



2020 NLARA Annual Report – Final Draft

September 2020

FY2020 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. NLARA members’ collective commitment is to inner city youth who are not exposed to nurturing sports opportunities because of barriers posed by the “pay-to-play” system that disproportionately rewards and penalizes socio-economic status.

Founded by UCAN, the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, Old St. Patrick’s Church and Play Like a Champion Today, in FY2020 the NLARA continued its fight against systemic racism and creatively responded to the unprecedented, significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that still is disproportionately impacting communities of color. 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.



To that end, in FY20 the NLARA worked closely with its members and the community to continue building a sustainable youth sports culture that fosters character and development through informed and compassionate coaches, parents and adult mentors. We completed our third year of programming and continued to grow in youth participation and program partners. Those increases were even more remarkable given that the NLARA navigated through unprecedented challenges resulting from the pandemic.

NLARA community partners met regularly – and virtually – during the pandemic to share experiences, best practices and strategies. Despite not being able to provide youth access to an open gym as in the past, the partners’ collaboration and cooperation, the addition of three new program partners, new virtual programming, and a limited number of safe, in-person events enabled the NLARA to reach more than 2,200 youth and their families compared to 700 plus youth in the previous year. In FY20, NLARA coaches and community leaders also broadened their service to include food and equipment distribution and provide family support.

As a result of our community collaboration, in FY20 the NLARA became a stronger presence in North Lawndale; one that allowed us to navigate the perils of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are continuing to prepare today to better serve youth when in-person programming resumes tomorrow.

2020 Programming

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 ran a summer internship program for 25 high school-aged youth, focusing on professional and athletic skills. In Fall 2020, the Bloc renovated its facility to include a learning lab that can accommodate up to 80 students.
- ✓ **The Investment** runs year-round basketball programming with practices and games throughout the year. Through the 2020 stay-at-home order, The Investment ran family support sessions and provided mental health resources to create supportive family environments for their youth.
- ✓ **Boxing Out Negativity** holds daily boxing practice that regularly includes distance running and cycling. In addition, Boxing Out Negativity provides participants with recreational opportunities throughout Chicago.
- ✓ **Endless Energy** ran regular virtual basketball workouts and provided support to athletes navigating high school and college sport scholarships. Endless Energy hosts the Jr. Go League, a 10-week basketball league for elementary schools that completed its third year.
- ✓ **Four Point Play** developed and distributed 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** hosts a variety of weekly Open Gyms for young people and community members and invites NLARA members to use their gym to run clinics and leagues.
- ✓ **Urban Initiatives** ran soccer programming for young children in two North Lawndale schools.
- ✓ **Girls in the Game, a new NLARA member**, ran multi-sport programming for girls in eight schools across North Lawndale.
- ✓ **Chicago Lions Community Rugby, another new member**, ran programming in two North Lawndale schools and provided rugby clinics to introduce young people to a new sport through various community organizations.
- ✓ **Girls on the Run, the last new NLARA member**, will pilot a community-based running program for girls at UCAN this fall.



Summer programming consists of camps, clinics and community events that provide community exposure to the NLARA culture and reinforce the NLARA's focus on mentorship and youth development.

- ✓ **Urban Initiatives** organized the distribution of 100 at-home equipment kits for families of NLARA member organizations.
- ✓ **Girls in the Game** ran a two-day camp on the Chicago Lions field that featured kickboxing, yoga and dancing.
- ✓ **Boxing Out Negativity** organized three community events through the summer, including a Fourth of July Cookout, a Bike Ride for Peace and a Back-to-School Labor Day event.

Note: Active programming partners **DRW College Prep**, **Wisdom Knot** and **Lawndale Christian Fitness Center** were unable to run programming due to COVID-19 interruptions.

COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 Interruption: Prior to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the NLARA had begun planning a Community Sports day to expand its recruiting, especially in underrepresented populations. Although the event was cancelled, the planning process generated interest from the Chicago Cubs Community Arm and the City of Chicago as a best practice to get young people engaged. The NLARA looks forward to planning this event for next year and continues to expand its marketing efforts to expand its reach in the community.

Collaboration

In response to the new obstacles to programming due to COVID-19, the NLARA collectively grew through intentional, mutually beneficial collaboration. Since March 2020, member organizations have worked to lift one another up to support young people and their families. Highlights include:

- **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. **YMEN**, a community leader in North Lawndale, promoting leadership development for youth, provided their outdoor courts to support social distancing for The Investment.
- Upon hearing that Chicago Park District facilities were closing their programming, **Girls in the Game** coordinated with **The Chicago Lions Rugby** to use their facility to run safe, in-person programming before the start of the school year.
- **Boxing Out Negativity** partnered with Equiticity, a national leader in developing racial equity through movement, to host a Street Love Ride, a bike ride demonstration for peace, which was attended by groups from **the Bloc, Lawndale Christian Health Center, and Chicago Youth Boxing League** (Little Village).
- An initial donation of 10 computers by Old St. Patrick's Church to **The Investment** expanded to a total of 30 that were distributed to the children of North Lawndale. This was spurred by a referral from **Chicago Lions Rugby** with potential for more as needed in the future.

Civic Engagement

Throughout 2020, NLARA member organizations significantly expanded their programming to meet and address the needs of young people, their families, and the wider North Lawndale community. NLARA member organizations served a key role in connecting families to resources and offering broad support. Some highlights of civic engagement:

- In coordination with **UCAN** and The Greater Chicago Food Depository, **Boxing Out Negativity** and **the Bloc** organized weekly food donations to their network of participants and their surrounding neighbors.
- **The Chicago Lions Rugby** delivered food, medicine and essential goods to community members through the stay-at-home order.
- **The Bloc** runs a weekly food pantry at their programming location. To date, they have served **977** families across the West Side of Chicago.
- **Boxing Out Negativity** organizes weekly community bike rides for young people and their families and distributed back-to-school supplies to community members.



Program Participant Breakdown:

Funding for programming was generously supported by The Steans Family Foundation, Emerson Collective and Chicago Community Trust Covid-19 Relief Fund. These funds were distributed by UCAN and the participation count was as follows:

	UCAN Open Gym	North Lawndale Eagles	The Bloc	Endless Energy	The Investment	Boxing Out Negativity	Urban Initiatives	Four Point Play	Girls in the Game	Chicago Lions Rugby	Total
Total Participants		40	1066	73	20	428	156	338	146	30	2297
Sports Programming		40	89	73	20	39	56	143	146	30	636
Community Events		0	977	0	0	389	100	195	0	0	1661

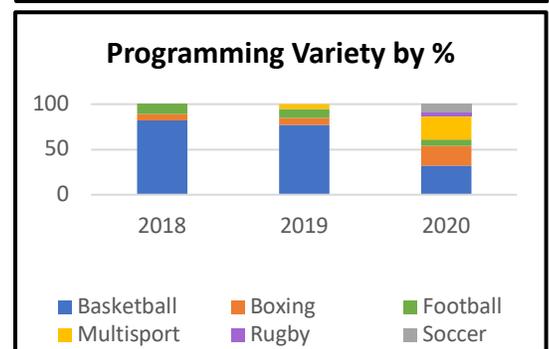
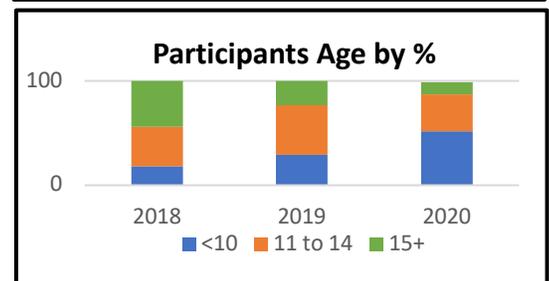
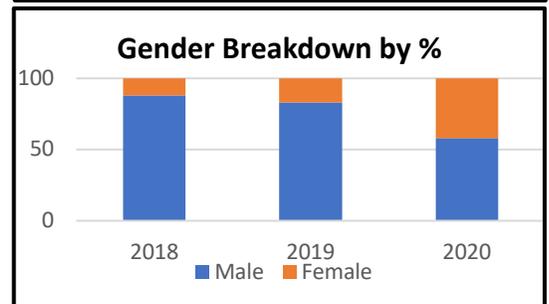
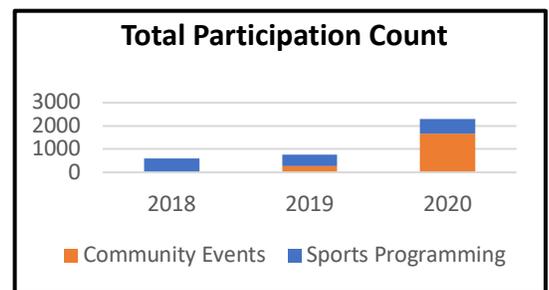
The NLARA intentionally targets underserved demographics, including girls, grades K-5, and first-time participants. We continuously strive to add variety to our programming, either by incorporating different sports into existing programming or working with new organizations to add new sports to the community's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

Participation: Participation increased in programming, from 505 to 694 and significantly increased in community events from 261 to 1661. These figures are especially impressive as the NLARA maintained its presence serving youth in North Lawndale as well as supporting families in response to additional challenges due to COVID-19.

Gender: While many NLARA programs primarily serve boys/young men, the NLARA welcomed Girls in the Game into the association, which greatly expanded our reach to young girls/young women. Male participation temporarily decreased in basketball programming due to social distancing restrictions. COVID-19. In the fall, Girls on the Run will join the NLARA and increase female participation.

Age Distribution: The NLARA targeted younger participants this year, resulting in a substantial increase in both the 10 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.

Sport Variety: The NLARA values providing variety in its sports programming to expand its reach and provide children with a variety of experiences. NLARA sports programming diversified significantly in 2020 as Girls in the Game added multi-sports programming and existing basketball programs, unable to conduct indoor programming, pivoted to other sports.



Program Evaluation Survey Completion: Survey completion has dropped significantly from last year due to the more stringent COVID-19 guidelines implemented in early August when most evaluations were to be collected. The NLARA has developed an online survey tool that will be implemented for future programming.

The NLARA, led by Notre Dame professor Dr. Clark Power, expanded its program evaluation survey. The survey was adapted to create a version for younger children and modified its survey to also include questions that measure development in socioemotional learning. These items reflect the NLARA 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.

- **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.
- **Play Like a Champion** ran a three-week national virtual summer camp, featuring NLARA partners, including the Chicago Lions, Girls in the Game and Four Point Play.
- **Boxing Out Negativity, The Bloc, and The Chicago Youth Boxing Club (Little Village)** attended the Bengal Bouts finals at the University of Notre Dame. The boxing clubs took a tour of campus, sparred with Notre Dame students, and got to know each other over dinner.
- **Endless Energy** sent high school seniors to a talent showcase in Phoenix, AZ to aid in recruitment and athletic scholarships for college.
- **Endless Energy, Girl in the Game and Boxing Out Negativity** presented at Play Like a Champion's 15th annual conference (virtual) attended by over 200 attendees. In addition, 12 NLARA members participated in discussions centered around building inclusive/supportive youth sports programs in their communities.

NLARA Organizational Support and Development

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

Community Needs and Assets Assessment: Over the past four years, the University of Notre Dame and Play Like a Champion have been conducting community assets and needs assessments in North Lawndale focusing on the youth sports and recreation landscape. The assessment creates a directory of programs offered in the community and evaluates the needs of the community, that have been impacted by CPS's budget cuts in afterschool programming. Each annual assessment is compiled from a combination of interviews with athletic directors, coaches, community leaders, including school principals and youth participants.

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. That programming focuses on preparing coaches to foster children's character development as mentors/team leaders.

The NLARA partners with **Play Like a Champion**, a nationally recognized youth sports consulting and education organization. Together, the NLARA and Play Like a Champion collaborate to provide ongoing community-based interactive workshops and educational materials to NLARA members. To date, 35 program directors and coaches have participated in this Program. In 2020, the NLARA partnered with **Urban Initiatives** to supplement **Play Like a Champion's** core curriculum to offer an online coaching/parent workshop focused on how to respond to children experiencing chronic stress in their environment, particularly through the pandemic.

Grant Applications, 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 response to COVID-19 restrictions and a shift to virtual programming, 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.

In response to COVID-19, the NLARA released funds months earlier than in the past. This expediency allowed the NLARA to support organizations in their transition to virtual and adapted in-person programming, assuring that young people felt continuous support from their coaches through the Stay-at-Home Order.

Organizational Support Provided by Founding Partners

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

- **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.
- **Fundraising:** UCAN Vice President of Development Fred Long is coordinating 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 process.

Volunteers: **Old St. Patrick's Church** is in its third year of building out the NLARA volunteer base. While COVID-19 restricted face-to-face engagement, the Old St. Patrick's initiated a program to Church Men's to refurbish and distribute 30 computers to NLARA youth.

NLARA Next Steps

In four 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 2200 children and families. The NLARA culture is well established, its membership is building presence is being increasingly felt in the community and it has plans to continue this trend in the upcoming year. The challenges of Covid-19 fueled NLARA partners to collaborate and find creative ways to stay in touch with the youth and serves 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.

The NLARA delayed funding for filling its staff positions and directed financial resources entirely to support the pressing needs of the community, acknowledging that fundraising to support a full-time staff is essential to its long-term plans.

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.