



## SoundBites Podcast Transcript

### Episode: Dr. Timothy Shriver

Dave Fabry: Welcome to a very special edition of Starkey Soundbites. I'm your host, Dave Fabry. Starkey's chief innovation officer. Our guest today is Dr. Tim Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics and fierce advocate for people with disabilities. Special Olympics is close to our heart here at Starkey. Our corporate social responsibility initiative Starkey Cares recently created a partnership with this incredible organization. Tim, thank you for joining us on Starkey Soundbites.

Dr. Shriver: Thank you for having me.

Dave Fabry: So at our recent launch event, which marked the 51st anniversary of when your uncle, John F. Kennedy, officially established the Peace Corps on March 1st, 1961, we talked a little bit about this partnership that has now been forged between Starkey Cares and with Special Olympics. Can you talk a little bit about why you're excited about this partnership?

Dr. Shriver: Well, you mentioned the Peace Corps. I mean, the Peace Corps in 1961 was an idea. It was a name. It was a concept. It was a vision. The vision captivated people before there was any program, before there was any plan. The vision that young people could live and work and meet each other eye to eye, heart to heart in villages and communities share a fundamental commitment to liberty, freedom to hope for the future, that they could work together with people from all different walks of life and all different cultures in pursuit of a more just and joyful future.

That's all the Peace Corps was in March of 1961, and yet tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people wanted to join without knowing anything more. Today, in the Special Olympic Starkey Cares example, there's a similar feeling. We know what we want to be, and we know how we want to live differently in this post pandemic world.

We know we want a more just future. We know we don't want to be so dominated by name calling, and labels, and walls that separate us from one another, and classrooms where children are separated, and communities where people are separated, and religious separation, and political separation. We want something different. All of us.

We came together, Starkey Cares and Special Olympics because we said, "Let's build on the spirit of inclusion to change something specific. Let's make it possible for people with intellectual disabilities to hear." That's the very concrete, but it can't be done unless we have the compassion, the value, the heart, the determination, if you will, to change the past and create something



new where the healthcare system and the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities is more just and results in more health.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. At the event, you talked about the “inclusion revolution,” which I love the way that you frame that. And when we look at hearing loss like intellectual disabilities, in many cases, individuals, children in the past have often been bullied and made fun of. Many of the terms, the pejorative terms that have been used in the past, really set a tone that wasn't very nice. I know in your wonderful book, *Fully Alive*, you talk about when you first began to become involved in Special Olympics people said, "Oh, that's nice." And you referred to it in the book where you say, "It's not nice." And the background of many of these individuals. Have you seen progress in the decades that you've been involved?

Dr. Shriver: I mean, the answer is yes. And I think it's okay to... some people say, "Well, don't talk about progress otherwise you'll help reinforce the myth that things are okay." I think it's the opposite. I think when people see that, in 1968, there were almost 200,000 Americans and institutions. And today there are almost none. I think that's an inspiration for people to know you can make a difference. Your efforts matter.

Dave Fabry: Absolutely.

Dr. Shriver: You can change the course of history. You, one individual. In the case of people with intellectual disabilities, one audiologist, one manufacturing company, one training program. If we train a new generation of people in the hearing profession to be able to care for people with intellectual and developmental differences, it can change thousands if not hundreds of thousands of lives. If we do better at making sure the insurance system support getting care, hearing aids and other devices for people with intellectual challenges, we can change hundreds of thousands of lives. So yes, things have gotten better for people with intellectual and developmental differences.

Are we where we want to be? Absolutely not. We've got a long way to go. Our kids are bullied in school. The unemployment rate for people with intellectual disabilities is somewhere between 70 and 90%. No one knows exactly the right number. We still struggle to find healthcare practitioners, dentists, doctors, physical therapists, who will care for our population. So there's a lot of discrimination. There's a lot of ignorance. And there's still a lot of fear. I talked to a mom today who's 49-year-old daughter is Katie Timbers, just a delight. And tears came to her eyes when she was born. She said the doctors told me to institutionalize my child.

And she said, now my child has a life. That's because all of us have done our part. Those that came into Katie's life have all done our part, not just to help Katie, but to change us. The future of the Special Olympics movement, it will



continue to be a movement for people with intellectual disabilities, but it is also a movement from them. It is also a chance for the rest of the culture in society to learn something deep and profound about who we are. All different, all unique, everyone with dignity, everyone belonging, that's their lesson to us.

Dave Fabry: We need a lot more of that.

Dr. Shriver: And we would do well to listen.

Dave Fabry: We need a lot more of that in the world today. Let's talk briefly about your journey. You were just a toddler in the summer of '62, it's a 50th anniversary this year of when your mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver had her first Camp Shriver. So you're about a month older than me, but those darn Kennedy genes, you look 15 years younger.

Dr. Shriver: I don't know about that.

Dave Fabry: But you were three years old.

Dr. Shriver: It's all my good living.

Dave Fabry: Three years old when your mom had that first Camp Shriver. Can you talk a little bit about her inspiration to you and what has led you then to continue?

Dr. Shriver: Well, look, I think if you're a kid and you have a big backyard, it was a farm. We actually lived on a working farm. Many of their farmers there that took care of cattle and planting crops and so on. So it was a big expansive space, thank God. I was very privileged in that regard, but all of a sudden in the summer, our backyard turned into an amusement park. We had games, and pony rides, and arts and crafts studios, and climbing ropes, and climbing walls.

And I think what I knew in the beginning was that I was given the chance to have a playful, fun, joyful backyard summer camp with hundreds of other people. I think what my mother understood was that if we try to beat people into change, shame them into change, force them into change, it's not likely to be successful. But if we invite people to play, have a good time, do something they enjoy, then we might meet on common ground.

And her genius, and I'm just the beneficiary of it. Not the architect. Her genius was for me as a little boy to, first, encounter people with intellectual differences, which I wouldn't have even known that's their situation. But to first encounter them as people I wanted to play with. People who brought me a lot of fun. And I think most Special Olympics volunteers today usually had a similar first experience. Maybe they were told they should, or maybe they were part of a group that said, "You ought to volunteer." But what they really typically have



in common is they came to the movement. They came to a Special Olympics event and they had fun.

And it's not often that someone can say having fun is really important. Usually, if I say to you, "Hey, this is really important." You think it's not going to be fun. If I say I got something really fun for you to do you think, well, that guy sounds great, but it's not going to be important. The Special Olympics movement has brought those two values together, fun and important, enjoy another human being and change your life by doing so. That's a valuable, and I think a very powerful value proposition. And it's why in little communities around the world, in Eastern Europe, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, and Asia, all over China, and all parts of the continent, North America and Europe, it's why in small schools, and small villages, and small towns, and big cities, people are still coming to the Special Olympics movement and offering an hour or two on a Saturday or an hour or two on a Thursday afternoon or an hour or two on a weekend.

And they're offering it because they're willing to give it a try, give encounter, meeting, crossing a boundary, a chance, just suspend your fear, your worry, just long enough to shoot baskets and see what happens. And then often, I'm happy to say, still the magic of our movement takes over.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And thinking back to those beginnings at Camp Shriver, and then did you... were you at the first, the Chicago?

Dr. Shriver: I was not. I was not at the Chicago game. It was a tough summer in my family.

Dave Fabry: '68, right? Yeah, it surely was.

Dr. Shriver: My dad had just been appointed to an ambassadorship in France. So we had moved over in April of that year, April of 68, shortly after Dr. King's death, to France. And then, of course, we lost my uncle a few weeks later. My parents came back for that. And so my folks were kind of on their own journey to try to manage in an unmanageable or unimaginably challenging period of time. So most of us kids, none of us kids were in Chicago in 1968. But I've often thought that it's quite a statement that in 1968, Chicago turned into a city in violence later that summer. There was violence around our country in April. The war, the racial challenges that continue to this day. My mom was not going to be deterred. All that could be happening in her own family and in her country. And yet she was determined. I can hear her saying, I'm sure people said to her, "Eunice, don't go. You don't have to go. Cancel." And I can hear saying, "To hell with that. We're going forward. Our athletes need it."

Dave Fabry: And out of that year, '68, I was also nine and remembered really, and not from the perspective of an adult, but from a child. And just all of the things and thinking about as I was preparing for this podcast, your family and really it



would've been easier to not continue. And her determination to pull that off and to begin and continue that movement to this day, testimony to something good came out of that year and this movement continues even now as you're chair of Special Olympics.

Dr. Shriver: Yeah. Well, the movement continues because people of goodwill as they did in Chicago, and as they did at Camp Shriver, and years before, my mom trusted this movement to volunteers. By that, I mean, she trusted it to average people. She didn't trust it to Ph.Ds. She didn't trust to political figures. She didn't trust it to business CEOs. All those kinds of people have helped, but she really gave the keys to this particular kingdom to average people saying, "If you, a member of the Lions Club. If you, a member of the church group. If you a member of the sports club. If you a member of the special education. If you will help us, we can create Special Olympics in your neighborhood."

And you didn't need a Ph.D. You didn't need a fancy credential for her. She was actually more interested in a 17 year old of goodwill whose heart and mind were open than she was necessarily in the more prestigious or more mature people.

So this movement has continued to be a welcome place for people who want to make a difference. And there's no other criteria than that. You're just, if you want to make a difference, you're welcome here. If you want to make life better for someone else and find out that it's also going to be better for you, the Special Olympics movement welcomes you. No training needed. Just an open heart, an open mind, and a willingness to give.

Dave Fabry: Well, and this partnership, I mean, I devoted almost 40 years of my career to hearing. And one of the things about hearing is that it's often an overlooked sense. It's taken for granted until it's lost. And yet it is, for most of us, with all respect to those with profound hearing loss who use manual communication. It is the means by which most of us communicate with each other, listen, and hear. And I think it's no coincidence that ear is in the center of the heart. I mean, we really honor, and respect, and are determined in this partnership to ensure, hearing is our concern, but then with the partnership with Special Olympics to really continue. I mean, in 2015, I did have the privilege of going to LA for the World Games and volunteering there. And I think, as you've said in the past, and I've read in your book, I was the beneficiary of far more than I gave on those days that I was there.

Dr. Shriver: Well, look, every... in this movement, you can see that every gift in isolation seems small. You, in a way, are sort of saying, "well, all we care... All we do is hearing." And the soccer coach says, "Well, all I do is teach children to dribble." And the volunteer who's helping with food and refreshments says, "Well, all I'm doing is bringing the water and the snacks." And someone else says, "Well, all I'm doing is helping to unlock the gym." And it's always the small that is big.



Every little piece is actually an enormously powerful gift when it's coming from the heart, when it's coming from the space in which we find ourselves as human beings united.

So I think what you found at the 2015 world games, what I've found as a four year old at Camp Shriver, what people at Chicago Soldier Field found in 1968 on that playing field in an empty stadium, what we found as we announced this partnership is Special Olympics athletes, as Katie said, who say, turn to someone and say, "I can't do it." And they don't mean I can't do it without a thousand people. They mean I can't do it without you.

So for everyone in the Starkey family and the hearing world, no gift is small. No gift is small. My sister always says this, "Don't say I am just." Don't put just in front of your word, your title, and say I'm just a mom, or I'm just an audiologist, or I'm just a coach, or I'm just a fundraiser and I don't matter. That's not what our athletes want to hear. They want us to hear them saying, I can't do without you.

Dave Fabry: It was very powerful when you said that in your speech. And you had the athletes stand up and-

Dr. Shriver: Yeah, that's not something I've done before, but it just kind of-

Dave Fabry: It was remarkable.

Dr. Shriver: They helped me out. They bailed me out.

Dave Fabry: Well, and it personalized it, like you said. It's not, "I can't do it without the team." It was personal, "I can't do it without you." And it's that responsibility, the accountability to each other, and-

Dr. Shriver: And to your best self.

Dave Fabry: And to your best self.

Dr. Shriver: That's the thing. People like, well, wait a minute, I don't know. But what about you? What about what's best in you? Don't you want someone to look at you and see what's best in you? This is what our athletes are doing. They'll look beyond all the BS labels and it's an enormous gift they have, many of them, is there's no universals in any organization. We have plenty of athletes who have lots of differing gifts, but many of our athletes have this one quality, which is to put the power of relationship and connection above all things.

And when you find and encounter someone who does that, who practices that way of living, all I say is follow them and you'll be surprised. You'll be following people you don't expect to be following, but they might be a person wearing a



Special Olympics outfit. And you might be thinking you came to help them, but you'll find yourself trying to model your life on their vision and wisdom.

Dave Fabry: Indeed. And with that, we'll wrap this very special edition of Starkey Soundbites. I thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, for your vision, and leadership, and partnership. And we look forward to seeing you at the US games in Orlando, and then the-

Dr. Shriver: Very soon.

Dave Fabry: World Games coming up after that.

Dr. Shriver: We very much look forward to it. We have millions of athletes who want the chance to hear, and we got work to do. Let's get after it. Let's go. Let's go.

Dave Fabry: Thank you.

Dr. Shriver: Thank you.

Dave Fabry: To our listeners. Thank you for listening to this episode of Starkey Soundbites. If you enjoyed this conversation, please rate and review Soundbites on your preferred podcast platform. You can also hit subscribe so that you're sure not to miss a single episode. See and hear you next time.