



2025 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,

As I write this letter in a Men's World Cup year, soccer's power to captivate communities across every corner of the globe is at the top of my mind.

Thinking about this unique aspect of the beautiful game – and the potential it holds as a force for good – is the same feeling I had when I founded Grassroot Soccer (GRS) in Zimbabwe nearly 25 years ago. It's also what I feel every day when I talk to Coaches, colleagues, partners, supporters, and community members who are all critical to GRS's work.

At GRS, we equip young people with the health knowledge, life skills, and access to services they need to overcome their most pressing challenges and thrive – using the game of soccer as a powerful engagement and teaching tool. Through our evidence-based "SKILLZ" programs, our team of trained game-changing Coaches serve as critical mentors for young people and use soccer games and metaphors to teach them life-saving health information in a way that is **fun, active, engaging, and memorable**.

Our work is critical right now. In sub-Saharan Africa – the highest-need part of the world where GRS focuses our efforts – adolescents face 6x the risk of death as their peers in high-income countries. Girls there are disproportionately impacted, too. Over half have an unmet need for contraception, and girls account for 85% of new HIV infections among 15–19-year-olds in the region.

Further, globally we are experiencing a mental health crisis among adolescents. An estimated 1 in 4 adolescents across the world experience a mental health challenge. In the U.S., the prevalence of diagnosed mental health conditions among adolescents increased 35 percent in the past decade – including a 61 percent increase in diagnosed anxiety. (That's why, on the occasion of the 2026 Men's World Cup, we're [bringing our proven approach to the U.S.](#) for the first time to support young people's mental health.)

In 2025, GRS continued to grow our partnerships to scale the reach of our programs, hone our approach through rigorous research and evaluation, and – most importantly – make a real, lasting impact in the lives of **more than 2.3 million young people** through our in-person and digital SKILLZ programs.

I invite you to read about our accomplishments in 2025 in the pages of this Annual Report.

At GRS, our vision is that all young people thrive and develop into healthy adults – a vision now threatened by a global health funding landscape that has grown more uncertain, not less. On the ground, this has meant disrupted clinics, paused services, and real uncertainty for the young people we serve. According to a new [Lancet Global Health study](#), continued cuts to global health aid could lead to millions of additional preventable deaths by 2030 – with sub-Saharan Africa facing the greatest risk of any region.



In this environment, the need for our work has never been greater. That's why we're laser-focused on reaching as many young people as possible while driving the deepest impact on their health outcomes.

When I look at all our team accomplished in 2025 – the measurable impact of our programs, the innovative ways we adapted in a shifting environment, and the powerful stories of change I hear every day – I remain filled with hope.

I'm also filled with hope when I think of our supporters, partners, advocates, and champions who make up our global community and make our work possible. **Thank you** for standing with us to change the lives of adolescents at a time when they need our support most.

With appreciation,

Thomas S. Clark, MD
CEO & Founder

Our Mission

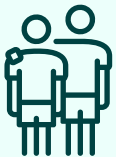
Grassroot Soccer is an adolescent health organization that leverages the power of soccer to equip young people with the life-saving information, services, and mentorship they need to live healthier lives.

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.



The Challenge

MENTAL HEALTH

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

Adolescence is a 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, sensitive, and interconnected health topics facing them – including mental health, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health and rights – along with the underlying social norms (such as gender inequality) that drive these challenges.

- Sub-Saharan Africa has more adolescents than anywhere in the world, and they face **6x 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.
- **HIV is still a leading cause of death** for adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa and the crisis falls hardest on girls, who account for **85%** of new HIV infections among 15–19 year-olds in the region.
- Over half of adolescent girls and young women in Eastern and Southern Africa have an **unmet need for contraception**, and the region has one of the highest rates in the world for pregnancies before the age of 20.

Through our efforts, we aim to contribute to fewer teen pregnancies, reduced HIV infections, improved mental health and well-being, reduced gender-based violence, and greater educational and employment opportunities for young people around the world.



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 10-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.



Our Solution: Digital SKILLZ

Grassroot Soccer reaches young people who wouldn't otherwise have access to in-person SKILLZ programs through Digital SKILLZ: a mobile phone-based, interactive health education platform that delivers life-saving information 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. By simply dialing "3-2-1", young people can access the voice-activated game in their local language for free, and listen to SKILLZ Coaches explain important health information through fun soccer games and quizzes.

GRS reaches young people through two Digital SKILLZ games: a game on sexual and reproductive health that covers puberty, HIV, contraception, gender norms, and healthy relationships, and the MindSKILLZ mental health game, which focuses on mental health literacy, emotional regulation, stigma reduction, and coping skills.

In 2025, Digital SKILLZ games reached youth in 12 countries.





“No matter where we are or who the group is, together we turn football activities into dialogues, allowing young people to speak about stress or loss through play. I believe every adolescent deserves a chance to rebuild and thrive. Together with Grassroot Soccer, I am committed to this cause.”

— Joseph Macharia (Coach, Kenya)

Our Impact Model

We use the universal appeal of soccer, combined with a youth-centered model, to create lasting change in young people's lives:



Learn the Game

Young people gain knowledge, skills, and agency to make healthy decisions.



Build Your Team

Young people are surrounded by positive peers, mentors, and support systems that respond to their needs.



Make Your Move

Young people practice healthy behaviors and access the services and opportunities they need.



Impact & Reach

In 2025, Grassroot Soccer reached **more than 2.3 million young people** with critical health information, mentorship, and connections to health services.

128,000+ via in-person SKILLZ programs

2,220,000+ via Digital SKILLZ



Improved Mental Health Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Participants in Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe showed significant improvements across critical mental health measures:

- Mental health stigma decreased by **45%**
- Help-seeking increased by **44%**
- Mental health knowledge increased by **34%**
- Overall mental health scores improved by **31%**

Sustained Gains in Reproductive Health Access and Agency

Girl participants in Zambia were **1.2x more likely** to use contraception at 6 months and **1.3x more likely** at 12 months, compared to those in a control group.

Improved HIV Testing

Girl participants in Zambia were **1.6x more likely** to test for HIV at 6 months, compared to those in a control group, with effects sustained at 12 months.

Program Highlights: Mental Health

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.

MindSKILLZ

Employing a positive, strengths-based approach, MindSKILLZ – Grassroot Soccer’s signature mental health program – 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.

A Year of Growth and Impact

2025 marked a year of significant growth for MindSKILLZ. **75,605 young people accessed the program in 2025** – a 345% increase from 2024 – bringing the total number of young people who have accessed in-person MindSKILLZ programs to over 100,000 across **seven countries** (Kenya, Malawi, Scotland, South Africa, the United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).

In Zambia and Zimbabwe, an analysis of WHO-5 data – the universally used self-reporting questionnaire that measures mental and psychological well-being – found that mean scores of MindSKILLZ participants increased an average gain of 11.4 points (a 16.4% improvement).

A 10-point increase is commonly considered a clinically meaningful improvement in well-being, suggesting that MindSKILLZ had a substantial positive impact on participants’ mental health in both countries.

These improvements were accompanied by the development of key protective factors for mental health:

- stronger coping skills and relationships, increased mental health knowledge and positive attitudes (+30%)
- greater willingness to seek help (+43%)
- and substantial reductions in stigma (–45%)

In Zambia, routine data from our largest cohort of MindSKILLZ to date in 2025 showed that participants’ mental health knowledge, attitudes, and skills increased strikingly – and the greatest gains were among young people who started with the poorest mental health. **81%** of those with low well-being moved above the clinical threshold by the end of the program, and **82%** of those at risk of depression before MindSKILLZ were no longer in that risk range after participating.



Program Highlights: Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa face disproportionately higher health risks than their male counterparts. Most don't know their HIV status, and among those who need contraception, most are not accessing it. As a result, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy-related complications remain among the leading causes of death for girls in the region.

Having the health information, life skills, and support necessary to access HIV testing and modern contraception is critical for adolescent girls to navigate structural barriers and live healthier lives. Grassroot Soccer's SKILLZ Girl program provides holistic support to do just that.

SKILLZ Girl

SKILLZ Girl – GRS's single-sex program for adolescent girls – turns the soccer pitch into a gender-transformative space. With the support of a female mentor SKILLZ Coach, participants learn information about key sexual and reproductive health topics (including HIV prevention, mental health, contraception, and sexual and gender-based violence), build their self-confidence, and gain access to youth-friendly services.

Helping More Girls Access Life-Saving Health Services

In 2025, GRS published findings from a randomized controlled trial (RCT) – the gold standard test for evidence that an intervention truly works – which showed that SKILLZ Girl is effective in empowering adolescent girls and boosting their long-term uptake of critical sexual and reproductive health services.

The study found that SKILLZ Girl participants were 1.6x more likely to test for HIV at 6 months, compared to those in the control group, with effects sustained at 12 months. Additionally, participants were 1.2x more likely to use contraception at 6 months and 1.3x more likely at 12 months, compared to the control group.

These sustained gains show that SKILLZ Girl is driving lasting behavior change that can ultimately support those who are living with HIV to access and stay on life-saving treatment, while helping those who are HIV-negative access effective prevention services such as PrEP and condoms.

Results from the study also show that SKILLZ Girl led to positive shifts in empowerment indicators, improving girls' sexual and reproductive health agency – including their confidence to communicate about sexual and reproductive health, negotiate safer sex, and access health services.

The study was funded by the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH) and conducted in partnership with the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ), Zambia's Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of General Education (MoGe), and the University of California, San Francisco. Read more about the findings in two peer-reviewed journal articles published in [PLOS Global Public Health](#) and [Reproductive Health](#).



Program Highlights: HIV/AIDS

Despite significant progress over the past several decades, adolescents have been left behind in the fight against HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV is still a leading cause of death for adolescents. Most adolescents living with HIV in the region are not tested regularly and fewer than two-thirds are on life-saving treatment.

Prevention, Care, and Treatment

Grassroot Soccer programs use a prevention, care, and treatment model to equip adolescents with the knowledge and skills they need to stop the spread of HIV.

Prevention: GRS uses soccer games and metaphors to equip young people with the knowledge and tools they need to identify and avoid risks that lead to spreading and contracting HIV, as well as connect youth with HIV testing (so they know their status) and high-impact prevention services such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC), and condoms.

Care: Youth living with HIV have specific needs. GRS provides critical, holistic care for participants living with HIV, including mental health support and a caring community of peers and mentors whom they can relate to.

Treatment: GRS helps youth living with HIV access life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART) treatment, and support them to stay on medication so they can live longer, healthier lives, as well as reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to others.

SKILLZ Plus

GRS's SKILLZ Plus program uses soccer and play-based learning to address the specific needs of these youth and create a safe space where participants living with HIV learn critical knowledge and skills necessary to navigate different aspects of living with HIV – including disclosure of their status, healthy relationships, mental health, and adherence to ART.

Like the participants, SKILLZ Plus Coaches themselves are living with HIV, meaning that every participant has a mentor who can relate to their unique challenges and serve as a trusted role model and support system.

Participants also saw a 17% increase in mental health knowledge and attitudes, emphasizing the value of integrated support.





**"I never thought I'd experience
the joy of motherhood.
Grassroot Soccer gave me
the knowledge to protect my
daughter. She's my miracle."**

— Loveness Phiri (SKILLZ Plus
Coach, Zambia)

Partnering for Impact

Grassroot Soccer works with a global network of resilient partners and sustainable infrastructures to create impact. As a technical assistance partner, GRS partners with community based organizations, NGOs, as well as local and national governments to contextualize and capacitate them on the SKILLZ model so that they can integrate, scale, and sustain sport-based adolescent health programming.

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



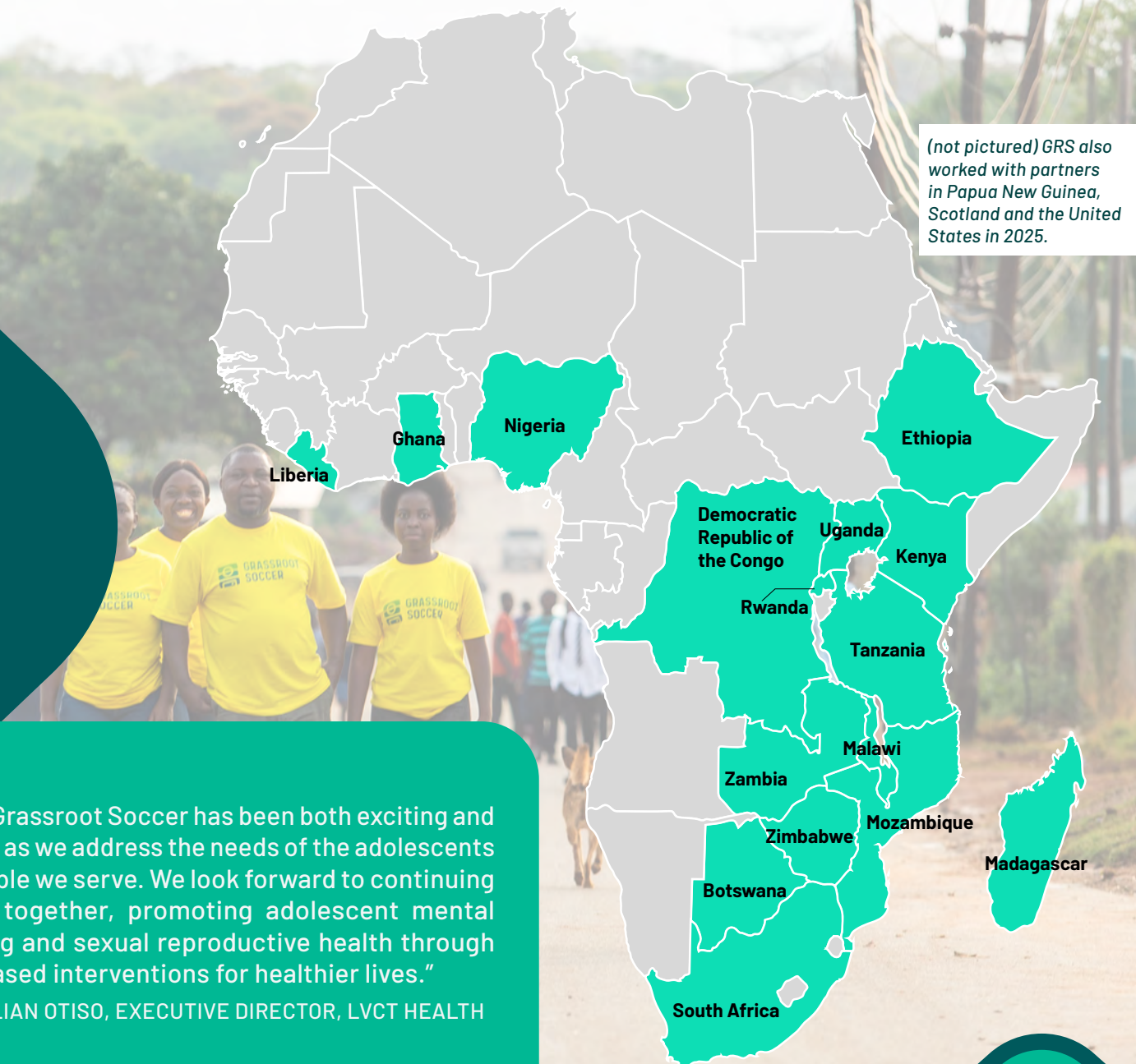
Where We Worked in 2025

GRS collaborated
with partners
across
19 countries
in 2025.



“Working with Grassroot Soccer has been both exciting and transformative as we address the needs of the adolescents and young people we serve. We look forward to continuing this journey together, promoting adolescent mental well-being and sexual reproductive health through sport-based interventions for healthier lives.”

- DR. LILIAN OTISO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LVCT HEALTH



📍 London, U.K.

2025 Annual Gala

The 2025 Grassroot Soccer Annual Gala brought our global community of supporters together to celebrate the power of coaching and **raise more than £1 million for Grassroot Soccer.**

"As football coaches, we're firm believers in recognizing potential and investing in young people, and Grassroot Soccer's Coaches are doing this around the world."

— **Sir Alex Ferguson**, legendary Manchester United Manager

"There's no price tag you can put on hope. We're raising money to provide these young people with the hope and the opportunity to have a future."

— **Tobin Heath**, 2x World Cup Winner, GRS Advisory Board Co-Chair and Ambassador

Christen Press and Tobin Heath

Rachel Riley
Gala Host

Game Changer Award Honoree:
Arsenal Women
(represented by Leah Williamson CBE)

"Grassroot Soccer uses football to provide safer, healthier environments for young people, and we're proud to align our efforts to drive generational change for young women and girls with such an inspiring organization."

— **Leah Williamson**, Arsenal Women Captain

Bobby Clark and Dr. Tommy Clark

Innocent Masuku
English National Opera

"Mentors are such important figures, and in at-risk communities around the world, Grassroot Soccer Coaches are playing this crucial role for young people every single day."

— **Sir David Beckham**, Footballing Legend

Fiona Ferguson

“By creating supportive and safe spaces, we encourage young people to openly share challenges and utilize services, and this is why our work matters. Of course we play soccer, but it is more than just a game.”

— Benson Mumba (Coach, Zambia)



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.

13 ongoing research and evaluation projects in **8** countries

4 papers published in peer-reviewed journals

2025 Research Partners:



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM



UCSF

University of California
San Francisco



YEDI



KAMUZU
UNIVERSITY
OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Goodbusiness



GRS and partners published articles in peer-reviewed journals including:

- [International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health](#)
 - A Gamified Digital Mental Health Intervention Across Six Sub-Saharan African Countries: A Cross-Sectional Evaluation of a Large-Scale Implementation
- [South African Health Review](#)
 - Lessons learnt from integrating mental health into sport-based adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes in South Africa
- [Reproductive Health](#)
 - The impact of the SKILLZ intervention on sexual and reproductive health empowerment among Zambian adolescent girls and young women: results of a cluster randomized controlled trial
- [PLoS Global Public Health](#)
 - Evaluation of the SKILLZ intervention to promote HIV testing and contraceptive uptake in adolescent girls in Lusaka, Zambia: a cluster-randomized trial

Spotlight on Youth Engagement

At Grassroot Soccer, we believe that young people are experts in their lives. That's why we intentionally apply the principle of "nothing about us without us" to our work and center youth perspectives within the organization.

Composed of 18 young leaders from 7 countries, GRS's [Youth Advisory Committee \(YAC\)](#) provides crucial youth-led review and input into GRS programming and influences decision-making processes across the organization, as well as creates opportunities for leadership and development to SKILLZ Coaches from affiliates and partners.

In 2025, YAC members represented GRS on global platforms such as the **WHO Youth Council** and at international conferences including the **International Workshop on HIV, SRHR, and Adolescence** and **Global Mental Health Summit**.



"Youth engagement to me is when our ideas are treated as sparks to ignite real change – and not as side notes."

– YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEMBER MUKUKA MUMBA, ZAMBIA



"Being a YAC member to me means representing youth perspectives and ensuring our ideas are heard, valued, and acted upon."

– YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEMBER TIYANJANE SMART, MALAWI

Our Supporters

Grassroot Soccer would like to thank our institutional donors and partners for their support in 2025. 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.

Ellen and Ware Adams
Dr. Anne H. Addington Fund
Masha Adonyeva
Fraser Allen
Richard Alvarado
Anonymous
Gregory D. Ansin Family Fund
The Averitt Family
Balyasny Asset Management L.P.
Bama Works Fund of Dave Matthews Band
Stephen and June Barth
Lex Bayer
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Jack and Dorothy Byrne Foundation
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Carola Lea
Christine and Scott Leber
Sabrina and Matt LeBlanc
Kate and Gregg Lemkau
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Michael Lewis
Dominique and George Lightbody
Mayra Linares-Garcia
Diego Londono
Steve Lubrano
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Susan and Steve Mandel
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Michel Massoud
Tom and Susie McCabe
Luke McFarlane
Jane and Peter McLaughlin
Merck & Co., Inc.
Michigan Center for Election
Heather Millstone
Mirnahill Foundation
Taku Miyashita
Erin Moskun
Moskun Family Fund
The Moose Fund
Angela Mwanza and Todd Blanke

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Owen Wagner
Todd Jensen
Mercer Island FC
Kaitlyn Helfrich

Sarah Lawrence College
Men's Soccer
Penn Men's Soccer
VTSU - Castleton Men and Women's Soccer

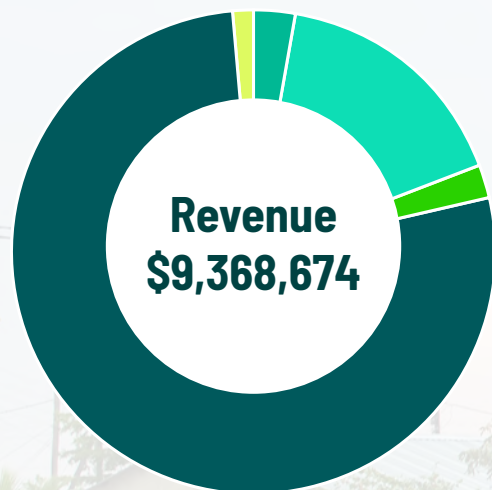
David Nadasi
Netflix
Andrew Niemiec
Dave Noakes
Anna O'Connell
Justine Oppenheim
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Matt Pickering
Portogallo Family
Christen Press
Cory Rellas
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Sandy and Joe Samberg
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Susan and Peter Schubert
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Taffy Schwelb
Anastasiya and Dustin Seale
Margaret and Charles Seale
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The Gould Shenfeld Foundation
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Jenny and Gordon Singer

Holly Hagens and Todd Sisitsky
Dag Skattum
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Janislee and William Wiese
J.J. Wiesler
Rick Wilber
Leah Williamson
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The Woolfolk Family Fund
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Mariano Zimmerler

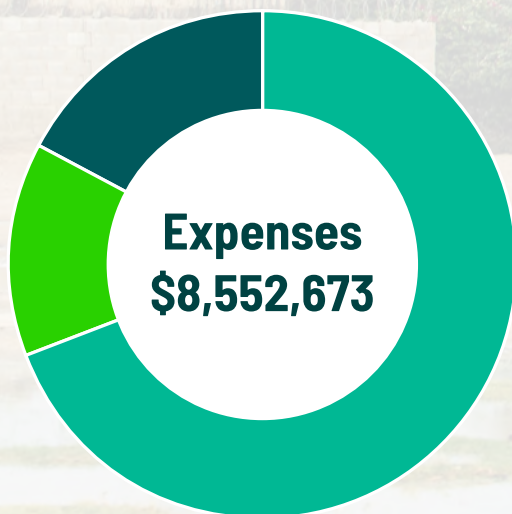
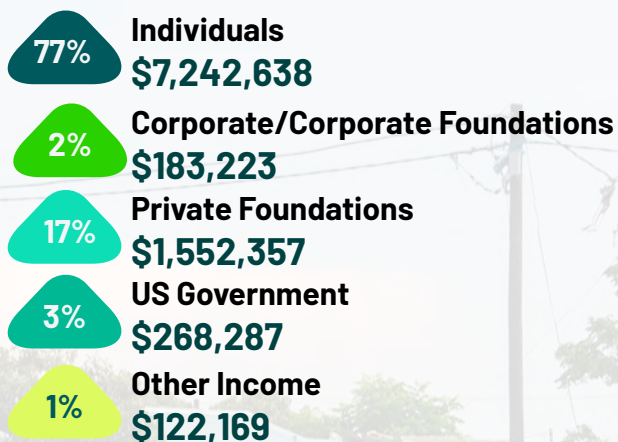
GRS also gratefully acknowledges the thousands of donors whose generous gifts, in every amount, made a meaningful contribution to our work.

Our Financials

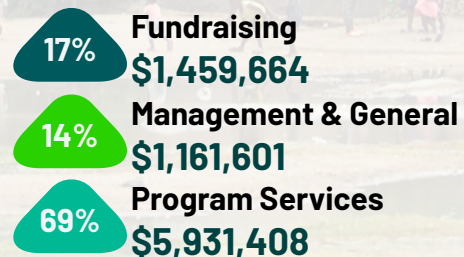
Grassroot Soccer has a deep commitment to our donors and we encourage you to take a look at our record of accountability. You can find more information about this commitment on our website, www.grassrootsoccer.org/financials.



Revenue
\$9,368,674



Expenses
\$8,552,673



2025 Board of Directors

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Principal, Averitt Consulting

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Chief Administrative Officer & General Counsel, White Castle Management Co.

Blaise Judja-Sato

Founder, VillageReach and the Resilience Trust

Jonathan Klein

Co-Founder/Former Chairman & CEO, Getty Images

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Clinical Professor of Business Administration; Faculty Director, Center for Health Care; Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College

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Former UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Founder Of Umlambo Foundation

Sherri C. Oberg

CEO and Co-founder, Particles for Humanity PBC

Christen Press

2x World Cup Winner, U.S. Women's National Team

Todd Sisitsky

President and Director, TPG Capital

Paula Ness Speers

Co-Founder and Senior Advisor, Health Advances





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