



Start a TOPSoccer Program



TOPSOCCER





What is TOPSoccer?



US Youth Soccer TOPSoccer (**T**he **O**utreach **P**rogram for **S**occer) is a community based recreational sports program for athletes with intellectual, emotional, or physical disabilities offered only through local US Youth Soccer-affiliated soccer clubs. TOPSoccer provides people with diverse abilities an opportunity to play soccer in a structured environment that is safe, fun, supportive, and inclusive.

Benefits for your Club/Organization

- Inclusive, community-based program
- Makes soccer available to every child regardless of ability
- Volunteer opportunities for current players and community
- Opportunities for sponsors and grants
- Shows a commitment to city/town leadership by serving all players of all abilities





What are the Goals of TOPSoccer?

- To provide a safe and fun environment in which the player can participate in a soccer program, based on ability, not age. The ability and participation level of these athletes will be diverse.
- Introduce players to a sport and team environment
- Provide the opportunity to participate in organized sports
- Provide not only an inclusive, but welcoming environment for players of all abilities
- Provide a sense of belonging for players of all abilities who for whatever reason are not able to participate in the more traditional approach to soccer.
- To build relationships among neurotypical and neurodiverse populations.





Who is part of TOPSoccer?



- **Volunteer Buddies:** Each participant is assigned a neurotypical volunteer, trained 'Buddy'. This Buddy works with their player individually and makes sure they are safe, engaged, supported, and having fun. The player-Buddy relationship is maintained throughout the course of a season, resulting in strong interpersonal bonds and an establishment of trust and confidence that allows each player to achieve their full potential.
- **Volunteer Coaches:** USYS offers education and certification training that assists coaches in successfully delivering the program. This includes coaching strategies and tactics specifically for children with special needs, education on the traits of the most common disabilities and guidance on how to modify typical soccer practice activities so everyone can be successful.
- **Athletes Families** – Required to be present, cheerlead and spectate unless needed on the field, and socialize with other parents.





Benefits for Players

- **SOCIAL SKILLS** - Players interact with their volunteer Buddy and other peers in a fun, group setting and build social behaviors.
- **TEAMWORK** - Players learn to trust someone else and rely on them through soccer activities and games.
- **PERSEVERANCE** - Players might encounter difficulties with activities, but they will be encouraged to keep trying and overcome challenges.
- **CONFIDENCE** - Players will achieve success on the field that carries over to their lives off the field in so many ways
- **COMPETITION** – Playing with like minded athletes, sense of belonging and experience success
- **PHYSICAL HEALTH** – Players build cardiovascular endurance and motor skills
- **FUN!**
- **IMMEASURABLE!**





Benefits for Parents

- ❖ Feeling of comradery
- ❖ Community building
- ❖ Resource sharing
- ❖ See compassion of others in the community
 - ❖ Others understand
 - ❖ Relax and cheer on their athlete
- ❖ Include their athlete in a more natural, inclusive & safe environment



Benefits for Volunteers

- Learn about kids with differences
- Leadership opportunities
- Learn empathy, compassion, and acceptance
- Problem solving and adapting on the fly
- Flexibility
- Volunteer hours
- New Friendships





Who is a TOPSoccer Player?



CAL NORTH



- ❖ Any athlete, who for physical, emotional, or behavioral reasons cannot successfully participate in a recreational soccer program.
- ❖ The players range from age 4 -17. Check with your league and/or state association to determine their age range for players and what works best for your program.
- ❖ The TOPSoccer player is an athlete, not their disability. They are, first and foremost, players with different personalities and abilities.
- ❖ Ideally, the player should be able to participate safely in small group and one-on-one basic skill exercises adapted to the individual player abilities.
- ❖ The most common disabilities include: Down Syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, ADHD, Hearing Impaired, and developmental and neurological disorders

What skills do you need as a coach?

♥ Compassion

♥ Patience

♥ Love of team sports and kids

♥ Ability to work and connect with people

♥ Flexibility

♥ Problem solve and adapt on the spot

♥ Soccer knowledge beneficial, but not required



Who Can Start a TOPSoccer Program

- ☐ Any league or club in Cal North can start a TOPSoccer Program to accommodate players that may be challenged by the typical game of soccer.
- ☐ Community Members
- ☐ Local Community Recreation Programs
- ☐ Anyone who is passionate about sharing the game of soccer with people of all abilities!





What Do I Need to Consider when starting a program?

- Is there a need in the community?
- Is there a local league, club, organization, or people who will support TOPSoccer?
- Is there someone who would like to take on the role of TOPSoccer coordinator?
- Do you have support for resources and equipment?
- Is there an accessible space with bathroom facilities to run the program?
- Costs associated with starting a program
- Do I have a community of volunteers who would like to be a part of TOPSoccer?



How to Start...



Consider..

- ❑ Within your league, club or community, Identify someone that is willing to administer and coach this program. (this may be 2 individuals)
- ❑ Contact your State Soccer Association to discuss questions/information regarding starting a program (this is really no different than starting any new program in soccer).
- ❑ Contact a league/club in your state that has a program and visit. Ask for help from those who are currently running a TOPSoccer program.

How to Start Cont...

- ❑ Gather a small committee of people that can help with different tasks to get started (Coaching, budgeting, Marketing-website, registration, risk management, equipment, fields and someone with knowledge of the players skills and abilities). A special needs parent can lend a wealth of knowledge. Many of these people are already working in our soccer communities and can jump right in to help you.
- ❑ Assess your needs. What kind of program would be best in your community. Clinic environment, teams, playdays, festival etc..... Outdoor or Indoor? Modified play for different spectrums. Start planning early. Give yourself 4-6 months lead time to launch.
- ❑ Create Goals and set target numbers for your program.

How to Start Cont...

- ❑ Select the best time to provide this program. Fall, Winter, Spring? Maybe at the same time as your recreation player? Be cognizant of conflicting programs so the players can participate. (school programs, Special Olympics etc.)
- ❑ Secure location. Be sure to explore a location to accommodate this program safely. Can it accommodate different needs (hard surface for wheelchairs and walkers)?
- ❑ Establish a budget. Reach out to local business for donations and sponsorships for start up expenses. Expenses to consider are specialize equipment and medical staff on site.

How to Start Cont...

- ❑ Advertise for Staffing (coaches, volunteers, buddy helpers) and get commitments. Many of the travel teams will participate, especially the high school players who need volunteer hours. You do not want to register players and then have no support structure to provide the program. Reach out while in the planning stages.
- ❑ Register players. Reach out to your current families, many are already looking for this kind of program for siblings. Market and advertise in the special education community, this is not any different than starting any other New Program.

Where To Recruit Players?

- Special needs programs in community – Challenger Baseball, Aquatic Programs
- Regional Centers
- School District Special Education programs
- Soccer Clubs Newsletters
- Other Soccer Clubs that don't have programs
- Special needs social media groups on Facebook/Instagram
- Nextdoor
- Parent Resource Groups
- Down Syndrome Connection
- Autism Speaks
- Talk About a Cure
- Cerebral Palsy Society
- CCS - California Children's Services
- COCOKids – Contra Costa County

Recruiting players Cont.

- Family Resource Network
- Care Parent Network
- Autism Programs
- Contra Costa Child Care Council
- Local City Recreation Programs – some have special education programs
- Charter schools - Visions in Education, Pacific Charter Institute, Valley View Charter
- CARE Parent Network
- Private Therapy Clinics
- Special Haven
- Special Ed Teachers, OT's, PT's, Developmental Specialists, Resource Teachers

Where To Recruit Volunteers?

- Local High Schools
- Soccer Clubs
- Friends/Family
- Families of players
- Community youth groups
- Religious organizations such as church groups, synagogues
- Local groups/organizations that promote teen social action

Marketing

- Flyer
 - Email to community programs
 - Post on social media
 - Drop off at community program
- Club Website – develop TOPSoccer tab with information and links to register for volunteers and players

WALNUT CREEK SURF SOCCER CLUB'S
TOPSoccer
 FOR ATHLETES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



WHEN: FRIDAYS 4:30-5:30 SEPT. 23-OCT. 28
WHERE: TICE VALLEY PARK, WALNUT CREEK
COST: \$35, INCLUDES PLAYER T-SHIRT
EMAIL: TOPSOCCERCOORDINATOR@WCSC.ORG

US Youth Soccer TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) is a community-based training program for all athletes ages 6-18 with intellectual, emotional, and/or physical disabilities. The program strives to provide soccer opportunities for players to develop at their own pace in a safe, fun, supportive and inclusive environment.

We start each session with small group and one-on-one basic skill exercises adapted to the individual players. After a short break, we scrimmage. A parent or guardian needs to be present.

Visit wcsc.org/program-information to register.

 **TOPSOCCER**  **YOUTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

Youth buddy volunteers ages 13-18 are invited to help! No experience with soccer or working with special needs required, just a friendly, positive attitude! To volunteer, email topsoccercoordinator@wcsc.org

 Walnut Creek Surf TOPSoccer
 FOR YOUNG ATHLETES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Now in its third season, Walnut Creek Surf Soccer Club is excited for TOPSoccer (The Outreach Program for Soccer) to return this Fall. TOPSoccer is a community-based soccer program for young athletes with special needs.

TOPSoccer is open to all athletes with physical or intellectual disabilities ages 6-18 who are challenged by the demands of traditional soccer.

Players will learn and play soccer in a safe, fun environment. TOPSoccer also offers an enriching experience for youth volunteers.

PLAYERS
 Open to children with special needs, ages 6-18
 No experience necessary, but a parent/guardian is required to be present.

WHEN & WHERE
 6 Friday/
 September 10, 17, 24,
 October 1, 8, 15
 4:30-5:30 PM
 Tice Valley Park,
 Walnut Creek

BENEFITS
 • Social opportunities
 • Increase self-esteem
 • Improve health
 • Learn skills & play games
 • Make sensory experience
 • 1:1 Youth volunteer buddy
 • Parent coaching
 • Safe, fun & caring environment

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS
 Youth volunteer buddies (ages 13-18) are invited to help! No experience with soccer or working with special needs children required, just a friendly, positive attitude.
 Volunteer sign up [here](http://wcsc.org/program-information)

REGISTRATION
 \$35 Registration Fee*
 To register, visit www.wcsc.org/sports/program-information
 *Includes player t-shirt

What Are the Start Up Costs?

- Costs vary depending upon your registration fees and insurance fees, and uniform and equipment costs.
 - *This is a rough estimate:*
 - \$8.50 – insurance
 - \$10-\$12/shirt
 - \$10/hour for field space
 - ~\$2000 – balls, pugs, pinnies, flags, ladders, hoola hoops
 - ~\$50 - Vinyl banner to hang at field (3'x6')
 - Other costs incurred from the club/league such as admin fees and fingerprinting/background check fees
- Cost should be kept low and affordable to all possible participants.
 - For Example: \$25-\$35 registration fee which includes a shirt
- Ask the club/league to provide equipment to help you get started

How Can I Raise Money to Start a TOPSoccer program?

- There are philanthropic entities, such as the Shriners which offer assistance. Research others in the local community (Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, etc.).
- Approach local companies or corporations for cash or in-kind donations.
- Foundations that support kids
- Local Children's hospital
- Fundraiser
- Grants
 - USYS Topsoccer Grant
 - Local City Grant – i.e. Walnut Creek Civic Pride Foundation
 - Corporate Grants

Registration

Who sets up Registration?

- CalNorth or
- Club/League

What do I include in Player registration:

- Standard information that the club already gathers **Plus:**
- Questions that will be helpful for the Buddy and coaches to be aware of to ensure that TOPS is fun and successful for the player. Some examples include:
 - Describe any sensitivities your player has? (i.e. noise, light, grass, touch)
 - Describe your players activity level? Are they an elopement risk?
 - Does your player need any support with transitions?
 - How does you player communicate? (verbal or non-verbal)
 - Does your player have any physical limitations that we should be aware of?
 - Does your player use adaptive equipment or a wheelchair?
 - Does you child have allergies that will impact their time on the field?

Registration cont.

How to register Volunteers?

- Google form

What Questions to ask Volunteers?

- Name
- Email
- Phone
- Age
- Dates available
- Why TOPSoccer?
- Any relevant experience with special needs?
- Emergency Contact

Weekly Volunteer Management

- ❖ TeamSnap
- ❖ Sign up genius

Buddy Orientation

- [USYS TOPSoccer Buddy Course](#) – can be used for live meeting
- [WCSSC TOPSoccer Orientation slides 2022](#)
- Buddy Videos –have buddies watch prior to live meeting
 - [Buddy Course](#)
 - [Disabilities](#)
 - [Buddy Roles](#)
 - [Additional Buddy Information](#)
- Live in person or zoom call within week of starting program (record for those who can't attend)
 - Introductions
 - Program expectations
 - Roles of Buddy/leaders

What Equipment Do I need to Get Started? **CAL NORTH**

Essential Equipment:

- Field space with bathroom accessibility, preferably fenced in or away from a parking lot of busy road – 2 hour block
- 1 ball/player + some extras
- Pug goals – small and large
- Cones – multicolored helpful
- Flags
- Pinnies - 2 colors

Additional Equipment to consider:

- Large soccer goals (usually locked on the soccer fields)
- Rebounder
- 3-4' large inflatable balls
- Parachute
- Agility equipment such as ladders, hula hoops, balance blocks, speed hurdles
- Sensory soccer balls – weighted, auditory, grippy
- Soccer Trainer Waist Belt

Other information

- Insurance – \$8.50 fee is covered in Registration fee
- Request Donations – have an option on registration to donate to the program
- Have parents sign photo release
- Concussion Release of Liability
- COVID Protocol – follow club policies
- Fingerprinting - anyone 18+ working directly with the kids on the field must be fingerprinted and background checked. Check with club/league regarding process. 18+ **Players** in TOPSoccer are exempt from this.
- Cal North Requirement - Annual online safety course through Safe Sport, Health and Safety Training, Background Questionnaire – one time
- Training for coaches through USYS – TOPSoccer Coaches Training Course, Annual Symposium, Quarterly TOPSoccer zoom meetings

Timeline

- 4-6 weeks prior –
 - open player registration either through CalNorth or through your club/league
 - Order equipment
- 6 weeks prior - start to recruit players – sign up through google form
- 4 weeks prior - open 2 sign up accounts such as Team Snap or sign up genius – one for players, one for volunteers – communicate through these accounts
- 2-3 weeks prior – order shirts (if providing)
- 1 week prior –
 - close registration for players
 - Make sure have enough volunteers based on number of players, if not, continue recruiting
- Within 1 week Prior – [Zoom Buddy Orientation](#) (example), send out welcome email to parents include what to bring/wear, introduce coaches, explain program

Prepare for Training cont.

Equipment list:

- 1 ball per player – varied sizes – 3,4,5
- Pug goals
- Other desired soccer equipment
- First aid kit
- Name tags
- Markers
- Clipboards
- Banner w/zipties to hang up at the field (if desired)

First Training

- If providing shirts – assign buddies to organize/distribute
- Assign buddies to be greeters and check in players
- Have buddies arrive at least 45 minutes early to assign buddies, review expectations, communication with parents, process, schedule, skill stations, etc...
- Have a brief parent meeting once kids are settled on the field – review what TOPS is, coaches, communication, layout of trainings, expectations of parents, answer questions, etc...

Other Considerations

- Youth leaders – i.e. Buddy group leaders, equipment manager, admin assistant, jr. assistant coach
- Assign a Team Parent
- Recruit a parent volunteer to take photos