One Goal: Promoting Peace through Football in Rio de Janeiro’s Morro dos Macacos Neighborhood
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
University of Chicago

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Website: One-Goal.org

Summary:

Can you provide a concise two-sentence summary of your project?
Our project seeks to promote peace-making skills to children in one of the most impoverished favelas in Rio de Janeiro by renovating a community-run futsal court and implementing an educational sports curriculum. Through One Goal, we hope children will use sports as an escape from gang activity and learn essential skills needed to become constructive community members.

Project Description:

How did you decide on the issue(s) you wanted to address, and what specific approaches or strategies did you choose for your project?
We wanted to address violence in Brazilian favelas through sports because Vinicius and I met playing sports on Rio’s beaches and recognized the influence sports, specifically soccer, have on Brazilian youth. Reading a U.N. report that found that in areas where there are sports programs for children and adolescents, there is an annual drop of 30% in crime in that area in Brazil further solidified our thoughts on the scope of our project.

Why did you select your host site, and how did local relationships contribute to or support your project?
We chose Morro dos Macacos as our location to complete our project because we had personally been to that community and recognized the positive potential a working soccer field will have on the children there. We also chose that location because we were confident that our relationship with Vitor, the leader of the local nonprofit Macacos Vive, would allow us to complete the entirety of our project with support from community members. Our local relationship with Morro dos Macacos was pivotal in ensuring the project succeeded. If it were not for the participation of Macacos Vive and community members, we would have not found the right resources needed to inspire local children through our soccer tournament or complete the renovations on the roof.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and what were the reasons behind these modifications?
Because construction cost much more and took much longer than what we expected on our initial proposal, we had to make a couple of changes to our plan including transforming the 2-week soccer camp into a day-long soccer tournament with over 40 children. We completed the soccer tournament on Brazilian Children’s Day and used that day to introduce children and their families to peace-building skills based on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) Line Up Live Up Trainer Manual. Construction costs on the roof were much more expensive than expected because we not only had to patch up existing holes in the roof, but we also had to replace parts of the roof’s rain gutter and industrially clean the water drainage at the ground level. We did not take any shortcuts with repairs and simply had to physically work alongside the engineers to get the work completed while staying within our budget.
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Were there any other fundraising efforts that contributed to your project, and if so, what were they?
Yes, luckily, we generated extra funding from a headshot fundraiser we held before the start of the project, hosted by UChicago’s Business Organization for Latino Development (BOLD). This helped us pay for unforeseen material and labor costs associated with out project. Additionally, we had over 10 volunteers regularly work with us in repairing the field. Without their help, this project would have been impossible since it realistically needed a budget closer to $20K.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue, and if there are, please describe them.
After the conclusion of One Goal, both Diego and Vinicius hope to continue volunteering in sports-related peace events. Diego will do so in the U.S as a coach for his local children’s team and Vinicius will continue working with the children at the Morro dos Macacos field in Brazil.

Reflection:

How do you personally define peace?
Peace, to me, is a state of harmony where conflicts are resolved without trouble, and individuals and communities coexist without fear of violence. It involves fostering understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect as well as equipping individuals with outlets needed for a peaceful coexistence.

In what ways do you believe your project might contribute to peace, and what short-term and long-term changes have occurred as a result?
Our project, One Goal, aimed to contribute to peace both in the short and long term. In the short term, our efforts involved the renovation of Morro do Macaco's soccer field and the organization of a soccer tournament, fostering community engagement and increased participation in sports. In the long term, this soccer field has the potential to become a focal point for the community, extending its influence beyond sports and serving as a safe space for interaction and communication. The collaborative approach we took with community members during the reconstruction process will leave a lasting impact, reminding the community of the power of unity and inspiring continued efforts to improve their surroundings.
Can you identify a significant conflict you observed or encountered in your work (at any level of relationship: intra- or inter-personal, community/group-based, or societal/global)? How did you navigate this conflict, and what would you like to learn more about as a result?
Through this journey, we encountered a significant challenge related to planning and communication. Coordinating with various parties, including engineers, masons, muralists, and community members, required constant communication and alignment to meet deadlines. This was further complicated by language barriers and the need to determine fair prices for services in a foreign country, demanding extensive research and negotiation skills. We overcame these challenges by growing our team, holding consistent weekly meetings, and being very diligent and intentional with our work. By the end of the project, we had seven people on the One Goal team which is five more people than we originally deemed necessary, not to mention our team of five engineers.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?
Witnessing the resilience of the Morro dos Macacos community and the enthusiasm of the children we worked with has undoubtedly changed the way I think about the world. My work showed me the power of local initiatives in addressing global challenges. It also challenged me to adapt and problem-solve in a dynamic, cross-cultural environment, ultimately enhancing my ability to navigate complex projects with several stakeholders.

Personal Statement
Diego: “In reflection, this project has taught me that community service knows no geographical boundaries and can be carried out across the globe. Furthermore, it has reinforced my belief that people are willing to assist others when provided with the opportunity to do so. The key to effecting positive change lies in identifying meaningful causes and rallying individuals to address issues at both the community and societal levels. Lastly, through my Davis Project, I grew confident that I would like to pursue a career in foreign service to continue working in new geographies all the while promoting the universal values of peace and community building.”