



In The Field

Healthy Hearing is changing lives in communities across the globe, providing free ear screenings, and other medical services and products to a group who needs it the most people with intellectual disabilities.

The amount of hearing loss among Special Olympics athletes is much greater than that found in the general population. Most athletes' hearing problems are previously undetected, un-served or under-treated.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT – New York:

Healthy Hearing screenings have found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes have untreated hearing conditions.

46% Have blocked or partially blocked ear canals

34% Failed Puretone hearing screening

GOALS:

1. Increase access to hearing care for Special Olympics athletes, as well as all people with intellectual disabilities.
2. Raise audiologists' awareness of the hearing concerns of people with special needs, including difficulties involved in accessing treatment.
3. Provide a list of regional audiologists who care for people with special needs to all athletes who participate in the Special Olympics Healthy Hearing program.
4. Develop a body of knowledge about ear canal hygiene of children and adults with special needs.

Over just a few months, Alva Stinson, a 48-year-old athlete from Indiana, became more confident and social, improved his performance at work, and began enjoying life much more than he ever did before. What changed? Alva received free hearing aids from Special Olympics and the Hear the World Foundation.

“I’m amazed,” said Dr. Robertson, Alva’s direct service professional who has been working with him since last year. “The change in him is phenomenal. He’s walking different. He’s talking different. He used to be in his own little world. Now, he can better understand what is going on in his environment.”

Alva’s story is part of a much larger push by Special Olympics Healthy Athletes to provide follow-up care to athletes. Addressing hearing loss has challenges that make effective follow-up care challenging. Hearing aids need to be fitted, adjusted and serviced, meaning multiple visits to a professional. For athletes like Alva, though, the effort is well rewarded.

