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**PRESS RELEASE
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SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW MEXICO RECEIVES GRANT FROM BCBSNM TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Albuquerque, NM – Special Olympics New Mexico (SONM) announced today that it received a \$17,000 from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM) through its Healthy Kids, Healthy Families® initiative. These funds will allow SONM to expand its ProjectUNIFY programs, which provide students inclusive sports opportunities at their schools. Because of our commitment to give people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to participate in competitive sporting events and develop physical fitness, we are in our fifth year of partnering with BCBSNM, whose Healthy Kids, Healthy Families vision is to help improve the health of youth in local communities.

“We’re proud to give our support to Special Olympics New Mexico’s Young Athletes and ProjectUNIFY programs as a Healthy Kids, Healthy Families partner,” said Janice Torrez, Divisional Vice President of External Affairs for BCBSNM. “Through its work, we expect to see measurable improvement in children’s health by creating opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities to be active during the school day, while also building leadership skills for their non-disabled peers.”

Special Olympics New Mexico’s ProjectUNIFY and Young Athletes programs provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to participate in sports activities alongside one another during the school day. The Young Athletes Program (YAP) partners first and second grade special needs students with older students without disabilities to teach them beginning sports skills. ProjectUNIFY gives Middle School and High School students the opportunity to participate in Inclusive Physical Education classes and Unified Sports during the school day.

“Evidence of a win-win partnership is shown by its tenure, growth, and impact on people,” stated SONM Executive Director Randy Mascorella. “BCBSNM’s commitment to Special Olympics New Mexico’s ProjectUNIFY and Young Athletes initiatives has not only stood the test of time, but it has helped to change attitudes about people challenged with disabilities through inclusive sports. There is no doubt that schools who have embraced this program are now more welcoming and able to celebrate all students for their unique accomplishments.”

About Healthy Kids, Healthy Families:

Healthy Kids, Healthy Families (HKHF) is a signature grant program of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico and is part of an ongoing commitment to invest in and partner with nonprofit organizations that offer sustainable, measurable programs to reach children and their families in areas of nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention and management, and supporting safe environments. To learn more about Healthy Kids, Healthy Families, please visit www.healthykidshealthyfamilies.org

About Special Olympics New Mexico

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities 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.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico is the largest commercial health insurer in New Mexico with more than 600,000 New Mexicans carrying a Blue Cross and Blue Shield card. Since 1940, BCBSNM has been committed to promoting the health and wellness of its members and communities through accessible, cost-effective, quality health care. BCBSNM is a Division of Health Care Service Corporation, the country’s largest customer-owned health insurer and fourth largest health insurer overall. Health Care Service Corporation is a Mutual Legal Reserve Company and an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

For Additional Information

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