, Special Olympics Arizona's healthy athletes coordinator.

