



## OUR STORY

Founded by community members in 2014, Heart of the City (HOTC) was formed to address the lack of access to quality youth sports programs for families in Lake County, Illinois. Merging its recreation league with the nationally-recognized soccer club known as North Central United, **HOTC has grown to nearly 800 players** and through the experience and expertise of new coaches, the quality of our programs have greatly improved. Today we are extending our reach beyond the field to help strengthen families while focusing on building infrastructure, so that our long-term sustainability is assured.



## OUR FOCUS

Unfortunately, not every child can join a sports team. Many children in Waukegan face economic barriers to doing so. Heart of the City is focusing on this underserved community. **Over 65% of our families are lower income and 98% of our players and their families are from the city of Waukegan.**

**Because access to soccer locally is also shaped by gender**, our organization focuses its efforts specifically on increasing the participation rate for girls in both our recreational season and our competitive club program.



## OUR MODEL

Studies show that **young people who play organized sports are more likely than their counterparts to attend college and obtain degrees.** Yet the most vulnerable populations of our community are not empowered to tackle their circumstances. Heart of the City seeks to change this by:

- (1) Recognizing that expenses are the biggest driver in youth soccer participation.** Our recreation program is 50-65% less expensive than other soccer organizations in our area. We also work with parents, particularly those with multiple children, to find ways to reduce the cost of registration fees to ensure no one needs to sit on the sidelines.
- (2) Placing significant emphasis on preparing young people academically.** Homework is a priority and is always completed prior to athletic training. Report cards are collected throughout each season from each player and reviewed for subject difficulties, overall grade point average, and attendance and truancy issues.

**Heart of the City**  
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