

Justin Bernhardt serves community in and out of SOMO <http://specialolympicsmissouri.wordpress.com/>

Posted on [August 14, 2012](#) by [Special Olympics Missouri](#)



When Justin Bernhardt became involved with Special Olympics, he was a shy and reserved teenager. To meet him now, you would have trouble believing that. Over the course of his years as a SOMO athlete, Justin has grown into one of the strongest young leaders in the state – inside or outside of Special Olympics.

He was one of only five freshmen named to Hazelwood West High School’s student council and currently serves as co-president of the Youth Activation Council for SOMO. This year, he attended the Missouri Association of Student Councils Leadership Workshop and SOMO’s Sports Camp in back-to-back weeks, sharing what he learned with both groups.

“MASC teaches me different things that I can take back to my school to help our student council,” Justin says. “Even though we both do things maybe in different ways, we still have the same goal.”

YAC is currently developing future plans for the “Spread The Word To End The Word” campaign across the state, a movement encourages people to end the use of the word “retarded.” Justin is responsible for starting that campaign at his high school.

“The partnership with MASC and SOMO is working so well because they really are about the same thing and that’s teaching others that we are all the same in one way or another,” Justin says.

After his week with MASC, Justin was fired up to engage with his friends at SOMO’s Athlete Sports Camp and to serve as one of three veteran campers arriving early to help set up. At the dance on Thursday night, Justin joined Matt Cepeda and Rachel Antal in teaching the entire camp a dance they learned at MASC’s workshop. He says the best part, though, is always trying new sports and meeting new athletes and volunteers.

“I got inspired by the other athletes too,” Justin says. “It helped me kind of accept my challenges a lot more.”

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