

Soccer Nights



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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BACKGROUND

Soccer Nights was started in 2008 by Vineyard Community Offerings at the Greater Boston Vineyard Church as a way to build unity in its immediate neighborhood of North Cambridge through celebrating a common interest in soccer. Since then, Soccer Nights has grown 8x larger (819%) with almost two dozen organizations working together to run six week-long summer evening soccer clinics in four different cities. Soccer Nights exists to promote athletic skill, leadership development, and citywide unity in neighborhoods throughout Greater Boston.

STAFFING

Soccer Nights is spearheaded by Vineyard Community Offerings at the Greater Boston Vineyard. Each site is run by a lead organization in partnership with multiple cross-sector sponsoring organizations. The planning and execution of program details at each site is carried out by a volunteer team supported by a small number of paid staff and interns. In each neighborhood where Soccer Nights occurs, the leadership team adapts programming to create a welcoming, friendly environment that fosters diverse and meaningful relationships in that community. For a complete breakdown of Soccer Nights' staffing structure, please see the chart on following page. [insert chart from executive report]

MISSION

Soccer Nights seeks to promote athletic skill, leadership development, and citywide unity in neighborhoods throughout Greater Boston.

PROGRAM GOALS

ATHLETIC SKILL

Participants receive instruction in the fundamentals of soccer (passing, dribbling, controlling, shooting) from a volunteer coaching staff. When crafting soccer curriculum, Soccer Nights staff members aim to introduce and reinforce the concepts of play, teamwork, and exercise in order to improve participants' physical activity and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Soccer Nights works to instill life skills and create opportunities for character-building and leadership development for its participants and volunteers by integrating principles of hard work, team building, service, goal-setting, and encouragement into its program through a comprehensive Values Curriculum, drafted annually around a particular theme.

CITYWIDE UNITY

Soccer Nights is designed to facilitate relationships and bring people from diverse backgrounds together. Soccer Nights adapts to each specific neighborhood location to create a welcoming, friendly environment that fosters diverse and meaningful relationships.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The Soccer Nights nightly program is comprised of the following nine key components:

1. **Registration & Check-In**
2. **Large Group Rally**
3. **Soccer skill demonstration**
4. **Soccer drills**
5. **Scrimmage**
6. **Leadership Development (Values) Curriculum**
7. **Soccer Nights Dance**
8. **Healthy snack option**
9. **Volunteer debrief**

Each site arranges these components to best fit its participant and volunteer base. All sites divide participants into specific, age-based divisions led by Division Leaders. Within each division, participants are assigned to specific teams, ideally comprised of 7-10 participants, on which they will remain for the duration of the week. Within teams, Coaches and Assistant Coaches lead participants through the nightly soccer drills, scrimmages, and Leadership Development (Values) Curriculum.

PROGRAM VALUES

SOCCER

Soccer Nights exists to catalyze a unified and engaged community through the game of soccer. *Why soccer?*, you might ask. *Couldn't you put on a community event centered around, say, kick ball, or perhaps food?* The answer is yes, we are certain we could (and often do). But there is something unique about soccer that speaks a sort of universal language across cultures that we think is pretty remarkable, and for this reason we've strived to be an excellent place for kids to play soccer. Soccer is the most played sport in the world, with more than 265 million people playing worldwide (*FIFA publication, 2006*).

Soccer is about utilizing as many people on the field as possible. One of the most vital skills a player can possess is vision, the ability to see one's teammates and to know when and how to utilize people, space, and time. We think this principle of creating space and utilizing the strengths of everyone is not only central to the game but reaches far beyond, and thus we work hard to embody it in every aspect of our program.

At Soccer Nights we love soccer for a few reasons. Firstly, because for most of us it has been a central and defining part of our story, helping shape who we are today. Secondly, as we have

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grown to care more and more about our community and continue to realize its rich diversity, we see soccer as an amazing vehicle by which we gather people from diverse backgrounds and develop the leadership skills necessary to improve our communities. Lastly, we care about kids and want to see the kids in our neighborhood thrive. Soccer is a unique means of teaching kids lessons in being healthy and active, being a part of a team, and most importantly, having fun and just being a kid. In sum, soccer is the best way we can accomplish all of the things we care about the most. It's really pretty awesome.

KIDS

At Soccer Nights we think kids are great. We think they are important members of our community. At Soccer Nights we want all kids who participate to know they are valued members of their teams, families, and communities, and that they have something unique to offer each of those spaces both on and off the field. We want kids to leave Soccer Nights not only better soccer players, but better friends, better brothers and sisters, better students, better neighbors. We want them to see and care for the people around them, and to take pride in who they are, where they came from, and where they're going. And most importantly, we want kids to leave Soccer Nights with smiles on their faces, having had one of the funnest weeks of summer. We've been fortunate to have worked with some awesome kids in our neighborhood, with 95 kids coming out to our first year of Soccer Nights in 2008 to an astounding 726 across four sites in 2011. It's a joy to watch both the amount of kids on our field grow *and* the actual kids themselves, as we've now known some of them for several years!

DIVERSITY

Soccer Nights truly embodies the diversity we so greatly value. Since the program's beginnings we've sought to be relationally-focused, seeking to develop life-giving relationships across the dividing lines of race, class, culture, and religion. Last year at our North Cambridge site alone our participants, parents, and volunteers represented more than 29 countries of origin, as well as many religions, races, and socioeconomic levels. "Everyone plays," a value we've upheld since the program's beginnings, truly shines through as we see people of so many different backgrounds coming together with their unique skills, experiences, and paradigms to make Soccer Nights happen. Furthermore, the free cost of the program ensures that it's accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic level.

COMMUNITY

At Soccer Nights we value celebrating and building community at all levels. All aspects of the program, from a family-friendly environment where families can participate together, to a curriculum focused on character values and community responsibility, to the many partnerships with local organizations, are centered on the importance of community. In just four years Soccer Nights has made remarkable strides at engaging all kinds of our community members with our program, from kids and families participating, to local churches and organizations providing funding and volunteers, to restaurants and businesses donating food, soccer equipment, and other goods to meet the needs of our program. Furthermore, we think the best community is created when it's centered on a specific place. For this reason, each Soccer Nights site focuses on its specific neighborhood. Our commitment to neighborhood-based programming means we believe the

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success of Soccer Nights for a particular neighborhood is directly tied to the strengths and dynamics of that neighborhood. Thus, planning and programming should result from and facilitate relationships with residents in that community.

SERVICE

Our dream is that with each year, as community buy-in to Soccer Nights increases, we would continue to create spaces for people to engage with each other and serve their community. We've seen amazing things happen in just 4 years – from a handful of people from a few churches and organizations coming together in 2008 to run the first Soccer Nights, to 396 people serving 4254 hours from more than 30 partnering organizations in 2011. Soccer Nights has become a strong example of serving the community in a fun, meaningful, and lasting way, and we continually strive to engage more and more people who are looking to serve.

LOVE

It's sung about and talked about all the time. But what if we tried for a week actually to embody and demonstrate this thing called love? We have big dreams that our neighborhood would be transformed by the powerful charge to love our neighbors as ourselves. We'd like to see a place where every person can feel safe, loved, and proud of where they live. But at a more basic level, we'd be happy if every child, parent, or volunteer who comes to Soccer Nights left feeling loved. We recognize that with the rich diversity of our neighborhood can come the tendency to disengage and only to care for those with whom we are most comfortable. Whatever our background may be, fighting that tendency and going beyond our comfort zones will bring us closer to building a thriving community. While we know this involves many more moving parts than just Soccer Nights, we're excited to see transformation already occur as a result of the program.