

Special Olympics Dufferin fundraiser kicks off at Shelburne Foodland and Orangeville Sobeys

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Special Olympics Dufferin is joining forces with a local grocer to raise funds to help athletes with intellectual disabilities continue to participate in sports.

Special Olympics Dufferin athletes ? Kristoff, Christopher, Sarah and Cole ? gathered at Foodland in Shelburne on April 25 to kick off the provincial-wide fundraiser, which raises funds for Special Olympics Ontario. Customers of Shelburne Foodland can donate to the program during checkout, and the same fundraiser is being held at the Sobeys in Orangeville (500 Riddell Rd.).

?We love to support our local Special Olympians. They're a big part of our family here at Foodland and we'd do anything for them,? said Shelburne Foodland store manager, Heidi Piel. ?It's great that we can do this for them because it helps them thrive in the world and gives them good goals; it's wonderful.?

?It's a really nice connection for us because the staff at Foodland are so lovely. We're so grateful because this brings awareness to our community about what Special Olympics does,? said Lisa Carlson, community coordinator for Special Olympics Dufferin.

Special Olympics Dufferin is a sector of Special Olympics Ontario, a charitable, non-profit organization which provides year-round sports training for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The primary objective of the organization is to contribute to the physical, social and psychological development of people with intellectual disabilities through positive experiences in sports.

In Dufferin County, about 40 athletes are participating in the Special Olympics. During the winter months, Special Olympics Dufferin runs three sports ? swimming, basketball, and curling ? and during the summer they run bocce ball, which is their biggest program with around 32 athletes participating.

In previous years, the local Special Olympics group has been able to offer other sports programs including soccer, softball and track but has had to pull back due to a lack of volunteers and coaches.

?We actually don't run a lot of sports because of issues getting volunteers, but we keep trying and working at it,? said Carlson.

As a parent of a Special Olympics Dufferin athlete, Carlson spoke about the benefits that participating in the program brings to those with intellectual disabilities.

?Special Olympics has been transformative for Cole and I've seen it for many athletes. I've seen so much growth and transformation, and it's helped them grow as people; to have confidence and overcome obstacles. It's why we keep doing it.?

Other parents also shared the experience the children have had since joining the sports programs with Special Olympics Dufferin.

?It's life-changing really. There's usually a lot of waiting or sideline watching, but this allows her to be right in the game in a way that she really hasn't been before,? said Michelle, whose daughter Sarah is part of the program.

?Sport is a great way for them to learn. It's a way to build up self-confidence that they're achieving something. They're getting stronger physically but it also supports them mentally and emotionally all the way through,? said Ingrid, whose son Kristof is an athlete with Special Olympics Dufferin.

The money raised through the Special Olympics fundraiser at Foodland goes towards Special Olympics Ontario to help organize games and competitions throughout the year.