Launching a ‘Soccer for Social Change’ Program;
A US Soccer Federation Certified Youth Club

By Mike Herman, President and Founder of the Compton United Soccer Club

Why Start a Club?
Soccer is alive and well in American urban areas, however the youth soccer opportunities in these neighborhoods typically are not sanctioned by US Soccer. This means players do not have access to all the US Soccer system offers including, college recruiting, important tournaments, Olympic Development Program (ODP), State and National Cups, clinics and international competition. While there are many factors for this, most have to do with economics. In the US, club soccer (the pathway to US Soccer) has become very expensive, thus leaving urban residents unable to pay for this privilege.

This is unfortunate especially for Hispanic youth, as soccer (futból) is a significant part of their culture. Most play soccer and even have a family tradition around the sport but few still have access to the benefits and opportunities provided by the US Soccer system.

There are many great ‘soccer for social change’ programs operating as after-school programs, soccer leagues, tutoring programs, etc., but few are actually sanctioned clubs. Running a club requires many resources and people, which makes it difficult to facilitate.

However, having a ‘soccer for social change’ youth soccer club in an urban neighborhood can be a catalyst for many positive changes with youth, their families and the community at large.

Step by Step
Here is a step-by-step approach. These are 15 (not-so-easy) steps to assist you in getting your urban club off the ground. Of course, your neighborhood and situation will require many unique solutions, so this is not an exact formula. This is meant to be a checklist of some general principles, tasks as resources to point you on your way.
1. Study and understand the needs in your neighborhood. If you live in your targeted area, this will be extremely beneficial to understanding the complexities of the community, youth needs, family situations, local political climates, schools, after-school opportunities, etc. You need to identify the key-people and networks that can help you to accomplish your mission.

2. Process and determine what social concern you believe a soccer club can help address: education, literacy, community infrastructure, health, youth/leadership development, HIV/AIDS, job readiness, unemployment, etc.

3. Develop the organization’s purpose. What will this organization/program/soccer club do that is not being done? Using this purpose, create a specific mission statement and vision. Make it as specific and narrow as possible.
   - Here is a great description from Wikipedia:

4. Create a business plan document. While this doesn’t need to be as detailed as a Fortune 500 company’s plan would be, it should give the reader (potential volunteer, donor, partner, etc.) the reason, overall vision, description and goals of your club.

5. Identify your US Youth Soccer State Association that administers and sanctions youth clubs for competitive play. Look up this website from the US Youth Soccer site:
   [http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/aboutus/StateAssociationDirectory.asp](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/aboutus/StateAssociationDirectory.asp) to determine your state association and learn their requirements to become sanctioned (non-profit status, certain number of teams, etc.)

6. Create (if not already acquired or under another’s umbrella) a 501(c)(3) status non-profit organization.
   - Here is the IRS site for Charities:
Here is a great ‘how to’ article from Wikihow.com:
http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-501c3-Nonprofit-Organization

The quickest and most simple way to file for a 501(c)(3) charity is to utilize an online service such as legalzoom.com. The cost for their assistance in filing is approximately $1500-$2000. This cost will vary depending on your state.

In this process you will need to set up a Board of Directors to help you administer the organization. One of the most often made mistakes are selecting people with influence, but without time to commit to the needs of your organization. Make sure your Board is committed AND has the time to commit.

- A good article on the overall picture of a board:
- A great website that will give you a lot of insight to the non-profit board:
  http://www.idealist.org/en/faqcat/3-1

7. Create a series of what is called ‘outcome measurements’. These are simply the ways you will know if you’re succeeding. Sometimes non profits get entire grants to hire someone to set these up and administer these measurements. But you need something in place right from the start. These are important for you to measure your success and also very important for foundations to determine whether or not to fund your program. If you have documentation of how well your organization is performing, you will be a successful soccer club.

Some possible outcome measurements may be attendance (attendance records), skill improvement over a period of time (skill assessments), improvement of grades (copies of report cards), player and parent testimonies, high school graduation percentage, decrease in red cards, etc.

- Here is a Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation:
  http://managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm
8. Set a budget. You need to figure out what your costs will be and what revenue you can expect. Initially this will be a flexible and evolving document! As you go along you will identify things you never before though of.
   - Here is a very good article on budgeting:

One of the biggest issues here is determining what you will charge for your players. You probably don’t want to charge nothing because you want your members to have ownership and also be motivated to always show up. However, you can easily out price players and families. This may be a trial and error situation or maybe you have an existing local model to look at.

9. Identify and secure a playing and practice field(s). This may be done later in the process but it is the first critical need of your club. Without a playing space nothing can happen. Be creative and think collaboratively: city parks, schools, local college, and private venues. It is easier to partner and possibly more beneficial for all parties in the long run. Partnerships also give your new organization credibility. A permanent home field will prove absolutely necessary to establish the stability an effective soccer club needs.

10. Identify, recruit and enlist volunteers. Since you’re launching a soccer club in an urban community, chances are you won’t have paid staff (at least not initially) so you will completely rely on volunteers. Remember to make the purpose and their roles as clear as possible. Job descriptions will be essential for this.
   - Here is a great outline for the job description process:
     [http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/jobdesc.htm](http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/jobdesc.htm)

Some of the key positions you need to think about immediately are: coaches, tutors, mentors, fundraisers, an accountant, marketing people, etc. If you
have already set up the board of directors for your 501(c)(3), keep them as directly involved in these roles as possible.

Once you have obtained and trained the volunteers, put systems in place to ensure simple and clear communication and remember to appreciate them as often as you can.

11. Decide what standards you will hold your players and parents to. Have each player sign an annual agreement listing the behaviors you expect from them, i.e. GPA level, respect for each other, fighting, etc. Do this with parents as well. A previously discussed and agreed upon arrangement will save lots of time and hassle in the future!

12. Begin recruiting players. More than likely, this will be one of the easiest steps in getting started.

13. Hold a players/parents meeting each season. Discuss yours and their expectations, requirements, hopes, etc. Be sure to lay the foundation of positive and clear communication.

14. Register in a league (also known as a gaming circuit) referred to you by your US Youth Soccer State Association. There are plenty of leagues around, make sure the one you enter is sanctioned. Maybe even start your own local league (requires a much larger number of teams).

15. You’ll probably need to raise some money! Your budget will determine what you need to raise each year (your expenses minus income equals your development goal).

You want to try to create as balanced a fund raising plan as possible, not too dependent on any one particular donor, sponsor or grant award. Strike a balance between individual donors, local businesses, corporate sponsors, in-kind donations (such as equipment or services you need) and grants.
There are literally thousands upon thousands of web resources, systems and references on the web for non-profit fund-raising. You’ll need to search to find resources that fit your particular needs. However, below are listed some of the more helpful tools:

- Grant info- [http://www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org)
- Grant listings- [https://www.nozasearch.com/](https://www.nozasearch.com/)
- Free online fundraisers- [http://www.chipin.com/](http://www.chipin.com/)
- Non profit resources- [http://www.idealista.org](http://www.idealista.org)
- Non profit tech assistance & resource listings- [http://home.techsoup.org/](http://home.techsoup.org/)
- Grants listings- [http://grantstation.com](http://grantstation.com) (pay but discounts possible through Techsoup)
- Event registration/ ticketing service- [http://www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)
- Non profit assistance- [http://www1.networkforgood.org](http://www1.networkforgood.org)

Don’t overlook online giving! Set up a free business Paypal account and tell your story on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Much can be done in getting your message and vision out using social media.

- [https://www.paypal.com](https://www.paypal.com)
- [http://www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
- [http://www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Additional resources:

- Urban Soccer Collaborative- [http://www.ussoccerfoundation.org/site/c.ipIQXOvFoG/b.5474295/k.7E3D/Urban_Soccer_Collaborative.htm](http://www.ussoccerfoundation.org/site/c.ipIQXOvFoG/b.5474295/k.7E3D/Urban_Soccer_Collaborative.htm)
- US Youth Soccer- [http://www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org)
Of course, there are more issues and steps than what are covered here. But hopefully this will provide a basic outline that you can use to launch your 'soccer for social change' US Youth Soccer Club!

Now get out and start your club!

About the Author:
Mike Herman is the President and Founder of the Compton United Soccer Club in Compton, CA.

Compton United Soccer Club was created to fill the absence of sanctioned, quality youth soccer programs in greater Compton area.

The Compton United Mission Statement:  
*Our Mission: Through the sport of soccer and the resources of US Soccer, develop a new generation of leaders who excel in all aspects of life: mentally, physically, socially, spiritually, and emotionally, to ultimately help develop our community into a model of social, economic and spiritual transformation.*

For more information see [www.comptonunited.org](http://www.comptonunited.org) or email Mike at mike.herman@comptonunited.org.