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**Two Northern California Students Selected to Participate in Global Youth  
Activation Summit During 2009 Special Olympics World Games**

*LOCAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT READIES STUDENTS FOR GLOBAL STAGE*

**San Francisco, CA**, February 5, 2009— Last week high school students Courtney Townsend and Nicholas Reinke participated in a ground-breaking Youth Leadership Summit in San Mateo County that is expected to have a powerful ripple effect when they take their learnings back to their schools. With 40 other high school students with and without developmental disabilities, they explored difficult and painful issues and began developing a plan to change attitudes among their peers.

This week Reinke, 17, a Special Olympics athlete from South San Francisco, and Townsend, 17, a peer partner without a developmental disability and long-time Special Olympics volunteer from San Carlos are headed for the world stage. Both were selected from among hundreds of applicants from around the world to participate in the fifth Global Youth Activation Summit on developmental disabilities that will be held in conjunction with the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games Feb. 7-13.

“I’m very excited about being chosen and having this experience,” said Townsend, a film student, who plans to make a documentary of the Summit and World Games. “I expect it to be very emotional. My friends think it’s pretty cool.”

“I’m really looking forward to Idaho,” Reinke added. “I think it’s going to be cold!”

Together they will be among 130 participants traveling from 22 nations who will attend youth-led leadership training programs, participate in interactive sports experiences and help host four live Webinars to connect with their peers throughout the world

In addition to the activities during the week-long summit, Reinke and Townsend will be part of a Global Youth Rally at the Taco Bell Arena at Boise State University on Monday, Feb. 9. The rally will bring together thousands of young people with and without developmental disabilities from around the world. It will be an exciting multi-media event designed to help youth develop awareness and discuss current issues, as well as serve as a call to action for youth to promote inclusion and acceptance for all.

### **Northern California Youth Leadership Summit**

Both students are ready for the trip after last week's Youth Leadership Summit held in San Mateo County. The Youth Leadership Summit is part of Project Unify, one of several global Special Olympics initiatives leveraging school communities as a place where young people can be agents of change to further respect, dignity and advocacy for people with developmental disabilities.

"As a parent (of a developmentally disabled student), I never realized how horrible it is out there," said Bonnie Silverman, Director of Special Olympics Schools Partnership Program. "The name-calling, the cruelty my daughter experienced was unbelievable. But, you don't hear about it too often. Developmentally disabled students tend to protect their parents because they know how much it hurts us."

During the Youth Leadership Summit, high school students were able to get a reality check. They attended a leadership training program, and participated in interactive problem-solving sessions. The day ended with lots of ideas, enthusiasm and a work plan to break down barriers back at their high schools. Participating high schools include: Woodside, San Mateo, Mills, Half Moon Bay, Hillsdale, Carlmont, El Camino and Burlingame.

Special Olympics Northern California received \$80,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Education 2008 appropriations as part of HR5131, "The Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act," and the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act." Those funds will go directly to support Special Olympics' partnership with many San Francisco Bay Area county and district schools.

Currently, more than 1,500 special education students between 6 and 22 years of age have the opportunity to train and compete in soccer, basketball and track & field during the school day. The program is integrated into the school curriculum and free to all eligible students.

### **About Special Olympics Northern California**

Special Olympics Northern California is a free year-round sports training and competition program for children and adults with developmental disabilities. More than 13,000 athletes compete in over 170 competitions throughout the region in 15 sports. This requires the extraordinary support and time of over 9,000 volunteers and more than 3,300 volunteer coaches. Programs are free to all eligible athletes. Find out how you can be a fan and visit [www.SONC.org](http://www.SONC.org).

### **About Project Unify**

Project Unify is about activating young people across the United States in an effort to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Northern California believes that through sports, young people can make a difference in friendships, schools and communities.

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