



EFDN

PLAYGROUNDS GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION: EFDN PLAYGROUNDS

Developmental benefits of playgrounds

In several studies on the benefits of playgrounds, their contribution to the holistic developmental needs of children stands out. Although there are numerous advantages, they can be boiled down to three significant benefits to development: motor skills, social skills and cognitive skills.

In a playground, physical activity is involved: physical ability will develop naturally and motor skills will improve. Children interact with each other, thereby developing and/or improving social skills. Unstructured outdoor play improves children's ability to make decisions while exploring their play environment. It can also give them the opportunity to develop their imagination, via the multitude of encounters that can stimulate their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Research studies of playgrounds show that children who participate in free play are less likely to develop depression and hostility, and are generally free of excessive fear, anger and worry. Furthermore, by socialising with people from different backgrounds, they learn to adapt to different circumstances.

Integrating sports with playgrounds

The European Football for Development Network (EFDN) Playgrounds project aims to create a safe space to play in every neighbourhood. It helps to make sport accessible to all, allowing people of different backgrounds and ages to develop positive social relationships and soft skills by being part of a team.

An important part of the project is its collaboration between sports organisations, such as football clubs, and local municipalities. The aim here is to adapt the playgrounds to the needs of the community and to become a source of inspiration for people in the neighbourhoods, fostering a sense of belonging.

About this practitioner's guide

This guide shares successful EFDN projects whose resources – such as the practitioner's guide, methodology and educational training – are freely available on our websites to inspire and assist any sports organisation interested in using sport as a tool for social

development and making a positive impact in their communities. Delivering educational programmes in these sports playgrounds will help people develop soft skills such as communication, teamwork, decision-making, leadership and creativity, while at the same time encouraging sports participation from children with a variety of backgrounds.

EFDN and Musco Lighting partnership

EFDN and Musco Lighting have teamed up since 2019 to promote the social power of football. Musco Lighting is a partner for the new EFDN Playgrounds programme and the More than Football Award. The winner of the More than Football Awards will not only receive recognition for having implemented the most innovative and impactful community and social responsibility programme in European football, but they will also win a complete Mini-Pitch System™ modular sports solution. The club-branded mini-pitch will be developed in partnership with the winning organisation, EFDN and Musco Lighting.

One quote: "We are excited to assist the European Football Development Network in its mission to help clubs and organisations use football as a tool for connectivity and social development," says Jeff Rogers, President of Musco Lighting. "The Mini-Pitch System will help clubs develop meaningful social programmes that can have a lasting impact in a community."

Hubert Rovers, CEO of EFDN then quote: "Football clubs, leagues and football associations are delivering social programmes in communities across Europe. Their excellent initiatives are rarely seen and they need to have safe spaces to maximise the impact of their activities. Through the partnership with Musco Lighting and the More than Football Award, we can provide a club, league or football association with both a long-lasting, club-branded mini-pitch and much-needed visibility."

THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS ON COMMUNITY AND HEALTH: A NEEDS ANALYSIS

Public playgrounds are safe spaces for children to have fun and feel a sense of community. They use sports as a vehicle. While football is of course involved, it's more about health, wellness and good positive habits. The emphasis is on having a positive role model, a tool for mentorship, and a shift towards health and well-being.

The need for children to play

While historically many may have seen the act of play as merely frivolous, over the last few decades there has been plenty of evidence that shows just how important play is to child development, learning and overall well-being, both physical and mental.

- **Play stimulates early brain development:** Neuroscientists have discovered that enrichment such as games and playing can alter a brain's chemistry and development. The brain area associated with higher cognitive processing (the cerebral cortex) can benefit from environmental enrichment and play more than other parts of the brain.
- **Play increases intelligence and academic achievement:** The more physical activity children undertake, the more cognitive function and academic achievement generally increase. Working memory is majorly impacted – an area that is a predictor of level of vocabulary and mathematical reasoning.
- **Play improves social skills:** Sports in particular can improve goal setting, time management, emotional control, leadership, social intelligence, cooperation and self-exploration.
- **Play increases happiness:** Endorphins are released when physical activity is undertaken, so it's no wonder that children who participate in sports are happier, have better self-esteem and are less anxious, with a decreased risk of suicidal behaviour.
- **Play has a life-long impact on physical health:** While it's common sense that more play equals better physical health in the short term, the impact of being healthy in childhood has a vast range of life-long benefits. Healthy children age less as they grow up, live longer, and live healthier. Play at an early age is therefore key to a healthier adult society.

The need for places to play

Taking all of the above into account, it's clear that in order for sport and play to have these positive outcomes, children need physical spaces in which to play. Playgrounds specifically are the most important for numerous reasons.

- **Places to play for inclusion:** Free to use, public playgrounds are a social leveller. Many families cannot afford to send their children to sports clubs, and not all schools have the facilities to accommodate sport within their grounds. Yet despite this, there is a relative lack of free-to-use playgrounds in lower socioeconomic areas. There is a need for more such spaces, especially in poorer areas, to allow people from all walks of life to reach their full potential.
- **Places to play for community:** "Placemaking" within communities is being seen as ever more important. Thoughtfully designed playgrounds can contribute enormously to a sense of place. They can be enjoyable gathering spaces where even teens and adults choose to hang out. They can build a sense of community in a new development or renew relationships in an established one.
- **Places to play for education:** Education should not be restricted to schools. Playgrounds, libraries and museums also play a role in the educational process. Playgrounds can be regarded as critically important in terms of providing an outlet for children's high energy, developing a positive sense of self, exploring skills, building self-esteem and encouraging success among children, while also contributing to the cognitive, physical and psychological development of children.



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BENEFITS OF CLUB-BRANDED MINI-PITCHES

What are mini-pitches?

Mini-pitches are a safe space to practise sport and promote a healthy lifestyle. They're often located in the heart of the community, in a publicly accessible area, but branded according to their local football club. They can be used all year round, as the pitch is suitable for all kinds of weather conditions. Moreover, pitches with their own identity suffer less vandalism than street furniture, are not bothered by dog owners, and maintenance is therefore cheaper in the long run. They can have a positive impact on recreational participation, giving more players across all grassroots categories the opportunity to play. Mini-pitches support informal play, making football accessible to more target groups.

Giving back to the community

Mini-pitches form a bond between football clubs and their local communities, and are also a way for clubs to give back. The result is tangible: a football ecosystem, brought to life in a public space. As Eduardo Zamarripa, Soccer Market Manager at Musco Lighting, explains: "You give something back to the community: they can start playing football, become a fan of your club, have a safe space to play, and this creates a circle of connectivity. It's something that connects football, community and club."

Ilja van Holsteijn from the Cruyff Foundation continues: "It's not about just building the pitch. What it's really about is implementing a concept in the community where you not only look at the physical part, but also make sure you listen to local stakeholders, organisations and the community itself."

Meeting point

One of the fundamental philosophies of the project is that a football pitch is much more than a place to play sports; it's a meeting place for friends. It brings together different cultures around the love of football and it provides an outlet for young people. "We forget that playing football on a regular basis costs money, which some people do not have – so we are also targeting a new group, as one of our goals is to make football accessible for everyone," explains Robin Cnops from the Royal Belgian Football Association.

Peter Gheysen continues: "Through the Club Brugge Foundation, we've been using the power of football to activate, inspire and motivate people for 15 years. By creating our Club Brugge Mini-Pitch, we're convinced that we can bring added value to the entire region around Zeebrugge."

"Soccer courts provide a meeting place. It is an encounter with sports and exercise that has a health-promoting character. The children and young people can also interact socially and build networks, preventing them from being pulled in a criminal direction. The emergence of subsystems can thus be counteracted" explains Henrik from Werder Bremen.



HOW TO CREATE A PUBLIC MINI-PITCH

Created to assist the U.S. soccer Foundation in providing safer places to play the game, the Mini-Pitch System™ is ideal for transforming abandoned courts and other under-used areas into places where children and families can come together in the spirit of teamwork, empowerment and physical activity. The system supports the Foundation's "It's Everyone's Game" movement to ensure that all children have access to football and its many benefits.

How the concept was born

At the end of 2017, the U.S. soccer Foundation came up with an initiative to create 1,000 mini-pitches by 2026: the year the World Cup will be held in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Musco Lighting started work on their patented "Mini-Pitch System" in October 2018 in cooperation with the U.S. soccer Foundation, and the project has been running ever since.

Since its inception, the project has created around 140 installations in the United States, Canada and Mexico, with projects also starting in South Africa, Gambia and Colombia. In Europe, Musco Lighting has completed three projects in the United Kingdom, with Tottenham Hotspur football club. They are now starting to branch out in Europe, part of which was the partnership with EFDN. Thanks to this partnership, they're now working with Club Brugge in Belgium – winning the 2020 More than Football Award, and building the first mini-pitch in Belgium.

Revitalising urban areas

To start a project, look for sports spaces that are not being used. Refurbishing, restoring, sharing or reorganising an existing space are all options that can be considered. Once you've identified possible locations, the next step is to talk to the local municipality to obtain the necessary permissions.

The majority of mini-pitches are installed on existing concrete or asphalt spaces – such as old tennis courts, basketball courts, football fields or parks – revitalising disused spaces into something useful for the community. Alternatively, when more funding is available, a new and long-lasting space can be created.

Differences and similarities between mini-pitches in the US and Europe

Sports playgrounds and infrastructures in many European cities show the effects of long neglect and are in need of major renovation and improvement. Sports playgrounds are usually managed by local authorities or in some cases by sports clubs.

Clubs and organisations in Europe tend to want a mini-pitch with artificial turf, rather than an acrylic, tennis-type surface. The latter is more popular in the United States, as it's more cost-efficient and requires less maintenance. For example, when a mini-pitch is in a rough area of New York, it needs to be long-lasting.





Location factors for mini-pitches

The aim is to locate a mini-pitch in a neighbourhood that does not yet have access to such a facility. When installing a mini-pitch, it's useful to look at several criteria:

- How many football pitches are already in use in that area?
- What are the population demographics of that neighbourhood (e.g. black, white, Hispanic, Asian)?
- What is the average income?
- Is there a football club in the area with which to partner up?
- Where would a mini-pitch have the greatest impact?

Dimensions of a mini-pitch

When it comes to dimensions, club academies generally request larger sized pitches, at 18 x 36 metres. Schools generally choose 12 x 25 metres, where playing three against three or four against four is still possible. Every project is unique in its own needs and depends on the kind of population it aims to serve.

Practical requirements

There are several requirements to consider when installing a mini-pitch:

- **Hard surface:** A mini-pitch requires a concrete or asphalt surface, because the structure is made out of galvanized steel that needs to be anchored on a hard surface. It can't go on grass or directly on turf; it has to go on a hard surface. Turf can be installed on the concrete surface later if desired.
- **Galvanised steel:** In order to be as long-lasting and durable as possible, the structure should be made from galvanised steel.

- **Sustainable lighting:** Using LED lights allows additional hours of play, while reducing electricity costs and keeping energy consumption extremely low. The light should only shine on the pitch and not further into the neighbourhood, to prevent light pollution.
- **Solar panels:** While more costly to install, solar panels are another option for generating sustainable energy to power the lighting for mini-pitches.
- **Delivery and installation time:** Lead time for the delivery of a mini-pitch is around six to eight weeks. Shipping to Europe takes around four weeks. Once materials arrive, it takes only two or three days to install a mini-pitch, while adding turf may take an extra week. In total, a mini-pitch project takes around three months to complete.
- **Costs:** A mini-pitch project will cost around 100,009 EUR depending on the degree of customisation of the design. Signage can be a good way to highlight clubs, brands and partners in a cost-efficient way.
- **Assembly by volunteers:** Musco Lighting provides instructions and videos to explain how to assemble and install a mini-pitch. A project manager is on site to direct volunteers from the local community – it makes a great community engagement activity!
- **Maintenance:** Community maintenance primarily requires keeping the surface of the mini-pitch clean and free from debris. There is a 10-year warranty on the galvanized steel structure and lighting, while the surface has a separate warranty.

PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDRAISING

A mini-pitch project is generally a partnership between a local community and a football club. The initiative to create a mini-pitch can be taken by the club itself, a football foundation or by a city/town, school or park directly. Funding such a project could also be in partnership with a charity, community centre or local council.

Examples of fundraising in Europe

Belgian Red Courts (see page 14) have, until recently, been using funding and grants from other projects. Now, Belgian cities are taking part in the projects and providing additional funding. Currently, Belgian Red Courts have 40 plans, and are considering where it makes most sense to locate the mini-pitches in collaboration with UEFA and the municipalities.

With the objective of renewing two soccer fields in Germany, Werder Bremen collected €55,000 through various fundraising campaigns. One of these, MatchWornShirt, generated new income and a new funding model by auctioning off the match-worn and autographed shirts of the entire squad. MatchWornShirt

works via real-time auctions, beginning at kick-off for a specific game and running until the closure of the auction four days later. The auction enables fans to place bids on the shirt of their favourite player, and creates a new and interactive fan experience inside and outside the stadium. The platform is designed to create a perfect user experience on every device to make sure that fans can place bids at the click of a button, regardless of where they are.

Examples of fundraising in the US

The U.S. soccer Foundation, in partnership with one of its biggest corporate partners, Target, installed 10 mini-pitches in Texas. Hypermarket chain Target funded the pitch, while the U.S. soccer Foundation found the location and guided the process.

Kick it Forward is a small non-profit based in Des Moines, Iowa. Musco Lighting brought partners together to carry out fundraising and encourage donations. As a result, Kick It Forward was able to deliver 20 mini-pitch projects in Iowa.



CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Like any project, installing a mini-pitch or sports playground is not without its challenges and pitfalls. Some of the most common to be aware of include:

- **Bureaucracy:** A project like this generally has multiple stakeholders, all of whom need to give their input and approval. It's important to leave plenty of time in the process for this, as it can be challenging in European cities in particular. Not every city council may be open to the idea, and there may be frustrations that one neighbourhood is benefiting from the project while another isn't.
- **Noise and light pollution:** In the evenings, a mini-pitch has floodlighting to enable people to play all year round. Playing sports generally causes noise as well. These factors need to be taken into account when deciding where to locate a mini-pitch and how to set up the lighting.
- **Hooliganism:** Not everyone in the community has positive associations with football. Neighbouring residents, for example, may see football fans and players as hooligans. There's work to be done to win hearts and minds of everyone in the community before building a pitch.
- **Vandalism:** Vandalism can be a valid concern due to club rivalries – in Bruges, for example, there are two large rival football clubs. In these cases, the goal is to create a sense of shared ownership: when a mini-pitch belongs to a community, it's less likely to be vandalised. You might also decide not to brand the mini-pitch according to club but according to city.
- **Upkeep:** In order for a mini-pitch to be used in the way it's designed to be, a certain amount of upkeep and maintenance is required. It's important to set out clearly which party is responsible for this, to avoid the pitch falling into disrepair.
- **Communication:** As with any project, communication is key. Gaining buy-in upfront, discussing plans with other local football clubs, getting the right permissions from the municipality – all of these steps can be challenging, but are crucial to the overall success of the project.



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BEST PRACTICES IN EUROPE

The mini-pitches concept has been implemented across Europe, including in Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. This section of the practitioner's guide looks at some examples of best practices.

NAC BREDA MAATSCHAPPELIJK COURTS

NAC Maatschappelijk works towards a society characterised by a healthy lifestyle, energetic living environment, opportunities for talent development and mutual respect. They accomplish their mission by implementing a variety of sports-based community and social projects.

To make a positive impact on recreational participation, giving more players across all grassroots categories the opportunity to play, NAC Breda initiated a project to construct 13 mini-pitches in Breda and its surroundings in collaboration with the municipality. Although NAC Breda was committed to the construction of new, high-quality playing facilities in Breda, the implementation was in the hands of the municipality. They were the owner of the playing fields and therefore ultimately responsible for the pitches' construction.

NAC Breda brought together as many interested parties as possible – including residents, neighbourhoods, village councils, so-

cial organisations and various commercial parties. The success of a mini-pitch depends in part on the support base in the neighbourhood. To ensure this support right from the start, NAC Breda involved the residents and users in the creation of the pitches, not only by listening to their wishes, but also by ensuring that both parties were committed to the project.

After completion, it's important that social organisations, schools, sports clubs and residents know about the possibilities of the pitch. Sport organisations can play a pioneering role here, organising various regular events and activities. For example, the NAC Street League and NAC Junior Street League organise their matches on the pitches, while other school outdoor gym lessons and after-school activities are also held there. Amateur football, hockey, handball, basketball, tennis, volleyball or badminton clubs in the neighbourhood can also use the facilities.



NIKE GRIND COURT AND N17 ARENA, TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

Tottenham Hotspur is an English professional football club, based in London and competing in the Premier League. In 2021, the club unveiled a new community space and talent identification centre on the campus of Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. The Nike Grind court was built together with Musco to enable talented young male and female footballers from the area to access a local training facility that provides a pathway through to elite level, right on their doorstep.

Local primary schools can select gifted students aged 6-11 to be put forward to take part in a six-week programme delivered by the club's global football coaches, with the opportunity to progress to Academy Development Centre sessions that also take place at the N17 Arena.

The Nike Grind court, meanwhile, is accessible to the local community Monday through Friday with time-tabled, free sporting activities. These include:

- After-school multi-sports for young people aged 8-18;
- Fitness, exercise and weight management sessions for local residents;
- Walking football sessions for older people;
- Disability sports provision.

NIKE GRIND COURT AND N17 ARENA TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR



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BELGIAN RED COURTS

The Belgian Red Courts are an initiative of the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) in collaboration with the Belgian Red Devils and Red Flames, their men's and women's national football teams. The RBFA has set themselves the task of renovating around 40 courts over the coming years and turning them into Red Courts.

The courts were initially built in 2005-2006 in cooperation with UEFA and are now being renovated. The former and current national team players of Belgium act as ambassadors, giving them a legacy as well as using their social influence to boost the project.

The project focuses on football to promote local social cohesion among young people through an inclusive and empowering approach, while making football accessible for everyone. The Belgian Red Courts are often located in urban environments, next to deprived neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, the project aims to create a strong local connection between the municipalities, local organisations, schools, football clubs, partners from the RBFA and expert partners. The Belgian Red Courts will become the platform for any local organisation doing meaningful work in term of social inclusion.

The project has three pillars:

1. Renovation of 40 football courts: Each court will be linked to a (former) Belgian Red Devils or Flames player, someone who has made a positive impact in Belgian football, in order to increase the popularity of the court as well as participation. For example, the player may have been born in the city or played for a local professional or amateur club. The first Red Court, officially opened by the RBFA, was the court in Lier, with Jan Ceulemans – a citizen of honour for the city – as ambassador.

2. Educational programmes: The Belgian Red Courts will implement educational football programmes around several themes – inclusion, ethics, health and the environment – and train Court Coaches to lead a weekly programme. Every court will have one Court Coordinator (working for the municipality) and two Court Coaches (one female and one male, between 16 and 26 years old) functioning as youth ambassadors. Both coordinators and coaches will receive training

from the RBFA in their national training centre, on how to attract boys and girls equally, how to make gender-neutral training sessions, and how to provide basic football coaching skills. The Belgian Red Courts Programme, a project by the Hannah Arendt Institute and the VUB, helps youngsters develop themselves in various competences and life skills.

3. National football tournament: In 2023, they will organize the first Belgian Red Courts Cup, a national football tournament. Various football disciplines will feature: youth football, disability football, walking football, girls' football, refugees and asylum-seekers football, and more. Inclusion is one of the top priorities of the tournament, in which players with and without disabilities will play together.



BOLZPLATZ PROJECT BY WERDER BREMEN

German sports association Werder Bremen was the first club in the Bundesliga to combine professional football with social commitment in 2002. The club's Community and Social Responsibility Management department has been in place since 2008, with 12 employees working with 320 partner organisations on 20 projects, including on issues like the integration of migrants and refugees.

Werder Bremen offers open soccer programs for children and young people on 9 soccer fields in Bremen . In 2021, around €55,000 was raised through a campaign by Werder Bremen to renovate two football pitches. In doing so, Werder Bremen aims to counteract several social problems. On the one hand, the pitches are intended to enable children and young people from deprived neighbourhoods to participate in sports every day. Children from different nationalities and backgrounds come together and learn to get along with each other. On the other hand, only one in two children in Germany is sufficiently active, while one in eight school beginners is overweight. And sports clubs are also losing more and more members or disappearing altogether.

Since the renovation of the courts in which Werder was involved, more children participate in the programs and use the courts for recreational sports. In addition, there is a kind of chain reaction. As more children are active on the court, more are attracted, which leads to adults and uninvolved people stopping in front of the court and watching the scenery, giving a simple training a certain event character.

President and CEO Dr. Hubertus Hess-Grunewald emphasises the importance of the project: "It is our social responsibility to do something about the lack of physical activity among children and young people and to take action."



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BEST PRACTICES IN THE U.S. DEVELOPED BY MUSCO

The mini-pitches concept has been widely implemented by Musco Lighting across the United States. This section of the practitioner's guide looks at some examples of best practices on the other side of the Atlantic.

BLACK PLAYERS FOR CHANGE AND BLACK WOMEN'S PLAYER COLLECTIVE

Musco Lighting has a partnership with Black Players for Change (BPC) and Black Women's Player Collective (BWPC), which are groups of black football athletes: MLS players on the men's side, NWLS players on the women's side.

After the George Floyd murder, Musco Lighting – together with U.S. soccer Foundation, Adidas, Black Players for Change and Black Women's Player Collective – built 18 new mini-pitches to provide under-served communities access to innovative play spaces and evidence-based soccer programs that instil hope, foster well-being, and help young people achieve their fullest potential. According to Active Living Research, one study found that more than 70% of African American and Hispanic neighbourhoods did not have any recreational facilities. In comparison, only 38% of white neighbourhoods lacked recreational facilities. Furthermore, only about one-third of Black and Hispanic children aged 6-12 play sports on a regular basis, according to Aspen Institute Project Play's State of Play,

The mini-pitches were installed in the hometowns of the board members and players, in the hope that they will go back to do clinics and engage with their communities. The initiative is part of BPC and BWPC's efforts to ensure the next generation of Black players have a voice, leadership opportunities and an equitable stake in the game.



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U.S. SOCCER FOUNDATION

Since being founded in 1994, the U.S. Soccer Foundation has established programmes such as “Safe places to play mini-pitches” and “Soccer for Success” to help children embrace an active and healthy lifestyle while nurturing their personal growth beyond sports.

The Foundation teamed up with Target to install 100 outdoor mini-pitches across the US in its mission to improve lives and communities, ensuring that every child has a safe place to play in their neighbourhood. Their aim is to create 1,000 new mini-pitches by 2026.

In addition, they manage Soccer for Success, a free after-school programme, with the aim of helping children establish healthy habits and develop critical life skills through coach-mentors and community engagement. Soccer for Success focuses on three main pillars:

1. **Healthy living:** Kids attend Soccer for Success after school three times a week throughout the academic year. Participants learn about eating right and other ways to stay healthy, and gain important decision-making and relationship skills from their interactions with coach-mentors and peers.
2. **Mentorship:** Soccer for Success coaches are also mentors. They teach kids the fundamentals of football, but also strive to help children build confidence and recognise the value of hard work, teamwork and persistence in achieving personal goals.
3. **Community focus:** The lessons Soccer for Success teach don't stop on the field. Coach-mentors meet with families regularly to educate parents and guardians about how to embrace an active and healthy lifestyle and nurture their child's personal growth.

Health results

During the 2013–2014 academic year, Healthy Networks Design & Research conducted a nationwide independent evaluation of Soccer for Success to measure its health impact. The study compared the change in health among Soccer for Success participants and non-participants from the same communities. At the conclusion of the study, Soccer for Success participants showed significantly



better health results compared to non-participants when it came to improvements in Body Mass Index (BMI), aerobic capacity and reduction in waist circumference.

Similar health outcomes, especially among children who are categorised as overweight or obese when they enter the program, were seen seasonally with each Soccer for Success programme: 83% of children who are categorised as overweight or obese were improving or curbing an unhealthy BMI and/or aerobic capacity trend by participating. In addition, the Foundation saw improvements in nutrition comprehension and healthy habits among participants.

Youth development results

During the 2014–2015 academic year, American Institutes for Research (AIR) evaluated the youth development and mentorship impact of Soccer for Success, by measuring life skills development among participants and their relationships with coach-mentors. Based on numerous site visits, focus groups, interviews and survey results, AIR determined that Soccer for Success is an effective group mentoring programme, and meets the key benchmarks outlined by MENTOR. The U.S. soccer Foundation also discovered that Soccer for Success can be an effective tool to discourage gang involvement and prevent juvenile delinquency.

SUGGESTED FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES TO IMPLEMENT IN PLAYGROUNDS

Having installed a mini-pitch or playground, there are several football programmes that can be implemented in order to more fully reach the social goals of the project. Here, you can read about four examples of these.

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

The Community Champions League is a social street football competition organised locally in various European countries. Participating teams can earn more points through fair play, equitable support and volunteering in community activities than by winning their street football matches.

The aim of the programme, funded by Erasmus+ and UEFA Foundation, is to promote social cohesion, education and volunteering through sport. The Community Champions League provides an opportunity for people from different cultures to build relationships and friendships while breaking down barriers, by preventing violence, racism and intolerance. The Community Champions League project focuses on the key element of “cultural understanding” to generate and emphasize mutual respect while building trust and strong relationships among participants.

The target group is boys and girls aged 8-16. Fair play, respect and tolerance are the values that are spread throughout the competitions and community activities organised by the participating

clubs. The local Community Champions Leagues bring together youth from different backgrounds in the same neighbourhood to compete as a team against their peers from other neighbourhoods in the city to become the Community Champions of their city. These city-wide competitions lead to social cohesion and teach the participants valuable life skills.



WELCOME THROUGH FOOTBALL

The Welcome through Football methodology focuses on the social inclusion and employability of newly arrived young migrants and refugees. To this end, the activities aim to improve the quality of youth work and intercultural dialogue, raise awareness and increase acceptance of diversity in society. The project also builds the capacity of football coaches and youth workers, helping them to develop and share effective methods for reaching out to the marginalised target group and preventing racism and intolerance. The project aims to empower vulnerable and marginalised young people and ease their transition to adulthood, with a particular focus on integration into the labour market, improving active citizenship, reducing social exclusion and promoting the social autonomy of young migrants and refugees in their new home. To this end, the project aims to encourage volunteering among the refugee and migrant population.

The project activities are organised into three stages, which offer participants many opportunities to contribute to their own development, their community and the project itself:

1. **Socialisation to sports:** Various football activities are offered for young refugees of both sexes, taking into account any special needs, such as language skills or trauma. Sports activities enable the participants to relieve stress, cope with trauma and learn a new language. They take part in activities, but do not have any responsibilities other than their own personal development.

2. **Socialisation in sports:** Participants work on team structure and are given more responsibility. They also have the opportunity to engage in activities outside the sports training sessions. They are introduced to a grassroots club where they discover the importance of volunteering to ensure the sustainability of such clubs. Cooperation with local schools and NGOs provides them with the opportunity to develop themselves further, participate in regular sports training and matches, and take part in a wide variety of volunteering activities.

3. **Socialisation through sports:** Participants focus on the skills they have acquired, with a view to qualifying for further education in and outside of sports. They have the opportunity to do short internships in local businesses, receive additional language training, and develop important employability and life skills.



Welcome
through football



WALKING FOOTBALL

The Walking Football League aims to deliver health-enhancing physical activity to people over the age of 50 years old, as well as providing opportunities to increase social inclusion levels, allowing them to lead physically and socially active lifestyles. The project aims to re-energise older people, particularly those in isolated positions in society, and encourage them to get back into exercise for their physical health and establish friendships for mental health.

Walking Football is a variation of football in which players do not run. Players are not allowed to make sliding tackles or make physical contact with other participants. Furthermore, the ball cannot be played above waist-height. These alterations are designed to make the game slower and more suitable to the participants' age and ability, and to prevent injuries.

A key aspect of this project is the focus on social inclusion and interaction. The opportunities for social interaction are not limited

to the football pitch but extend after playing in the "Extra Time" aspect of the project. After participating in the Walking Football training session, opportunities are provided for participants to sit together and have lunch, coffee or snacks while interacting with each other. Extending the time available to socialise by providing food and drinks helps improve the overall enjoyment and satisfaction of the participants and increases their desire to participate for longer, subsequently improving the sustainability of the project and improving participants' overall health and well-being.

The Walking Football League will further develop Walking Football as a sustainable sport in Europe and raise the profile of the game. It will act as an incentive for other clubs outside the project consortium to start with new teams and to participate in structured games at local, national and international levels.



EUROPEAN
WALKING
FOOTBALL
LEAGUE



PLAYGROUNDS

EXCELSIOR STREET SOCCER

The Excelsior Street Soccer project focuses on increasing sports participation and on the training/improvement of civic skills. Football is played every school week a playground in Schuttersveld, the Netherlands. With Excelsior facilitating the target group: children in secondary education, aged 12-16. The children are encouraged to think about the content of the activities, so that choices are made more consciously with support from the group.

The Excelsior Street League is a street football competition that focuses on improving liveability through (street) football. The Excelsior Street League is carried out on Friday afternoons, after school on various playground/football pitches in Rotterdam. The league is divided into two age categories:

1. Excelsior Street League Young is for children from primary school groups in the category 10-12 years.
2. Excelsior Street League Old is for youngsters from the age group of 12-16 years of secondary school.

But the Excelsior Street League is more than just football:

- **Matches/tournaments:** By choosing a football pitch in the neighbourhood as the venue, matches are played every week. Excelsior Street League tournaments are also organised. Matches and tournaments earn match points and social points. More social points are earned than match points.
- **Contribution to the neighbourhood:** Participants earn extra points with their team by contributing to the neighbourhood. Actions for the elderly, organising a tournament for the younger children in the neighbourhood, and many other activities are eligible.
- **Workshops:** Before each school holiday, the Excelsior Street League organises a workshop focusing on a social theme for the teams.



MORE THAN FOOTBALL AWARD

The More than Football Award was introduced by EFDN to honour the best social initiatives in Europe delivered by a European club, league or football association, and to increase the visibility of the positive impact football has on society. It was first awarded at the 13th EFDN Conference held in Barcelona in 2019.

The winner of the 2022 More than Football Award, powered by Musco Lighting, will not only receive recognition for having implemented the most innovative and impactful Community and Social Responsibility programme in European football, but they will also win a complete Mini-Pitch System™ modular sports solution. The club-branded mini-pitch will be developed in partnership between the winning organisation, EFDN and Musco Lighting.

There are several criteria for the award. To be eligible, the project must:

- Be promoted by the club, league or football association during the More than Football Action Weeks;
- Be delivered by the club, league or football association and cannot be an external initiative that is supported by the club, league or football association;
- Have a proven positive impact in the community;
- Be replicable by different sized clubs, leagues and football associations in Europe;
- Be initiated by an EFDN member.

Several winners of the More than Football Award have successfully gone on to create mini-pitches in their communities. The following two pages outline a couple of examples.



TOGETHER WE ARE #Morethanfootball

THE BEAR AND HIS SCARF CHILDREN'S STORY BY CLUB BRUGGE

Club Brugge Foundation won the More than Football Award 2020 for *The Bear and his Scarf*, a children's bedtime story about respect, values and principles targeted at both children and parents. This book features Daddy Bear and Baby Bear, Club Brugge's mascots, who go to a football game together for the first time and meet lots of mascots from other Belgian first division football teams. All the mascots wear a scarf in the colours of their team. The animals think these colours are what distinguish them from each other. But the more the animals talk to each other, the more it becomes apparent that they have much more in common than initially thought.

By publishing and sharing this book, Club Brugge aimed to promote respect for all supporters, players, referees and other parties involved, no matter what colours these people prefer. The club made a clear and powerful stand against hooliganism, racism, abuse, discrimination and disrespect in the sport.

After several discussions with local authorities about building the mini-pitch, in September 2022 the More than Football pitch was completed and opened for use in Bruges. Club Brugge Foundation intends the pitch to be an asset for the people of Bruges, making sure more children get the opportunity to play football.





THE BIG HEARTS SUPPORTERS BY BIG HEARTS COMMUNITY TRUST

The Big Hearts Supporters initiative is the first of its kind in Scottish football, enabling any Hearts fans to get involved with their charity in a manner that suits them. The volunteering programme seeks to use the time, skills and expertise of Big Hearts Supporters to make a significant difference to the most vulnerable people within their community. Every year, over 240 supporters volunteer across the community; in the past 12 months, they have volunteered over 4,800 hours to support groups who need help the most.

Craig Wilson, General Manager of the Community Trust, has been working towards implementing the pitch in the correct place within the community: “The option of a location close to our stadium is the one we've explored most. There's already a pitch there. It's connected with the community, and it would be in the club's

boundary. The land itself is actually owned by local business, but I don't think of that as being a problem – they've been really supportive.”

There are, however, a couple of factors to consider in terms of access and making sure that the mini-pitch is as accessible to as many people as possible, and that local residents are comfortable with the pitch being there.

Craig continues: “We could perform some of our school projects or after-school projects at the pitch once it's installed, which is quite exciting! It's also a huge advantage to have a facility that comes with lights and the possibility that comes along with that. It will give our Trust many opportunities to deliver a wide range of activities to our local community.”

THE BIG HEARTS SUPPORTERS

BY BIG HEARTS COMMUNITY TRUST





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