



**GRASSROOT
SOCCER**



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Playing for Life

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



Letter from CEO & Founder Tommy Clark, MD

Dear Friends,

Young people around the globe today are facing unprecedented health challenges. Globally, one in four adolescents are experiencing anxiety or depression, and in sub-Saharan Africa, the largest generation of young people in the world is 4x more likely to die from preventable causes (such as HIV, complications from teen pregnancy, and self-harm) than their peers in high-income countries.

At Grassroot Soccer (GRS), our team is working tirelessly to tackle these pressing and interconnected challenges. Through our soccer-based programs, our incredible team of Coaches are teaching young people life-saving health information in a way that is **fun, active, and engaging** – so young people want to participate and the lessons stick.

We've been honing this signature approach – informed by rigorous research and evaluation – for more than two decades. In 2024, we continued to innovate, scale the reach of our programs, and – most importantly – equip adolescents with the critical health knowledge, life skills, and support they need to thrive.

A Year of Impact and Growth

I'm proud to share this Annual Report, which highlights some of our achievements in 2024.

In this report, you can read about how, in 2024:

- We **reached nearly 2 million young people** with life-saving health information, skills, mentorship, and services.
- We continued to support adolescent mental health across our programs – and completed two critical evaluations that provide foundational evidence that our approach is leading to significant improvements in **young people's mental health knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and coping skills**.
- We expanded the reach of our innovative, phone-based **Digital SKILLZ platform** to more than 1.2 million adolescents and adults across 10 countries in Africa – connecting young people who otherwise wouldn't have access to our in-person programs with vital health information in a fun and interactive digital format.
- And we **launched an exciting and vibrant new brand** that reflects our commitment to the young people we serve and the unique ways in which our programs bring together soccer and health.

The Road Ahead

I'm so proud of the game-changing strides our organization made in 2024. But as I write this letter in 2025, it is with the sobering reality that

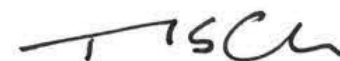
our context today is different – and more challenging – than it was in 2024.

With nearly 50% of global health financing in Africa under threat, young people's access to critical health services, life-saving medications and treatments, and more are at risk. These cuts threaten to reverse significant gains made in global health and cause more than 14 million extra deaths by 2030, according to *The Lancet*, casting a shadow of uncertainty and fear over the communities GRS serves.

In this current moment, the need for our work has never been greater. But when I look at the impact our programs had in 2024 – and the powerful stories of change I hear from our inspiring Coaches working to support young people in their communities each and every day – I'm filled with hope and belief.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our efforts. At GRS, we believe that soccer can change the world. Together, we're *Playing for Life*.

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





"Growing up is a time of change, which is exciting, but challenging too. Sometimes what young people need is someone to just sit down and listen."

– DENNIS, GLOBAL STAFF MEMBER, SOUTH AFRICA

The Challenge

Grassroot Soccer works with adolescents in the highest-need areas of the world, which has meant centering our efforts in sub-Saharan Africa.

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 during this time have profound implications for their health and life trajectory. During this critical time in their development, GRS engages adolescents around the most pressing and interconnected health topics facing them – including mental health, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and issues around sexual and reproductive health such as teen pregnancy.



- Sub-Saharan Africa has more adolescents than anywhere in the world, and they face 4x the risk of death as their peers in high-income countries
- Globally, 1 in 4 adolescents are experiencing anxiety and/or depression – with young people in Africa at an even higher risk
- In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV is still the leading cause of death for adolescents
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the world, which is a leading cause of death and disability for adolescent girls

At GRS, we are tackling these challenges through an integrated approach to adolescent health – equipping young people with the knowledge, life skills, and access to services they need to thrive and develop into healthy adults.



Our Solution: SKILLZ



Grassroot Soccer's SKILLZ programs use soccer games and metaphors to teach young people life-saving health information.



SKILLZ CORE for Younger Adolescents (9-14):

This 10-lesson curriculum covers foundational health topics including HIV, sexual and reproductive health, gender norms, mental health, and life skills.



SKILLZ Girl for Older Adolescent Girls (15-19):

Led by a female Coach, this 12-lesson curriculum covers health topics in more depth including HIV prevention (HIV testing services, PrEP, condoms), mental health, pregnancy, contraception, STIs, sexual and gender-based violence, substance misuse, and navigating health services.



SKILLZ Guyz for Older Adolescent Boys (15-24):

Led by a male Coach, this 12-lesson curriculum engages boys and young men on key health topics including positive masculinity, gender-based violence prevention, mental health, sexual health, HIV, substance misuse, and health services (e.g. HIV testing, voluntary medical male circumcision).

SKILLZ Plus for Youth Living with HIV:

Led by Coaches openly living with HIV, this 10-lesson curriculum supports youth living with HIV by providing critical health knowledge and encouragement to access/adhere to medication, improve their mental well-being, and live happy, healthy lives.



MindSKILLZ Mental Health Prevention and Promotion:

MindSKILLZ is an 11-lesson curriculum designed to improve the mental health of all young people including those who are currently suffering with depression and anxiety, as well as preventing others from experiencing poor mental health in the future.

Impact & Reach

In 2024, Grassroot Soccer reached **nearly 2 million young people** with critical health information, mentorship, and connections to health services.



Reducing Depression

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



Improving Mental Health Knowledge and Attitudes

MindSKILLZ participants demonstrated substantial gains in stigma reduction (+45%), help-seeking (+43%), and mental health knowledge (+33%) after completing the program.



Inspiring Lasting Behavior Change Among Girls

At six months post-intervention, SKILLZ Girl participants saw a 62% increase in contraception uptake and 84% more HIV testing compared to a control group – gains which were shown to be sustained for 12 months.



Program Highlights



MindSKILLZ: Improving Young People's Mental Health Knowledge, Attitudes, and Coping Skills

*In 2024, Grassroot Soccer continued working to improve the mental health and well-being of young people in communities with limited access to information and services – and completed two critical evaluations that provide **foundational evidence that our approach is working.***

Globally, poor mental health is the most critical health issue facing young people. Not only that, poor mental health is closely linked to other important health risks such as HIV, teen pregnancy, and sexual violence.

The MindSKILLZ Solution:

Employing a positive, strengths-based approach, **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.



2024 Impact:

In 2024, GRS completed **two critical evaluations** that provide foundational evidence that MindSKILLZ is leading to significant improvements in adolescents' mental health knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and coping skills, along with increased mental well-being and reduced mental health difficulties.

A pilot study in Kenya assessing MindSKILLZ showed improvements across the spectrum of adolescent mental health and well-being, most notably a **near 50% reduction in the number of participants with clinical depression symptoms and poor mental well-being.** The study also showed that MindSKILLZ participants in Kenya:

- Improved their **resilience and coping skills**
- Enhanced their **mental health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors**
- Demonstrated **improvements in school engagement and academic performance**

Additionally, a large multi-country evaluation of the program covering Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe found that MindSKILLZ is substantially improving adolescent mental health across different settings. Across all four countries, MindSKILLZ led to:

- A 30% **increase in mental health knowledge and positive attitudes**
- A 45% **reduction in mental health stigma**
- A 43% **increase in willingness to seek help**



"I want to be influential in my community and change another child's life, the same way MindSKILLZ changed my life."

—NOBUBELE, PARTICIPANT, ZIMBABWE

Program Highlights continued...

Digital SKILLZ: Delivering Health Information Directly into Young People's Hands

*In 2024, Grassroot Soccer reached more than **1.2 million** young people and adults across 10 countries with crucial health information through the Digital SKILLZ platform.*

Across sub-Saharan Africa, young people face major barriers to accessing accurate, timely health information – particularly around mental health and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). These challenges are most pronounced in rural and underserved communities, where youth-friendly services are limited and stigma is high.

At the same time, mobile phone access is growing rapidly. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 577 million people aged 10 and older in Africa now own a mobile phone. However, many young people still rely on basic phones without internet or app capability, limiting their ability to access essential digital health resources.

The Digital SKILLZ Solution:

Grassroot Soccer is bridging this gap through **Digital SKILLZ**: a mobile phone-based, interactive health education platform that delivers life-saving SRH and mental health information to adolescents through Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology.

Developed in partnership with Viamo, Digital SKILLZ is a youth-friendly platform that combines essential health content with engaging, soccer-themed features to educate, empower, and connect youth at scale.

In 2024, GRS reached young people through two Digital SKILLZ games: a game on SRH that covers puberty, HIV, contraception, gender norms, and healthy relationships, and the MindSKILLZ mental health game, which rolled out in 2024 and focuses on mental health literacy, emotional regulation, stigma reduction, and coping skills.

2024 Impact:

Countries: Botswana, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

In 2024,

- GRS brought Digital SKILLZ to young people **across 10 countries and in more than 16 local languages**
- Young people and adults played Digital SKILLZ games over **1.9 million times**
- **85%** of Digital SKILLZ users said they were very likely to recommend the game to a friend.
- In Nigeria, a pilot evaluation found that Digital MindSKILLZ **strengthened young people's understanding of mental health concepts and promoted practical coping skills** such as mindful breathing. Participants also showed an **improvement in well-being as measured by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index**.



Partnering for Impact

Grassroot Soccer collaborates with a diverse global network of civil society organizations, governments, and private sector partners. As a technical assistance provider, GRS works with partners of all sizes to contextualize and capacitate them on the SKILLZ model so that they can scale and sustain sport-based programming. Partners deliver GRS's methodology as a standalone SKILLZ intervention, layered as part of a larger project, and/or integrated within an existing program.

Areas of technical assistance:

- Program design
- Product development
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Coach development (recruitment, training, support and wellness)
- Program optimization
- Youth engagement strategy
- Research and evaluation
- Thought leadership

Establishing a Youth Advisory Committee

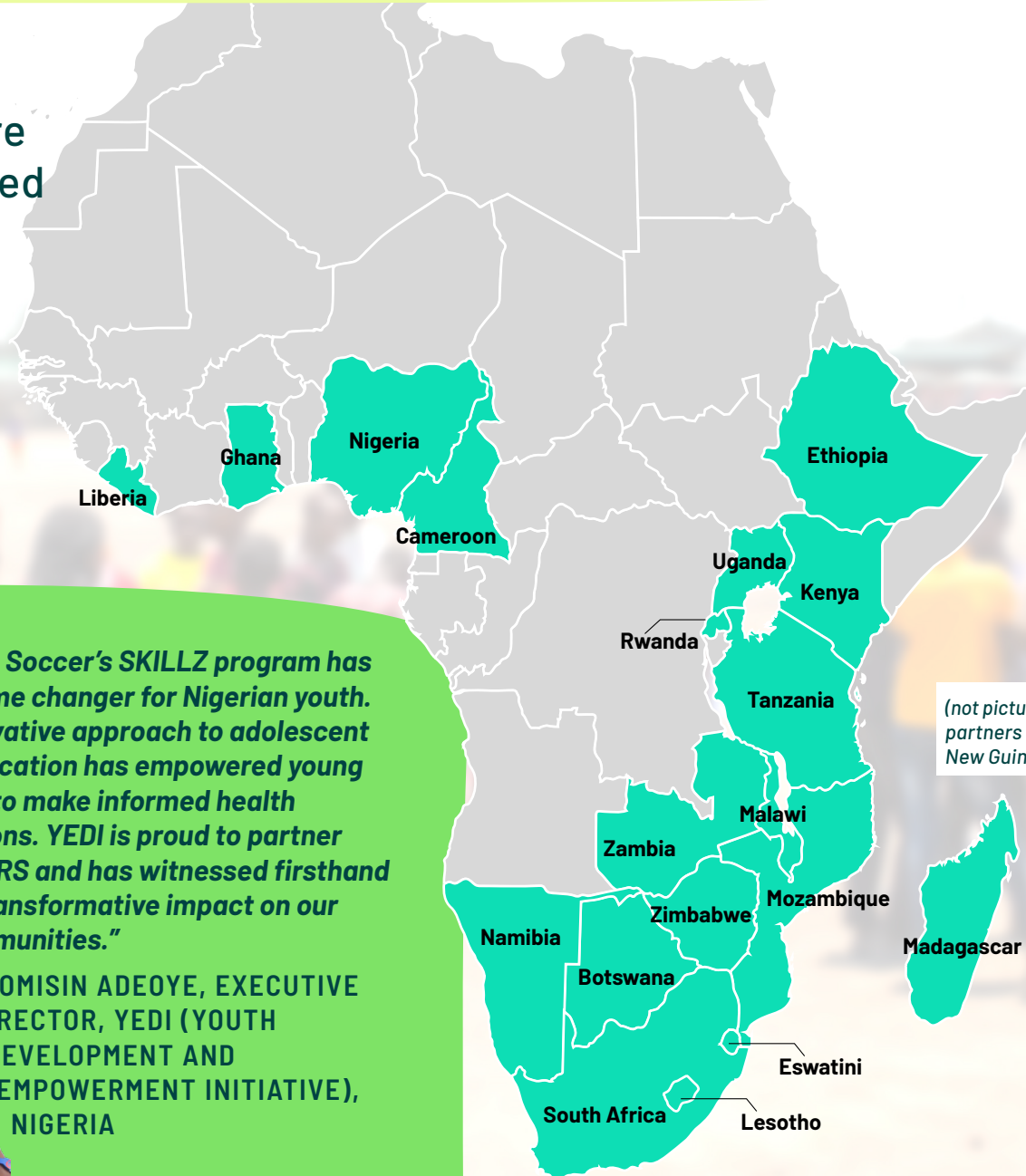
In 2024, GRS established a **Youth Advisory Committee (YAC)** to center youth perspectives within the organization and provide opportunities for leadership and development to SKILLZ Coaches from affiliates and partners. Composed of 18 young leaders from 7 countries, the YAC meaningfully engages Coaches to provide youth-led review and input into GRS programming and influence decision-making processes across the organization.



Where We Worked in 2024

23

countries where
GRS collaborated
with partners



"Grassroot Soccer's SKILLZ program has been a game changer for Nigerian youth. Their innovative approach to adolescent health education has empowered young people to make informed health decisions. YEDI is proud to partner with GRS and has witnessed firsthand the transformative impact on our communities."

— TOMISIN ADEOYE, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, YEDI (YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT AND
EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE),
NIGERIA

(not pictured) GRS also worked with
partners in Ecuador, India, Papua
New Guinea, and Scotland in 2024



2024 Annual Gala

Our 10th Annual Gala brought together leaders from the worlds of sport, entertainment, and global health on Giving Tuesday to raise more than **\$2 million** for Grassroot Soccer.



Tim Howard, former goalkeeper for U.S. Men's National Team and Manchester United



(Left to Right): Tommy Clark, Jessica Berman, Ethan Zohn, Don Garber

"Football is at its best when it transcends football and is about true human goodness. There are so few places that are more true to that than [Grassroot Soccer]."
— **Roger Bennett**, Founder of the Men In Blazers Media Network



Fiona Ferguson

"[Grassroot Soccer Coaches] are able to communicate and use this incredible gift we've been given in football to break through barriers unlike anything I've ever seen before."
— **Tobin Heath**, 2x World Cup Winner and GRS Advisory Board Member and Ambassador



Game Changer Award Honoree: U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (Left to Right: Tobin Heath, Ali Krieger, Carli Lloyd, and Christen Press)

"I have experienced the work of Grassroot Soccer up close on the ground, and I've seen what is possible when young people are healthy in mind, body, and spirit."

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



Board Member Tom Crotty launched the Play it Forward Campaign



Andreas Dracopoulos, Co-President, Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF); and Kola Bokinni, Actor, from Emmy and SAG Award winning Apple TV+ series *Ted Lasso*

"I'm a firm believer that football has the power to change the world, which is why I've been a proud supporter of Grassroot Soccer for several years."
— **David Beckham**, Footballing Legend

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.

10

ongoing research and
evaluation projects in

5

countries in 2024

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
- mass media approaches to social and behavior change

2024 Research Partners:



A New Look for Grassroot Soccer in 2024



**GRASSROOT
SOCCER**

Grassroot Soccer has been improving the health of adolescents through the power of the beautiful game for more than two decades.

In that time, we've evolved and grown significantly from an HIV-focused organization to an adolescent health organization helping young people navigate their most pressing health challenges – including HIV, mental health, issues around sexual and reproductive health, sexual violence, and more.

To reflect this evolution and the young people we serve, Grassroot Soccer unveiled a new look in November 2024.

The new logo embodies how our programs bring soccer and health together. The icon consists of three organic shapes, which together form a dual meaning: an aerial view of a soccer pitch with the goal at the bottom, and an outline of an adolescent including their head, body, and heart.

This icon symbolizes our focus on soccer as a pathway for health, as well as our commitment to each individual adolescent in the communities we serve.

While our look changed in 2024, the mission remains the same. We are still dedicated to leveraging the power of soccer to equip young people with the life-saving information, services, and mentorship they need to live healthier lives.



Our New Logo in Action



Our Supporters

Grassroot Soccer would like to thank our institutional donors and partners for their support in 2024. 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 support.

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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.



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