

Loretta Claiborne

Now in her mid-sixties, Loretta recalls a time when children bullied her for being different, causing her to become so angry that she resorted to physical violence to defend herself. Loretta was expelled from school and fired from her job because of outbursts. She was lost in a world where people with intellectual and physical disabilities were not treated with dignity. "If it weren't for sports, I wouldn't be the person I am today. I was very angry before and sports was the arena that turned that around for me," Claiborne says. "I got support from family, community and God -- he is the strength of all and can make anything possible."

Loretta's achievements display that anything is possible with dedication and the right support. She is not only an accomplished runner and Special Olympics athlete, but also holds a 4th degree black belt in karate, communicates in four languages, including American Sign Language, and holds two honorary doctorate degrees; one from Quinnipiac University and one from Villanova University, making her the first person with an intellectual disability to receive such honors, according to Special Olympics Incorporated.

However, despite all the honors bestowed on her, Claiborne says the most rewarding part of her life has been her involvement with Special Olympics. She wants to continue helping people with intellectual and physical disabilities succeed, just as she has found success. She advises them, "Find an opportunity and seize it. Be the best you can be, and never let anyone doubt you."

Claiborne still runs every day. She is no longer a competitive runner, but runs anyway, just for the joy of it. Loretta naturally lives each day in a manner that brings joy to herself and everyone she encounters. "I don't really look toward the future because you don't know what tomorrow will be bring," she says. "You have to live your life for today."

Loretta has been busy since 2013 in her current role as Chief Inspiration Officer with Special Olympics, Inc. (the first-ever athlete selected to serve in this role). She also serves on the Board of Directors with Special Olympics representing her fellow athletes. She participates in her local Special Olympics York County (PA) program with multiple sports each week, as well as takes part in Zumba classes.

Some of the highlights of Loretta's speaking events since being recognized by the National Inclusion Project:

2014

- Rutgers University, NJ – NJ Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities
- Philadelphia, PA – Intellectual disability Services Conference
- New York, NY – Clinton Global Initiative Summit – Invited Guest
- Harrisburg, PA – PA Family Support Alliance State Conference
- Norwood, MA – Vinfen Conference
- Philadelphia, PA – The Alliance of Community Service Providers of Philly Conference
- East Brunswick, NJ – Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities

- San Antonio, TX – Nielsen Consumer 360 Event – Invited Speaker

2015

- United Nations – New York, NY - Spoke at the United Nations Summit in New York
- West Chester, PA – West Chester University of Pennsylvania Student Conference
- Johnstown, PA – Commonwealth Technical Institute – Graduation Speaker
- California, PA – California University of Pennsylvania – Diversity Conference
- Baltimore, MD – Yachad, National Jewish Council for Disabilities Leadership Mission
- Pittsburgh, PA – PA Disability Employment and Empowerment Summit
- Los Angeles, CA – 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games - Speaker
- Apple Valley, CA – Sitting Bull Academy Schoolwide Assembly
- Phoenix AZ – Special Olympics Arizona Breakfast of Champions
- Hamilton, NJ – The NJ Partnership for Workforce Development
- Naples, FL – Character and Thought Workshop
- Loysville, PA – Loysville Youth Development Center School Assembly
- Boston, MA – Ruderman Inclusion Summit – Guest Speaker
- St. Augustine, FL – “She is Fierce” – Award Winner

2016

- United Nations – New York, NY - Spoke at the United Nations Summit in New York
- Vatican in Rome; Sport at the Service of Humanity – Keynote Speaker
- Quebec, Canada – McGill University – Invited Guest Speaker
- Phoenix, AZ – International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conference – Guest Speaker
- Winnipeg, Canada – Canadian Conference on Developmental Disabilities and Autism – Guest Speaker
- Naples, FL – Character and Thought Summit – Guest Speaker

2017

- [Featured in Adapted Physical Education and Sport Textbook](#); Human Kinetics Publisher
- Austria – 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games – Honored Guest who hosted the Second Lady of the United States, Karen Pence
- Abu-Dhabi – Guest of the Royal Family serving as an ambassador for the 2019 Special Olympics World Summer Games
- Los Angeles, CA – ESPY Awards – Representing Special Olympics on stage for the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage, given to Eunice Kennedy Shriver
- Quebec, Canada – McGill University – Invited Guest Speaker
- Cherokee, NC – North Carolina Chiefs of Police Conference – Law Enforcement Torch Run