

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. 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. 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. 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. "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. "We have had many trials and errors at school. Fortunately, it worked for us, because Omar loves learning, and the school believed in him. We know that Omar is just like his three sisters. We deal with him as we deal with them." Meera al Shami, Omar's 15-year-old sister has a powerful message for the whole world: "Omar is my role model in life. It is because of Omar that I look at the world differently. I am lucky to have had this opportunity to have a Person of Determination in my family," she said. "We go to the same school, and they always refer to me as "Omar's sister", which makes me very happy. 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. If anything, they are different in a positive way, they are unique." Even during the pandemic, Omar has been actively participating in all Special Olympics UAE and regional activities, virtually. Recently, he even created a robot at home using recyclable material, that can spray disinfectants to curb the spread of germs and save people from the Pandemic! Omar's drive and resilience to work hard and achieve great milestones is an inspiration to all. As Omar's parents share with his siblings, Omar happens to have an extra chromosome that makes him work .harder than all of us