



Volunteer Handbook

Helping provide Social Opportunities and

Active Recreation

For Children and Adults with

Developmental Disability

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in helping us include our friends with developmental disabilities in meaningful social and recreational activities.

Social Opportunities & Active Recreation, Inc. (SOAR) was established, as a 501(c)(3) corporation in 2015 to strengthen the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities in Glynn and McIntosh Counties. SOAR's primary role is to facilitate social, athletic, and recreational opportunities for community members with developmental disabilities. Its core belief is: Together, We SOAR!

SOAR's Vision

“Citizens with developmental disabilities will have access to enriching and engaging activities within the community, much like their non-disabled peers.”

Statement of Values

- Physical Fitness—Fostering active, healthy, safe lifestyles
- Self-Esteem— Instilling confidence by offering experiences that yield success
- Unity— Building friendships, sense of belonging and social inclusion through active recreation
- Service— Enriching the lives of others through the giving of oneself
- Acceptance— Every person has a unique value to the community and world
- Collaboration— Developing productive partnerships within the community increases outcomes for its citizens

What is developmental disability?

According to the World Health Organization, developmental disability is “a condition of arrested or incomplete development of the mind characterized by impairment of skills and overall intelligence in areas such as cognition, language, and motor and social abilities. Although reduced level of intellectual functioning is the characteristic feature of this disorder, individuals with a developmental disability may have widely ranging levels of functioning.” This is the official definition used by Special Olympics’ national organization. Our SOAR club members and Special Olympics athletes present a wide variety of abilities, characteristics, and personalities! You may enjoy engaging conversation with plenty of smiles and laughter. You may also interact with someone who does not speak or respond when spoken to. Some of our folks are quite athletic, and some have a physical disability—several have jobs and will enjoy telling you about their work. Many have few opportunities to socialize outside the home. Our participants are of all ages , sizes, shapes, abilities, and personalities- **very much like all of us !**

Some practical tips for interactions with participants

- Ask nicely when cooperation is needed– with encouraging tone.
- Avoid responding loudly or insistently if directions are not followed.
- Return a hug if offered one , but refrain from unsolicited physical contact. Touch should be on shoulders.
- Show respect and acceptance .
- Use simple language when communicating.
- Pair demonstration and modeling when explaining how to do something.

Suggestions to facilitate interactions:

Starting conversations might feel forced or awkward at first. Here are some great topics to keep in mind to start a conversation.

Family members - Hobbies - Where/if they work - Favorite holiday - Trips taken - Movies/TV shows - Sports - Stories about a pet - Talk about the activity

Volunteer Guidelines

How do I find out about volunteer opportunities?

SOAR and Special Olympics Coastal Georgia maintain a volunteer database through which we communicate needs for volunteers. If you wish, you can add your name to our database and receive these notices. We also regularly post on Facebook. You may contact our Volunteer Coordinator at volunteersocga@gmail.com or our SOAR Board of Directors at info@soargoldenisesles.org. Both SOAR and Special Olympics have volunteer tabs on their website homepages. www.soargoldenisesles.org , www.socga.org

What are the requirements for volunteers?

Volunteers must be at least 16 years of age, unless accompanied by an adult. Volunteers with direct responsibility for and interaction with participants will be required to have a criminal background check .

There are two classifications for volunteers:

Class A: Class A volunteers include individuals with direct involvement and contact with SOAR club members or Special Olympics athletes such as coaches, support swimmers, and activity chaperones. *A criminal background check is part of the registration process for all Class A volunteers. SOAR covers the cost of background checks.*

Class B: Class B volunteers are individuals who have no SOAR Club member supervisory responsibilities or volunteers who provide administrative support with financial management, publicity, website and social media support, or fundraising. Class B Volunteers typically sign up for a particular event or fund raising activity, or provide ongoing administrative help to our organization. No background check is required.

THERE ARE MANY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Event Volunteers Help at activities and events (i.e., assist participants with group activities, awards, serve refreshments, sign in participants, etc). Events range in time commitment from 2-6 hours on the day of the event.

Adult Enrichment Program - Volunteers for the Adult Enrichment program work with our Adult Enrichment Program Coordinator. Volunteers help plan, organize, or publicize activities or volunteer to help during activities by assisting club members. There are weekly programs as well as special events such as holiday celebrations, concerts, dances, and a wide variety of activities . Class A and B volunteers are needed.

Special Olympics Program Volunteers for Special Olympics Coastal Georgia work with our Special Olympics Program Coordinator. Opportunities exist for Class A and Class B volunteers. You may volunteer for a single event or a longer commitment. Volunteers are needed to serve as coaches, chaperones, serve on local management committees, and help at local and state level events and competitions. Sports include swimming, golf, bocce, basketball, tennis, bowling , and many others. If you have experience coaching a sport, you might consider volunteering to coach with Special Olympics. If you enjoy participating in a sport you might consider becoming a Unified Partner. Unified partners compete side-by-side with athletes. Time commitment is a two -three month sport season. Unified Partners, coaches, and anyone who travels with athletes are Class A volunteers and must complete Special Olympics registration including a background check.

Fundraising Events Volunteer at fundraising events and on planning committees. Time commitment may be for a specific time period (i.e., serve on a committee that meets monthly) or 2– 4 hours on the day of the event. No background check is required.

Administrative Volunteers Assist with publicity, accounting, planning, data entry, website and Facebook maintenance, and other administrative tasks. No background check is required.

Expectations of Volunteers

SOAR and Special Olympics very much appreciate your willingness to give your time to help us fulfill our mission! While you are involved with a SOAR or Special Olympics activity, you are representing our organizations. We ask that you follow these guidelines.

When you arrive at an event, please check in with the event coordinator who should be wearing a SOAR volunteer badge or a Special Olympics badge or clothing.

- Arrive at the assigned time. If you are delayed or unable to attend, contact the event coordinator immediately.
- Volunteers must sign in with the event coordinator and wear a name tag at all events.
- Appropriate casual attire is expected— pertaining to the event. Refrain from wearing revealing clothing.
- Alcohol, tobacco, weapons, or illegal substances of any kind are not allowed at SOAR or Special Olympics events.
- Only SOAR volunteers are allowed to attend events. Please refrain from bringing individuals with you who are not SOAR approved .
- Refrain from making promises of items or reinforcers to bring later. (Stickers, toys, candy) for an individual.
- Any items brought to an event should be cleared through the coordinator and should be shared with the entire group.
- Refrain from offering activities outside SOAR activities to individuals or a group.
- Any unusual occurrence (medical, behavioral, safety, or other) involving a SOAR participant, volunteer, employee, caregiver, family member, or bystander should be reported to the event coordinator.

- Avoid situations which may leave you alone with a participant. Some participants may attend an event with a caregiver. The caregiver is responsible for supervising their participant at all times including using the restroom. If a participant does not have a caregiver and asks to go to the restroom, ask if they need assistance. If bathroom assistance is not needed, help the participant locate a restroom, but allow them to enter the restroom alone. If assistance is needed, locate your event coordinator. If personal assistance is necessary, two SOAR volunteers should be present.
- SOAR does not routinely provide transportation for participants to events. If a SOAR volunteer transports a SOAR participant, it will be at the volunteer's own risk.
- Always be supportive of participants and use encouraging and supportive comments .
- Do not give your personal contact information to participants.
- Volunteers should not photograph participants. Pictures of participants are only shared via newspaper or social media by designated SOAR individuals. SOAR coordinates with the event hosts on pictures the host submits for posting. SOAR only posts pictures of participants for whom they have permission from participants, guardians, and/or responsible family members.
- Refrain from posting pictures, using names, or sharing personal information of participants in social media or at social gatherings.
- Contact the event coordinator immediately if a participant makes comments about or has indications of, abuse or neglect. Do not question the participant regarding comments or injuries.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I find out about upcoming volunteer opportunities?

Sign up for our email list ! You may also email volunteersocga@gmail.com or info@soargoldenisles.org

2. What age are the participants in activities?

Participants range in age from children 8 years old to older adults.

3. Do I need experience with citizens with disabilities?

No prior experience is necessary !

4. Is SOAR a local or a national organization?

SOAR is a local nonprofit which was formed to serve citizens with disabilities in Glynn and McIntosh counties. We receive funding from United Way and several local agencies.

5. Are there behavior issues with participants?

Participants in our activities are generally very well behaved. If behavior issues become a problem, event supervisors are on hand to provide intervention.

6. Why is a background check required?

Many of our participants are vulnerable. It is our responsibility to protect them. We require only criminal background checks at NO cost to the volunteer. Our system does not reveal credit history or any other information. However, if you object to submitting personal information, we welcome your help as a Class B volunteer !

Contact Info

SOAR (Social Opportunities and Active Recreation) is a local 501(c)(3)nonprofit organization. **Website:** www.soargoldenisles.org **Email:** info@soargoldenisles.org
Mailing address: P.O. Box 21672, St. Simons Is. , GA 31522 **Phone:** 912-434-3484

Special Olympics Coastal Georgia is an agency of Special Olympics national organization. **Website:** www.socga.org **Email:** sogacoastal@gmail.com
Mailing address: P. O. Box 1952, Brunswick, GA. 31521 **Phone:** 912-602-8077