

'Need to integrate physically challenged into the society'



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Track and field legend Carl Lewis yesterday called for full integration of people with disabilities into the society, saying doing so will make them more diligent and focused in life.

He was speaking to the media on the sidelines of the 4th International Annual Forum of the Shafallah Centre for Children with Disabilities that concluded yesterday.

"Our objective should be integrating everyone of these children into the society, we should ensure that they have jobs and get everything anyone else gets, he said after spending time with more than 20 budding athletes from the Shafallah Centre.

"It is a wonderful and amazing thing that Shafallah Centre is organising an event like this in order to call attention to the children so that they can be treated like every other person without a disability," Lewis said.

"Through my work, I've been able to work with a lot of young people, including people with disabilities. I have learnt so much about them ... which has made me a better person and helped me understand them better."

Lewis, who is in Doha for the second time, said: "I was guided by beautiful parents who are always tell me that I can be the best I can and like I said I've been involved with children with disabilities as far back as 1980s and all we have to do is to give them opportunities to achieve the best they can."

Since his retirement in 1997, Lewis has devoted a great deal of his time and energy to charity founding The Carl Lewis Foundation, which serves as an umbrella for many charities he supports, including the 'Best Buddies' organisations, the Wendy Marx foundation for organ donor awareness and other youth fitness groups.

Speaking with the Gulf Times, International Paralympic Committee president Sir Craven called for the inclusion of children with the disabilities saying their disabilities is only being perceived.

"We just have to accept that everybody has the same emotion and should have fun in life as I don't need to talk about their disabilities, I'll talk about them as people," he pointed out.

The wheelchair-bound Sir Craven emphasised that the most important thing for people with disabilities is about achieving independence and for each individual to decide for themselves what they want to do with their lives.

"It is true that people with disabilities may need help in achieving what they want to do, but it is up to an individual to decide for himself and not another person deciding for everybody else because that person has a perceived disability," he stressed.

On their interaction with the Shafallah athletes, he said: "This is what sports is all about because it is primarily about having fun. If you are able to get smiles on the faces of the kids, it means you are having fun and having a good time."

Encouraging all youngsters, whether physically challenged or not, into sports and physical activities, he raised the possibility of inviting Shafallah's budding talent to international events, praising the centre for already exposing them to other major events.