

Have Ball, Will Travel

Hey, how'd you get that soccer ball out here in the boonies?

By Mal Warwick

Walk into just about any village or any neighborhood, practically anywhere in the world, with a soccer ball under your arm, and it won't be long before children, who are clamoring to play, surround you.

If you're currently serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV), or have done so in the past, you're probably well aware of this. Soccer—or football, fútbol, or futebol, as it's otherwise called—is the world's game. Soccer looms so large all around the planet that its reach is effectively beyond the average American's comprehension: the “beautiful game” has literally several *billion* fans. A single soccer team (Manchester United) alone boasts nearly 700 million. American sports teams don't come even remotely close in the breadth of their appeal.

So, why doesn't every Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) arrive in country carrying a soccer ball?

The nearly indestructible soccer ball

Recognizing the goodwill value of carrying a soccer ball, and the demonstrated potential of soccer as a teaching tool, PCVs from a dozen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia turned to One World Futbol Project to obtain one to 480 of the company's unique, nearly indestructible soccer balls. The requests started coming in shortly after the project launched in 2010, and they've kept coming.

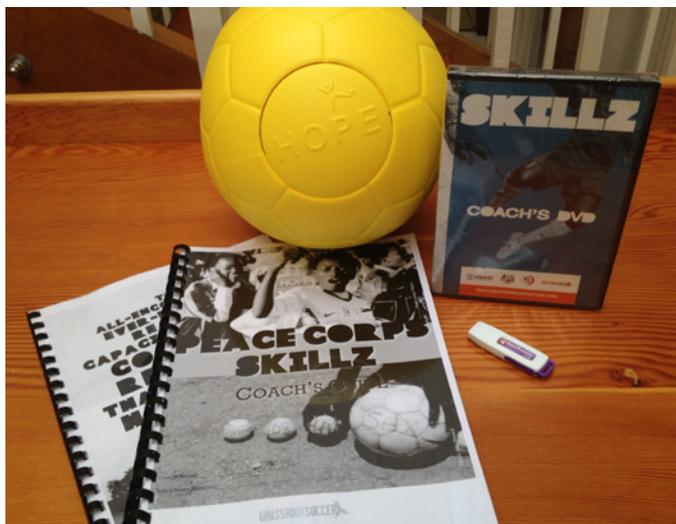
To date, three-year-old One World Futbol Project, a mission-based business based in Berkeley, Calif., has distributed more than 500,000 of its balls in 162 countries around the world, benefiting an estimated 15 million children and youth. Support from its founding sponsor, Chevrolet, has enabled the young company to distribute container-loads of at least 5,000 One World Futbols to government agencies, NGOs, schools,

orphanages, and faith-based organizations in each of more than 40 countries.

In 2011, the Project partnered with an NGO, Grassroot Soccer, to provide the balls to PCVs at 26 Peace Corps posts where the NGO works. To date, the futbols have gone to 475 Volunteers, who put them to use in Grassroot Soccer's sport-based curriculum to teach essential life skills to youth.

Grassroot Soccer (<http://www.grassrootsoccer.org>) uses the power of soccer to educate, inspire, and mobilize communities to stop the spread of HIV. Founded in 2002 by four professional soccer players, Grassroot Soccer works with youth ages 12 to 19 by engaging local coaches such as PCVs. The NGO's skillz curriculum builds basic life skills and healthy behaviors through a series of soccer-based interactive activities and discussions.

A spokesperson for Grassroot Soccer explains, “The brightly colored balls



Grassroot Soccer mails the Peace Corps skillz toolkit directly to PCVs with all the materials needed to deliver soccer-based HIV-prevention activities.



Fútbol is beloved around the world.

attract youth to PCV programs in communities where a real soccer ball may never have been used before. Additionally, One World Futbol balls are the only balls that can withstand the rough conditions in these rural communities, making them a sustainable development tool.”

The spokesperson pointed to the experience of a PCV in Ethiopia named Caitlin to illustrate the impact of the One World Futbol in its skillz program, one of the world’s best examples of the emerging field of sport for peace and development.

Soccer for peace and development

Caitlin is a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Ethiopia who attended a Grassroot Soccer training program and implemented the skillz curriculum at her site. Like every Peace Corps Volunteer who enrolls in the training, Caitlin received a kit of materials that included the One World Futbol. Though at first the ball seemed like just one of a number of items in the kit, Caitlin quickly realized the futbol was invaluable to the success of the skillz program.

“In villages filled with stones and thorns and lacking in paved roads and soccer pitches, the balls are key,” said Caitlin. “Knowing that the balls are all-but-indestructible and that you can smack them around is really awesome.”

Breaking down barriers

The One World Futbol also plays a key role in facilitating a PCV’s entry into the community and helps to bridge cultures, genders, and languages. Caitlin explains, “A problem in my community is the difference in socio-economic status between children. For example, one child may wear clothing with more holes than someone else, or speak worse English compared to someone else, which causes that child to be treated differently. This ‘class issue’ is a huge problem in my community, but the One World Futbol brings people together and makes them forget about the differences.”

For more information

A two-minute video online at <http://bit.ly/11KI3Hp> features PCVs in South Africa engaged in the Grassroot Soccer Program. In addition, One World Futbol Project has abundant resources online at its website: (<http://www.oneworldfutbol.com>), its Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/oneworldfutbol>), its Twitter feed (<http://www.twitter.com/oneworldfutbol>), and its YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/oneworldfutbol>).

Mal Warwick (Ecuador 1965-69) is one of three partners in the One World Futbol Project LLC. He is a writer, social entrepreneur, impact investor, and consultant who is best known for his many books on fundraising for nonprofit organizations and for his involvement in the movement for socially responsible business. His latest book, co-authored with Paul Polak (author of Out of Poverty), is The Business Solution to Poverty, which will be published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers in September 2013.



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