

Football for the Future

Carlos Eduardo Espina
Vassar College
Home Country: United States
Football for the Future
Bryan/College Station, TX
Partnering Orgs: Bryan ISD
Project Dates: April 15 - August 9

Background:

As the most popular sport in the world and renowned for being 'the people's game', soccer has the ability to change lives and bring communities together in a way that very few other things can. For many, soccer is a passion that leaves a positive impact on our lives, as it is a way to make friends and forget about our problems, provides a healthy alternative to crime, drugs, and other things that destroy lives, and teaches us values such as dedication, camaraderie, and humility. Most importantly, for millions of people all over the world, soccer provides a source of joy and hope, even in difficult times. Thus, we should view soccer as not only a sport but as a tool that, if managed correctly, can create positive change in the world. However, for soccer to have a real impact, it must be accessible to all communities, including the ones that are most vulnerable. That said, in countries like the United States, soccer has been commercialized, commodified, and made exclusive, and thus has been limited in its ability to have a positive influence. Clubs and camps have turned soccer into a business, charging hundreds, even thousands, of dollars for their services. As a result, kids all around the country are not able to play the game they love year-round because their families are unable to afford the high prices most camps and clubs charge. In low-income communities such as Bryan, TX, where 75.2% of youth in public schools are economically disadvantaged, the problem of inaccessibility to summer sports camps is exacerbated. Because of this, the summer before heading off to college, I founded Football for the Future, a volunteer-run 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that, through free co-ed summer soccer camps, provides youth in the Bryan/College Station area the opportunity to play soccer over the summer, regardless of their family income or background. In 2017, with the help of my friends and other community leaders, we ran our first camp in a very grassroots manner, serving 105 kids throughout June and July. In 2018, building on the first year's success, we expanded our staff to 55 volunteers and served over 300 kids. According to the data collected in the end-of-camp surveys, of the kids who participated in 2018, 95.3% qualified for free lunch at school and 88.4% had never attended a soccer summer camp before Football for the Future.

Needs/Plans:

While lack of access to soccer is an issue, it is not the only one facing my community and the demographic that Football for the Future serves. Given that almost all our participants are low-income youth, they also struggle with access to education, especially in the summer. For this reason, I would like to expand the services of Football for the Future to include an educational aspect with various components. The first would be to make the camp five days a week, keeping the current three days of soccer and adding two days of educational activities which will take place at Henderson Elementary School, the same school where the soccer camp takes place, or the public library. On these days, the volunteers will team up with Bryan Independent School District (BISD) teachers to provide tutoring, mentorship, and help the kids wherever needed. Working with parents and the teachers, we will try to identify the needs of each student and provide a tailored curriculum. The second component will be a scholarship fund that will support dedicated camp volunteers who are either in their junior or senior year of high school. Given that none of our staff are paid, this scholarship will reward the hardworking individuals who plan on attending college. The goal of this initiative is to encourage the volunteers to work hard and inspire them to pursue higher education. The third component will be to host four workshops, one every two weeks, that focus on how to: identify and apply for college, find scholarships and apply for financial aid, prepare for standardized tests, build a resume, write college essays, and other similar topics. The goal of this will be to inform the parents of the camp participants and volunteers on how the college process works, as this is something many are unfamiliar with. We aim to get the younger participants and their parents thinking about college while at the same time helping those volunteers who

are already in the process. The last component will be to establish an online tutoring and mentoring service that students and parents can access year-round to ask for school help and advice. The service will be hosted on the Football for the Future website (footballforthefuture.com) and will be staffed by volunteers. All of these services, like the soccer aspect of the camp, will be completely free.

Goals:

The goal of introducing an educational component to the camp is to provide a more complete experience for the participants and to ensure that they continue making academic progress over the summer. While we are already doing a good job of providing a safe environment for youth to come together and be active, we now hope to give these kids the educational tools they need to achieve their goals in life. Essentially, we hope to uplift the underprivileged youth in our community who will go on to become the future leaders of tomorrow by giving them the opportunities they are currently denied.

Longevity & lasting impact:

After two successful consecutive summers, Football for the Future is now an established non-profit organization in the Bryan/College Station community. After becoming a registered 501(c)3 in September 2018, the organization is now in a position to continue serving the local community for many years to come. If an academic component is successfully incorporated, the appeal of the organization will be increased and its impact multiplied. Ideally, both the soccer and educational aspects will become perfected, making Football for the Future the only completely free summer sports and academic camp for youth in the region. By allowing youth ages 6-12 to participate as campers and those 13 and older to help as volunteers, we hope to provide a yearly program that inspires kids of all ages to get involved in the community while also instilling a desire for self-improvement, both academically and athletically.

Timeline:

April 15 - Participant and volunteer registration open.

May 15 - Return to Texas. Continue promoting camp and planning schedule.

May 20-31- Hold volunteer trainings & meet with BISD to finalize camp details.

June 3 - Camp begins

August 2 - Camp ends

August 5-9 – Post-camp: End of camp party and collect feedback from participants Supporting Documents