



Play Equity Fund and Nike Team Up to Launch LA Made to Play Neighborhoods in Boyle Heights and Watts

The three-year, \$1.3 million program will empower 13 community organizations across the two neighborhoods to create equal access to play for Latino and Black girls

Los Angeles (May 17, 2022) – The [Play Equity Fund](#) (PEF) and [Nike](#) introduced an innovative partnership today focused on closing the play equity gap for girls in Los Angeles (LA) County’s Boyle Heights and Watts communities. To celebrate the launch of this three-year, \$1.3 million commitment, members from 13 grassroots youth play and sport organizations located in these neighborhoods joined leaders from Nike and PEF for the LA Made to Play Neighborhoods Summit at Nike’s Los Angeles headquarters.

Play Equity: Reaching Girls in LA to Close the Gap

This commitment started with a question: How can we ensure that girls in LA are healthy and starting on a track for success? Recent research by the [LA84 Foundation](#) indicates that in the LA region, youth most likely to be inactive are Latina, aged 15-17, living in low-income households.

Educators and researchers emphasize the importance of sport and play in developing healthy kids and thriving communities. It has never been more urgent after the isolation and hardships brought on by the pandemic, which have disproportionately affected low-income households and people of color.

Despite well-documented research and reports that confirm the value of sport and play in young lives, there remains a systemic crisis in youth sports. According to insights from PEF, household income is the greatest indicator of whether a child will play sports. This gap persists due to a lack of access to play for children, and it has grown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the LA84 Foundation 2020 Youth Sports Report, physical inactivity of youth from households with annual incomes less than \$35K annually (32%) is over four times the inactivity rate of youth from households with annual incomes of \$150K or higher (7%).

LA Made to Play Neighborhoods in Boyle Heights and Watts Will Center on Girls Ages 7-14

In 2021, Nike asked PEF to go deeper and build on the 2020 report findings. PEF identified two communities in LA where the opportunity to bring a place-based impact model could help close the play equity gap to drive transformative change – one girl, one family and eventually one neighborhood, at a time.

As a result, Nike will invest \$1.3 million over three years through PEF to fuel 13 organizations in Boyle Heights and Watts – two of the lowest-income neighborhoods in LA County with median household incomes

of nearly \$40K and \$30K, respectively. The three-year project from spring 2022 to spring 2024 will build capacity in these 13 organizations and create a deep bench of support through parent engagement and coach strategies.

The 13 organizations are co-invested in this initiative to help grow their programs, nurture the health of the girls who participate – as well as inspire stronger communities. The focus will be on a place-based approach to create impact, and the LA Made to Play Neighborhoods of Boyle Heights and Watts will work closely with these 13 organizations to create lasting and transformative change:

Boyle Heights:

- [**After-School All-Stars**](#) – provides free, comprehensive after-school programs that keep children safe and help them succeed in school and life
- [**Boyle Heights Youth Football**](#) – teaches children the fundamentals of football and cheer, teamwork, competition and leadership to give them a sense of pride in their community.
- [**Boys & Girls Club West San Gabriel Valley**](#) – provides a safe place to empower youth to support their community, sustain meaningful relationships and develop a positive self-image.
- [**Hollenbeck PAL**](#) – works with the LAPD to prepare and empower underserved and underprivileged youth to lead responsible, productive and fulfilling lives.
- [**Proyecto Pastoral**](#) – works to instill self-confidence and self-efficacy in youth so that they graduate from school and are motivated to give back to their community.
- [**Students Run LA**](#) – challenges underserved secondary students to experience the benefits of goal-setting, character development, adult mentoring and improved health by providing them with a truly life-changing experience: the training for and completion of the LA Marathon.
- [**YMCA Metro LA**](#) – ensures people of all backgrounds work together to strengthen communities and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Watts:

- [**Everybody Dance LA!**](#) – offers high-quality dance education in low-income areas of LA for youth, ages 4-19, to instill high expectations and cultivate lifelong skills of collaboration, discipline and self-expression.
- [**Street Soccer USA**](#) – fights poverty and empowers underserved communities through soccer.
- [**Watts Rams**](#) – aims to positively change the minds of youth through its ‘Kids and Cops Making a Difference’ program by challenging, guiding and teaching student-athletes to be positive leaders, not only in Watts, but in life.
- [**Watts Skills Academy**](#) – leverages basketball to offer a mentorship program founded and led by LAPD officers, to build leaders and trust through basketball.
- [**Woodcraft Rangers**](#) – builds strength and resiliency (body), character and equips youth with new skills (mind), deeper understanding of their place in the world (spirit), and greater commitment to their community (service).
- [**Peace Players Los Angeles**](#) – focuses its peer-to-peer development program for youth leaders in Watts and South LA as part of a global network advocating for a more peaceful and equitable society.

“The LA Made to Play Neighborhoods partnership between the Play Equity Fund and Nike is taking action to bring access to the life benefits of sports and play to the girls of Boyle Heights and Watts,” said **Renata Simril, President of the Play Equity Fund**. “The gap in access and opportunity for so many children is a crisis hiding in plain sight. We are inspired by Nike’s commitment to these communities. Their investment and support for these 13 organizations brings a team approach to addressing challenges that aren’t insurmountable with the power of collaboration.”

“At Nike, we’re committed to taking action to create a better world and expanding sport for a new generation. And as we mark our 50th year as a company, we’ll continue to take action to change the game for all as we move forward. That’s why we’re building LA Made to Play Neighborhoods with the Play Equity Fund,” said, **Matt Geschke, Senior Director of North America Social & Community Impact for NIKE, Inc.** “By focusing on place-based impact, grounded in local data and insights, we’re rallying 13 community organizations to go further, faster by sharing resources, coach training and collective support so girls in Boyle Heights and Watts can aim to reach their potential through play and sport.”

Dayleen Morales, 11, was one of the girl participants in the Summit, representing YMCA Metro LA for Boyle Heights. She summed up her goal for girls participating in the project this way: “I would like to encourage other girls to do more sports and make them want to be somebody that they didn’t even imagine they could be.”

The partnership with PEF and community nonprofit organizations is a continuation of Nike’s [Made To Play](#) global commitment to get kids moving, while working with local partners to increase kids’ participation in sport – particularly in marginalized communities.

To learn more about the partnership between the Play Equity Fund and Nike, please visit <https://playequityfund.org/nike-la/>

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About the Play Equity Fund

A 501(c)3 public charity, the Play Equity Fund was established by the LA84 Foundation in 2014 as its charitable partner and supports programs and actions to ensure all children have equal access to the transformative power of sport and play. The Play Equity Fund supports the sports-based youth development ecosystem for greater impact, raises awareness of inequities and develops partnerships to advocate for funding and sustainable solutions to ensure children in communities of color have access to pathways for lifelong well-being. The Play Equity Fund is the only nonprofit focused on play equity as a social justice issue. For more information, visit playequityfund.org.

About Nike Social & Community Impact

We believe in the transformative power of sport to help move the world forward and create change. To help create a more equitable and inclusive world, we’re tackling systemic inequality through our commitment to getting kids active and building inclusive communities. We’re empowering adults to welcome all kids to play through community partnerships and coaching resources. And we’re teaming up with organizations and our employees around the world – to rewrite the playbook so everyone can win in life. We invite you to learn more about our Social & Community Impact as part of [Nike’s Purpose](#).