Three IYAF delegations representing Ghana, Sierra Leone and the United States participated in the 2014 « Mundial Futebol de Rua » in São Paulo, Brazil. Youth from over 20 countries arrived in São Paulo to take part in leadership workshops, team-building activities and a Street Soccer Tournament devoted to inclusion, human rights, collaboration and peaceful resolution to conflict.

The delegates represented youth-serving organizations from around the world dedicated to working in their respective countries to address exclusion, discrimination and violence. The collaboration took place from 1-12 July 2014 in public spaces like Ipiranga Avenue-Republic Square and the Largo de Batata Plaza.

Delegates spent 2 weeks together developing leadership skills and having continuous cultural exchanges as they learned, played, taught, and shared 24 hours a day in sites around the city and in the community centers which hosted the teams. Staying in community centers located in the heart of favelas around São Paulo meant that delegates made friends with favela neighbors.

The daily arts and cultural activities encouraged reflection about the event and helped delegates manage the intense experience on a personal level as well as with teammates.

Each day in Brazil closed with a cultural event which helped delegates process the immersion into a metropolis hosting an international sporting event and untangle the juxtaposition of extreme wealth and intense poverty in a city with the worst helicopter congestion in the world as the rich enjoy private helipads well removed from the struggles of daily life in favelas that cover São Paolo.

In this special edition newsletter, we share reflections of the young leaders, the history of the event, the paths that led them to São Paolo, and the lessons learned in Brazil.
The Street Soccer Movement: Some History

The Street Soccer Movement was born in Argentina as a strategy of social transformation some 20 years ago in response to the many crises that affect youth in Latin America. The movement spread beyond Latin America to effectively engage youth living in vulnerable situations. It has been used to address issues like violence, gang membership, discrimination and conflict resolution.

The Movement (www.movimientodefutbolcallejero.org) has mounted 5 Latin American Festivals (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, Uruguay) and participated in 2 World Cups in Germany and South Africa. In 2014, the Movement organized the Street Soccer World Cup in Sao Paolo with the Brazilian NGO Brazilian NGO Ação Educativa and the Argentinian non-profit FUDE. (www.fundacionfude.org.ar).

The Methodology

The participants set the rules to play by, acquire dialogue skills and a better understanding of positive values by experiencing them through the game. Girls and boys play in mixed teams in 3 periods (all teams must have an equal number of girls and boys) with a mediator to support them. During the first period, players sit in a circle and set the rules with the mediator facilitating the discussion. All players agree to abide by the 3 values of respect, solidarity and collaboration and then decide by consensus on additional rules regarding no violence, etc.

The second period is the game itself. The third period is a return to the mediation circle where both teams discuss if the rules were respected. Points are tallied for each team based on whether respect, solidarity and collaboration were maintained and for goals scored. Players talk about the game, resolve situations that arose on the field and celebrate a shared victory at the conclusion of the mediation.

-Lisa Solmirano
FUDE Director, Argentina

Besides the fun, the game teaches: tolerance, togetherness and respect for one another. Sitting after the game to iron out differences was great.

-Munaya Naanchene,
Delegate from Ghana

Welcoming Smiles and Shouts of “Ghana! Ghana!”

The Ghanaian team was a collaboration of Youth Network for Human Rights and Democracy (you-net) and Youth Advocates Ghana (YAG) through the support of IYAF.

When we arrived in the Butanta favela, teams from Chile and Pei, Brazil were already there. To our utmost surprise, both the Chilean and the Brazilian delegations were waiting in earnest for our arrival. Hence, the moment they saw our bus arrive, they surrounded it with broad welcoming smiles and shouts of “Ghana! Ghana!”

Ghana took fourth place in the tournament. Apart from making new friends, the youngsters acquired leadership skills, developed team-building skills, discipline and networking skills.

-Prosper Hoetu,
Ghana Team Coordinator
There Was Always a Lot of Joy on Our Fields in Sao Paolo

What is Street Soccer? And how can a soccer tournament promote world peace? These questions, and more, filled my mind while preparing to go to Brazil. As a competitive athlete, the idea of a friendly tournament without rules, (not to mention extra points for sportsmanship), seemed somewhat absurd. Will players be allowed to try? Will talented players be punished?

Throughout the tournament, however, my worries vanished. The games were still competitive, and everyone tried hard. The more games we played, the more I began to realize that the real purpose of the tournament had nothing to do with soccer.

Incredibly, this tournament resulted in bonding that I could never have imagined. Young adults from Ghana, Argentina, the United States, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Germany and many other nations used their common love for the game to get to know one another.

They didn't let the weight of competition drag them down.

Instead, the short street soccer games were friendly and fun. While the players took the games seriously, the tournament was marked by self-refereeing and solidarity. Teams were known for high-fiving their competitors and applauding great goals, even if they were scored by the opposing team.

These teams embraced the spirit of collaboration and cultural integration that the tournament represented. After being brought together for a common cause, the delegates from each nation managed to teach each other incredible amounts about their home countries, their cultures, and their personal stories.

Through this opportunity, I learned about traditional Paraguayan dances, growing up in poverty in Ghana, the complications of living in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and countless other cultural experiences. It turns out that street soccer taught me much more about the world than most books and experiences could, and for that I'm incredibly grateful.

-Isabel Albee
US Delegate

What do kids from all over the world have in common?

You guessed it – a love for soccer.

Thanks to IYAF, I was one of several young adults brought to Sao Paolo as part of the collaboration between Youth Advocate Programs and Humanity Helping Sudan Project to represent the US. As one of these lucky participants, I was unsure of what to expect.

I admit, at first I was skeptical. I was unconvinced that a few soccer games against strangers would breed unification. It seemed that the competitive nature of the game would overpower any cooperative end value.

And I was so glad I was wrong.

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-Turner Shaw, US Delegate
São Paolo Is a Long Way from Philly

“When I was 16 years old, I got into something that I knew would change my life but I didn't know in what way. It was my decision to make my negative fallout a positive uplift” says Ellana regarding her referral to Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) following a fight at school that resulted in her expulsion and involvement with probation.

“Ellana, like most delegates, was on an intense personal journey in São Paolo” says Diana Matteson, who led the U.S. delegation in Brazil. “There was a moment when she almost didn't go at all, but the support of the YAP team and the encouragement of her uncle, along with that special Ellana quality that makes her like no other, were the nudges she needed to get on the plane. I think I speak for all 300 people at the event when I say I'm so glad she did.”

Ellana introduced herself early on as a singer when a cultural night ended with an open mike and Ellana was first up on the stage to introduce delegates to the gospel genre of American music. On another night, the American delegation was tasked with presenting something about American culture to share. The group created “For Love of Country and Beyoncé” which began with Ellana doing a solo of the US National Anthem followed by the group joining her to sing and dance to a string of Beyoncé hits.

The US team came together as a family for two weeks, and the delegates remain close. This solidarity extended to other teams, volunteers, staff and neighbors from the favela. The U.S. team was one of a handful of teams that earned the maximum number of value points in every game played in the tournament. It was this same spirit of respect, solidarity and collaboration that made the event in São Paolo, so very far away from Philly, feel like home.

-As told to YAP Staff by Ellana Watson, US Delegate

Sierra Leone’s Bright Future-A Future Youth Will Create

In Sierra Leone, football is the biggest sport played, from our National Stadium to community fields and local street corners. When the opportunity came for Sierra Leone Youth Advocate Program (SLYAP) to participate in the Street Soccer World Cup, we saw this as an opportunity for our NGO to begin international dialogue through sports and to give the young adults in the program the opportunity to meet other youth within their age group and share experiences and, of course, play football.

Upon arriving in São Paolo, we were met by Josi, a volunteer who was always there to help us. We stayed in the Jaguare favela. In our dorm community, we were the only English-speaking delegation and had to cross cultural boundaries to communicate. On our first day, we met other teams and did a local community service project. On Day 2, we met all the other teams including the Ghana and US delegates who spoke English. The days ahead gave us the opportunity to learn about the Street Soccer methodology and how we can use it at home.

SLYAP was developed for Sierra Leonean youth who were meant to be the most devastated members of society after the 10 year war in Sierra Leone. SLYAP has created new programs for the youth in the areas of: education; mentoring; a non-violence campaign; physical fitness; life skills training; teenage pregnancy prevention; positive peer relationships, values and self-esteem development; and advocacy for the end of young girls being forced into marriage. With the goals of personal growth and community-building, these youth have the opportunity to now direct their own lives and be empowered to become productive contributors to Sierra Leone’s bright future—a future that the youth will create.

-Ajara Bomah, Sierra Leone Team Coordinator
The commitment of the local government, the participant organizations and a few corporate sponsors made this happen. This pool of partners made the event possible. The international media coverage highlighted the daily struggles of these young people and their triumphs. Since the event ended, participants have communicated an outpouring of joy, hope and new dreams to achieve... perhaps this is the greatest victory: to encourage the youth to keep dreaming and to keep fighting to achieve it.

-Lisa Solmirano, SSWC São Paolo Coordinator

It truly focused on cooperation and unity.

-Eric Prince, US Delegate

Welcome to our youngest street soccer player Sarah Marie Keister, born 12 Nov 2014. Congratulations, Ajara and Family!
The US delegation thanks the US Soccer Foundation, 4POINT4 and DC United/United for DC for its collaboration and equipment support.

One of the US delegates came back from Brazil so inspired that he has drawn up the mission statement and blueprint of his own non-profit.

-Dr. Robin Mama, IYAF Treasurer

This was a fantastic example of the global cooperation among our members in pursuit of amplifying youth voice and developing young leaders.

-Mike Bertrand, IYAF President

One of the things that impressed me the most and that resonates so strongly with the mission of IYAF is the recognition of organizations that may not receive support in their own country...in Brazil, the work was honored. New connections among like-minded organizations means greater solidarity and cooperation among the organizations which benefits everyone...beyond the 2 weeks in Brazil.

-Jeff Fleischer, IYAF Secretary

Our Mission

The International Youth Advocacy Federation is a multinational consortium of like-minded organizations and individuals that directly partners with young people, promotes family and community advocacy and assists vulnerable young people and their families to lead safe and productive lives in their communities. The IYAF maintains a dual focus on advocacy action and policy change.

LET’S WORK TOGETHER

www.advocacy4youth.org