

## Special Olympics wants to eliminate 'r-word'

Campaign seeks to put end to use of 'retarded'

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Holland, MI — Lucia Rios believes she has experienced more discrimination as a wheelchair-user than she has as a minority.

"I'm a Mexican-American, yet it's because I use a wheelchair that people assume I am not capable of doing things, like driving a car or speaking for myself," said Rios, who is an accessibility specialist for the Lakeshore Disability Network.

Assumptions like those are hurtful, and often, so are the words people use carelessly about people with impairments, Rios said.

On March 2, the Special Olympics is taking a step to eliminate one word that was once used as a medical term — "retarded" — with its "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign.

When introduced, the term "mental retardation" had a clinical connotation, according to the campaign's website, R-word.org.

Today, however, "retard" and "retarded" have become words often used as pejoratives to degrade people with mental disabilities. Or, they are used as synonyms for "dumb" or "stupid."

The campaign website seeks pledges from themselves — and others — to stop using the word "retarded."

Pledging also includes a promise to "promote the acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities," according to the website.

About 150,000 people have signed the online pledge so far.

In Holland, the Lakeshore Disability Network strives to educate people that words such as "retard" are not acceptable to use,

said Kathryn Gray, public policy specialist for the organization.

Many people continue to use the "r-word" because they don't think anyone will "call them out" on it, she said.

"You have to make a personal decision not to use it, because you never know who you're talking to or how it might affect them," Gray said.

Last October, President Barack Obama signed a law that strips the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" from federal health, education and labor policy.

Those terms were replaced with "intellectual disability" and "individual with an intellectual disability."

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The site provides ideas on how to spread the message, host a "rally for respect" and contact Congress members about the issue.

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