



## Spread the Word to End the Word Fact Sheet

### WHAT

**Spread the Word to End the Word™** is an ongoing effort by Special Olympics, Best Buddies and our supporters to raise the consciousness of society about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the word "retard(ed)" and encourage people to pledge to stop using the R-word.

The campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools organizations and communities to rally and pledge their support at [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) and to promote the inclusion and acceptance of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### WHEN

The official annual day of awareness is held the first Wednesday of every March. While most activities are centered on or near that annual day in March, people everywhere can help spread the word throughout their communities and schools year-round thru pledge drives, youth rallies and online activation.

### WHO

Spread the Word to End the Word was founded by college students Soeren Palumbo (Notre Dame 2011) and Tim Shriver (Yale 2011) in 2009, and continues to be led by passionate young people, Special Olympics athletes and Best Buddies participants across the United States and in many other parts of the world.

Celebrity activist John C. McGinley is a spokesperson for the campaign.

### WHY

Respectful and inclusive language is essential to the movement for the dignity and humanity of people with intellectual disabilities. However, much of society does not recognize the hurtful, dehumanizing and exclusive effects of the word "retard(ed)."

It is time to address the minority slur "retard(ed)" and raise the consciousness of society to its hurtful effects.

### HOW

Visit [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) to learn how you can **Spread the Word to End the Word**.

### For more information, contact:

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## WHY PLEDGE: What is the R-word and Why is its Use a Problem?

Effects on People | Historical Notes | History of the Campaign | Clinical Description | Rosa's Law

### The effects of the R-word on people with ID and their families and friends



Students from the University of Kansas help 'Spread the Word to End the Word.'

"Everyone has a gift and the world would be better off if we recognized it." – *Timothy Shriver, Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics.*

The R-word is the word 'retard(ed)'. Why does it hurt? The R-word hurts because it is exclusive. It's offensive. It's derogatory. **The R-word is hate speech.** See why supporters think the R-Word is hurtful when used in jokes or as part of everyday speech. More on Effects >

### How "retardation" went from a clinical description to a word of derision

When they were originally introduced, the terms "mental retardation" or "mentally retarded" were medical terms with a specifically clinical connotation; however, the pejorative forms, "retard" and "retarded" have been used widely in today's society to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, when "retard" and "retarded" are used as synonyms for "dumb" or "stupid" by people without disabilities, it only reinforces painful stereotypes of people with intellectual disabilities being less valued members of humanity.

#### History of the Campaign

##### 2004

In response to Special Olympics athletes' call for change, the Special Olympics International Board of Directors adopts a resolution to update the movement's terminology from "mental retardation" to "intellectual disabilities."

##### 2008

Special Olympics launches the website [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) to combat the inappropriate use of the R-word in common usage.

##### August 14, 2008

Special Olympics, Best Buddies International and a coalition of national disability organizations, mobilizes a grass-roots campaign against "Tropic Thunder," a DreamWorks production. Special Olympics athletes joined protestors at demonstrations in Los Angeles, California, Washington D.C.,

New York City, Delaware, Massachusetts, Missouri and Texas. "Tropic Thunder," marketed as a satire about Hollywood actors and the movie industry in general, contains scenes promoting the idea that a "retard" is funny.

[View the complete history of the campaign](#)

## Why "intellectual disability" is replacing "mental retardation"

The R-word, "retard," is slang for the term mental retardation. Mental retardation was what doctors, psychologists, and other professionals used to describe people with significant intellectual impairment. Today the r-word has become a common word used by society as an insult for someone or something stupid. For example, you might hear someone say, "That is so retarded" or "Don't be such a retard." When used in this way, the r-word can apply to anyone or anything, and is not specific to someone with a disability. But, even when the r-word is not said to harm someone with a disability, it is hurtful.

Because of this, Special Olympics, Best Buddies and the greater disability community prefers to focus on people and their gifts and accomplishments, and to dispel negative attitudes and stereotypes. As language has evolved, Special Olympics and Best Buddies have updated their official terminology to use standard, people-first language that is more acceptable to constituents.

## Rosa's Law and Legislature Challenges

On October 5, 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama officially signed bill S. 2781 into federal law. Rosa's Law, which takes its name and inspiration for 9-year-old Rosa Marcellino, removes the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from federal health, education and labor policy and replaces them with people first language "individual with an intellectual disability" and "intellectual disability." The signing of Rosa's Law is a significant milestone in establishing dignity, inclusion and respect for all people with intellectual disabilities

[More on Rosa's Law >](#)

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# HISTORY OF THE R-WORD CAMPAIGN

## A String of Successes but Far to Go

For Special Olympics, the R-word campaign kicked off in 2004 at the request of athletes with intellectual disabilities who were uncomfortable being called mentally retarded.

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### February 2009

Spread the Word to End the Word is created by youth with and without intellectual disabilities who participated in the Special Olympics Global Youth Activation Summit at the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games.

### March 31, 2009

First annual day of awareness for "Spread the Word to End the Word."

### November 2009

Rosa's Law is introduced into the U.S. Senate and championed by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) to eliminate the term "mental retardation" from most federal laws.

### January 2010

Best Buddies International partners with Special Olympics in supporting the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign, expanding the campaign's message of respect and inclusion for all people to their network of 1,500 middle school, high school and college chapters around the world.

### March 3, 2010

Second annual day of awareness for "Spread the Word to End the Word." Over 500 events were held on March 3rd and more than 20,000 pledges were collected on this day alone.

**March 4, 2010**

The Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign reaches 100,000 pledges.

**March 10, 2010**

Spread the Word to End the Word hits primetime – a Spread the Word t-shirt on Turk (played by Donald Faison) on the hit show "Scrubs."

**April 8, 2010**

Special Olympics Project Unify joins forces with TEEN TRUTH to deliver the important Spread the Word to End the Word message to youth around the nation with reach to over 200 schools and approximately 200,000 students.

**May 26, 2010**

The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Labor, Education and Pensions (HELP) approved Rosa's Law to remove the words "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from federal laws.

**August 5, 2010**

Rosa's Law is unanimously passed in the U.S. Senate.

**September 23, 2010**

Rosa's Law is unanimously approved in the House of Representatives.

**October 5, 2010**

Rosa's Law is signed into federal law by U.S. President Barack Obama. The law removes the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from federal health, education and labor policy and replaces them with people first language "individual with an intellectual disability" and "intellectual disability."

**March 2, 2011**

The third annual day of awareness is held. During a week full of activities over 50,000 pledges were collected, over \$65 million in television ad value was donated, over 10 million social web impressions were generated and hundreds of high schools and colleges held events.

**March 31, 2011**

On the second anniversary of the inaugural day of awareness for Spread the Word to End the Word, the campaign crosses the 200,000 pledge plateau.

**May 24, 2011**

During the season finale of Fox's hit show "Glee" our hard hitting new public service announcement "Not Acceptable" aired on national television. The ad highlighted people from multiple demographics stating that it is not okay to call them by a derogatory slang word and then concluded with Lauren Potter, an actress with Down

Syndrome who plays the popular Becky Jackson on "Glee", and Jane Lynch from "Glee" stating that the R-word is just as hurtful as any other slur. On You Tube, the ad went viral, hitting 100,000 views in just 18 hours and 1,000,000 views in its' first month online.

**March 7, 2012**

The fourth annual day of awareness will be held.

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