

Press Release

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CONTACT: Estella Espinosa
Work: (832) 395-7022
Cell: (832) 465-4782

H.P.A.R.D.'s Soccer for Success Program Coordinator Hector Avila Honored As Let's Move and Physical Activity "Champion of Change" by White House

"Soccer for Success" Works to Increase

Access to Physical Activity for Youth in Houston

H.P.A.R.D.'s Soccer for Success Program Coordinator, Hector Avila, was honored as a White House Champion of Change in a ceremony last Thursday by First Lady Michelle Obama. The honor recognizes Avila's work with the H.P.A.R.D. Soccer for Success program to improve the lives of Houston school children through athletics and education. First Lady Michelle Obama launched her *Let's Move!* initiative with the goal of solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation, and physical activity – in addition to a healthy diet – is a key focus of the initiative.

"We are very proud and honored that Hector and our Soccer for Success program have been recognized for helping get area youth involved in a healthy physical activity that will benefit them throughout their lives," said Joe Turner, Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department. "We are especially proud to be able to say that not only is Hector the program coordinator, he is also a product of our department's many after school programs, himself. Before he grew into the great role model he is today...he was a young person who came to our parks and learned how to play soccer through parks after school programming. We are very happy to say congratulations to Hector for this honor and thank him for serving as a role model for the youth he works with everyday."

Hector Avila learned how to play soccer through a H.P.A.R.D. soccer program when he was a teenager. He credits the program with giving him focus and a career path. Today, he holds licenses from the United States Soccer Federation and the South Texas Youth Soccer Association. He has dedicated his life to improving the lives of inner city youth through soccer, team work, life skills development and healthy and active lifestyles.

"Soccer for Success is a great program because it helps give young people an outlet that they might not have without the program," said Hector Avila. "While we are working with the kids to teach them the game of soccer, we are also teaching them life skills through sports. In sports, you have the chance to have fun, you learn teamwork, you develop a skill and you find a positive outlet for your energy. Programs that give young people this focus can help them develop into young adults with goals for their lives and future careers."

Soccer for Success is a partnership program between the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.), the U.S. Soccer Foundation (U.S.S.F.), the Houston Dynamo and Dynamo Charities, and the Houston Independent School District (H.I.S.D.). It offers Houston children the opportunity to take part in an organized after-school recreational soccer program at no charge. Originally

created by H.P.A.R.D. over three years ago, the Department has worked with U.S.S.F. to develop educational curriculum and training guidelines to help replicate the program in other cities.

Today, H.P.A.R.D.'s Soccer for Success program is funded by a grant from the U.S. Soccer Foundation. The program offers over 1,000 low-income youth the opportunity to learn soccer and develop life skills that will last throughout their lives. The Houston Parks and Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.) has been awarded a two-year, \$230,000 grant from the United States Soccer Foundation (U.S.S.F.) to continue providing after-school soccer skill development activities to 1,000 low-income children in 10 public schools. The grant award is one of thirteen U.S.S.F. Social Innovation Fund Sub-Grants, totaling \$3.6 million over two years, to support the implementation of *Soccer for Success* nationwide. The funding came from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which seeks to utilize public and private resources to grow promising, innovative community-based solutions to improve the lives of those in low-income communities.

The Champions of Change program is part of President Obama's "Winning the Future" initiative and the First Lady's "Let's Move!" program, which strives to beat America's childhood obesity problem within one generation. Each week, a group of community leaders making strides in this area is honored at the White House. Hector Avila was one of the Champions of Change receiving accolades last week.

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department (H.P.A.R.D.) stewards and manages over 38,992 acres of parkland and greenspace for the City of Houston and develops and implements recreational programming for citizens of all abilities. For more information on Soccer for Success, youth sports, and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, call (832) 395-7022 or visit www.houstonparks.org.