

Social Innovation Fund Partners with U.S. Soccer Foundation to Bring Healthy Choices to Youth and Their Families



Vicky was shocked when a doctor said her 9-year-old daughter Celeste was at risk for juvenile diabetes due to poor nutrition habits. That day she made a big decision for her whole family: “We have to change our life.”

Celeste enrolled in *Soccer for Success*, a U.S. Soccer Foundation initiative funded in part by a federal Social Innovation Fund Grant, implemented in her South Los Angeles neighborhood by a local social services agency called Brotherhood Crusade.

Through this free, after-school program focused on fitness, nutrition and mentoring, both mother and daughter met their goals: Celeste lost weight, and the whole family improved their eating and exercise habits.

“I can run faster, I can do more things,” Celeste said.

Soccer for Success, a program created by the U.S Soccer Foundation, has a proven track record of combating childhood obesity in under-resourced urban neighborhoods. Solutions to this growing problem are becoming ever more critical, according to a 2011 report of the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity which found that one out of three children aged 2 to 19 are overweight or obese.

“The problem was the way we were eating at home, with a lot of white rice, white sugar, white bread. Everything like cream,” said Vicky, who is from Columbia originally. “In our country, it’s different: We like to eat cream with rice. We eat everything together. So, we think ... for the baby, it’s OK because later [she’s] going to lose the weight.”

The risks associated with childhood obesity can include diabetes, having elevated blood pressure and/or high cholesterol, and come at a hefty price: The cost to society of childhood obesity exceeds \$3 billion a year.¹

In underserved neighborhoods such as Celeste’s, where more than 90 percent of public school students qualify for the federal free and fee-reduced lunch program², many schools have slashed recess and gym time due to budget constraints. In these same areas there often are not many structured, safe opportunities outside of school for children – who make up more than a third of residents in South Los Angeles – to play and exercise.

Soccer for Success Core Components:

Physical activity: Children participate in 90-minute sessions at least three days a week.

Mentorship: Soccer coaches also serve as mentors who stress the importance of doing well in school and avoiding negative influences such as drugs, alcohol and violence.

Nutrition: Staff teach basic nutrition, the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices, and strategies for maintaining healthy eating habits.

Family engagement: Staff encourage parents and family members to reinforce the program's teachings at home. They receive information on nutrition, health and public services to help them achieve a healthier lifestyle.

¹ Dr. Cynthia Ogden and Dr. Bill Dietz, “The Childhood Obesity Epidemic: Threats and Opportunities,” (presented at the monthly Public Health Grand Rounds webcast, June 17, 2010). Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/about/grand-rounds/archives/2010/06-June.htm>

² From Brotherhood Crusade’s application materials.

Soccer for Success, before launching in Celeste's area, already had proved successful in low-income communities in eight U.S. cities.

In 2011, the U.S. Soccer Foundation received a \$2 million Social Innovation Fund grant to add 10 new *Soccer for Success* cities – along with Los Angeles – reaching an additional 12,000 children in kindergarten through eighth grade over five years. Celeste is among 1,600 children who will benefit from the U.S. Soccer Foundation's partnership with and support of programs like the Brotherhood Crusade's, who is applying federal SIF funding for *Soccer for Success* programs held at six school campuses and three community centers in South Los Angeles.



The program, which meets three afternoons a week for two 12-week sessions each year, engaged Celeste's entire family. Celeste's younger sister, Genesis, asked to enroll in the program, inspired by her sister's weight loss. Celeste's father helps coach and mentor the participants when his work schedule

permits, and Vicky walks around the track surrounding the soccer field with the other mothers while her daughters play soccer.

"I try to lose weight because Celeste says, 'Mom, if you want to do it, you can do it,'" said Vicky. "So, if my daughters do it, I have to do something. I do exercise with my friends. We do the 'fun waiting': I walk around the field with my friends and that's the way we wait until they finish [soccer practice]."

Beyond exercising more, Vicky and her family have changed their eating habits, opting for brown rice, wheat bread, unsweetened yogurt and homemade, no-sugar-added fruit juices. And Vicky has noticed since *Soccer for Success* that Celeste takes initiative on her own to make better choices.

"I don't have to be behind her saying don't eat this," said Vicky, because Celeste reads food product labels at the market, looking at the number of calories and the amount of sugar. "She's so happy, and I'm so happy, too. Because she's doing great."

***Soccer for Success* expands to 10 additional cities with Social Innovation Fund grant**

Brotherhood Crusade is one of 13 nonprofits awarded funding from the U.S. Soccer Foundation in March 2012 to launch or expand the *Soccer for Success* program in 10 states and the District of Columbia:

California: Brotherhood Crusade in Los Angeles and El Monte Community Building Initiative

Colorado: Colorado Fusion Soccer Club in Denver

Georgia: Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta

Michigan: Think Detroit Police Athletic League

New Jersey: Boys & Girls Club of Camden County and the Boys & Girls Club of Trenton & Mercer County

New York: Independent Health Foundation in Buffalo

Ohio: YMCA of Greater Dayton

Pennsylvania: Widener University in Chester

Texas: Houston Parks & Recreation Department

Washington state: Washington Youth Soccer Association in Seattle

Washington, D.C.: DC SCORES