**SPORT – MORE THAN A GOLD MEDAL:**

**EMPOWERING AT-RISK YOUTH THROUGH SPORT EXCELLENCE PROGRAMS.** *PRESENTED AT THE 22-ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ECSS*

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Introduction

The benefits of sport-based intervention programs for the advancement of at-risk youth cannot be overstated (1).

The Model

*Sport – A Bridge to Education* (N.P.O) has developed a novel holistic sport excellence program that uses sports and the values upon which sports are founded, as a platform for self-empowerment of at-risk youth. The strength and uniqueness of the model is enhanced by the fact that it operates in Israel solely in villages for at-risk youth, in closed educational frameworks. Thus, it has the powernot only to influence the participants themselves but also other interfacing circles within the village. This model takes advantage of the duality existing in sport, being both a goal and a means of achieving a social change.

Our Goals

The main goal is to create a sense of competence and self-identification in our participants. Secondly, to minimize involvement in violence and increase school attendance.

Description of the Program

The program is operating in 6 villages for at-risk 12-18 years old youth. Our participants undergo intensive training and social enrichment that emphasize sport’s values: self-discipline, responsibility, setting and striving to achieve goals, dealing with failure and success– values that are integrated through training sessions. They are supported by sport nutritionist; a mental coach and they meet with leading figures that may serve as role-models for these youngsters.

Preliminary Achievements

Upon completion of third year of the program, our first graduates finished grade 12 with partial or full completion of the final exams. They were recruited to the army and serve in combat units, while our female graduates enroll in National Community Service or military service. Participants take part in sport events and tournaments and often win 1st- 3rd places. Standing on the podium is often their first positive experience and a sense of achievement.

Sport-Bridge to Education will further expand its activity aiming to provide sport as a platform for more children and adolescents on a national scale.

References

1. Caruso RJ. (2011). Socio-Econom, 40(5).

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