



Playing for Life

Grassroot Soccer is changing the way the world engages and empowers adolescents around their health.



Letter from CEO & Founder Tommy Clark

Dear Friends,

Adolescence is the key time to build good habits for physical and mental health that last a lifetime. At Grassroot Soccer (GRS), our unique approach to adolescent engagement uses activity-based learning (our **Curriculum**), caring near-peer mentors (our **Coaches**), and fun (our **Culture**) to create safe spaces in which adolescents can learn about vital health topics and establish lifelong healthy behaviors.

We've been doing this for more than two decades, and in 2023, we surpassed the milestone of **25 million young people reached** with health knowledge and skills through our sport-based health programs.

2023 was a year of innovation and growth for GRS, as our efforts continued to expand and evolve in response to a changing world and an increasing need for our work.

Take, for example, the global adolescent mental health crisis. Using our SKILLZ model, GRS is filling a critical care gap in mental health by training Coaches to improve young people's mental health awareness, coping skills, and resiliency, including through our signature mental health promotion and prevention program, MindSKILLZ. **In Kenya, MindSKILLZ cut the number of adolescent participants with depression in half.**

And while our in-person programs remain as critical as ever, we're also innovating in an increasingly digital world to meet the needs of the millions of adolescents who may not otherwise have access to our programming. Through our **Digital SKILLZ game**, which adapts our signature approach into a fun and interactive game that young people access through their mobile phones, we reached more than 1 million young people in 2023 with life-saving sexual and reproductive health information.

I invite you to read more about GRS's work and impact in 2023, including both of these exciting initiatives, in this Annual Report.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to equipping millions of young people with the life-saving knowledge and skills to lay the foundation for lifelong physical and mental health. We're excited to work together with you to reach millions more.

With appreciation,



Thomas S. Clark, MD
CEO & Founder



Our Mission

Grassroot Soccer is an adolescent health organization that leverages the power of soccer to equip young people with the life-saving information, services, and mentorship they need to live healthier lives.

Our Model

3C's



Curriculum

Our Curricula are activity-based and provide accurate and actionable health information.



Coaches

Our Coaches care about and connect with adolescents so that they are inspired to take action.



Culture

Our Culture creates a fun and safe environment that is optimal for engaging young people around the most important, difficult, and often taboo health topics.

Our Impact

3A's



Assets

We build Assets (health knowledge and the confidence to use it).



Access

We improve Access to high-quality health services.



Adherence

We increase Adherence to crucial treatments and healthy behaviors.



The Challenge

Adolescence is a unique time of significant social, emotional, and physical change. The lessons a young person learns, the habits they form, and the choices they make have profound implications for their health and life trajectory. During this critical time in their development, Grassroot Soccer engages adolescents around the most pressing, but often taboo, health topics facing them.

GRS works with adolescents in the highest-need areas of the world, which has meant centering our efforts in sub-Saharan Africa, where adolescents face nearly 10x the risk of death as their peers in high-income countries (*WHO*).

- **HIV/AIDS** continues to be a leading cause of death among all adolescents in Africa (*Avert*).
- **Pregnancy and childbirth** are the leading cause of death among teen girls in Africa (*Avert*).
- Thirty percent of adolescent girls report being victims of **sexual violence**, and the actual number is estimated much higher (*Avert*).
- Sub-Saharan Africa has a higher prevalence of **mental health** conditions yet fewer resources for mental health care than other parts of the world, meaning that more than 90% of young people in need of mental health services in the region will never receive them (*University of Cape Town*).

These challenges don't exist in a vacuum, but are closely interconnected. For example, anxiety and depression have a negative compounding effect on almost every other health challenge that adolescents face. Adolescents with poor mental health are:

- 4-10 times more likely to acquire HIV (*AIDS*)
- 50% less likely to take their HIV medicine and be virally suppressed (*AIDS and Behavior*)
- 2x more likely to become pregnant and drop out of school (*AIDS and Behavior; Journal of Community Psychology*)

Because of the interconnected nature of these pressing issues, GRS takes an integrated approach to adolescent health—equipping young people with the knowledge, life skills, and access to services they need to lay the foundation for lifelong physical and mental health.



Impact & Reach

In 2023, Grassroot Soccer surpassed the milestone of



25 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE

reached all time with critical health and life skills programming and services.

2023 Impact at a Glance



Improving Adolescent Mental Well-Being

MindSKILLZ cut the number of participants with clinical depression symptoms and poor mental well-being

IN HALF

in Kenya.



Preventing HIV Transmission

After participating in GRS programs,

96%

of participants living with HIV had an undetectable viral load, which makes HIV untransmittable to others.



Driving Health Services Uptake

74%

of GRS participants accessed health and social services during or after participating in a SKILLZ program.



Program Highlights

In Kenya, Grassroot Soccer's flagship mental health promotion and prevention program **cut the number of participants with depression in half.**

Building MindSKILLZ For A Healthy Future

In 2023, GRS continued working to improve the mental health and well-being of young people in communities at heightened risk of poor mental health and with limited access to information and services.

In Kenya, GRS successfully piloted and evaluated its flagship **MindSKILLZ** mental health promotion and prevention program, finding that it **cut in half the number of adolescents with clinical depression symptoms.**

Mental health goes up and down over time, and the tools and knowledge a young person gains, whether or not they are clinically anxious or depressed right now, will be invaluable over the course of their lives. That's why MindSKILLZ was designed **to improve the mental health of all young people:** to help those who are currently struggling with their mental health, as well as preventing others from experiencing poor mental health in the future.

Employing a positive, strengths-based approach to mental health, MindSKILLZ uses soccer language, metaphors, and activities to engage young people and draw connections to mental health. MindSKILLZ fills a critical care gap in mental health by training non-specialists (Coaches) to work with young people and improve their mental health awareness, knowledge, coping skills, and

resilience. In addition, MindSKILLZ **reduces stigma and harmful misconceptions** about mental health, which are significant barriers for young people who need support or care.

The MindSKILLZ pilot in Kenya, funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) and in partnership with Kenyan-based LVCT Health and Departments of Health (DoH) in Nairobi and Mombasa Counties, reached 4,500 adolescents. A rigorous evaluation conducted throughout 2023 found that the program:

- cut the number of participants with clinical depression symptoms in half,
- improved participants' resilience and coping skills,
- and was found by participants to be highly enjoyable, satisfactory, and fun.

Building on the success of the pilot and evaluation, in 2024 GRS will replicate the project in Zimbabwe with the WHO and Zimbabwe Ministry of Health, while continuing to bring integrated mental health promotion practices to young people across all of its core programs.



“We learned about mental illnesses, and we were told mental illnesses are common. It’s not just going crazy. Some of them [include] being anxious, being stressed, depression. It’s not just going mad.”

- MindSKILLZ Participant, Kenya

Connecting Youth with Life-Saving Health Knowledge in a Digital World

In 2023, Grassroot Soccer reached **more than 1 million young people** with the phone-based Digital SKILLZ game and **increased their knowledge on sexual and reproductive health.**

Across Africa, the vast majority of young people won't have the benefit of accessing an in-person GRS program. But 60% of them (roughly 250 million) have access to a cell phone, which provides them a private and convenient space to learn about sensitive health information when and where they want.

GRS is leveraging this power of mobile health to sustainably reach millions of youth with key health information through the **Digital SKILLZ game.**

Digital SKILLZ gamifies GRS's sport-based approach to adolescent engagement to reach young people with life-saving health information and life skills through mobile phones. The youth-friendly, high-energy, and interactive game follows young people as they join community soccer teams led by GRS Coaches, who help them learn about critical sexual and reproductive health topics including **HIV and violence prevention, healthy relationships, changing bodies, family planning, and gender equality.**

I liked [the game] because it was **fun and interactive!**

- Digital SKILLZ participant,
Nigeria

“

The game, developed in partnership with leading social enterprise Viamo, uses innovative Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology—participants listen to prompts and use the buttons on their phone to make different choices and create their own journey. The game is completely voice-based, meaning it is accessible for adolescents with literacy challenges, and users can dial in and access the game anywhere, any time, and free of charge.

In 2023, the game was translated into seven languages and reached young people in Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Nigeria.

Data from a rapid pilot evaluation demonstrated that the game **increased young people's knowledge** related to condom use, contraceptive methods, and puberty.

In 2024, GRS and Viamo will expand Digital SKILLZ games to 12 additional countries and roll out Digital MindSKILLZ, a new game that covers mental health information and coping skills.

Partnering for **IMPACT**

Throughout 2023,
Grassroot Soccer collaborated
with partners across **21**
COUNTRIES

Grassroot Soccer has built a unique and strong network of partners around the globe that includes community-based organizations, national and local governments, and international NGOs.

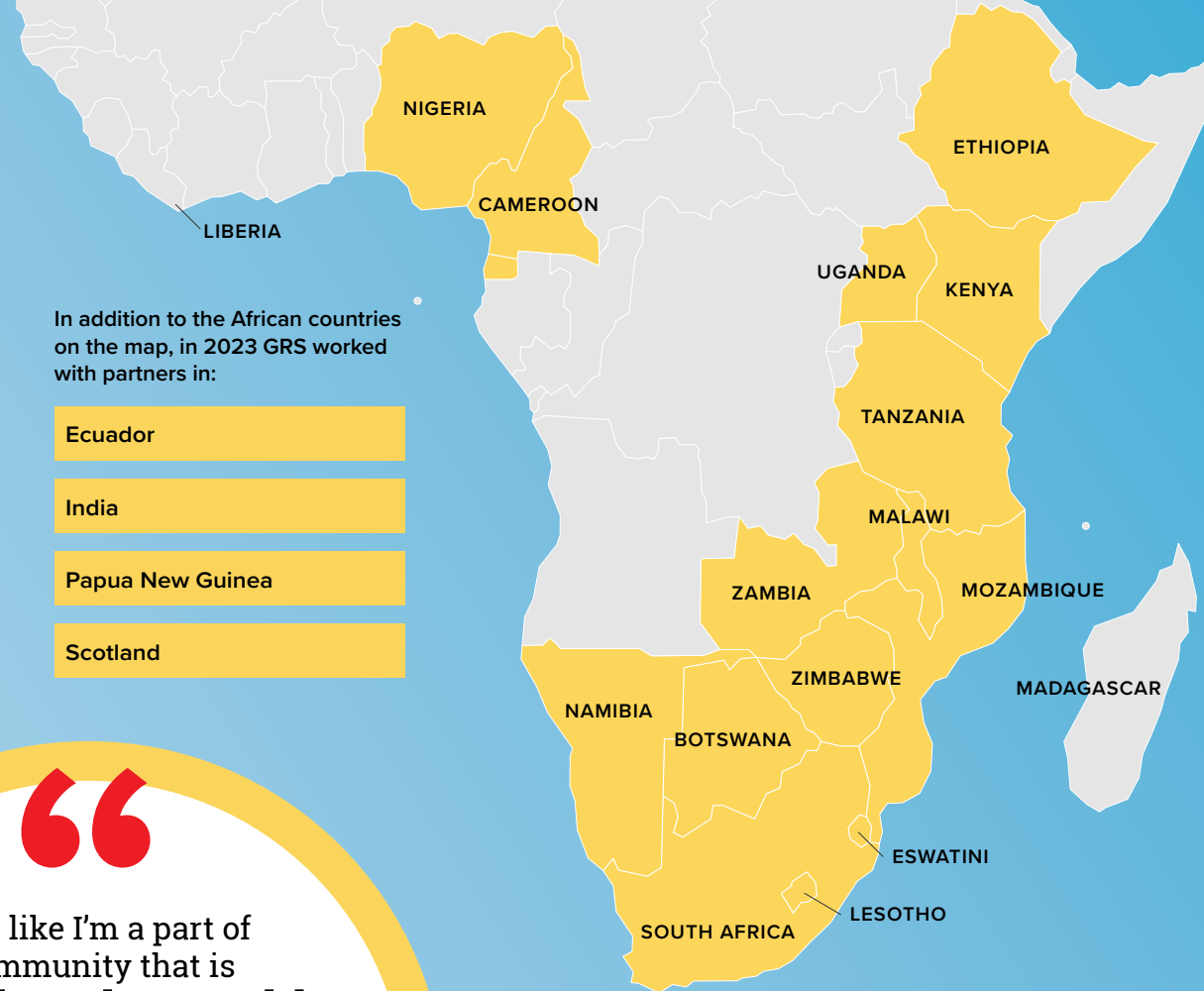
As a technical assistance provider, GRS trains partners to effectively deliver its programs using GRS's signature SKILLZ methodology. Since local partners know their communities best, this approach to partnership both dramatically broadens the reach of GRS programs **and** allows GRS to learn from and incorporate local institutions, knowledge, and talent into its work, ensuring impact that is deep and sustainable.



Partnering for **IMPACT**



This map shows the countries where Grassroot Soccer collaborated with partners for impact in 2023.



In addition to the African countries on the map, in 2023 GRS worked with partners in:

Ecuador

India

Papua New Guinea

Scotland

“

“I feel like I’m a part of a community that is changing the world.”

- Stella, Coach,
Zambia

📍 London, U.K.

2023 World AIDS Day Gala

Grassroot Soccer's Ninth Annual World AIDS Day Gala shined a spotlight on adolescent mental health—the most critical health issue facing young people globally—while raising nearly **\$2 million for Grassroot Soccer programs.**



Tommy Clark

“

“The genius of [Grassroot Soccer's] approach is in harnessing the skills soccer fosters—perseverance, self-awareness, and self-discipline, and, most importantly, team spirit—to help ensure [youth] can live healthy lives, physically and mentally.”

Andreas Dracopoulos
Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)
Co-President



Game-Changer Award Honoree:
Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)

Left to Right: Aurélie Avice, Casey Russo, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (presenter)

“

“Grassroot Soccer creates a space where young people are able to be optimistic and hopeful in the face of great challenge.”

Christen Press
2x World Cup Winner and
GRS Global Board Member
and Ambassador

“

“Football is all about joy, and I'm so inspired by the way Grassroot Soccer uses the joy and fun of football to teach kids important lessons about mental and physical health.”

Cristo Fernandez
Ted Lasso Cast Member

“

“Grassroot Soccer is doing an amazing job. They're creating a dynamic that basically says, 'It's okay to not be okay.'”

Kola Bokinni
Ted Lasso Cast Member



Tobin Heath

Kunda Mwitwa

Christen Press



June Sarpong



Fiona Ferguson



Game-Changer Award Honoree: **Ted Lasso**

Left to Right: Kola Bokinni, Billy Harris, Brendan Hunt, Gregg Lemkau (presenter)

Research Highlights

From managing rigorous evaluations to conducting rapid impact assessments of program data, Grassroot Soccer is committed to contributing to the global understanding of what works in adolescent health. GRS integrates these insights, along with the latest science and research in the field, into its programs so that they have the greatest impact possible.

11 ongoing research and evaluation projects in

5 countries in 2023

These projects spanned a number of critical and interconnected topics in adolescent health, such as:

- mental health
- sexual and reproductive health
- HIV prevention, care, and treatment
- family planning
- gender-based violence

2023 Research Partners



World Cup Winners Playing for Life

Global
Ambassadors
Christen Press and
Tobin Heath Visit Zambia
with Grassroot Soccer



“Grassroot Soccer doesn’t fly in, try to create change, and fly out. It’s actually about empowering young people and giving them the opportunity within their own communities to be leaders. Meeting the Coaches is what made me want to be a part of Grassroot Soccer for life.”

- Christen Press



“The impact that Grassroot Soccer Coaches are having is so important. They’re supporting what is going to be the next generation of changemakers and leaders in their communities and in the world.”

- Tobin Heath

In November 2023, 2x World Cup Winners with the U.S. Women’s National Team and Grassroot Soccer Global Ambassadors **Christen Press** (also a GRS Global Board Member) and **Tobin Heath** (also a Global Advisory Board Member) traveled to Lusaka, Zambia to spend time with GRS Coaches and participants in their communities.

Christen and Tobin saw firsthand how GRS uses soccer, fun, and mentorship to connect young people with life-saving health information and services.



Our Supporters

Grassroot Soccer would like to thank our institutional donors and partners for their support in 2023. Their sustained commitment to our mission enables us to continue connecting adolescents around the world with life-saving health information, services, and mentorship.



Our Donors

Grassroot Soccer is very grateful to the following individuals and institutions for their unrestricted support.

\$1,000,000+

Shari and Tom Crotty

\$500,000 - \$999,999

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\$100,000 - \$499,999

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GRS would like to thank and acknowledge the following schools and community organizations for participating in student-led fundraising events and campaigns for our cause:

Holton-Arms School
The Leffell School

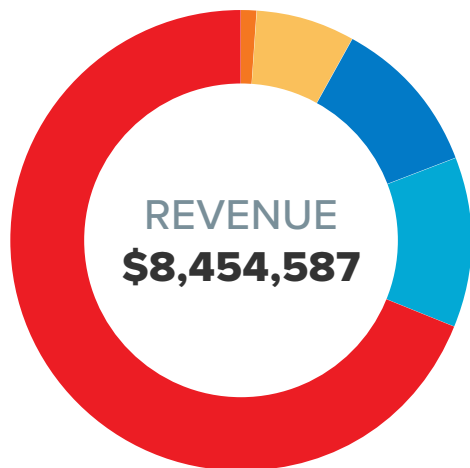
St. Paul's School
Vassar College



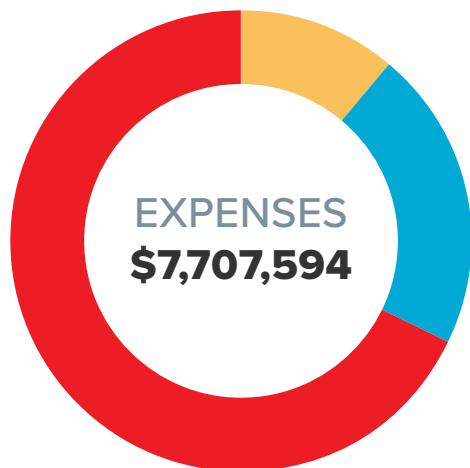
GRS also gratefully acknowledges the **thousands of donors** who gave in other amounts. These gifts made a substantial contribution to our work.

Our Financials

Grassroot Soccer has a deep commitment to our donors and we encourage you to take a look at our record of accountability. You can find more information about this commitment on our website, www.grassrootsoccer.org/financials.



- 69%** Individuals
\$5,791,703
- 12%** Private Foundations
\$1,012,082
- 11%** US Government
\$927,626
- 7%** Corporate/Corporate Foundations
\$632,031
- 1%** Other Income
\$91,145



- 68%** Program Services
\$5,232,512
- 21%** Fundraising
\$1,655,521
- 11%** Management & General
\$819,561



“I started to challenge harmful societal norms with the knowledge I had gained. As a result, I became a reference point for other adolescents in my community, which made me a role model.”

- Fortune, Former Participant and Coach, Zimbabwe

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Professional Soccer Player, U.S. Women's
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* joined in 2024



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