

Omar Al Shami proudly represented his country, the United Arab Emirates, at the Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019, and achieved a gold medal in the swimming competition. In addition, Omar was elected by his fellow Athlete Leaders to represent Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa as the Vice President of the Regional Athlete Leadership Input Council. "When Omar was a child, I was advised that people with Down syndrome can only learn one language, so I applied to every single Arabic school I could find. But God knew Omar can achieve more. He was accepted to his sisters' American school and ended up fluent in two languages: English & Arabic!", she said. Omar is also a member of Special Olympics UAE's Unified Youth Council, a Health Messenger advocating for swimming and fitness, works with the Unified Schools program, and speaks at various large-scale events. Omar's mother, Rula al Shami, was an early pioneer in parenting that empowers all abilities. She encourages parents to recognize all abilities of their children and embrace inclusion. I get lots of questions about Omar, and I just try to convince people to give people with intellectual disabilities a chance. Because, in the end, we are all the same.