



Youth Sports Research Council: Teenage Youth Sport Program- Paterson, NJ

Background

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated many existing issues around youth development. Among them, the psychological and physical development of children who have now spent more than one year without traditional outlets for physical activity and social connections beyond their immediate families and the virtual world.

The Youth Sports Research Council at Rutgers brings research expertise in this area- studying the effects of movement and youth sport on future athletes, and communicating the ways that coaches can reinforce the positive influence of sport on children's mental and physical health.

The Problem

Youth sport is an ideal context to develop various social skills, promote friendships with peers, and increase physical activity when structured appropriately (Smith & Delli Paoli, 2017; Smith, 2019). Physically active children have better physical health and higher likelihood of having a healthier adulthood as physical activity reduces the risks for many chronic diseases (Health and Human Services, 2019). Unfortunately, current participation rates of youth sport show less children are participating in sport than years prior and more are in need of increased physical activity.

Over the past year, municipal recreation departments who provide a majority of the youth sport opportunities in the State of New Jersey faced complying with new guidelines and postponing sport seasons or cancelling them entirely with restricted resources and budgets. These challenges have left our children deprived of the physical activity opportunities via youth sport they would otherwise benefit from. In particular, hospital admission rates for mental health disorders among teenagers has doubled (St. Joseph's University Medical Center Admissions Data 2019-2020). Moreover, as vaccination for COVID-19 becomes more available, the African-American vaccination rate is in the single digits (NJ Department of Health, April 2021).

There exists a need to assist local municipal recreation departments to offer youth physical activity programs that address the acute needs of the mental health issues among teenage participants, especially in resource restricted and urban communities such as Paterson, NJ.

Additionally, there exists a gap in the data behind the importance of youth sport to expand awareness and reach more of these communities. The research generated from studying youth sport continuation is critical to promoting movement and reducing the likelihood of mental and physical disease into adulthood.

Youth Sport Program in Paterson, NJ

We plan to establish an 8-week program in Paterson, New Jersey beginning July 2021 that aims to motivate youth to continue sport and physical activity, beyond the program's timeframe. In partnership with St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson, youth athletes will have access to educational sessions on nutritional, physical and mental health. In addition, they and their families will have access to information on the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination.



Through the Paterson Division of Recreation, the program will invite participants of the football, girls AAU basketball, and boys and girls soccer programs in the city of Paterson. The expected number of participants is between 400 to 600 and up to 100 coaches.

The Rutgers Youth Sport Research Council will lead coach training, focusing on three key areas:

1. Coaching and communication with a focus on youth psychosocial issues
2. Awareness of teenage mental health issues
3. Referral pipelines for athletes needing medical services and vaccination services

The program includes specialized training administered only by Rutgers Youth Sports Research Council for volunteer coaches in the state of New Jersey. These volunteer coaches will be able to receive the Rutgers SAFETY course that provides civil immunity to volunteer youth sport coaches in New Jersey that will be supplemented with mental health education. The coaches will also receive feedback throughout the 8-week program.

The Investment

The projected total program cost is \$50,000 which includes staffing, travel, equipment and materials. Also built into the program cost is participant compensation both for participating in the program as well as in the research that will generate critical information on the effect of such a program on youth motivation to continue physical activity.

Currently, we are seeking investment in the program from interested partners, individuals, foundations, and corporations. There are various opportunities for full or partial support along with recognition.

For more information, please contact **Divine Tabios, Senior Director of Development, Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences**, at divine.tabios@sas.rutgers.edu.

Support the Rutgers Youth Sports Research Council Program directly by making a tax-deductible contribution online:

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