

Youth Sports in South Chicago, Chicago: A Needs and Assets Assessment

Conducted by Play Like a Champion Educational Series
Supported by the Claretian Associates

In this report, we assess the resources and needs of athletic programs within the South Chicago community. We begin by providing an empirically grounded overview of the role that youth and high school sports can play in cultivating the competencies, skills, and social networks that all children need to succeed in school, secure future employment, and contribute to society. We then evaluate the opportunities for children ages 7 through 19 participate in organized and pickup sports in South Chicago highlighting the assets and gaps in resources. We conclude with recommendations for ways in which the South Chicago community can ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in sports in a safe and nurturing environment.

Sports and Youth Development

Educators and civic leaders have always recognized that engagement in sports and in other outside of school activities play a vital role in children's education and development as citizens in a democratic society. Yet over the past several decades, cuts in public spending and the fragmentation of social networks have shifted the burden of financing youth sport participation from the general public to individual families, who must pay for their children to play. This has led to a decline of afterschool and programs in low income areas because parents cannot afford escalating participation fees and equipment costs.

A growing body of research indicates that youth sports can have a significant impact on youth in low income communities with failing schools, increasing violence, and a high rate of physical inactivity. Under the proper environmental conditions¹, youth sports programs can foster positive youth development (PYD); 2) prevent violence; and 3) provide children with regular physical activity leading to a healthy lifestyle improving health outcomes.²

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is defined by UCAN Chicago as “a framework that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities and supports so that agencies can help young people develop their full potential.” As its name implies, PYD emphasizes developing a child's strengths and ability to contribute to the world through

¹ (Coakley)

² (Holt)

developing the five C's: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring^{3 4}, which are negatively related to risk and problem behavior. PYD's positive view of children contrasts with what Lerner describes as the "deficit model," which focuses on children's limitations and failures.⁵ From the perspective of applied psychology, PYD focuses not on fixing what is wrong with children, but on fostering what is right.

A meta-review of the research concluded that a wide range of positive youth development approaches can result in positive youth behavior outcomes and the prevention of youth problem behaviors. Nineteen effective programs showed positive changes in youth behavior, including significant improvements in interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, problem solving, cognitive competencies, self-efficacy, commitment to schooling, and academic achievement. Twenty-four effective programs showed significant improvements in problem behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, school misbehavior, aggressive behavior, violence, truancy, high risk sexual behavior, and smoking. This is good news indeed. Promotion and prevention programs that address positive youth development constructs are definitely making a difference in well-evaluated studies.⁶

Sports teams provide opportunities for PYD approaches, offering a safe and engaging alternative to the streets during the summer and after school. Even young people who have highly supportive home environments, benefit from the developmental assets provided at school, in their neighborhoods, and in after-school activities. Youth sports provide fertile ground for young people to develop qualities such as discipline, selflessness, teamwork, time management, and responsibility.

High-quality sports programming can provide the assets that lead to PYD outcomes, such as structure, purpose, social engagement, recreation, mentoring, and peer support. Research has shown that youth sport participation leads to a higher academic performance in high school, higher increases in interest in school between the ages of 10th and 12th grade, higher likelihood of attaining a job at 24 that offers autonomy, and more years of tertiary education by 25.^{7 8} Outside of the classroom, sport participation in youth has also been shown to lead to lower rates of early sexual activity among females, and lower likelihood of depression, suicidal, behavior, as well as cigarette and drug use.⁹ ¹⁰ In short, organized sports can provide youth with critical developmental assets. However, research makes clear that participation in youth sports alone does not guarantee PYD outcomes.¹¹

³ (McKay, Sanders and Wroblewski)

⁴ (Lerner)

⁵ (Lerner)

⁶ (Catalano, Berglund and Ryan)

⁷ (Barber)

⁸ (Eccles)

⁹ (Miller)

¹⁰ (Page)

¹¹ (Coakley)

If sports programming is to be an effective means of promoting PYD, athletic administrators and coaches must establish a PYD climate with an explicit life skills focus in the youth sport setting.¹² Such programming goes against the grain of a compete-to-win mentality, which places performance goals, such as winning, before PYD outcomes. Power and Seroczynski demonstrated that a PYD character-focused coach education program in an urban setting led coaches to become more committed to their role as educator-mentors and to their student athletes' social and character development.¹³

Violence Prevention

Violence “disproportionally affects youth” and is the leading cause of death among African American youth between the ages of 10 and 24¹⁴. The CDC, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), and the Division of Violence Prevention (DVP) created a national initiative, Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE), based on the best available research to prevent violence nationally.¹⁵ The STRYVE report lists a number of risk factors correlated with youth violence, including: diminished economic opportunities, high concentration of poor residents, social norms supportive of using violence to solve problems, involvement in gangs and delinquency, high rates of school failure, and constrained opportunities for supervised after-school activities.

Drawing on a solid and growing body of research, the STRYVE report concludes that violence is not inevitable and that a greater emphasis needs must be given to prevention: Youth violence is a preventable public health problem and not just a law enforcement problem.”¹⁶ STRYVE recommends a number of effective strategies with the following characteristics: “positive, sustained attachments with at least one adult; peer groups that promote healthy beliefs and set clear standards; [and] a sense of belonging.”¹⁷

Youth sports, in particular, have a number of characteristics that lend themselves to preventing violence and criminal activity more generally. Research identifies two modes of crime prevention through sports: 1) the averting mode and 2) the social-change mode.¹⁸ The averting mode prevents violence and crime by taking youth off the streets and putting them in a sports environment that is engaging and entertaining. The social-change mode goes further by placing youth in an environment that is structured to develop individual character as well as provide nurturing adult and peer relationships.

¹² (Nicholas L. Holt)

¹³ (Power and Seroczynski)

¹⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainmenttips/violenceyouth.html>

¹⁵ (STRYVE)

¹⁶ (STRYVE) p.

¹⁷ (STRYVE) p.

¹⁸ (Simon)

There is no evidence that participation in sports alone is the silver bullet for preventing violence or delinquency¹⁹ (e.g.) In a win at any cost environment, sports can actually encourage aggression and physical domination without a concern for the well-being of others. On the other hand, a growing body of research suggests that sports programs can effectively prevent violence by developing a culture oriented to positive youth development with strong moral norms of caring and social responsibility.²⁰

Physical Health

In addition to its social psychological benefits, youth sports foster physical and mental health. Children should get 60 minutes or more of rigorous physical activity every day²¹. Studies have shown that youth who continuously participate in sports are more physically fit, have less body fat, and are more likely to play sports as an adult than youth who do not play sports^{22 23} (al.);). In addition to promoting health into adulthood, physical activity through sports also promotes children's cognitive development and mental health²⁴. Research by the University of Florida's Sport Policy & Research Collaborative (2014) indicates that children from low income households (equal or below \$25,000) are only half as likely to reap the benefits of youth sports as children from higher income households (\$50,000 or above). Lancet (2016) estimates that increasing children's level of physical activity could save the U.S. \$26 billion dollars in healthcare costs.

South Chicago

The vibrant and longstanding community in South Chicago has experienced many cultural and economic shifts during the past century. Established as a haven for immigrant workers in the steel industry in the 20th century, South Chicago has a diverse array of residents. Currently, the neighborhood is largely African-American (75%) and has strong representation of Mexican-Americans.²⁵ One-third of the neighborhood are 19 and under which suggests great opportunity to expand youth programming.²⁶ 43.1% of the neighborhood is below the poverty line and the median household income is half that in Chicago.²⁷ The neighborhood faces a number of obstacles pertaining to its geography and access to public transportation. The neighborhood currently lacks easy

¹⁹ (Spruit)

²⁰ (Holt)

²¹ (Placeholder2)

²² (Alfano)

²³ (Perkins)

²⁴ See Project Play: http://www.aspenprojectplay.org/sites/default/files/StateofPlay_2016_FINAL.pdf

²⁵ CMAP, Community Data Snapshot South Chicago, Chicago Community

Area

²⁶ CMAP, Community Data Snapshot South Chicago, Chicago Community

Area

²⁷ CMAP, Community Data Snapshot South Chicago, Chicago Community

Area

access to CTA trains and has a Park-n-Go Metra station to accommodate commuters from NW Indiana. The community's distance from downtown Chicago makes it difficult for city-wide programming to engage with South Chicago.

South Chicago Needs and Assets Assessment

In 2017, the South Chicago YMCA closed their doors despite being used and loved by many. This was primarily because of the high cost of running the YMCA and the community's inability to meet higher monthly fees for membership. Acknowledging the gap caused by the YMCA's closure, the Claretian Associates bought the property in 2019 with plans to open the building back up for the community by the end of 2020. The aptly-named Salud Center will be renovated into a multi-use center addressing the mental, physical and spiritual health of the community. The space will include a basketball court, running track, computer lab, work-out facilities, and the potential of a pool.

In December 2019, The Claretian Associates became finalists for the Chicago Prize, a \$10 million community development grant. Included in the project proposal are renovations for the Salud Center, an indoor soccer dome at Our Lady Guadeloupe, renovated and additional residential units, a grocery store, updated public spaces and more along 92nd St and the Commercial Ave. corridor.

In conjunction with the proposal development for the Chicago Prize, the Claretian Associates asked Play Like a Champion to conduct a community wide needs and assets assessment(needs assessment). The primary goals of this needs assessment were trifold:

1. Gauge community interest in and capacity for using the Salud Center and other recreational spaces
2. Evaluate the current state of youth programming, their needs and assets, and what programmers hope to develop in the future
3. Understand community interest in developing sports programming within schools and grassroots organizations through culture-setting and community-oriented programming

The needs assessment includes five community organizations of varying size and role. More organizations were scheduled for interviews but the research process was interrupted by the development of and restrictions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Participation in Youth Sports-Organizational Profiles

BOWEN HIGH SCHOOL, PRINCIPAL PRISCILLA HORTON

- **Description:** Small (200 kids) CPS high school that uses sports as a way to support young people as they move through high school. Coaches often act as student's key adult, a caseworker-type role, and provide academic and socioemotional support. They have a robust sports program and share their large building with a Noble Charter School. They are known for their championship wrestling team. They have equal opportunities for boys and girls (per Title IX) and will create a sports team if there is a group of 10+ interested students. 70% of their kids are on a sports team throughout the entire year.
- **Assets:** A very entrepreneurial, energetic and supportive Principal and administrative staff, a resource coordinator from Metropolitan Family Services, a budget to encourage kids to use the Salud Center and take advantage of opportunities for fitness. Already host Chicago Scores, Basketball tournaments, and have the capacity to host more. Leading many community-based initiatives to create community and support for youth and would love to engage with other like-minded people to reinforce the presence of a supportive and safe environment for youth to play
- **Needs:** Space to host simultaneous programming, funding to bring back sports teams that were disbanded during previous administration (annual costs close to 100K funded by external grants)
- **Salud Center Uses:** Love the space and have ideas for potential partnerships between the center and the school. For example, physical education program to take classes at Salud Center like yoga, pilates, boxing, etc. Bowen could pay for this at reduced cost, at Principal Horton's old school they had partnership with Planet Fitness. In addition, the school would love to use it for staff development days, PTSA meetings and continuing education courses currently run at Bowen
- **Community Organization / Culture Setting:** Embrace the idea of having staff participate in PLAC training and is excited to learn more.

MIRELES ACADEMY ELEMENTARY, PRINCIPAL EVELYN RANDLE, ROBBINS:

- **Description:** A diverse CPS school with around 450 students with a comprehensive sports program. They offer 7 sports for grades 5-8 and wish they had the opportunity to start younger. A lot of students leave their school because of transient housing. They are proud to have sports to add social cohesion in their school environment.
- **Assets:** Space, equipment
- **Needs:** funding, human capital (people to run programming for younger kids), summer programming (could be either organized within the school or outside programming)
- **Salud Center Uses:** Indoor soccer games, kids interested in non-traditional or new opportunities for programming and they would contribute equipment to field day or other activities run at the Salud Center

- **Training:** Interested, they have 10 coaches that are recruited within the school that would enjoy receiving a more focused training for their role as coaches.

LEARN SOUTH CHICAGO, PRINCIPAL DAVID LEWIS

- **Description:** Small Charter School that shares their building with Thorp Elementary. They don't have the space or the human resources to have expansive sports programming. When they 'host' basketball games (boys only) they run games at a LEARN school in North Lawndale. They also host Girls on the Run.
- **Assets:** Lots of interested students with no programming to participate in
- **Needs:** Space in a major way
- **Salud Center Uses:** Use the gym for basketball games and practice, dance recitals and showcases for other afterschool programming they run. Would have funds depending on price of using space
- **Training:** Interested

METROPOLITAN FAMILY SERVICES, VANESSE SCHWARTZ

- **Description:** Primarily a mental health care provider for larger area of South Side. They have resource coordinators in 3 South Chicago schools: Bowen, Gallistel and Marsh. They frequently coordinate afterschool programming and provide grants to expand programming opportunities for students. MFS is a secondary level of support, they don't run programming but coordinate programming
- **Assets:** MFS would reach out to partners to gauge interest of vendors to run programs at the Salud Center
- **Needs:** Safe Transportation from schools to Salud Center
- **Training:** N/A –Will ask resource coordinators who are probable interested

YMCA METRO CHICAGO SOUTH, JAUNITA PYE

- **Description:** Provide tons of programming for youth, especially those who have experienced trauma, considered at-risk or in need of therapeutic intervention. In addition to providing mental health care and support, the YMCA runs a variety of programs to keep kids engaged and having fun. While they run 4 different co-ed sports options, the programmers feel as though it can run better. The primary concern is that the sports programs are run by YMCA staff who are already overwhelmed with programming needs and areas to support.
- **Assets:** Mentorship programming, Trauma-based care training and curriculum
- **Needs:** Human resources to support programming outside of YMCA staff, equipment to run a larger variety of sports programming
- **Salud Center Uses:** more central location to provide programming for South Chicago population but no funds to pay for space
- **Training:** "absolutely interested"

2.Participation in Youth Sports-Organizational Profiles

Addressing Age Gaps in Sports Programming: Most youth sports programming is focused on children in grades 5 through 8. There are relatively few opportunities for children under the age of ten (5th grade) to play sports in an organized program. Yet leaders in the South Chicago youth sports community believe that if sports are to prevent crime and violence as well as promote PYD, neighborhood-based programs should be provided for children starting at ages six and seven before they become involved in “activities on the streets.”

The Gender Gap: The schools, taken as a whole, involve somewhat more boys than girls although athletic directors expressed a strong desire to close that gap. All but one of the community-based programs, including the baseball leagues and open gyms, serve predominantly boys. Bowen High School demonstrates the best practice in their adherence to Title IX and will provide sports opportunities for all boys and girls. We see that if an organization is strapped for resources, they will cut programming for girls first. In order to accommodate both genders, some organizations will make programs co-ed without adjusting their programming to address specific needs for young women in sport.

Trained Coaches/Staff: Along with lack of facilities, development and expansion of sports programs are often limited by the number of coaches available. This is often because programs cannot afford to pay more coaches and volunteers are sometimes difficult to find.. As coaching staffs shrink and coach turnover is high, it is difficult to provide consistent quality programming.

Funding: In nearly every organization we contacted, we found that coaches had to reach into their own pockets to keep their programs running. Although financial support is scarce, the organizations supporting South Chicago do not turn children away because they cannot pay the fees. The schools interviewed had different ways to fundraise or organize their budget to prioritize sports programming. All principals expressed hardship regarding their ability to meet the need for programming as expressed by their youth.

Program Quality: Coaches and program directors generally have a clear vision for what they hope to provide for the youth they serve. After school sports programs generally aim to mentor children, teaching them not only skills required in a sport but also responsibility and social skills. These coaches strive to reach children before they get lured into the life of vice and crime that infests the streets of the community, helping them develop emotionally and preparing them for college and beyond. Every program also has a strong academic focus where time is carved out of every week dedicated to study hall or tutoring. Coaches understand that pairing athletic ability with academic competence is important for the child to succeed as a college athlete, and that the skills that are involved in succeeding academically will translate into the professional world.

However, there are many sports programs with inexperienced and unprepared coaches. Simply having played a sport at a high level does not qualify an individual to coach. There are many coaches, who fail to teach young children the fundamentals properly at a young age, requiring coaches at higher levels of the sport to have to break bad habits. Even many coaches who are adept at teaching fundamentals of their sport do not know how to communicate motivate, and mentor young people. Like teachers, doctors, and counselors, coaches need to be prepared to work effectively with children of different ages and with different needs. A systemic program of coach education, such as Play Like a Champion's can help to assure that all coaches are prepared for their role and will help to develop a PYD sports culture throughout the entire South Chicago youth and high school sports community.

Learning how to play a sport is secondary to learning the life lessons that good coaches can teach through sports. Many coaches in South Chicago make it a priority to raise awareness about the alternatives to violence and gang life and show the players that they have other options.

Safety and Transportation: Most children walk to and from practices, open gyms, and games. But walking down certain streets can be dangerous, and this creates a serious obstacle to sports participation for many young people. One of the obstacles to sports participation in South Chicago is getting the children to and from practices and games safely. Walking a couple blocks could be life threatening, depending on the neighborhood gang. Widespread organizations like the YMCA Metro Chicago South or Metropolitan Family Services would benefit from opportunities to host programming at the Salud Center to access populations that are unable to safely transport themselves to site centers in South Shore or other surrounding neighborhoods. Some programs have a bus of their own or have received funding to provide for some of their transportation needs. The 3 schools that we interviewed were able to sequester funds to promise transportation for the team sports they are able to maintain.

Parental Involvement: Whether sports are offered through school or an independent program, parental involvement is generally minimal. There are a number of reasons for this. Practices and games are often on Monday-Friday before the workday ends. Many parents are busy working jobs that simply don't give them the flexibility to transport their children to and from after school activities. Sometimes, the coaches fail to properly communicate to the parents or are so busy managing the children on their teams that they don't have the time to call parents. Some parents may not see the value of being involved perhaps because their parents did not come to their games. Other parents may be battling depression or addiction. Still others may need to be home to care for younger children or an aging family member. The athletic directors and coaches in South Chicago would very much like to increase parental involvement. Principal Horton at Bowen High School has had some success in engaging parents by reaching out to them individually and giving them opportunities to support the team that fit within their time constraints. Holding a team meeting (or

even two meetings) at the beginning of each season at an accessible place and at convenient time is one way of keeping parents informed.

Recommendations

The needs assessment has confirmed that there is demand to utilize the Salud Center as well as confirming that there is a shared community vision articulated in the survey that ALL children should have the opportunity to play sports and recreation in a safe and supportive environment. Sports and recreation (non-competitive physical activities, like dancing, biking, running, swimming, jump rope) are critical to the community in that it serves as a positive alternative to “life on the streets.” In light of the above, based on Play Like a Champion’s experience in other communities, we recommend the following:

- **Formally establish with your stakeholders and community partners the vision, mission and culture for the Salud Center before any programming begins.** As noted above, the culture will be focused on reaching children most in need and primarily focused on the development of the child. Critical components of the culture include the following:
 - Requiring all coaches to participate in workshops to reinforce the culture.
 - Require all organizations to **collect registration data** on youth participants and complete coach and **participant surveys** for all programming to measure impact. Play Like a Champion will share templates used in other communities). We have found that data is essential in communicating to potential donors.
 - Develop **an application** for prospective programs identifying the program description, purpose, profile of participants, duration and articulation of the proposed outcome.
 - **Continue community outreach** to youth sports and recreation providers and schools in the South Chicago community and develop kinship in the community.
 - Work with Metropolitan Family Services and Play Like a Champion to establish list of **potential partnerships** outside of South Chicago community organizations to diversify programming
- The vision for the Salud Center can serve as the initial step in forming a community-wide Athletic and Recreation Association in the future where all youth sports program providers work collaboratively to achieve its goal of reaching all the children in the community.
- **Hold a community meeting** to report on the needs assessment and articulate the vision, culture and plans for the Salud Center.
- **Conduct coach workshop** for the community youth sports leaders
- **Pilot** first program

Play Like a Champion would appreciate the opportunity to support the Salud Center’s roll out of the above, conduct coaching workshops, establish data gathering protocols and evaluation as well as organizational development.

Finally, we acknowledge that we are all operating in a Covid-19 world and are developing creative ways to maintain contact and show love to those most in need. We are including the Claretians in our conversations with our partners sharing creating

approaches to keep our relationships with our youth going through phone, social media and alternative methods as needed. In addition, we will be sharing how our partners are planning for today but also for the anticipated roll out when social distancing restrictions are lifted.

References:

- “FBI Releases 2014 Crime Statistics” FBI National Press Office. Washington D.C. September 28, 2015. FBI.gov
- Ahmed-Ullah, Noreen; Chase, John; and Sector, Bob. “CPS approves of largest school closure in Chicago’s history”. *Chicago Tribune*. May 23, 2013.
http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-05-23/news/chi-chicago-school-closings-20130522_1_chicago-teachers-union-byrd-bennett-one-high-school-program
- Advancing Youth Development Curriculum, Copyright 1997 by Search Institute,
<http://www.greatkidsallencounty.org/40assets.html>
- Alfano, C. M., Kleges, R. C., Murray, D. M., Beech, B. M., and McClananhan, B. S. (2002) ‘History of sport participation in relation to obesity and related health behaviors in women’, *Preventative Medicine*, 34: 82–9.
- Barber, B. L., Eccles, J. S., and Stone, M. R. (2001) ‘Whatever happened to the Jock, the Brain, and the Princess? Young adult pathways linked to adolescent activity involvement and social identity’, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 16: 429–55.
- Miller, K. E., Sabo, D. F., Farrell, M. P., Barnes, G. M., and Melnick, M. J. (1998) ‘Athletic participation and sexual behavior in adolescents: the different worlds of boys and girls’, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 39: 108–23.
- Page, R. M., Hammermeister, J., Scanlon, A., and Gilbert, L. (1998) ‘Is school sports participation a protective factor against adolescent health risk behaviors?’, *Journal of Health Education*, 29: 186–92.
- Perkins, D. F., Jacobs, J. E., Barber, B. L., and Eccles, J. S. (2004) ‘Childhood and adolescent sports participation as predictors of participation in sports and physical fitness activities during young adulthood’, *Youth and Society*, 35: 495–520.

Appendix A: Afterschool Programs

Afterschool (Late August-May)

- Bowen High School
 - Boys: Basketball, Volleyball, Baseball, Bowling,
 - Girls: Basketball, Cheerleading, Dance Team, Bowling, Softball, Volleyball,
 - Co-Ed: Track & Field, Wrestling
- Mireles Academy Elementary
 - Boys: Basketball, Soccer
 - Girls: Volleyball, Cheerleading, Basketball, Soccer
 - Co-Ed: Golf, Track & Field, Flag Football
- LEARN- South Chicago
 - Boys: Basketball
 - Girls: Girls on the Run
- YMCA- Metro Chicago South
 - Co-Ed: Volleyball, Basketball, Softball, Flag Football
- Metropolitan Family Services:
 - Schools Served: Bowen, Gallistel and Marsh

Appendix B: Primary South Chicago Assets and Needs

- Primary Community Assets:
 1. Interested Young People
 2. Enthusiastic Leadership
 3. Resources to increase breadth of programming within community
- Primary Community Needs:
 1. Space
 2. Human resource (coaches, program leaders and volunteers)
 3. Funding (for transportation, equipment, etc.)