

Hello, I'm Margaret Larsen. When I interviewed to become president and CEO of Special Olympics Texas, I saw a group of women—most of them older than me—who were playing ball toss. They were Special Olympics athletes. As I watched them, it suddenly occurred to me that some of these women had probably been in institutions their whole lives.

Special Olympics Texas provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in 23 sports. We are actively changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by giving them the opportunity to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Over the past 17 years at Special Olympics Texas, I have come to know thousands of people with intellectual disabilities. You'll learn more about some of them this morning. Special Olympics athletes like Ruben, who was found living in a chicken coop.

Athletes like Stacey, who credits Special Olympics with giving her the will to continue living.

Athletes like Colby, who overcame early discrimination to become an Eagle Scout at age 16.

Athletes like Billy Ray, who has a job and a girlfriend and dreams of a bright future.

Athletes like Sam, who never really talked and who really never liked to get up and move...who now speaks and plays several sports that require running.

You know, I could go on and on, but I'd like you to hear some of these stories from other people this morning.

Each day, I hear another story of an athlete whose life was transformed because they participated in Special Olympics Texas events. Those stories are the reason I come to work every day with a sense of purpose and a sense of joy.

We are transforming lives, one person at a time, and there is still a lot of work to be done.

We currently serve 44,531 athletes here in Texas. But it's likely that there are upwards of 500,000 people—just here in Texas—that could qualify for participation in Special Olympics. Granted, not all of them would want to take part in our program, but I want them to have the chance, the opportunity, to choose for themselves.

Our athletes are more likely to have gainful employment than people with intellectual disabilities who do not participate in Special Olympics. They have better access to quality healthcare services. And they are making a difference in their communities by becoming more involved and more visible.

Our strategic plan is that we will serve more than 60,000 athletes here in Texas by 2015. My dream is that by 2020, we'll be serving more than 100,000...and that our athletes and others with intellectual disabilities will be valued and equal members of our society. I hope you'll join us.