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THE VISION: The Play for Fun, Learn for LIFE Program

PLAY SOCCER Nonprofit International (PSNI) supports the health, education, physical and socio-economic development of children and youth, using the world's most popular sport as a purposeful recreational vehicle to develop them as players who love the game, have the knowledge and life skills to lead healthy productive lives, and engage through the sport as agents of positive change in their communities. The vision of what sport can accomplish was recently articulated by Mr. Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee, when the UN established April 6 as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. He said: "The true worth of sport is determined not by words on paper, but by how sport is practiced. Stripped of its values, sport is combat by another name. Sport with values is a gateway to cultural understanding, education, health and economic and social development. We have seen the true worth of sport and physical activity many times. It helps young people learn the value of self-discipline and goal-setting. It builds self-confidence. It defies gender stereotypes. It provides an alternative to conflict and delinquency. It can bring hope and a sense of purpose to refugees, impoverished communities and other people in need. It helps keep young people in school, **it brings health.**"

The vision to "bring health," as broadly defined by Mr. Rogge, is what PSNI aims to accomplish through its core program, Play for Fun, Learn for Life. The program derives from the intrinsic value of soccer/football itself: its inclusive appeal to all age groups and populations; its recreational use as a low cost, easily played and widely enjoyed sport; its positive contribution to wellbeing and physical development; the social engagement and values it promotes; the educational opportunities it affords to teach health and social life skills; and its potential to prevent the chronic non-communicable diseases that impact on productive lives and socio-economic development.

PSNI, a nonprofit USA organization without political or religious affiliation has 501(c) 3 tax-exempt status and is recognized with Consultative Status by the United Nations. Incorporated in New Jersey in 1999, its award winning core program has been implemented in Africa since 2001 and in the USA since 2012 through a PSNI Network of affiliated PLAY SOCCER organizations. The program is recognized through Football for Hope, FIFA's corporate social responsibility program in various countries, and in Ghana, with a Football for Hope Centre, a 2010 World Cup Legacy, through its Network affiliate, PLAY SOCCER Ghana.

In May 2013, PSNI in partnership with the Santa Monica Sports Medicine Foundation, a FIFA Medical Center of Excellence in the USA, held a Forum hosted at the LA84 Foundation. The Forum drew on the participation of experts to explore the health, social, medical and physical education content that could be incorporated into coaching education. Recommendations from these experts, including preventive techniques to avoid injuries, have been incorporated into the PSNI curriculum, which was revised in 2013 for 2014 implementation.

WHAT is the PLAY for FUN, LEARN for LIFE program?

Play for Fun, Learn for Life is a replicable and scalable sport for development program open to children regardless of skill, through community based organizations. The program encourages equal participation of both girls and boys, generally following FIFA guidelines for co-ed play. The program is structured through physical activities that integrate soccer, health and social content, all taught through activity-based sessions on the soccer pitch. It starts with young children to encourage early childhood development and to empower children for their lifetime through education, physical wellbeing and social engagement. In addition to using exercise science to aid physical development and player skill, Play for Fun, Learn for Life aims to provide early opportunity to learn lifelong habits that build healthier and productive individuals. Acquiring skills while having fun is at the heart of this recreational, educational program. The program can be implemented on its own, or included as part of competitive league training and structure. It aims particularly at the 5-10 year age group, but many communities include children up to age 15.

Originally designed for severely underserved communities in Africa, the program usually uses available community facilities and does not own or construct its own, except in Ghana where it proudly hosts the FIFA Football for Hope Centre and field facility.

The program relies heavily on volunteerism and civic service for several reasons: to maintain a low cost structure, to develop youth leadership, and to engage communities. The involvement and training of volunteer instructors, locally recruited ---male and female, primarily young adults---is an important educational investment that adds significant program impact. It builds the sport and contributes to healthy community environments by encouraging the wellbeing and health of these young adults, providing experience and credentials to further vocational and employment opportunities and developing their basic skills and leadership as agents of change., particularly in the area of community health

Collaboration with other organizations adds further opportunity to “bring health” through sport within the community. Collaborating to add value offers enormous possibilities - health and social services, academic, cultural, scientific, artistic, as well as other sports - to maximize the efficient use of community resources, multiply benefits, and to lay the foundation for sustainable programming and community development.

What is the curriculum of the PLAY for FUN, LEARN for LIFE program and how is it implemented?

The core curriculum has three (3) main components and areas of skills and knowledge: soccer, health, social. These are taught through twice weekly sessions that are planned to include both free play and the curriculum. Aiming to address the “whole child” with physical as well as cognitive and social learning objectives, the activities incorporate basic movements associated with loco-motor and bio-mechanical techniques for appropriate physical development and cardio-vascular health..

The curriculum is delivered through three separate modules, each approximately 12-15 weeks, which can be implemented sequentially----- or limited, to only Module 1. In addition to the three core components, the curriculum encourages language arts and math through adjunct activities.

Please refer to the attached documents: Core Curriculum Components, The Guide for the schedule of Module 1, and the introduction to the Activities Manual which provides a further program overview.

What Human Development and Health Principles Underpin the Program Vision?

“Designed to Move”, a 2012 study prepared by NIKE, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, noted that “the extent to which human capital is developed and strengthened serves as an indicator of a healthy economy” and that “physical activity accelerates the development of many dimensions of human capital in a unique, comprehensive way.”

The study explains that “the period between infancy and adolescence also represents the time when the most fundamental motor skills are developed. These are critical and foundational movement skills that must be developed during this phase as they are the building blocks of all later physical activity.” This is also a period of critical brain development that has impact on the rest of one’s life.

For children that go on to become professional athletes as well as those who do not, development and lifelong benefits can be positively impacted by appropriate physical activity, by learning the critically important motor and cognitive skills through recreational involvement. The benefits of recreational exercise and sport participation provide these benefits to all participants and should be understood in this context. The holistic approach to develop human capital can add value to all individuals, including the development of the competitive and potentially professional athlete and the sport of soccer as an industry.

In terms of health and other physical development principles, a 2007 Danish study by Dr. Peter Krstrup of Copenhagen University in Denmark specifically highlighted the positive effects of soccer’s characteristic combination of slower and faster periods of movement with frequent sprints, benefiting not only the cardiovascular system, but also boosting muscle development and fat reduction. "Football (soccer) is a great deal more than merely a popular team sport - it is extremely valuable in helping us maintain our health," Dr. Krstrup summarized. “And as a general rule, the risks involved in physical activity for a recreational footballer represent far less of a danger than the much greater threat posed by lack of exercise.”

Scientific studies have shown that the game’s specific activity pattern with the permanent change between high, moderate and low intensity is highly effective in reducing cardiovascular risk factors and overweight/obesity, more than other promoted activities such as running. Importantly, these beneficial effects occur with playing on a leisure time base a few times a week. Other scientific articles in *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports* reported that regular participation in soccer increases both bone mass and bone density, causes a significant improvement in standing postural balance and improves muscle strength. Together, these effects reduce the risk of falls and bone fractures.

The game is a powerful tool to promote self- responsibility in health care and as a team sport to develop community skills. The sport is fun and can be a low cost and effective vehicle for community recreation in various types of spaces and fields. It is enjoyed by players of all age groups, gender and social background. It does not require high level skills to be enjoyable and excludes no one. Demands on facilities and equipment are minimal as balls and goals are improvised in the thousands every day all over the world.

How can a recreational soccer/football and non-formal educational program impact health, well-being and socio-economic development?

Health includes more than the provision of medical treatment, timely treatment and acute illness intervention. Skilled players and successful teams require excellent health if they are to be successful in the global sports industry. The prevention of disease is in part an educational process that must begin early in life. Education is essential, particularly in early childhood, to teach and develop practical knowledge, lifelong skills and habits that prevent both communicable and non-communicable disease, including exercise as an integral part of daily life. Regular physical exercise, what is called an active lifestyle, plays an invaluable cost effective role in early intervention and disease prevention.

Health is fundamental to productive employment and economic activity, not only for professional athletes. Communities, schools and governments at all levels need inexpensive and effective tools to respond to health challenges, and to engage in prevention and education which are effective, and also less costly than medical interventions. Health services that have been focused on acute disease are poorly prepared for the very different demands of chronic disease care. Governments and municipalities face huge financial burdens to provide this chronic health care.

Inadequate physical fitness is regarded as a critical determinant of mortality, more important than obesity, hypertension, diabetes, or smoking. In the developing world, the more visible acute infectious and communicable diseases or early childhood or HIV /AIDS still cause high death tolls, but the growing epidemic of chronic non-communicable disease exists in both developing and developed countries. The rapidly growing global burden of chronic diseases of lifestyle is particularly threatening to low and middle-income populations, undermining their economic development because those most affected are middle aged adults at the peak of their productive and economic activity. WHO estimates billions of dollars of lost income will result. Mainly caused by physical inactivity and poor diet, the chronic diseases have become a disease of the poor, hitting them at a younger age and in a more advanced stage.

Beyond their impact on these health issues, as a public good to improve social determinants of health, sport programs have been recognized as an important tool for the prevention of crime, juvenile delinquency, alcohol and substance abuse and other social maladies. By providing the appropriate venue for social inclusion and engagement as well as the individual social skills that can be acquired through sport, such as discipline, values, self- control, and sportsmanship, these adjunct activities provide important life skills. Recently, sport programs have added other kinds of social interventions and support resources such as mentoring, and academic after school tutoring, linking sport participation to school attendance and achievement. Though outside the sport itself, playing the sport is the attraction that draws participants to these adjunct activities. Sport can lead to community cohesion, to trust, teamwork and collaboration, and to positive relationships that bridge differences in race, disability, religious and other differences.