Rehabilitation and Empowerment of Haitian Youth with Disabilities through Football

Haiti
Mara Galic
**Organization type:** nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
**Budget:** $500,000 - $1 million
**Website:** http://www.blazesports.org

- Disability
- Community development
- Disability rights
- Health care
- Recreation
- Vulnerable populations
- Youth development

**Project Summary**

**Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.**

In the absence of comprehensive, systematic rehabilitation services, football programs for persons with physical disabilities/visual impairment provide transforming experiences addressing physical/psychological rehabilitation goals, facilitation of reintegration/inclusion in society, enhanced health through increased self-care and decreases the onset of secondary medical conditions that are life compromisers. Haitian youth with disabilities are particularly vulnerable since the earthquake of January 12, 2010 that devastated the nation.

**About Project**

**Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?**

WHO estimates more than 800,000 Haitians have a disability. While the impact of the January 12, 2010 earthquake may never be known, estimates suggest as many as 10,000 Haitians were permanently disabled by amputation and untold thousands experienced life altering injuries. BSA recognizes the importance of inclusion, visibility, autonomy, and independence and the need to promote/protect the human rights of persons with disabilities. Prior to the earthquake Haiti was among the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere and now faces even greater challenges. The country and the governmental divisions that serve persons with physical disabilities face unique barriers and an inadequate infrastructure for physical medicine and rehabilitation for persons with physical, mobility, and visual disabilities. In the absence of comprehensive rehabilitation and Haiti currently has minimal capacity, sport/football can and does produce many of the shared goals and outcomes of rehabilitation including increased independence and self-acceptance, prevention of chronic health conditions/secondary medical complications, community reintegration, health promotion, social support, advocacy and outreach.

**Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!**

An intensive, field-based development project focusing on recovery, restoration and redirection of disability sport/football and community-based recreation therapy services in Haiti in cooperation with the Haitian National Paralympic Committee and the Haitian Ministry of Sport. In the absence of comprehensive, systematic rehabilitation services, sport/football programs for persons with physical disabilities and visual impairment across the continuum from recreational to competitive provide transforming experiences by successfully addressing basic physical and psychological rehabilitation goals, facilitation of reintegration and inclusion in society, enhanced health through increased self-care and noteworthy decreases in the onset of secondary medical conditions that are life compromisers. By providing direct training of football and Paralympic Committee personnel, leaders and coaches; strengthening national infrastructures and increasing institutional capacity; bringing together disenfranchised and marginalized groups; and providing technical assistance, the project will empower individuals whilst utilizing football for human, economic, and social development. 1) Recovery Phase- Practical assistance to enhance, strengthen, and expand operations of the well-established recovery activities already underway. 2) Restoration Phase- To restore sport/football services to pre-earthquake levels the project will work closely with the Haitian National Paralympic Committee, the Ministry of Sport, and NGOs/associations. Restoration will include: Train the Trainer initiatives, provision of sports/football equipment and BlazeSports Toolkits, and planning/implementation of the annual National Day of Handisport initiatives conducted in 2008 and 2009. 3) Redirection and Capacity Building- To stabilize operations/services, ensure effectiveness, sustainability and growth, focus must be placed on increasing the capacity of the National Paralympic Committee and its member organizations.

**Impact: How does it Work**

**Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.**

BlazeSports America (BSA) and its partners have had significant impact in the disability sport/rights movement both domestically and
Internationally, BSA, the legacy organization of the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, has been serving the disability sport/recreation community in Georgia and the US ever since. BSA serves more than 62,000 persons annually through its inclusive sport/recreation programs. Since 2002, BSA has conducted major projects with partners in numerous countries. Through funding from the US Depts of State and Education, BSA and its principals have provided deep/broad programming through direct sport and recreation services to people with disabilities, train the trainers (coaches, administrators, medical/rehabilitative personnel, etc) and building disability sport/recreation infrastructure in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, Libya, Tunisia, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Mauritius, US and numerous other countries. BSA leadership have held or currently hold prominent positions in the Olympic and Paralympic movements and other international sport governing bodies. Carol Mushett, CEO of BlazeSports and Ben Johnson, consultant and university administrator, have led these multinational projects and are the recipients of over $10M in funding to support their various disability sport projects. These federally funded projects in total have led to the training of more than 1000 international disability sport coaches, trainers, administrators and medical/rehabilitative personnel. Through the multiplier effect of BSA’s projects, many thousands of people with physical disabilities in Africa and the Middle East have benefited from the new/enhanced disability sport/recreation programs provided by BSA project participants. BSA has traveled to Haiti to evaluate the needs of the disability population (and particularly the newly injured) and establish meaningful relationships to deliver its proven sport programs.

About You
Organization:
BlazeSports America
Visit website

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Your idea
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Innovation
Do you have a patent for this idea?

Impact
Actions
BSA conducted an on-site needs assessment and signed MOUs with Haitian governmental ministries and NGOs to perform disability sport/rights/rehabilitation projects. BSA has established a relationship with USAID and has been approved for development/rehabilitation work in Haiti. Furthermore, BSA has secured the support of the International Paralympic Committee and US Paralympics for its work in Haiti. BSA has commitments from numerous international experts to provide their services in support of this football/soccer specific project as a part of a comprehensive disability sport program. Lastly, BSA has networked with the existing disability football/soccer leadership in Haiti and has secured their support while also understanding their wishes/needs in recreating/improving the sport's infrastructure including leadership, facilities, and both grassroots and elite programs. This project will serve the needs of the pre-earthquake football population while also serving as a means to
Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with NGOs? 

Yes

Does your organization have a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board?

More than 5 years

How long has this organization been operating?

National Paralympic Committee of Haiti; Haitian Ministry of Sport; Sec. of State for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities

If yes, provide organization name.

Yes

Is your initiative connected to an established organization?

In what country?

What stage is your project in?

What stage is your project in?

What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?

Less than $50

Does your project seek to have an impact on public policy?

Yes

What will it take for your project to be successful over the next three years? Please address each year separately, if possible.

YEAR 1: Recovery Phase- Practical direct assistance must be provided to enhance, strengthen, and expand the operations of the well-established recovery activities already underway by the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) and Ministry of Sport. By offering football activities throughout Haiti, BSA will: a) locate people with disabilities and identify persons who sustained disabling injuries in the earthquake; b) record the location, contact information (or contact resources), the initiation of regular direct communication and contact, tracking and follow-up to address and assist with urgent needs or health concerns and education for self-care and disease prevention; c) link cohorts of people/families with the shared social experience of disability in a disaster zone for safety, peer support, and provision of care by creating networks within tent communities to provide practical, social, emotional and life-sustaining support of displaced and marginalized persons with disabilities.

YEAR 2: Restoration Phase- Restore services to pre-earthquake levels by working closely with NPC, Ministry of Sport, and NGO’s. Restoration must include the provision of Train the Trainer initiatives, provision of sports equipment and BlazeSports Toolkits, and the planning and implementation of the sports/football festivals for people with physical disabilities.

YEAR 3: Redirection and Capacity Building- In order to stabilize operations and services, and ensure effectiveness, sustainability and growth, focus must be placed on increasing the capacity of the NPC and its many member organizations. A strategic action plan must be established that includes clear benchmarking. Tension exists between various agencies/governmental divisions who operate without clearly defined roles. Progress must be made in bridging the gaps and increasing the awareness of NPC leaders and other NGOs. BSA will utilize this project to bring the leadership and organizations together to provide a cohesive approach to rehabilitation, visibility and human rights for people with disabilities. A National Institute of Sport must be established to sustain training of sport leaders.

What would prevent your project from being a success?

1) The most obvious negative factor would be insufficient funding or no funding at all. BSA is working with US governmental and private foundations to garner support for its more comprehensive disability sport project in Haiti. The Nike/Ashoka/Changemakers funding would enable a more in-depth football/soccer program to be developed than would otherwise be possible. Fortunately, football/soccer is the dominant sport in Haiti and can be played with a number of modifications from that of the norm including crutch soccer, cerebral palsy soccer, beep soccer (for the blind and visually impaired) and wheelchair soccer. 2) Given the keen interest in the sport in Haiti and the large number of persons who enjoy playing, challenges may be created if appropriate playing surfaces/fields are not available due to establishment of tent communities on existing fields and lack of flat, smooth surfaces of adequate dimensions for wheelchair soccer. 3) Insufficient supplies of crutches and wheelchairs to accommodate the population with a disability that would need such equipment in order to be mobile. 4) Further catastrophic events such as another earthquake or a hurricane that might further erode Haiti’s fragile infrastructure and governmental leadership.

How many people will your project serve annually?

1001-10,000

What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?

Less than $50

Does your project seek to have an impact on public policy?

Yes

Sustainability

What stage is your project in?

Operating for less than a year

In what country?

Is your initiative connected to an established organization?

Yes

If yes, provide organization name.

National Paralympic Committee of Haiti; Haitian Ministry of Sport; Sec. of State for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities

How long has this organization been operating?

More than 5 years

Does your organization have a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board?

Yes

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with NGOs?
The Story

What was the defining moment that led you to this innovation?

Without question the defining moment that led to the need for this important project was the January 26, 2010 devastating earthquake in Haiti that killed more than 250,000 and led to permanent disabilities for tens of thousands of its citizens. Haiti has long been among the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere and this disaster has further compounded what was already a very bad situation by the near total destruction of its major city and national capital, Port-a-Prince. The media reports and images seen on virtually every televised news channel pointed to the unparalleled death and destruction created by the earthquake. These images were indelibly etched into the minds and hearts of our organization. Having long been involved in the disability rights movement, the leadership of BlazeSports immediately took action to determine how the organization could provide its services to assist in the relief effort. We met with officials at the Department of State and USAID who were familiar with our work in Africa and the Middle East and acted on their suggestions. A trip in mid-April to Haiti allowed us to establish relationships with the leadership of the National Paralympic Committee of Haiti, the Director General of the Ministry of Sport and the Secretary of State for Inclusion of People with Disabilities. We traveled to many parts of the island nation under the guidance of the Secretary General of the National Paralympic Committee to observe the devastation and assess the needs of persons with disabilities in the numerous tent communities. This visit further solidified our commitment to lend our expertise to benefit the significant numbers of people with disabilities we met who are truly the poorest of the poor. Our observations during the visit were that Darwin's theory on "survival of the fittest" was quite accurate as persons with disabilities faced the greatest challenges of survival in this sea of devastation. There was competition in virtually every aspect of daily life for all Haitians and persons with physical disabilities were disadvantaged at every turn making them the most vulnerable segment of the population. Three months after the earthquake, many people with disabilities were still without shelter. Those that found shelter were frequently relegated to the most undesirable locations within the tent community…the sections that flooded when it rained requiring them to sleep on piles of broken concrete in order to stay dry as the water flowed through their shelter. Likewise, when food was delivered to the tent communities people with disabilities generally found themselves at the back of long lines because they could not move quickly enough. If they were fortunate enough to receive food they were then vulnerable to having the food that they did not immediately consume stolen from them by their able-bodied neighbors.

Our meetings with government and NGO officials made it quite clear that effective rehabilitation services were not being provided and likely would not be provided to sufficiently serve the overwhelming needs of the newly injured population. We observed vast numbers of youth and young adults with leg and foot amputations. We met with many persons who had lived with disabilities prior to the quake in order to understand how the current situation had impacted their lives. It was very clear that they, too, faced a very different and more challenging existence due to the environmental conditions offered by mountains of debris, impassable roads and lack of governmental services.

Upon our departure for the US, we committed to return and do everything in our power to make the lives of the people we met more tolerable and to bring a bit of joy to their hearts through sport and recreational activities that would also serve as a means of physical rehabilitation. The opportunity to positively impact the lives of Haitians with physical disabilities through football/soccer related programs with funding from Nike/Ashoka/Changemakers would greatly enhance BlazeSports' work with Haiti as it recovers from the devastating earthquake.

BSA's success is built around its ability to engage its many partners in creating positive social change through inclusive disability sport programming. BSA has worked with a wide assortment of governmental, nongovernmental and business organizations to effect positive social change for youth and adults with physical disabilities in Georgia, the US and numerous countries around the world. It is particularly critical when working in foreign countries to have the cooperation of in-country NGOs or government agencies. These important partners provide insight, connections, infrastructure and expertise that would be almost impossible for a foreign NGO to duplicate.

In the proposed project, the Haitian NPC has worked diligently since the January earthquake to locate and stay in communication with Haitians with disabilities. They have a large number of Haitian volunteers who are dedicated to supporting this very vulnerable population. Furthermore, the Haitian Ministry of Sport and the Secretary of State for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities will engage all available resources in support of this project as each organization has recognized its benefit in serving Haiti's needs.

What are the three most important actions needed to grow your initiative or organization?

1) Ability to acquire adequate funding to continue to grow the organization's breadth and depth of disability sport services. With the international economic downturn, many nonprofit organizations have seen their external funding diminish significantly. BSA has experienced a decrease in the amount of external funding received but has experienced recent success in reversing this situation. BlazeSports is working with USAID and US Department of State on more comprehensive funding to support broader and more in-depth disability sport initiatives in Haiti. Funding from Nike/Ashoka/Changemakers would greatly enhance BlazeSports' work with Haiti as it recovers from the devastating earthquake.

2) Recognition by Nike/Ashoka/Changemakers that BSA is an agent for change in Haiti would enable us to multiply partners, volunteer-base and funding by leveraging this partnership. The name recognition and solid reputation of Nike and Ashoka would lend further credibility to the capabilities of BSA and the important work the organization performs. BlazeSports could, therefore, expand their capacity to deliver even better programming through this recognition as it is likely would increase overall funding, have increased ability to acquire critical in-kind contributions of goods and services from businesses, and attract larger number of volunteers to support BlazeSports' cause.

3) The "green light" to begin offering programs and services in Haiti. Numerous logistical issues exist in Haiti which makes working in the country challenging. Since BlazeSports has already made a site visit and established partnerships with the government and National Paralympic Committee, BlazeSports is awaiting full approval from USAID to begin implementing the disability sport project there. While football/soccer is a major part of the plan for sport programming there, being selected as a "changemaker" would enable BlazeSports to greatly expand its offerings. Without question, Haitian partners would be thrilled to be able to expand efforts there particularly if it involves greater programming in football/soccer.

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with businesses?

Yes

Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with government?

Yes

Please tell us more about how these partnerships are critical to the success of your innovation.

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Tell us about the social innovator behind this idea.

As the Executive Director, Carol Mushett oversees the operations, strategic management and development of BlazeSports America. Carol has
over 30 years experience in Paralympic sport, therapeutic recreation, rehabilitation services, higher education and non-profit leadership.

Carol has a Master’s degree in Education and has been certified in the following fields: certified social worker, certified therapeutic recreation specialist, certified sports counselor and certified child custody evaluator. Carol was twice elected by the International Paralympic Committee General Assembly (assembly of nations) as the Technical Officer and Chairman of the Sports Council and served two terms of office from 1997-2004 during which time Carol oversaw the sport technical operations, sport rules, qualification processes, and Games development for the Nagano, Sydney, Salt Lake City, and Athens Paralympic Games. Carol is one of only five Americans to have received the Paralympic Order which is the highest honor bestowed by the International Paralympic Committee. Carol also served on the Board of Trustees for the Salt Lake Olympic and Paralympic Organizing Committee.

Having directed numerous international projects, grants and lectured in over 20 nations, Carol is known worldwide as an expert in disability sport and recreation. Carol began her career in the Atlanta area as the first therapeutic recreation specialist hired in public schools and started the DeKalb County School System adapted sports program along with several colleagues. Carol is widely published and a much sought after speaker on topics such as Paralympic sport, classification of athletes with disability, community reintegration, psychological adjustment to disability, and peacebuilding through sport.

How did you first hear about Changemakers?

Through another organization or company

If through another, please provide the name of the organization or company

Sport for Social Change Network - CARE International and others

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