



2023 NLARA Annual Report

FY2023 Executive Summary

The North Lawndale Athletic and Recreation Association (NLARA) emerged from a shared vision of the North Lawndale community and the NLARA's founders to create a safer environment for youth in the community through equitable sports and recreation opportunities. The NLARA is committed to providing equitable opportunities for young people of all ages to participate in safe and nurturing sports and recreational activities.



Founded by UCAN, the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, Old St. Patrick's Church and Play Like a Champion Today and multiple sports program leaders in April 2017, the NLARA continues its fight against systemic racism and creatively responds to the needs of the North Lawndale Community. At our core, we believe that engaging youth at an early age can combat the negative influences in the community and support them on the road to a healthy and fulfilling life. All founding partners remain vibrantly active in the NLARA. We are stronger together!

As we completed our sixth year of operation, the NLARA has been true to its mission of working together to leverage our impact on the community while we keep our focus on the well-being of the youth we serve. Key highlights include:

- **Participation:** continuing to increase our outreach which is now over 6200 youth and their families (over 2400 participants and 4800 residents through community events).
- **Partners and Programming:** collaborating partners increased to over 25 organizations and over 50 programs.
- **Climate and Culture:** A Laureus Grant allowed Play Like a Champion to offer attendance incentives for coaches and parents to attend coaching and parent workshops. Coach attendance was 67 (doubling previous years highs) and we introduced parent workshops with 167 attendees. The Laureus grant was renewed for 2024 and we anticipate generating the same numbers in the upcoming year.
- **Expanding Funding Sources:** The NLARA is grateful for its funding partners, many of whom are providing multi-year support. The NLARA is primarily funded through 10 partner organizations and added the Administration of Children and Families. This funding supported operational needs as well as supporting over \$100K in grants to participating partner organizations.

Org Growth: the NLARA has updated its website, refined its data collection processes and is playing leadership a role within Laureus Sports for Good as well initiating a Girls/Women's Sports Council to provide a focused effort on increasing girls sports participation.

Kinship is at the root of our success: collaborating with each other and putting the needs of the community first provides a strong foundation for our future growth.

Programming Overview – need to update. Thinking we go with a 2 pager. Like we did in 2022. (see other attachment.

We could show highlights of the year namely:



Quotes and pictures for Parent workshops.

- Eagles sending x children to National in Florida
- Lions Rugby: 9 North Lawndale graduates receiving Scholarships from Ivy League schools.
- Formation of a Girls in Sports Council to increase participation in North Lawndale

Over the past year, the NLARA supported ongoing and summer-specific programs with the continued focus of providing a safe and supportive environment for the youth participants:

- ✓ **North Lawndale Eagles Football:** The Eagles provide programming for young men ages 6-14. With a large team of athletes, coaches and parental support, the Eagles, have had a notable community presence for over 30 years.
- ✓ **The Bloc** uses the discipline of boxing to provide resources for Chicago's youth. In addition to daily boxing practice, The Bloc offer supplementary programming in the arts and sciences through its computer labs as well as providing food and clothing banks to the community.
- ✓ **The Investment** runs basketball programming for boys and now girls as well as provides family support sessions for both children and their parents.
- ✓ **Boxing Out Negativity** held daily boxing practice that regularly included distance running and cycling. In addition, Boxing Out Negativity provides participants with recreational opportunities throughout Chicago like kayaking and yoga.



- ✓ **Endless Energy** hosted the Jr. Go League, a virtual basketball league for elementary schools that completed its fourth year. Additionally, Endless Energy provides athletes and their family support as they navigate high school and college.
- ✓ **Four Point Play** develop and distribute virtual basketball programming with an emphasis on character-building, mentorship and nutrition. Four Point Play runs skill clinics in collaboration with other NLARA members and organized at-home equipment kit distribution for athletes.
- ✓ **UCAN** hosted a variety of weekly open gyms and invites NLARA members to use their gym to run clinics and leagues.
- ✓ **Girls in the Game** ran multi-sport programming for girls in schools throughout North Lawndale. Girls in the Game also presented sport sampling camps during spring and summer breaks.
- ✓ **Chicago Lions Community Rugby** ran their competitive rugby program for 7th-12th graders. The Lions plan to restart their in-school programming in the current academic year.
- ✓ **Girls on the Run** piloted a community-based running program for girls at UCAN this Fall and will run another season this upcoming Winter.
- ✓ **Carole Robertson, a new NLARA member**, provided after-school programming to young people from birth to 17 years old in North Lawndale and Little Village. Programming involved a mix of tutoring, recreational activities, and many forms of play.
- ✓ **West Side Sports League, a new NLARA member**, organized basketball and baseball leagues for West Side youth. Teams are a collaboration between non-profits, religious institutions, and police officers.
- ✓ **Peace Runners**
- ✓ **A Step Ahead Chess**

Collaboration and Community Engagement

Spring and Fall Community Sports Day

This year, the NLARA piloted two community events to increase youths' exposure to non-traditional sports and provide opportunities for families to sign up their children for programming. The Community Sports Days gave community members a chance to learn about the NLARA and experience the collaborative approach to program development. Families met coaches and found quality programs and activities for their young people. During the Fall Community Sports Day, young people experienced new activities like rowing, chess, lacrosse, and rugby. The event was featured by BlockClubChicago.com [here](#).

Collaboration

In the wake of the programming disruption caused by the pandemic, the NLARA collectively grew through intentional, mutually beneficial collaboration. Throughout 2021, member organizations worked to lift up one another to support young people and their families. Highlights included:

- **The Investment, Four Point Play, and Endless Energy** collaborated to adapt their existing basketball programs by offering virtual and safe in-person sessions to stay connected with the young people they serve and keep them active throughout the pandemic. This collaboration across basketball programs is most aptly experienced by [this short documentary](#) on the virtual Jr. Go League.
- **Girls in the Game** coordinated with **The Chicago Lions Rugby** to use their facility to run safe, in-person programming during Spring Break and throughout the Summer.
- **Boxing Out Negativity** partnered with various community organizations, including **Working Bikes and Equiticity**, a national leader in developing racial equity through movement, to host their second annual Street Love Ride, a bike ride demonstration for peace.
- **Lawndale Christian Community Church** trained high-school-aged leaders who served as summer interns with **The North Lawndale Eagles** and **The Investment**.

Program Participant Breakdown

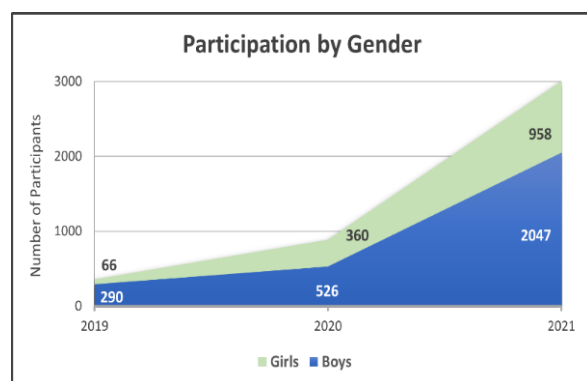
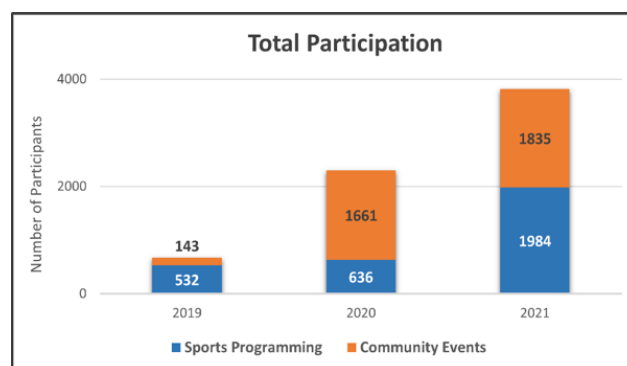
Funding for programming was generously supported by The Steans Family Foundation, IMC Foundation, Old St Patrick's Catholic Church, The Chicago Cubs, Nike and the 100 Thousand Foundation. These funds were distributed by UCAN and the participation count was as follows:

	ASWBL	Boxing Out Negativity	The Bloc	Carole Robertson	Chicago Lions Rugby	Collins Academy	Endless Energy	Girls in the Game	Girls on the Run	NLARA	North Lawndale Eagles	The Investment	Four Point Play	Franklin Park Little League	West Side Sports League	Total
Total Participants	36	439	395	179	92	23	93	224	12	85	85	15	1605	34	502	3819
Sports Programming Total	36	23	133	179	92	23	55	224	12	0	85	15	571	34	502	1984
Community Events and Support Total	0	416	262	0	0	0	38	0	0	85	0	0	1034	0	0	1835

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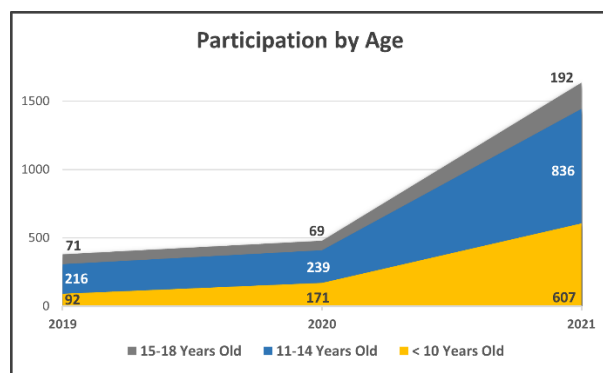
NLARA intentionally targets underserved demographics, including girls, grades K-5, and first-time participants. We continuously strive to add variety to our programming, either by incorporating different sports into existing programming or working with new organizations to add new sports to the community's option.

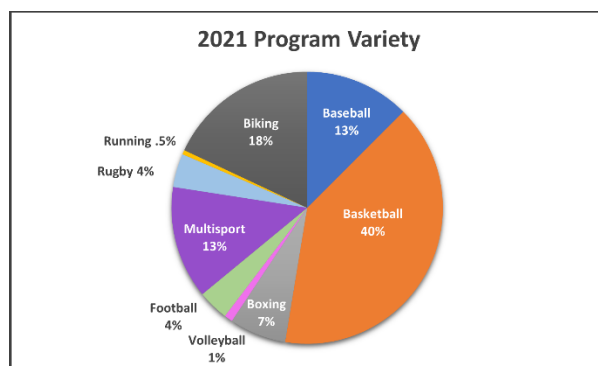
Participation: In 2021, the NLARA served 3,819 young people and families. Participation increased in sport programming from 636 to 1,984 and maintained a strong community presence, increasing impact from 1,661 to 1,835. The primary drivers of this growth are the expanded programming capacity and the addition of new partners.



Gender: While many NLARA programs primarily serve boys/young men, the NLARA welcomed Girls in the Game, Girls on the Run, and ASWBL into the association. The NLARA plans to continue partnering with member organizations to increase opportunities for young ladies.

Age Distribution: The NLARA targeted younger participants this year, resulting in a substantial increase in both the ten and under and 11 - 14 age groups. The NLARA recognizes that engaging children when they are young will lead to higher retention rates as they grow older. While engaging youth earlier is important, the NLARA acknowledges the importance of programming for high school-aged youth as well.





Sport Variety: The NLARA values providing variety in its sports programming to expand its reach and provide children with a variety of experiences. This year, we were able to add sports like running, Biking, and Volleyball. During our Community Sports Day, we exposed young people to Chess, Rowing and Lacrosse.

Program Evaluation Survey Completion: Program survey completion has proved to be increasingly challenging due to several factors. Many organizations have their own survey requirements and are hesitant to ask for additional information. However, the NLARA has a high success rate in collecting registration information and will increase its focus on the survey collection process while responding to the requirements of its partners.

The NLARA, led by Notre Dame professor Dr. Clark Power, expanded its program evaluation survey that was adapted to create a version for younger children and modified to also include questions that measure development in socio-emotional learning. These items reflect the NLARA's commitment to developing a sport culture that is fun, builds relationships, teaches moral values, and encourages effort in the classroom.

Expanding Horizons: The NLARA seeks to expand participants' experience beyond the North Lawndale community. Program leaders, as they did last year, continued that focus.

- **Claude Robinson (UCAN)** presented at Play Like a Champion's 16th annual conference (virtual) attended by over two hundred youth sport leaders from across the country. In addition, 12 NLARA members participated in discussions centered around building inclusive/supportive youth sports programs in their communities.
- **Boxing Out Negativity** took their athletes camping in Southern Wisconsin and organized an opportunity to kayak on the Chicago River while collecting trash in collaboration with the Shedd Aquarium.
- **Endless Energy** sent high school seniors to a talent showcase in Phoenix, AZ to aid in recruitment and athletic scholarships for college.
- **The Bloc** developed their programming curriculum to include supplemental activities that develop literacy and computer skills, scientific curiosity, and artistic expression.
- **The Investment** went to Indianapolis for a weekend tournament.

NLARA Organizational Support and Development

The NLARA, now in its fourth year, continues to grow its operating and outreach capacity as highlighted by the following:

Community Needs and Assets Assessment: Over the past five years, the University of Notre Dame and Play Like a Champion have been conducting community assets and needs assessments in North Lawndale focused on the youth sports and recreation landscape. Each annual assessment is compiled from a combination of interviews with athletic directors, coaches, community leaders, including school principals and youth participants.

The assessment creates a directory of programs offered and evaluates the needs of the community. This year Clark Power hired Charee Toussant, a Psychology major at Harold Washington College and North Lawndale resident, as a research intern. She was tasked with asking questions about the challenges and opportunities presented by the return to program after the long layoff due to Covid restrictions. The assessment underscored the continuing need to respond to the loss of public-school sports and the growth potential of existing and new partnerships.

Coach/Parent Education: The NLARA is invested in developing a supportive youth sports culture in North Lawndale through rigorous educational programming for coaches, program directors and eventually parents. The training

focuses on preparing coaches to foster children's character development as mentors/team leaders. To date, seventy-seven program directors and coaches have participated in interactive coach workshops across twenty-nine organizations. In 2021, **Play Like a Champion** partnered with **The Investment** to run a supplemental workshop focused on incorporating mediation into sport trainings.

Grant Applications, and Registration and Data Collection

The NLARA is committed to developing consistency in its operating processes to support its members and facilitate program delivery and program evaluation. Great strides have been made in the following areas:

- **Grant Applications:** All grant applicants completed the NLARA application prior to the deadline.
- **Participant Registration Forms:** In 2020, the NLARA shifted to online registration data collection, supported by the UpMetrics platform. This data collection approach has improved the integrity of organization's data and subsequently improved the NLARA's ability to describe its collective impact. Registration data collection processes continue to improve as organizations become more comfortable with online platforms.

Organizational Support Provided by Founding Partners

UCAN (fiscal agent) has been providing guidance to the organizational development of the NLARA.

- **Program Management:** Claude Robinson, UCAN's Executive Vice President of Diversity and External Affairs, serves as Executive Director of the NLARA, and is the face of the NLARA to the North Lawndale community. Claude manages the overall NLARA organization and coordinates community outreach.
- **Marketing/Communications:** Derrick K. Baker, UCAN Vice President of Marketing Communications, is leading that effort as the NLARA continues to roll out its brand through its partners and seeks positive media coverage to expand its brand message to larger audiences, including funders and partners.
- **Fundraising:** UCAN Vice President of Development Fred Long the NLARA's fundraising efforts.

Project Management/Operations: **Play Like a Champion** project manages the organizational development process for the NLARA and has been playing the role of operations manager, particularly focused on implementing the data and evaluation processes.

Volunteers: **Old St. Patrick's Church** is in its fourth year of building out the NLARA volunteer base. There was strong Old St. Pat's involvement at both Community Sports Days, the Lawndale 5K, and bike rides hosted by Boxing Out Negativity.

NLARA Next Steps

In five years, the NLARA has grown from an idea of passionate community leaders who had a shared vision to a visible force in the community, serving over 3,800 children and families. The NLARA culture is well established, its membership is building a presence that is being increasingly felt in the community and plans to continue this trend in the upcoming year. The challenges of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic fueled NLARA partners to collaborate and find creative ways to stay in touch with the youth and serve the entire community. The children of North Lawndale need our support now more than ever and the NLARA will continue to work passionately to provide the children the opportunities they deserve.

As we enter 2022, the NLARA has set the following priorities:

- Impact 500 youth and families through sports programming and community events.
- Increase community partnerships from 31 to over 35. Specifically, the NLARA plans to expand its relationships in the Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Schools.
- Engage 50-100 coaches and parents in NLARA workshops reinforcing its supportive culture.
- Expand community outreach through community sports days and building out the NLARA MarCom capacity.
- Establish a strong and stable funding base to support the hiring of staff positions during FYE June '20..

Finally, the NLARA has never lost sight of its shared vision, which is centered around its core values: serving the children of North Lawndale by providing sustainable, supportive and safe youth sports opportunities to promote their character development -- and have fun in the process. In essence, the NLARA exists because we love our youth and want to provide them with positive alternatives to help coach/mentor them along in life.