The primary focus of the three intermediary programs presented here is to provide technical assistance to sport organizations that want to offer a youth development focus.

Intermediaries supporting sports-based youth development programs

Anne Wicks, Jeffrey P. Beedy, Kathy J. Spangler, Daniel F. Perkins

After the Active Youth: A National Leadership Summit to Connect Sports, Health and Learning in Out-of-School Time, the editors of this volume asked all who attended the summit to write a brief description of their organization. The three organizations highlighted in this article were identified as intermediaries whose primary focus is providing technical assistance to sport organizations that want to have a youth development focus. There are many more intermediary organizations at the local, state, and federal levels, and the three organizations chosen represent excellent examples of different types and strategies for systems’ building.

Team-Up for Youth

Team-Up for Youth believes in the power of sports to help children learn and grow socially, emotionally, and physically. Founded in 2001, its mission is to pioneer strategies to support the healthy
development of youth by strengthening and expanding afterschool sports and physical activity programs that serve low-income communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Team-Up’s vision is that all low-income Bay Area children can access the social, physical, and emotional benefits of high-quality afterschool sports and physical activity programs in their neighborhoods.

Sports have the potential to transform a child’s life and significantly change the way young people think about themselves and the world. A sports program focused on youth development enables youth to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, experience a sense of belonging and connectedness, and learn valuable life skills. Through high-quality sports-based youth development activities, youth learn that determination is as important as physical strength, that they can lose a game that really matters but take it in stride, and that they can push themselves beyond what they thought was possible.

Although young people have much to gain from playing sports, low-income children face significant barriers to participating in quality programs. Public funding cuts, steep registration fees, and unsafe facilities have left many of these young people on the sidelines. The limited numbers of community programs that do focus on sports are all too often deficient in terms of staff, capacity, and overall program quality.

The lack of quality after-school sports opportunities for children in low-income communities is particularly detrimental given the decline of physical education during the school day. Barely one-third of students in public schools attend physical education class daily. With diminished opportunities for exercise both in and out of school, it is no wonder that youth obesity rates among low-income youth are skyrocketing, leaving these children at risk for a host of health complications. Team-Up seeks to level the playing field for these children by providing training, volunteers, and funding to the programs that serve them; cultivating public leadership and community engagement to support quality youth sports programs; and sharing lesson learned on the value of youth sports with practitioners and policymakers.
Program design and content

Team-Up for Youth is an intermediary that targets youth sports providers, public officials and policymakers, and key staff and students at Bay Area colleges for its coaching corps. The overall goals and objectives of Team-Up are to (1) increase access to high-quality youth sports experiences, particularly among girls and low-income youth in general; (2) mobilize coaches and staff with skills to help children learn and grow; and (3) spread the word about the value of sports in youth development. The program’s content has these components:

- **Training and education.** Team-Up’s training department trains youth-serving organizations in youth development and cultural competency principles and secures training with other experts in the field.

- **Coaching corps.** Team-Up recruits, trains, and places college students to serve as coaches for local youth sports programs that serve low-income communities.

- **Grant making.** Team-Up makes grants to community organizations to expand or augment their physical activity programs.

- **Public policy.** Team-Up seeks opportunities to educate elected officials and community leaders about the numerous benefits of quality afterschool sports.

- **Knowledge creation and sharing.** It translates research into accessible best practices for its nonprofit partners, provides an expert voice in the field of youth development, and is in the midst of a two-year evaluation of its work to better understand and identify opportunities for success.

Team-Up trainings are based on its building blocks framework of applying youth development principles to sports programs. Team-Up for Youth devised the building blocks framework in 2002 by drawing on a combination of youth development research and input from youth sports program directors, staff, and coaches. The framework highlights five core supports that are critical for the healthy development of young people. Moreover, it provides suggestions for how those can be put into practice in the context of sports.
training is delivered through workshops, flagship training camps, and specialized on-site consulting.

**Evaluation results**

Team-Up for Youth is midway through conducting an evaluation by Philiber Associates to help it understand the quality and participation measures of its work. It continues to seek anecdotal evidence from grantees and partners; here is what they are saying about Team-Up:

“Most of us working with kids have not been trained in a formal way in youth development principles. We get experience through our work. But the Team-Up curriculum helps us compare what we are doing day to day against recognized best practices.”—Focus group comment

“Team-Up gave us the money to provide sports activities for 150 kids every day. Our school has no P.E. or existing sports. Team-Up’s support has allowed us to provide activities for kids who would otherwise have nothing.”—Team-Up grantee

“They pointed out a wealth of research and resources I wasn’t aware of... I learned a lot about connecting observed behaviors and underlying motivations [of kids in my program].”—Program director, Sports4Kids

“Today’s program made me look at the essential issues of nature and nurture as we explored what we can do to help girls validate themselves as athletes.”—Girls’ basketball coach, San Francisco YMCA

“The addition of reliable, qualified Coaching Corps coaches has allowed us more flexibility in practice planning. We have a lower coach-athlete ratio, which is great for our program. And we are able to serve more kids.”—Bay Area outreach program, Coaching Corps partner

**Program sustainability**

Team-Up’s success in the Bay Area was made possible with substantial launch funding and support from the Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund, the San Francisco Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (through The After School Project), in
addition to individual donors and foundations. Team-Up is in the midst of executing an ambitious fundraising plan to sustain and augment its work across the broader Bay Area.

**Sports PLUS Global**

Sports PLUS Global is an independent international organization that delivers educational training to communities and programs using sports to promote positive human development, social change, and human rights. Sports PLUS Global is based on the work of Jeffrey Pratt Beedy and the Positive Learning Using Sports (PLUS) method. Since 1984, Sports PLUS has reached over five thousand children and trained two thousand coaches and educators in camps and after-school programs throughout the United States, Cyprus, Canada, and Hong Kong.

The mission of PLUS is to tap the power of sport as a medium for positive human development and social change, including promoting peace, health, and human rights to communities and children in crisis. Toward these ends, PLUS conducts and synthesizes research, develops and directs enrichment-based sport programs, and operates the PLUS World Education Web site, which provides sport-based programs with access to relevant research and links to other sport-based humanitarian programs.

The PLUS model began in the early 1980s with Beedy’s dissertation research at Harvard on the role of sports in children’s overall development. Since then, the model has spawned the New Sport Camp in Maine, the PLUS Camp in Milton Massachusetts, and Sports PLUS afterschool programs in New England. In the fall of 1997, Sports PLUS collaborated with AmeriCorps and the Lawrence Library to develop the new PLUS After School Program Model in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The middle school youth development program combines a child’s natural interest in sports with exposure to literature in order to promote literacy, social skills, health, and fitness.

In 2000, Sports PLUS teamed up with youth sport pioneers Brenda Bredemeier and David Shields and conducted a year-long
ethnographic study of the role of competition in building character in elite basketball players in a New England basketball team. In 2003, it conducted research on the impact of afterschool programming on five outcome goals (character, community, intrinsic motivation, physical health, and moral theme comprehension) in five Chicago pilot sites as well as in Bristol, New Hampshire, resulting in a seven-hundred-page manual, *The Sports PLUS Method* that bridges the gap between youth development research and youth sport pedagogy. In 2006 the PLUS method was adopted as the educational model for the Doves Olympic Movement, which seeks to establish peace between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot children on the island of Cyprus.

The PLUS method is a systemic, multifaceted, educational model designed to serve as a communitywide template for organizing sport-based youth development programs. The model requires that all community stakeholders adhere to the program’s interconnected principles: determining a program’s outcome goals, philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy. When implemented in its entirety, the PLUS method has the potential for sport to contribute significantly to the positive development of youth. The ultimate vision of the method is to create a sustainable community training and education program for youth sport leaders that increases the likelihood that the sport experience will be a positive one for all youth.

The PLUS method is based on a number of educational beliefs. First is the belief that sports provide the necessary educational ingredients to address youth-related issues of obesity, violence, and illiteracy. The joys and struggles that naturally occur while participating in sports provide the necessary psychological and emotional ingredients to promote learning. Second is the belief that positive youth development is linked to a positive sense of community, a critical factor in building resiliency in youth. The third belief is that education and training are necessary components for sustainability of positive change.

The PLUS method, which consists of twelve essential steps that communities can employ, develops a shared philosophy, fosters respectful relationships, and designs well-prepared practices with
sound pedagogy and understanding of child development, as well as an understanding of how children learn in groups. In an effort to create a sustainable community of leaders, there needs to be continuous education and training and access to relevant research in the field of youth development. The PLUS method provides the template for education and training. Although the notion that sports can promote positive development is not new, the systems or community approach to children’s sports is new. The PLUS Educational Centers encourage all community stakeholders—teachers, coaches, principals, superintendents, parents, referees, community center directors, and local merchants—to unite behind the community’s interconnected principles. These principles include determining a program’s philosophy and outcome goals, as well as the importance of conducting warm-up and cool-down meetings to discuss team goals. Following are the steps that represent the essential principles of the PLUS method and provide community members with a way to take a proactive approach to their youth’s sport experiences:

Step 1: Synthesize the System: PLUS Educational Center. The purpose of the PLUS Education Center is to provide community members with the support of recent research to promote positive youth sport programs.

Step 2: Prepare Philosophy. The philosophy of your program drives all your decisions in the day-to-day life for the youth sport programs.

Step 3: Outline Outcome Goals. Program leaders need to outline their outcome goals at the beginning of the season. The goals should be clear and measurable. The PLUS Community Approach focuses on the following outcome goals:

- The cultivation of a sense of community
- The promotion of five core character values
- The promotion of intrinsic motivation
- The promotion of physical development
- The promotion of literacy appreciation and an enhancement of moral theme comprehension.

Step 4: Cultivate Culture. Developing a positive youth sport culture is very much a human endeavor and depends upon how people are treated, how safe children feel in their environment and a myriad of interrelated relationships among the players, coaches, referees and parents.
Step 5: Study Psychology of Learning. To increase the likelihood that the sport experience does in fact promote our program’s goals we need to design our sport environment in ways that positively connect to how people learn. The PLUS Community Approach turns to educational learning theories and recognizes four distinct ways people learn. We call these the PLUS Learning theories:

- Modeling: Social Learning Theory
- Rules and consequences: The Behavioral Learning Theory
- Dialogue: The Cognitive Developmental Theory
- Reflections: Experiential Learning Theory

Step 6: Design Developmental Levels. There is an important reason why young children play on little fields and as they grow physically the field dimensions grow in distance and size. The field size fits the physical development of the children. The same approach needs to be applied to the psychological and social development of children. Children at different ages and levels of development need and respond to different social cues. The following PLUS Levels can be used as a guide:

- Level I Under Eight: Learning to Cooperate
- Level II Eight to Ten: Understanding Team and Competition
- Level III Ten to Twelve: Team as Community

Step 7: Practice PLUS Cycle. In the PLUS Approach we call this daily rhythm the PLUS Cycle, which consists of a Warm-up followed by an Activity concluded with a Cool-down. This consistent structure provides the youth leaders with continuous opportunities to gather the team, reflect on the process and set new goals. The PLUS Cycle is where group dialogue takes place.

- The Warm-up phase of the cycle allows the coach to quiet the chaos and direct the social and psychological attention of the children towards the goals of the day.
- The Activity phase is the active part of the practice or game where teachable moments occur.
- The Cool-down meeting provides the team an opportunity to reflect, dialogue, and set new goals, and to put the PLUS Cycle in motion once again.

Step 8: Respect Relationships. All learning takes place within the context of relationships. There are many ways to develop positive relationships. The PLUS Approach respects the children as active learners and views dialogue as a necessary ingredient to the educational process. In this sense, both the adult and the child are partners in the development process as they walk alongside each other in the relationship. The PLUS Approach understands the power of the coach. The coach will
influence the quality of the sport experience more than any other factor. One reason is because the coach has the power to make decisions such as to who will play where and when. But more than that the coach plays an important role as a mentor and model for our children. Young players look up to their coach for guidance. Here is where the power of modeling comes in—both good and bad.

Step 9: Leverage Leadership. As coaches we often are asked, what is the ideal ratio of players to adults? Often, we neglect to realize that this question is based on the assumption that the coach is the only leader and the children are all detractors or followers. When we consider that our players can serve as leaders—people who can bring equipment, clean up the bus, and address issues of disrespect, then the adult-to-child ratio takes on a whole new meaning. However, if we want to activate the leadership power of our children then we must develop a system that cultivates leaders. The PLUS Community Approach utilizes the following Leadership scale to link tangible behavioral actions to the abstract notion of leadership:

- **Leading:** Understands role as a team member and leader, plus models a step-by-step process for leadership to other members of the team.
- **Contributing:** Understands role as a leader and team member, plus looks for new opportunities for leadership.
- **Participating:** Understands role as team member and leader.
- **Observing:** Accepts leadership role only when forced to and will not contribute when the coach is not around.
- **Detracting:** Continuously detracts from the goals of the team.

Step 10: Account for Activities. In what ways do our team activities promote our goals? Are we fully aware of all the opportunities to teach important lessons within our sport program? To account for our activities is to ensure that everything we do aligns with our outcome goals and principles and those we are taking full advantage of, even seemingly mundane activities (loading and unloading the bus) to achieve our stated goals.

Step 11: Share with Stakeholders. If it takes a village to raise a child then we need to determine who are the villagers who are raising the child. In a systems or community approach there are many members who have a stake in the outcome of our children.

Step 12: Evaluate and Recycle System. In addition to these general questions each community will actually conduct pre-and post tests cast against our programs outcome goals. We want to know—did we actually improve our players’ understanding of teamwork—or not? In what ways did we improve our players’ understanding of responsibility? What do our findings tell us about what we need to do differently next year?
National Recreation and Park Association

Public park and recreation agencies are the largest provider and facilitator of community-based youth sport opportunities in the United States. Not only do these agencies provide instructional programs and coordinate youth sport leagues, they manage an estimated 500,000 facilities that are permitted to independent youth sport organizations to conduct their own programs and leagues. The physical magnitude and influence of public policies and practices developed and implemented by park and recreation systems has precipitated an expanded focus on youth sports as a core concern and issue for the field.

Since 1998, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has engaged national partners and local park and recreation agencies to improve the quality of youth sports nationwide. Fundamentally, youth sports has been in transformation since the early 1980s when Proposition 13, a California tax rollback initiative whose policy over time was adopted nationally, significantly altered the funding landscape for public parks and recreation. Prior to Proposition 13, most youth sports were managed in-house by park and recreation staff. Today, an estimated 112,000 youth sport organizations operate the majority of program administration. The youth sport facility is still largely maintained by the public sector at parks and school facilities.

NRPA national sport partnerships initially focused on expanding or improving programming that would result in participation growth. The National Football League was the first national sport organization to fund informational resources that targeted parents with a resource entitled Fun First. Improved programming practices in tennis, basketball, baseball, and football all resulted from partnerships with national organizations but had an impact on only sport programs delivered directly through park and recreation agencies.

A request for proposal was issued by Sports Illustrated in 2002 seeking national organizations to serve as a charity partner for its fiftieth anniversary celebration in 2003–2004. NRPA was selected for its Sportstown proposal to designate one community in each state as the Sports Illustrated fiftieth anniversary Sportstown. This national competition attracted applications from 250 communities in all
states, and once the state winners were selected, NRPA analyzed the applications to identify strengths and weaknesses across numerous categories. NRPA requested additional funds from the National Football League Youth Football Fund for a demonstration project to elevate the leadership role of parks and recreation to improve youth sports. Thirty-eight communities were selected to become magnet centers and demonstrate a leadership model to convene communities around improving the quality of youth sports during 2004.

At the conclusion of the demonstration project, NRPA took the results of the project back to *Sports Illustrated* with a concept for developing a national initiative. The *Sports Illustrated* GOOD SPORTS presented by the National Recreation and Park Association was launched as a result in January 2005. Over fourteen hundred communities joined the initiative to improve youth sports through the following elements:

- Teach life skills through sports.
- Empower success among youth through sports.
- Promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles through sports.
- Strengthen communities through youth sports.

The model that was demonstrated by the Youth Sport Magnet Center served as the basis for the action plan outlined in the *Sports Illustrated* GOOD SPORTS initiative, which proffered three recommendations:

- Convene a summit of youth sport stakeholders to identify common issues.
- Host a skill development festival to expose youth to new sport opportunities.
- Implement a communications strategy to inform parents of their leadership role and provide guidance to foster all youth involved in sport.

During the first year, twelve communities gained national visibility for their efforts to improve the quality of youth sports. During the second year (2006–2007) NRPA partnered with the Citizenship through Sports Alliance (CTSA) to conduct a Grassroots Report Card of Youth Sports in America as requested by the Congressional
Youth Sports Caucus. NRPA participated in the development of the report card and is assisting local community efforts to benchmark their grassroots report card against the national findings. NRPA and CTSA will report back to Congress in early 2007 with recommendations for public policy to support the leadership role of parks and recreation to improve the quality of youth sports nationwide.

The leadership role of parks and recreation in advancing child-centered youth sports is increasingly evident. Convening community stakeholders and engaging partners to improve programs, policies, and practices around all youth sports is imperative, and park and recreation agencies sit at the crossroads of responsibility and opportunity to elevate the practice and develop new standards for the benefit of all children. NRPA has committed to continued growth and development in this regard.

ANNE WICKS was director of development for Team-Up for Youth before joining the staff of Teach for America.

JEFFREY P. BEEDY, an expert in the field of youth development through sports, is the Sports PLUS founder.

KATHY J. SPANGLER is the director of national partnerships for the National Recreation and Park Association.

DANIEL F. PERKINS is a professor of family and youth resiliency and policy in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at The Pennsylvania State University.