

Project: Football for the Future

Location: Bryan/College Station, TX 77840

Sponsoring College: Vassar College

Project Leader: Carlos Eduardo Espina

Home Country: United States



Football for the Future is a volunteer-run 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to provide kids in the Bryan/College Station area the opportunity to play soccer, regardless of their family income or background. All around the country, kids are not able to play the game they love year-round because their families are unable to afford the high prices most summer camps charge. This is especially true in low-income communities like as Bryan/College Station, TX, where 75.2% of youth in public schools are economically disadvantaged and opportunities are scarce. We believe that this is a great injustice, and we aim to alleviate the problem in our small corner of the world by providing an option that allows kids to play without placing a burden on their family. Every summer, we provide a free two-month-long soccer and educational camp for youth in the Bryan/College Station area. The organization is very grassroots, and is run almost entirely by young people.

Football for the Future is an organization I started in summer 2017 before going to college as a way to give back to my community and serve those who do not have the same privileges I had growing up. Although I was able to attend soccer and other camps over summer thanks to my family's economic stability, thousands of kids in my community are denied that opportunity. Thus, Football for the Future is an attempt to even the playing field and close the opportunity gap that exists among people of differing economic statuses. Originally, the initiative started as a 8-week-long 3-day-per-week soccer program that had no money and only 5 volunteers (including myself). However, thanks to grassroots fundraising, we've raised thousands of dollars from hundreds of individual contributors which has allowed us to grow exponentially. Now, I return to Texas every summer to run Football for the Future, and it is always a pleasure to be back home serving my community. Today, Football for the Future is one of the fastest growing nonprofits in Central Texas, having served over 500 kids over the past three summers. Of those served, 92% come from low-income households and 88% had never attended a summer camp before Football for the Future. Beyond this, our volunteer staff has grown to 50, a majority of whom are highschoolers passionate about soccer who are doing community service work for the first time.

This year, thanks to the \$10,000 received from the Davis Foundation 100 Projects for Peace Grant, we were able to take Football for the Future to the next level. Given that it was the third year of the program, I did not feel at any point that things would not work out or that the money was too much to handle. Instead, having learned from mistakes made in the previous two years, this was the year I was most prepared for. Additionally, the grant money allowed me to expand the program in ways that I've wanted to for a long time but have not been able to due to financial restrictions. For example, this year we were able to transition from being an organization focused solely on soccer to one that also includes education as well. Thanks to a partnership with the Clara B. Mounce Public Library, every Tuesday and Thursday of the summer we were at the library doing a variety of educational activities. According to the librarians who helped us, the activities we organized brought in more kids than the official programming done by the

library. The rest of the week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we were at Henderson Elementary School, running the traditional soccer component of the camp. This year, we served around 250 kids, marking our most successful summer yet.

Of course, this does not mean that there were no challenges along the way. In fact, there were many. The first one was staying energetic and engaged at all five sessions throughout the entire summer. As you can imagine, working with kids aged 6 to 11 and planning activities for them can be exhausting, and there were times where I simply wasn't feeling it. In these moments, I had to remind myself that this work is about others, not me, and that my struggles are minimal compared to theirs. Another challenge came from having to oversee and organize 50 volunteers and 250 participants. Being accountable for so many people, there were times when communication was difficult and stressful. This was especially true when unexpected events disrupted the usual routine, such as the times rain forced us to cancel practice or the public library was not open on a day we expected it to be. However, I've learned to be flexible and realize that, sometimes, things just won't work out, and that's okay.

Given the nature of the grant, I feel I must also explain what my vision of peace is and how Football for the Future fits into it. For me, peace means equality. Historically, many of the conflicts and wars that have plagued humanity have arisen due to the inequality that exists among racial, economic, and other social groups. By reducing these inequalities, we can work towards a more peaceful society. It is precisely for this reason that I see the work I am doing with Football for the Future as essential. By empowering historically marginalized communities through sport and education, Football for the Future is working to reduce inequality and move towards the broader goal of achieving peace. Although we have been operating at a micro level since we began, serving only one small city in Texas, I am proud of all that we have accomplished. To change the world we must first start with the community around us. That said, my goal in the future is to continue expanding, hopefully opening up new chapters in different cities throughout the state, country, and world. Football for the Future has already transformed the lives of hundreds of kids, and I wish to continue more people.

At the same time, Football for the Future has also transformed my own life. Before I founded the organization, I was relatively pessimistic about the world and our future. However, through my work, I've realized that there is still hope, and that with modern ideas, we can create a better future and solve the problems my community and all other marginalized groups face. However, I've also realized that this will require driven, educated, and innovative leaders willing to put in the work necessary to challenge existing power structures. I am determined to become one of those leaders. Thanks to Football for the Future, I no longer feel the hopelessness I earlier in life, but instead feel empowered knowing that I'm in a position to help others and enact positive change. While the world remains a complex and often harsh place, this realization has motivated me to continue moving forward and fighting for a better future.

Personal Statement: "Soccer is not just a sport, it is a powerful tool that educates, unites people, and can positively and peacefully transform the world. Unfortunately, in recent years, soccer has been commercialized in such a way that excludes the marginalized communities that most benefit from it. Through Football for the Future, I aim to change this and make sure all kids around the world, regardless of their economic situation, have access to soccer. Without access and equal opportunity, peace can be achieved." - Carlos Eduardo Espina

