Each of the four highly successful and unique sports-based youth development programs described here presents a different focus to achieving the same mission: promoting positive youth development through sports.

Examples of sports-based youth development programs

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We asked four programs that represent the many experiments ongoing throughout the United States to address four questions: (1) describe the program’s mission and vision and the rationale for creating the program, (2) describe the program’s design and content, (3) present any evaluation results that have been collected, and (4) describe how the program has been able to sustain itself. We examine four examples of sports-based youth development programs. The programs are Harlem RBI, Tenacity, Snowsports Outreach Society, and Hoops & Leaders Basketball Camp.

Harlem RBI

Harlem RBI is a nonprofit, sports-based, youth development organization located in East Harlem, New York. Its mission is to use baseball and softball and the power of teams to provide inner-city
youth with opportunities to play, learn, and grow, inspiring them to recognize their potential and realize their dreams. Harlem RBI began in 1991 when a group of local volunteers transformed an abandoned, garbage-strewn lot into two baseball diamonds for the youth of East Harlem. After several years of offering a summer baseball league, the organization recognized the critical needs of its population and started offering off-the-field programming such as mentoring, a youth newsletter, and a summer literacy camp. Although the programming was effective in engaging youth in positive activities, it nevertheless failed to eliminate the long-term effects of growing up poor in East Harlem.

Ten years after opening its doors, Harlem RBI set out to chart and implement a new program structure to better meet the complex needs of participating youth. Its first strategic plan, initiated in 2001, aligned its programs with a youth development model of service that supported Harlem RBI participants through childhood and adolescence, both year-round and from year to year. Underlying this considerable expansion in Harlem RBI’s work were a new vision, mission, and set of values. This plan, and the work that emerged, transformed Harlem RBI from a start-up into an established community presence founded on the following organizational values: one community working together as a team; respect the community, the surroundings, and themselves; believe that everyone has unlimited potential; and know that playing, learning, and growing is fun and a central part of the Harlem RBI experience.

Harlem RBI’s approach to youth development addresses the barriers inner-city youth typically face by providing opportunities to build the skills and confidence needed to break the cycle of poverty. Its year-round academic, enrichment, and sports programs are free of charge and open to participants regardless of athletic or academic ability. Once youth join Harlem RBI, they are part of a safe, supportive, and engaging environment until they graduate from high school and matriculate to college.

Now fifteen years old and with an annual budget exceeding $2.7 million, a well-functioning board of directors, and an experienced,
professional staff, Harlem RBI is poised for future success. Its model youth development programs garner much support from a growing number of institutional and individual supporters who believe in the program model and understand that while baseball and softball are powerful hooks, the real game is about learning and growing.

The goal of Harlem RBI is to ensure that participants who enter the program as vulnerable children graduate as resilient young adults. When youth leave Harlem RBI, the organization’s goal is that they will be (1) physically and mentally healthy, able to avoid risk behaviors; (2) high school graduates who matriculate to postsecondary education; (3) prepared for work by possessing the basic knowledge and skills to find and maintain a job; (4) good teammates, friends, and family members who cultivate positive relationships with peers and adults; (5) confident, competent, and caring members of their communities; and (6) active citizens who participate in their community’s social and political life. Harlem RBI’s long-term goals for youth are achieved through participation in the program over time.

Program design and content

Harlem RBI programs serve over six hundred East Harlem boys and girls between the ages of seven and eighteen. Activities are age and gender appropriate and intensify over time as participants grow, from season to season and year to year. All programs are free of charge, and all participants are accepted regardless of athletic or academic ability. Once youth enter Harlem RBI, they are expected to commit to the organization until they graduate from high school and matriculate to college. Participants spend between eight and fifteen hours per week during the school year and as many as thirty-five hours per week during the summer in Harlem RBI’s academic, enrichment, and sports programs.

Harlem RBI’s academic and enrichment programs provide developmental opportunities for participants; the hook to attract youth participation and a youth development tool itself is playing on a baseball or a softball team. Harlem RBI’s sports teams emphasize physical activity and an awareness of healthy habits and social skills that ultimately lead youth to make better life choices. In a community where organized sports programs are scarce, playing on a
team provides an outlet for healthy competition and positive social, emotional, and physical growth.

Harlem RBI’s youth development programming has these elements:

- Youth are engaged over many years, not on a seasonal or ad hoc basis.
- The programs are group based, creating a support network among peers.
- There are low adult-to-youth ratios, fostering connections between youth and caring role models.
- Well-trained staff and volunteers ensure high-quality programming.
- The expectations for all participants, no matter what their personal circumstances, are high.

This approach creates a safe environment in which youth not only receive fundamental tools to succeed, but also have consistency and continuity in their relationships with peers and adults, something often missing from their lives. As youth progress through the program, they recognize their role in achieving their personal goals, as well as their responsibility to their team and their community.

In addition to playing on a baseball or softball team, youth participate in the following age-appropriate off-the-field programs: the Rookie League summer program, which teaches seven- and eight-year-old children the basics of baseball and softball and teamwork; the REAL Kids Summer Program (Reading and Enrichment Academy for Learning), a seven-week, full-day summer literacy and enrichment program for nine to twelve year olds that culminates with a one-week stay at overnight camp; the REAL Kids After-School Program for those ten to twelve years old, which provides cognitive, enrichment, recreational, and sports activities designed to build academic, social, and emotional skills; and the Team Enrichment Program, a comprehensive, year-round youth development program that consists of three components: (1) Team Builders, with same-sex academic and enrichment activities for thirteen and fourteen year olds; (2) TeamWorks, which provides academic support, job readiness activities, and summer jobs for fif-
teen and sixteen year olds; and (3) DreamWorks, which provides college preparation and job placement services for seventeen and eighteen year olds. Harlem RBI also provides comprehensive social work services for any youth who require additional support.

**External relationships**

Harlem RBI views collaboration with other youth and social service providers as an opportunity to connect its participants to services, avoid duplication, and build a community among agencies working within East Harlem and New York City. To achieve these goals, Harlem RBI has these formal partnerships:

- The After-School Corporation, Supportive Children’s Advocacy Network, and the Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation through partnerships where Harlem RBI replicates its own after-school component and trains agency staff to maintain and build programs at their sites
- The Partnership for After School Education Program Council, where Harlem RBI’s executive director is a founding member of the YouthSport Alliance, which advocates for the inclusion of sports and physical fitness activities in after-school programming
- The East Harlem Human Services Consortium, where neighboring agencies keep each other abreast of best practices and new initiatives for East Harlem children and families
- Public School 50, Junior High School 99, and Public School 38, where classroom and gymnasium facilities are available to Harlem RBI for program activities year round
- The Positive Coaching Alliance, which works with Harlem RBI to provide workshops and practical tools for Harlem RBI coaches, parents, and leaders to learn the power of positive coaching and its influence on youth

**Evaluation results**

Harlem RBI’s evaluation process is ongoing and incorporates a participatory approach that engages staff members in evaluation design, implementation, and analysis. Evaluation methods typically
include pre- and postsurveys, focus groups, and data collection. Evaluation results are compiled and analyzed to improve program practice and provide evidence of program effectiveness to its stakeholders: donors, board members, participants, and parents. Harlem RBI evaluates each program by participants’ progress and achievement of program goals. Here is a sample of results obtained from the evaluation studies of 2005:

_Academic Performance_

- Eighty-six percent of REAL Kids improved or maintained their reading scores, showing no summer learning loss.
- Ninety-two percent of REAL Kids reported that the program helped them like reading more.
- Over 90 percent of parents reported that as a result of REAL Kids, their children try harder in school.
- One hundred percent of DreamWorks youth graduated from high school and matriculated to college.

_Social Skills Development_

- Over 75 percent of REAL Kids improved their ability to praise, motivate, and support their peers.
- Nearly 100 percent of REAL Kids reported that the program helped them to challenge themselves to do better.
- Eighty-five percent of TeamWorks youth take initiative to solve problems.

Program attendance, completion, and retention are also tracked to show Harlem RBI’s engagement of youth. To date, its teenage participants demonstrate engagement and continuity, with an average of 3.9 years of participation in Harlem RBI. These figures are evidence that the programs attract and retain youth participation over many years, and not simply on a seasonal or annual basis. This trend will enable Harlem RBI to evaluate long-term goals of physical well-being, high school graduation, college matriculation, work readiness, and civic engagement.
**Sustainability**

Harlem RBI will continue to sustain programs by raising funds from a diverse group of individual donors, corporations, foundations, and public agencies and garnering the support of a community of funders, volunteers, staff, and families. Particularly important to its sustained development is the organization’s ability to garner unrestricted funding through special events. These resources support programs when foundation support cycles off or enable the development of new initiatives when a need arises. Harlem RBI has a growing fundraising campaign. It has increased organizational revenue for ten consecutive years through a reliance on a strategy to diversify and expand revenue.

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**Tenacity**

Tenacity is a nonprofit organization, headquartered in Boston, that was created in 1999 to serve children who otherwise would lack a safe, productive, and healthy out-of-school-time (afterschool and summer) environment. The founders, former professional tennis players Ned Eames and Bud Schultz, created an organization that would enable inner-city youth to achieve excellence in the classroom while imparting life skills and promoting character development. Tenacity uses tennis as the magnet to attract and retain students who participate in a high-quality academic support and physical fitness program. Tenacity’s mission is to improve the scholastic, character, and physical development of urban youth through a combination of academic support and tennis instruction and competition with a focus on life skills.

Tenacity offers two core programs: the After-School Excellence Program (ASEP) and the Summer Tennis and Reading Program (STRP). ASEP works in close partnership with the Boston Public Schools to deliver an intensive three-year high-quality program designed for at-risk middle school students, integrating academic support, life skills development, and tennis activities in a structured environment. ASEP students are required to make a three-year commitment to Tenacity and attend the program three afternoons
per week for thirty weeks during each of their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade school years, for a total of 290 hours each school year and 90 hours each summer. The STRP is a citywide initiative that completed its eighth season in August 2006, serving 3,619 children between the ages of seven and fifteen at twenty-eight neighborhood sites throughout Boston, working in close partnership with the Boston Centers for Youth and Families and the Parks Department.

To enhance these core offerings, Tenacity has also developed complementary programs. The Elementary School Program introduces fifth graders to tennis and serves as a critical component in the ASEP student recruitment process. The High School Tennis League is a collaboration between Tenacity and the Boston Public Schools that creates an important high school opportunity for girls and boys who have graduated from ASEP and wish to continue playing tennis. The ASEP Alumni Club represents an opportunity for ASEP graduates to obtain further literacy and academic help, recreational and cultural field trips, college preparation, and opportunities to mentor younger Tenacity students, including a paid summer job.

Program design and content

Tenacity’s programs are designed to serve Boston children ages seven to fifteen who are considered primarily disadvantaged and at risk and come from low-income families. Most of the summer students and more than 90 percent of the school-year students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches. Tenacity participants come from nearly every Boston neighborhood, including Dorchester, East Boston, South Boston, and Roxbury, some of the city’s most economically-distressed areas.

In addition to serving young people directly, the programs benefit families as a whole through Tenacity’s parent involvement program. In ASEP, parents participate in at least two home visits each year and are required to ensure (not financially) their child’s participation in ASEP for each of their sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade years. These parents are also required to attend award ceremonies at the end of each ASEP semester and to evaluate the progress of their child twice each year. Tenacity encourages par-
ents to develop an interest in tennis and play with their children by offering weekend tennis clinics for students and their parents.

To meet its goal of helping youth achieve their full potential in life, Tenacity develops and implements programs that seek to meet the following objectives: (1) increase interest in reading and literacy skills of at-risk Boston children between the ages of seven and fifteen; (2) provide tennis instruction and opportunities for individual and group tennis play for at-risk Boston children between the ages of seven and fifteen; (3) improve the academic and literacy skills of at-risk Boston middle school students; (4) improve the physical health and skills of at-risk Boston middle school students; and (5) improve the mental health and the social and life skills of at-risk Boston middle school students. Tenacity seeks to create a pathway to excellence that serves students from elementary to high school, with a focus on the middle school years as the time to make the most impact because maturing children begin to make their own choices about success during this developmental stage.

Tenacity’s core programs, ASEP and STRP, have a major focus on both tennis and physical fitness and reading and literacy. STRP provides daily tennis instruction and daily reading to promote interest in reading and the acquisition of reading skills beginning with children as young as age seven. ASEP works in close partnership with the Boston Public Schools to deliver a high-quality, intensive three-year program designed for at-risk middle school students. Its academic support component includes a primary focus on literacy through a customized curriculum based on the nationally recognized KidzLit, a character development–based literacy curriculum. In addition to promoting academic achievement, ASEP promotes overall well-being by teaching and modeling nine key life skills: respect, responsibility, trust, support, effort, self-control, conflict resolution, communication, and success. Students spend approximately 50 percent of the program day in physical fitness and tennis activities, including warm-up and stretches, followed by stroke production, using a games-based approach. They learn through competitive and cooperative drills, with five students and one instructor per court. ASEP also promotes job readiness
training and work experience through Tenacity’s employment program, which enables students age fourteen and older who complete ASEP to work as employees in the STRP.

Tenacity has developed an intensive, interactive reading curriculum in partnership with ReadBoston, designed to help students develop positive attitudes toward reading and literacy, build communication skills, and raise students’ grades in English language arts. Based on the nationally recognized Developmental Studies Center’s AfterSchool KidzLit curriculum, Tenacity’s curriculum, entitled Perspectives, is a series of two-week units with group activities, reading, daily journaling, and biweekly student presentations based on culturally sensitive and gender-appropriate literature. The book titles are recommended by nationally recognized literature review sources (the Coretta Scott King Book Review, the Horn Book, ALA Book List, Children’s Book Review Magazine, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, Newbery Book Award) and from Tenacity staff, ReadBoston, teachers at partner schools, and students. Participants are asked to think deeply about the books they choose to read, while applying important concepts such as first impressions, perspective taking, motivation, empathy, and context, which seek to foster self-awareness and compassion for others.

Tenacity’s reading program includes instruction in several modes in an inclusive environment, where students participate in small group reading, group read-alouds, shared reading, journaling, and presentations to show their mastery of reading skills. Students are also encouraged to read independently. A major goal of ASEP is to promote the enjoyment of reading so that students become enthusiastic about school work and other reading. Tenacity’s reading curriculum exposes young readers to a wide variety of reading materials, including acclaimed books, newspapers, magazines (literary, news, and sports), poetry, and chapter and picture books.

Tenacity’s program facilitates regular and open communication among families to give consistent messages and support to students. Toward this goal, prior to the start of each thirteen-week session, the ASEP leadership team conducts home visits with each student and his or her family to establish and sustain family connections;
enable parents to ask questions, offer their thoughts, and learn about ASEP volunteer opportunities; and discuss ways to work with Tenacity to foster student success.

During their intensive experience, students receive ninety minutes of literacy instruction each day and are exposed to other structured extracurricular activities such as wilderness education and cultural events. Tutors generally work with groups of one to three students to implement the reading curriculum, and often tutors work with students on a one-to-one basis.

External collaborators

In the STRP, Tenacity works closely with the Boston Centers for Youth and Families and the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, which provides access to neighborhood tennis courts and reading sites across the city. It has established a positive, enduring supportive relationship with the City of Boston Mayor’s Office (for example, it sponsors the Mayor’s Cup Tournament each summer). Tenacity also works with approximately fifty youth-serving organizations located in Boston neighborhoods to recruit participants for the STRP.

ASEP is built on a solid foundation of key partnerships, beginning with the Boston Public School Department. The program currently partners formally with seven Boston public middle schools. Tenacity staff members work directly with the teachers of each student in ASEP to ensure that the academic support component of the program meets each student’s individual needs. To ensure long-term expansion of ASEP, the organization has established solid partnerships with the principals of the seven middle schools, along with the central administration, including the Boston Public Schools deputy superintendent. Building on these strong partnerships, Tenacity will continue increasing the number of at-risk middle school students it serves each year, with a goal of 250 students by 2009.

Tenacity has also developed stable and vibrant partnerships with each of the three original indoor ASEP program sites—the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center, Harvard University, and the Boston Athletic Club—and added a fourth program site in the fall of 2005: the Harborside Community Center in East Boston. These
sites ensure access to four indoor tennis court facilities as well as classroom and study hall space for the academic component of the program. Collaboration with Harvard University provides additional extracurricular activities for ASEP students, such as working as assistants at Harvard’s varsity tennis matches.

Tenacity collaborates with ReadBoston via the Literacy Coaching Initiative granted by the Mass 2020 Foundation as part of Boston’s After-School for All Partnership. ReadBoston provides initial and ongoing training to full-time staff and tutors, as well on-site modeling and coaching at Tenacity’s four ASEP locations.

**Evaluation results**

Tenacity employs a comprehensive outcomes measurement program to assess student progress as a function of participation in ASEP. The afterschool program for middle school students focuses on the development of reading skills through a customized literacy curriculum. Students are evaluated in the fall and spring of each academic year. Improvement is measured for students within each year of participation and across all years of participation. One of the most notable outcomes is that not one of the ASEP graduates to date has dropped out of high school (the high school dropout rate is over 20 percent for the Boston Public Schools).

Results from the outcomes measurement program for the first two academic years of its implementation (2004–2005, 2005–2006) indicate that students have achieved significant gains in four areas important to learning and academic performance: reading skills, participation in and enjoyment of reading, academic competency in English language arts, and executive functioning and organizational skills. For example, all students experienced an improvement in behavioral regulation, which involves their ability to productively adjust to shifts in the environment and schedule (for example, in the transitions between classes or subjects). Moreover, ASEP participants have exhibited positive outcomes in the areas of student attendance, retention rates, and graduation rates. ASEP’s overall attendance rate for 2004–2005 was 84 percent
across all program sites, and for 2005–2006 it was 83 percent. The majority of 2004–2005 program participants (83 percent) returned for the 2005–2006 program. In 2004–2005, 90 percent of eighth graders graduated from ASEP (the 10 percent who did not graduate either moved or were expelled from school). In 2005–2006, 86 percent of eighth graders graduated from ASEP and in 2005–2006 100 percent of eighth-grade students graduated.

**Sustainability**

Tenacity has been highly successful in establishing youth development programs and raising the funds necessary to support them. It has been, and anticipates continuing to be, successful for several reasons: the results achieved with students year to year in ASEP and the STRP and the overall impact on students’ families, as well as on their schools, parks, and neighborhoods; the strong public-private partnership that is the basis of Tenacity (it was founded and operates as a public-private partnership with the Mayor’s Office, working hand-in-hand with the Boston Public Schools and Boston Centers for Youth and Families to maintain and increase the youth development programs); and since its inception, raising over $6.8 million in donations and pledges and being the beneficiary of generous financial support from individual donors, foundations, corporations, government agencies, and its own special events.

As an organization, Tenacity seeks to ensure its long-term financial health by having access to a diverse array of funding sources. It has established a number of funding relationships with foundations, which it plans to continue for the long term, as well as relationships with individuals that have resulted in a significant number of multiyear pledges ranging from $1,000 to $100,000 per year for up to five years. To maintain and build on this success, it has a development team composed of Tenacity’s board of directors, a full-time development coordinator, Tenacity’s president and founder, a carefully selected volunteer-based major gifts arm called the Energy Team, and outside fundraising expertise when necessary.
Snowsports Outreach Society

The Snowsports Outreach Society (SOS; originally the Snowboard Outreach Society) was founded in 1993 in Vail, Colorado, by a group of concerned individuals who wanted to raise money for charities through snowboarding competitions. SOS quickly realized that the true opportunity to help underprivileged youth was to bring them to mountain resorts and give them the experience of being on snow. Snow sports are an ideal vehicle to find teachable moments and keep youth engaged. For example, youth overcome their fears while on the slopes and are able to apply this to academic challenges that they face in school. SOS’s mission is building character in at-risk and underprivileged youth to enhance decision making for healthy and successful life experiences. SOS is striving in the next two to three years to be a national model for best practices in sports-based youth development programming.

During the 1995–1996 season, SOS introduced forty Denver youth to snowboarding. The program provided them with a day of free lessons, equipment, and lift tickets. In the 1997–1998 season, it piloted a new, resilience-based, five-day learn-to-ride (LTR) program. During the 2001–2002 season, SOS created the University program as a long-term opportunity to continue the core value foundation created through LTR. Both SOS programs are designed to increase resiliency and protective factors in at-risk youth. During the 2005–2006 season, SOS served the therapeutic recreation needs of over fifteen hundred youth, counselors, and volunteers at twenty-four mountain resorts for a total of over 260 days.

Learn to Ride and University, SOS’s core programs, serve youth ages eight to eighteen with risk factors: low-income households, single-parent households, families involved in the court system, lack of family support, and lack of positive peer support. SOS relies on youth agencies and school districts to identify the students who will most benefit from the structure and consistency of the SOS curriculum. In 2005–2006, SOS partnered with sixty youth agencies or schools to serve 1,075 students. It is important for youth to be within a transportation corridor to mountain resort communities. Since the carrot of the program is snow sports participation, it
requires youth to be within traveling distance and have easy access to the resorts.

Significant research has demonstrated that youth with risk factors in their lives are more likely to engage in drug and alcohol use, dropping out of school, sexual activity, violence, and suicide. SOS programs are designed to increase resiliency and protective factors, thereby increasing the possibility that an individual will make decisions designed to protect him or her from engaging in unhealthy and harmful activities. As a result, the quality of life is improved for both the program participant and others affected by his or her decisions. The SOS model promotes healthy self-sufficiency within communities.

**Program design and content**

In SOS’s base program, LTR, each participant is provided with five days of professional snowboard instruction, equipment rental, lift tickets, and clothing. What distinguishes this program from any other snowboard lesson is the SOS curriculum, which promotes self-image, positive relationships, social competencies, and positive values. Each of the five days of the LTR program focuses on one of five values: courage, discipline, integrity, wisdom, and compassion. The morning begins with a discussion about the core value, and the activities of the day elicit examples of that value in action. In addition, SOS adults encourage the students to look for ways these values affect their everyday decisions. SOS uses best practices in coaching, recreation, and character education to build resiliency and protective factors in youth.

SOS University, developed through feedback from participants, parents, and counselors, is a long-term way of working with at-risk and underprivileged youth to increase their resiliency and protective factors. This is a four-year curriculum using the following guidelines:

- Year I students participate in an orientation, two University community outreach days, five ride days, and a graduation ceremony.
- Year II students participate in orientation, two University community outreach days, ten additional hours of group community outreach projects, five ride days, and a graduation.
• Year III students attend one orientation and one University community outreach day. Then groups plan and execute a community building project or a youth issue awareness project. They also ride five days with local snowboard club coaches and have a graduation.
• In the culminating year, year IV students participate in orientation, one University community outreach day, a job skills and résumé-building course, an internship of their interest, five ride days with local snowboard club coaches, and a graduation.

SOS spent the past three years researching and implementing best practices from the youth development field in its programs to be more effective in meeting the goal of building resiliency and protective factors in at-risk and underprivileged youth. Over 86 percent of youth in the four-year University curriculum increased their levels of resiliency during the 2005–2006 season.

External collaborators
SOS has developed relationships with multiple winter sport companies, mountain resorts, and youth agencies. Winter sport companies donate products to outfit the students with the necessary equipment. All SOS participants receive the ski equipment and clothing necessary for a successful day on the hill. Mountain resorts provide each SOS participant with the lift tickets and professional instructors for a successful LTR session. University participants rely on donated lift tickets to complete the program. Youth agencies enable SOS to identify and enroll a population of students who will benefit from the structure and consistency of the curriculum. SOS also partners with and trains over four hundred volunteers per year to reach a youth-to-adult ratio of 1 to 2.5. SOS is in the process of changing its name from Snowboard Outreach Society to the Snowsports Outreach Society to introduce a broader range of winter sports to youth.

Evaluation results
All SOS programs are evaluated using the Individual Protective Factors Index (IPFI): A Measure of Adolescent Resiliency, which is designed to be used as a pre- and posttest measure. Each partic-
Participant completes the index prior to participation in an SOS program for the year and on completion. The scale is compared to measure a student’s progress through the program. The preevaluation is administered prior to the student’s initial participation in an SOS program, and the postevaluation is completed during the final organized activity for the year. IPFI measures the participant’s resiliency skills, and the student should demonstrate increased resiliency in moving through the program. During the most recent season, 86 percent of all SOS program participants demonstrated increased resiliency skills on completion of the SOS curriculum.

**Sustainability**

SOS has increased its number of yearly participants thirty-six times; its funding has grown eleven times based on the strong partnerships it has created with mountain resorts and winter sports organizations. Their support enables all programs to succeed. SOS does not anticipate that any of its community support will diminish. In fact, winter sports organizations have been demonstrating an increased commitment to SOS over the past two years to enable SOS to serve more participants at additional mountains. Part of the reason for the name change to be inclusive of all winter sports was the urging of these partners.

Program sustainability is achieved through the diversification of funding that SOS has focused on over the past three years: in-kind donations and volunteers, multiple local and national foundations, individual donors, and income from special events. All regional sites are supported in the implementation of regional fundraisers to provide direct support to SOS programs in their area. Also, SOS has initiated grant campaigns to locally based funding organizations to provide smaller grants to local SOS programs.

**Hoops & Leaders Basketball Camp**

The Hoops & Leaders Basketball Camp (HLBC) is an innovative and replicable youth mentoring and leadership development program, now entering its fifth year in a summer camp format. Its
mission is to improve the lives of at-risk urban youth by leveraging the game of basketball to provide them with caring mentors, leadership skills, and exposure to different educational and career paths. Founded and directed by Aaron Dworkin, HLBC is a non-profit program, free for all participants and cosponsored by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City (BBBS). HLBC has successfully run four camps for a total of 280 campers and mentors from Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan. Mentors volunteer for a minimum of one year and attend an orientation and every camp session. Each night, campers and mentors have dinner together to get to know one another better. The camp is then divided in half, with eight teams playing with equal numbers of campers and mentors. Four teams play a full court game on two courts at once, with volunteers serving as referees. The other four teams participate in a fun leadership activity. After an hour, the game and activity groups switch. Teams are mixed up each night in order for campers and mentors to get to know each other. The evening concludes with ice cream, free-throws, and a group huddle.

HLBC’s philosophy is that although not everyone can be a great student or athlete, most youth can become adept leaders in their own way given proper training, empowerment, and opportunities. The organization uses basketball as a way to teach leadership skills to young people and instill in them the confidence they need to overcome obstacles and improve their lives. The physical experience of playing the game provides a productive framework—fun, clear, and meaningful—for understanding how various leadership skills and values are put into practice.

**Program design and content**

Each day during the two-week camp, HLBC introduces and reinforces a different leadership theme. The focus of each session is supported by themed basketball practices and drills, guest speakers, dinnertime discussions and activities, and campwide community service projects. Social values are paired with on-court skills, each supporting the other.
A major goal of HLBC is to create interaction between campers with mentors and guest speakers that will broaden the campers’ horizons and raise their sights for what is possible in their lives. Through dinner discussion topics, classroom activities, and a mentor college and career fair, a group of HLBC campers learn about forty different colleges and jobs from forty different mentors. Because success happened to a mentor, now a teammate and a friend, maybe it can happen to them too.

Basketball has emerged as perhaps the world’s most popular sport. According to the International Association of Sporting Goods Manufacturers, more basketballs were sold than any other piece of sporting equipment in 2005. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has an extensive global marketing presence, and the league’s stars have become icons known by their first names: Michael, Magic, Kobe, and LeBron. Thus, it is no wonder that when thinking about jobs, many urban teenage boys think that making the NBA is a realistic option. On television, they see players who look like them making millions of dollars, having fun, and living lavish lifestyles. Almost all HLBC campers raise their hands when asked at camp, “How many of you plan to pursue a career playing in the NBA?”

At HLBC, campers learn that very few or none of them will be playing professionally, but there may be other jobs related to the NBA and sports in general besides being a player. Through nightly guest speakers (examples are NBA referee Tom Washington, ESPN reporter Chris Broussard, and New Jersey Nets general manager Rod Thorn), campers learn about important leadership lessons from the game as well as different well-paying sports career paths they can pursue, such as broadcaster, coach, agent, team doctor, and sports marketer.

HLBC recruits mentors through its own mentor alumni network; targeted e-mail and Internet marketing campaigns; adult basketball leagues; civic, religious, and business groups; and university and fraternity alumni organizations. Recruiting focuses on minority men who (1) are already making time to play basketball, (2) are interested in volunteering in the community but may have more time than money to give, (3) have no children, and (4) are young enough to relate to and enjoy playing with the campers. The protocol for the
selection of mentors is a written application, verified referrals, a personal interview, and orientation. If the mentors want to be matched with a camper at the end of the camp, they go through another screening process with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City, which includes fingerprinting and a background check.

An HLBC camp runs on eight days during two weeks over the summer. In 2007, the camp times were 5:00 P.M. to 9:30 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The camp is run in the evenings so mentors can participate after work and campers are able to attend summer school classes and hold summer jobs. On Saturday of the first week, the camp schedules a day trip to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. On Saturday of the second week, campers participate in an all-day community service project and, in the evening, an awards banquet for campers, mentors, friends, and families. There is also a precamp orientation and postcamp follow-up meeting to match mentors and campers. The daily schedule involves practice drills, icebreakers, leadership presentations from nightly guest speakers, off-court experiential leadership activities, full court games with campers and mentors on the same teams, and a concluding reflection and social activity. At HLBC, there are no league standings, championships, or all-star teams. The camp focuses on learning leadership and building relationships more than winning.

The Human Knot game is an example of an off-court experiential leadership activity. Ten men stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle and grab one hand of each of two people standing across from them. After becoming entangled, each group must figure out how to untangle themselves and become a full circle again without letting go. Then the group is divided into three teams and told that they are the marketing departments for Nike, Reebok, and Adidas sneakers. Each team is given markers and paper and instructed to develop and design a new sneaker. They must name it, price it, and identify its special features, where it will be sold, and what athlete will endorse it. They also must come up with its slogan. Then each group creates and presents a one-minute commercial about the shoe.
External collaborators

HLBC has had two major collaborators: Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. The latter has been a sponsor of HLBC for all four years and provides campers the exclusive use of a recreation center in Manhattan where the program takes place. It also offers staff support during the camp and assistance with ordering and transporting supplies. It wants to expand the camp to more centers to serve more New York City youth. In 2006 Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City became a cosponsor of HLBC. It recruited and provided campers from its program waiting lists and provided space and assistance for precamp mentor and camper orientations, critical staff support during the camp, and a follow-up orientation and screening for men who would like to become year-round one-to-one mentors to campers from their program. In 2006, it also served as the fiscal sponsor for HLBC, allowing tax-deductible donations to be made to HLBC. It is very pleased with the program and will continue working with HLBC in the future.

Evaluation

Over the past four years, HLBC has created dozens of mentoring pairs for numerous mentoring organizations. Unfortunately, as a volunteer-led and part-time program, it has not had the resources, staff, or infrastructure in place to do proper evaluations. As it moves to become a full-time program, it plans to develop evaluation tools to measure and improve the effectiveness of HLBC’s leadership curriculum. For example, it will examine its success by measuring the number of successful mentor matches it creates and helps sustain for a minimum of six months.

Sustainability

Program sustainability is achieved through the diversification of funding from in-kind donations and volunteers. HBLC has received financial support from a variety of sources, including the National Basketball Association, CIBC Oppenheimer, Merrill Lynch, Edwin Gould Foundation for Children, Moody’s Investors Service, Elaine
Gorbach Levine Foundation, Idlewood Supporting Foundation, Simon Firemen Foundation, the NBA Store, Sports Illustrated, TrioRx Marketing, Double Rainbow Ice Cream, Workman Publishing, Madison Square Garden Network, and the New York Knicks. With the current plan to expand to a full-time program, HLBC will be able to work more closely with its partners to establish a strategic sustainability plan to ensure its long-term viability.

RICHARD A. BERLIN, executive director at Harlem RBI since 1997, previously participated in the RBI program as a volunteer baseball coach, mentor, tutor, and interim program director. He currently sits on the Program Council at the Partnership for After School Education.

AARON DWORKIN is codirector of Hoops and Leaders Basketball Camp in New York City.

NED EAMES is president and founder of Tenacity. He also serves as chairman of the United States Tennis Association’s National Junior Tennis League Committee, focused on serving urban youth and founded by Arthur Ashe.

ARN MENCONI is founder, president, and executive director of the Snowsports Outreach Society.

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