



# Recommendations for Communities

Helping Community Leaders Establish a Strong and Positive Youth Sports Culture

## **Executive Summary**

Organized youth sports programs are one of the greatest resources available for instilling valuable life skills in youngsters.

More than 30 million children participate in a wide range of organized youth sports programs nationwide – and they deserve to enjoy a fun, safe and rewarding experience. Unfortunately, the climate surrounding many programs has become less than ideal. Reports of physical altercations and verbal sparring among volunteer coaches, parents and officials have dramatically increased. This volatility that has emerged across the youth sports landscape has sent a disturbing message to countless youngsters, as well as diluted the many wonderful things youth sports participation can provide when conducted in an appropriate fashion.

The alarming nature of these problems led the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) to convene the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children’s Sports in 2001. Recreation professionals from 34 states across the country gathered in Chicago, Illinois to examine the widespread problems affecting organized sports and to devise usable guidelines that can be implemented in any community. In 2002, NAYS originally released the *Recommendations for Communities* document as a consensus of the contributions from the National Summit on Raising Community Standards in Children’s Sports.

Since the *Recommendations for Communities* were first released, changes have occurred in the youth sports environment that required NAYS to re-examine these initial guidelines. To further analyze the state of youth sports, especially as it relates to the relationship between public entities and volunteer youth sports organizations (YSOs), NAYS conducted a *Facility Usage Survey* of recreation professionals in 2012. Results showed:

- **88%** of public entities have volunteer youth sports organizations (YSOs) utilizing public facilities.
- Nearly **70%** of recreation professionals agree **public entities are responsible** for the actions of YSOs using their facilities.
- **92%** of recreation professionals agree volunteer league administrators/board members would benefit from an education program. **However**, only **19%** require it.
- **82%** of recreation professionals require volunteer coach training for their own programs. However, only **48%** require it of YSOs using their facilities.

Due to the increased prevalence of YSOs, the inconsistency in management techniques of volunteer organizations, as well as the perceived lack of control over public facilities from the recreation standpoint, an updated *Recommendations for Communities* resource was deemed necessary.

The *Recommendations for Communities* address how communities can improve the culture of youth sports and deliver a fun and stress-free playing environment for youngsters by focusing on *reform, education* and *accountability*. These *Recommendations* outline aggressive steps that are aimed at mending a multitude of problems – such as over-aggressive parents, untrained league administrators and win-at-all-cost youth coaches – that are leaving an indelible mark on youth programs.

The detailed *Recommendations* are organized into three parts:

- Part 1 – Adopt a community philosophy that makes youth sports safe and positive for children.
- Part 2 – Appoint a professional youth sports administrator to ensure adherence to the philosophy.
- Part 3 – Hold everyone associated with community youth sports accountable for their behavior.

The *Recommendations* also include supporting evidence for taking action in youth sports policy, including an overview of children’s sports in this country, the purpose of youth sports, a look at how they are commonly structured and the valuable role they play in a child’s physical and psychological development. Specific problems and issues affecting youth sports are addressed, as well as the primary factors behind these problems and what steps can be taken to change the culture of children’s sports.

The update to the *Recommendations* incorporates a self assessment exercise for community leaders and recreation professionals, refined tactics for overseeing YSOs, and customizable templates to easily implement recommended procedures.

A youth sports program should not be something that a community simply hopes will turn out well. There simply is too much at stake when the emotional and physical well-being of children are involved. Changing the culture of children’s sports will not be easy. In fact, most people will probably resist change at first. But restructuring youth sports programs is not as difficult as it may appear, because the resources and training programs exist – and so does a plan to implement them.

If the next generation is going to reap all the wonderful benefits that organized youth sports provide, it is imperative that the *Recommendations for Communities* is fully understood and adopted.