

Psychology Department Connects with Refugee Children through Soccer

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Dr. Sara Boghosian assists a child in tying their shoe.

Photo credit: Benjamin Juarez

Graduate students, faculty, and partners of the USU Psychology Department meet with refugee children every Saturday to play soccer. Clinical assistant professor Sara Boghosian and graduate student José Manuel Gonzalez Vera started this soccer club in partnership with [Athletics United](#).

"I have an inexplicable love for soccer," said Boghosian. "I say 'inexplicable' because I did not grow up watching it or playing it, and my father was an American Football coach my entire life."

Boghosian and Gonzalez Vera connected over their common interest in soccer, but they both recognized that the sport has become very competitive and expensive to participate in during recent years. "We realize that many families around the country cannot afford to sign their kids up for a soccer club due to the financial aspects of the sport."

Boghosian and Gonzalez Vera reached out to the Cache Valley organization Athletics United to form a partnership. Athletics United is a local nonprofit running club that offers local children from refugee families a place to connect with the community and participate in athletic activity.

"The support of Athletics United has been invaluable," said Boghosian. "We took a lot of our structure from their practices, we operate under their non-profit status, and we do mutual fundraising. Their connection to the refugee community allowed us to take off very quickly."

Boghosian and Gonzalez Vera began reaching out to peers in the Psychology Department community for volunteers. Soon undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and family members started supporting the cause.

"I have been amazed at how many of our graduate students and faculty have wanted to support this," said Boghosian.

The soccer club meets every Saturday from 10am to noon behind Bridger Elementary School. Children range in age between 3 to 17, and about 25 children participate weekly. While the club focuses on soccer skills, there is also plenty of opportunity for children to build community connections with each other and with the volunteers, something that Boghosian feels is deeply important.

"My grandfather was a refugee to this country. He was not always accepted or welcomed with open arms, but he made a good life for his family in this country," said Boghosian. "I want these children and their families to feel welcome and valued here. Soccer allows us to connect, even though we have significant language differences."

The soccer club and Athletics United are raising funds for new soccer goals, after-practice snacks, and more. Individuals interested in participating in the soccer club, volunteering to support Athletics United, or donating are encouraged to contact [Dr. Sara Boghosian](#) or visit the [Athletics United website](#).

This story was originally published on the USU Psychology Department website.