

A Goal For Social Inclusion

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2003

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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**Supervisor**

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion of social inclusion and sport programs for marginalized people by giving voice to program participants and volunteers, while critically examining the tensions inherent in such programs. Presented as a case study of the Victoria Dreams—using realist and creative ethnographic representations—this research study offers important insights on the social dynamics of street soccer and strives to contribute to the larger body of research on sport, and social inclusion. An original fictional representation, and four interviews illuminate the culture and experiences of Victoria Dreams street soccer players and volunteers. Social Capital theory is used as a guiding framework to explore both bridging and bonding links. The results address central issues including: the importance of friendship and integration; eating together; motivation, self-confidence and the role of competition. The discussion offers further exploration of key points including: access and inclusion; the role of tournaments; social capital theory; communication and leadership; and fictional representation as a research genre. A number of future research directions are offered, in the hope of adding to the street soccer experience and adding to the research base on sport and social inclusion. Notably, it is suggested a community-based participatory action research project could help improve the delivery of street soccer and ensure more participants and volunteers are engaged.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The power of sport has increasingly been recognized for its ability to bring people together and promote social inclusion (Magee, 2011; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). The benefits of sport for marginalized individuals may include: improved mental health, self-esteem, and physical wellbeing (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). Sport programs serving marginalized populations may also provide significant societal benefits, including: increased community development and integration, crime prevention, health, education, and economic benefits (Skinner et al., 2008).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the discussion of social inclusion and sport programs for marginalized people by giving voice to program participants and volunteers, while critically examining the tensions inherent in such programs. Through a case study investigation of the Victoria Dreams, this research study offers important insights on the social dynamics of street soccer and strives to contribute to the larger body of research on sport, and social inclusion.

Within the context of the Victoria Dreams street soccer program, it is important to define the demographic of players involved with the program. While the group operates under the banner of “street soccer,” and has an implied designation of serving the “homeless” population, most of the players are not actually homeless. However, the majority of players lack strong community connections and have limited access to social capital. Throughout this study, I refer to these players as “marginalized.” Specifically, it

is the lack of social networks and restricted opportunity to engage in civic life which appear to be the common and defining threads leading to the marginalized experience.

### **Linking to Social Determinants of Health and Social inclusion**

The importance of this research study is further illustrated by examining the social determinants of health and the damaging effects social exclusion has at both individual and societal levels (Carey, Riley & Hammond, 2011). Social *exclusion* may be defined as “what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown” (Magee, 2011, p. 160). Social *inclusion* is seen as “the minimization of social exclusion or the extent to which people and groups have access to and are integrated into the different institutions and social relations of ‘everyday life’ and the extent to which people and groups ‘feel part of’ or included in society at an everyday level” (Ward, Meyer, Verity, Gill & Luong, 2011, p. 3).

There is a strong connection between the social determinants of health, the social gradient, and social inclusion (Ward et al., 2011). It has been clearly documented that people lower on the social gradient have less access to social opportunities including sports and leisure activities, further perpetuating their exclusion (Collins, 2004). In the last ten years, a global shift within government and public health sectors has occurred towards an increased consideration and understanding of the social determinants of health and health inequities (Gore & Kothari, 2012; Ward et al., 2011). It is relevant therefore,



to consider the social determinants of health, the social gradient, and their connection to social inclusion.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the increased recognition from researchers and community stakeholders of the potential impact sport-based social inclusion programs have, there remains a paucity of research illustrating how such programs impact social inclusion (Skinner et al., 2008; Trussell & Mair, 2010). Trussell and Mair (2010) identified three notable studies that examined the impact of sport and leisure experiences for marginalized populations, including Klizting (2003; 2004), Dawson and Harrington (1996) and Tirone (2003/2004). All three studies found that sport or leisure opportunities for marginalized populations helped participants reduce stress, make meaningful connections to the community, and act as a coping mechanism for social exclusion (Trussell & Mair, 2010). While researchers have studied sport, social capital, and social inclusion programs, no studies known to this researcher have drawn on participant and volunteer perceptions to explicitly understand how a local, free, drop-in street soccer organization impacts social inclusion.

### **Aim**

By sharing the perspectives of both participants, and volunteers, this research adds to the understanding of how social inclusion is impacted in a community sports program for marginalized people. As suggested by Sherry and Strybosch (2012), an applied understanding of social capital is pivotal in research examining sport and social inclusion. By guiding the proposed research with a social capital theoretical lens, this study benefited from the use of an established framework and aligned with past studies

focused on sport and social inclusion development (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, & Lyras 2011). While limited, ongoing discourse does exist on street soccer and social inclusion, thus, such an alignment also helps facilitate this study's findings into the appropriate academic forum.

### **Research Question**

How do volunteers and participants experience the culture of Victoria Dreams street soccer?

### **Background Context**

For the past eighteen months I have been participating with the Victoria Dreams street soccer team. The Victoria Dreams are a local, volunteer-run, non-profit street soccer organization with the mission to "use sport as social inclusion to empower and build self-esteem (Victoria Dreams, 2013, para. 2). The group is for men or women who may be homeless, in transitional or low-income housing, or suffering from mental health or addictions issues. Soccer "practices" are free to drop-in, and held once a week in an inclusive and non-competitive sporting environment.

### **Researcher Location, and Truth**

While my research was conducted and presented in a transparent and systematic manner, it does not claim to, nor aspire to be, a purely objective interpretation. Rather, this study embraced my "insider" position and intimate knowledge of the Victoria Dreams to enhance the research process in building an authentic representation. This familiarity allowed me to purposively select interview participants I felt would provide the most meaningful responses. Further, observations deliberately focused on the most salient aspects of team practices relative to my questions of interest. In presenting the

findings, my own experiences and influence are present throughout. "Truth" for the reader will be co-constructed and hinge on achieving a sense of verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002).

### **Operational Definitions**

Throughout this study, the terms "social exclusion," "social inclusion," and "marginalized" are used and defined as follows:

1. Social exclusion: "what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown" (Magee, 2011, p. 160).
2. Social inclusion: "the minimization of social exclusion or the extent to which people and groups have access to and are integrated into the different institutions and social relations of 'everyday life' and the extent to which people and groups 'feel part of' or included in society at an everyday level" (Ward et al., 2011, p. 3).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

The following is a review of both seminal and current literature pertaining to this study's main question of focus. The first section offers a brief historical synopsis of social capital theory, and concludes by identifying core concepts and interpretations, which are used throughout the remainder of the study. The middle section of the review discusses social exclusion and inclusion before transitioning to a discussion of sport for inclusion programs. Next, the emergence of "street soccer" and background of the Homeless World Cup are presented, with specific consideration of the impact on players. The impact on street soccer volunteers and a study incorporating social capital theory are also examined. Finally, a direct connection between social capital theory and sport for inclusion programs is drawn.

### Social Capital Theory

Researchers across many disciplines have increasingly used social capital theory to explore the impact of sport for community building and social inclusion projects (Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). While social capital theory has gained popularity, it remains a highly contested framework, with "many fault lines in the literature...and differences among conceptualizations of what social capital means" (Glover & Hemingway, 2005, p. 394; Seippel, 2006, p. 170).

While definitions of social capital can vary widely between disciplines and theorists, there are also some central themes. According to Yuen and Glover (2005), social capital refers to the "relational resources embedded within social networks" (p.

21). In reference to sports and social inclusion, Sherry and Strybosch (2012) suggested social capital could be envisioned as "the advantages of connections or social positions, and trust, relating to the often-cited outcomes of social network developments of sport participation" (p. 495).

While the major focus of this literature review is not on contrasting different social capital theoretical conceptions, it is important to briefly examine where some of these conceptual divides originated. Social capital theory is deeply rooted in sociology, with contemporary theorists Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam all having made substantial contributions to its development (Portes 1998; Coalter 2007).

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resource which is linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Bourdieu's conception of social capital was built on the intersection of economic capital and social positioning. His view of economic capital transcended those of traditional economists by recognizing social position and social networks were influenced by one's economic wealth (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu was interested in power relations and saw that an accumulation of economic capital could be leveraged to gain a dominant social position, versus a deficit, that could restrict opportunities or result in undesirable positioning—a concept he referred to as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu's conception of social capital may be understood by comparing membership in a competitive, private soccer team, versus a community street soccer team. Both facilitate networking opportunities, however the socio-demographic attributes of the respective clubs' members will likely differ dramatically between teams. This example demonstrates social capital can be mediated by context and stratified by wealth. The utility of social capital then, as seen by Bourdieu, is to secure economic capital (Skinner et al., 2008). Essentially, Bourdieu conceived social capital as "primarily an asset for the privileged and a means for maintaining their superiority" (Spaaij, 2012, p. 78).

Coleman recognized the benefits social capital has for marginalized groups— not just the powerful (Spaaij, 2012). He saw social capital not necessarily as intentionally being collected, but as something that could accrue as a result of being involved in other activities for their own purposes (Coalter, 2007). For example, joining a street soccer team to "get some exercise" could result in social connections that lead to a job, or housing. A central difference between Bourdieu and Coleman's conception of social capital is that, for Bourdieu, social capital is, "to secure economic capital, but for Coleman it is to secure human capital—education, employment skills, and expertise" (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 258).

Putnam's use of social capital differed from both Coleman and Bourdieu. At the individual level, Putnam (2000) described two kinds of social capital—bonding capital, and bridging capital. Bonding capital occurs in connections between close friends, and

bridging capital occurs when more distant connections are made, such as between work colleagues (p. 22). However, the primary distinction of Putnam's view was his focus on social capital as a community resource and its development through community networks (Coalter, 2007). Putnam believed that social networks have value in building norms of trust and reciprocity, and enabling civic engagement (p. 542). As a result, he argued communities high in social capital would have lower crime rates, and better health (p. 542).

For the purpose of this research study, a simplified and hybridized understanding of social capital is used, drawing most closely from Putnam's conceptualizations. At the individual level, social capital is envisioned as a product of social relationships that offer a person an extended network for potential future reward (Seippel, 2006). At the societal level, social capital is envisioned as the civic virtues of reciprocity, trust, and recognition (p. 173).

In the context of sport, it has been suggested sports build social capital because they widen social contacts, promote respect for rules, and build self-esteem (Uslaner, 1999). As a benefit to society, it has further been suggested that increased morality and egalitarian values are a direct byproduct of sports (p. 146).

In using social capital theory, this research study assumes participation in social activities—specifically street soccer—impact social capital for participants and the surrounding community, with *how* being a principal point of investigation (Sherry &

Strybosch, 2012). As Nicholson and Hoye (2008) proposed, regardless of the exact theoretical approach ascribed to, for social capital theory, the core assumption is that greater social inclusion through more social contacts will improve one's life.

### **Understanding Social Exclusion**

To better illustrate the meaning of social inclusion, it is useful to further examine what it means to be socially "excluded." Researchers have identified four distinct determinants of social exclusion including: "denial of participation in civil affairs, denial of social goods, exclusion from social production, and economic social exclusion" (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010, p. 32).

Denial of participation in civil affairs may occur from systemic forms of discrimination, legal sanctions, or other institutional mechanisms preventing a person from fully engaging in social pursuits (p. 32). Denial of social goods occurs when a person does not have access to housing, employment, education or healthcare (p. 32). Exclusion from social production is a restriction of engagement in cultural and social activities, including sports—this restriction often results from not having enough money to participate (p. 32). Economic exclusion occurs when a person is unable to secure a job or generate personal income (p. 32). As illustrated, the identified means of exclusion are not exclusive, and interact to compound experiences of exclusion.

Social inclusion may be dependent then, on four main dimensions as described by Burchardt et al. (2002): the capacity to consume; participation in economically or socially valuable activities; political engagement in local or national decision-making; and social



interaction with family, friends and the community (p. 231). It is important to recognize there is a complexity of factors that contribute to exclusion or inclusion. Simply put, exclusion is the negative, and inclusion is the positive.

## **Sport for Social Inclusion**

### **Identifying access barriers to sport for marginalized populations**

While sport on its own may not be the solution to all social and economic problems, it can make a valuable contribution for both individuals and communities (Jarvie, 2003). Trussell and Mair (2010) indicated access to recreation and sporting opportunities played a fundamental role in improving the social ills of marginalized populations. As previously noted, financial restrictions may preclude people from participation in social activities such as sport. Collins (2004) also convincingly demonstrated class and wealth restrict access to sport. In order to increase access and inclusion, researchers determined community-based social services should be low-cost or free, and located in a centralized area (Trussell & Mair 2010). Trussell and Mair (2010) also noted service providers should recognize people might be reluctant to participate in programs if required to publicly declare or prove their low-income status to gain subsidies; and marginalized people accessing public recreation or sport opportunities often reported feeling unwelcomed because of stigmas they experienced.

### **Advent of street soccer and the Homeless World Cup**

Over the past ten years, soccer has emerged as a popular sport for developing social inclusion in marginalized populations. Currently, there are more than 90 street soccer organizations, in over 70 nations (Streetfootballworld, 2013, para. 3). Through international networks such as Streetfootballworld, teams can connect to share resources, knowledge, and funding. Within Canada, twelve teams are affiliated with Street Soccer

Canada. Street Soccer Canada's mission is to: "engage and connect with marginalized shelter users and individuals that have been isolated or on the fringes, using the positive power of sport to enrich and empower" (Street Soccer Canada, 2013, para. 2).

The hallmark event for many street soccer teams is the annual Homeless World Cup. The first-ever Homeless World Cup was held in 2003, and was conceptualized by Mel Young and Harald Schmied as a way to "change the lives of homeless people through football" (Homeless World Cup, 2013, para. 3). Specifically, the tournament aims to raise media awareness about homelessness, challenge negative perceptions, and increase social opportunity and interaction (Magee & Jeanes 2011). While the Homeless World Cup is not exempt from certain criticism, the global profile of this event has been instrumental in inspiring many local groups, such as the Victoria Dreams, to form street soccer teams.

#### **Realizing the positives of street soccer while mitigating the negatives**

In a case study of the Homeless World Cup, Magee (2011) described the experience of taking a team of Welsh players to the first-ever tournament. It was noted the "widening of sporting access was intrinsically beneficial to those in the squad; although the opportunity was not capitalized upon by all" (p. 170). As described in the study, some players felt humiliated after losing games by wide margins, because some of the other teams included former professional players. Overall though, researchers and players suggested the tournament was successful in (1) encouraging and motivating players to be physically active, (2) providing an inclusive environment to raise self-esteem and personal dignity, and (3) challenging stereotypical views and media

representations of homeless people (p. 162). In supporting these final three claims, the researchers referenced a document released by the Homeless World Cup made specifically available for media outlets. At this time, the document is no longer accessible. Further research that substantiates these findings may be warranted.

### **Impact On Volunteers**

The majority of research focusing on social inclusion through sport for marginalized populations has focused almost exclusively on participants. However, many such "sport for inclusion" groups are run through non-profit organizations and depend on the commitment of volunteers. By examining the experiences of volunteers, a more complete understanding of social capital development can be gained (Welty Peachey et al., 2011).

In a recent study, Welty Peachey et al. (2011) concluded the experience of volunteering made a significant impact on volunteers, and led to the development of social capital. Specifically, bridging capital was developed as interactions between participants and volunteers—two different socioeconomic groups—built increased understanding and community cohesion (p. 35). It was recommended future research studies be conducted to further understand this process. It was also suggested these findings could be helpful for organizations looking to recruit volunteers. The authors concluded that in order to gain a complete perspective of how social capital and social inclusion are impacted in street soccer, researchers must include the volunteers in their study (p. 34).

## **Understanding Sport and Social Capital**

As Jarvie (2003) suggested in a comprehensive study on sport and social capital, simply because a project is successfully delivered in a disadvantaged area, or with a marginalized group, does not mean it is actually promoting social inclusion or that its intended benefits are being recognized by the participants. In this vein, it is important to understand the impact that purported social inclusion sport programs have and their connection to social capital. As Seippel (2006) noted, differences between sport organizations may also influence how social capital is distributed. Focused investigation of a single organization such as the Victoria Dreams may then offer important insights into the larger body of research on sport, social capital, and social inclusion.

## **Summary**

In reviewing the literature, a number of important findings were highlighted while identifying opportunities for further research to be conducted. First, social capital theory was discussed with some manageable conceptions derived. Second, a deeper understanding of social exclusion was gained and research on sport for inclusion was introduced. The emergence of street soccer and the homeless world cup was then documented, including research on players and volunteers. Here, the extension was drawn to sport and social capital. It was concluded researchers still have an unclear picture of exactly how a sport for inclusion program—such as the Victoria Dreams street soccer group—impacts social capital and social inclusion.

## Chapter Three: Methods

### Research Design

A qualitative approach was selected as it offers a thick, in-depth understanding of social phenomena, and has proven successful in studying marginalized populations in sport intervention programs (Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). This study also applied social capital theory as a guiding lens, as it has proven insightful and frequently been used to study social inclusion through sport (Welty Peachey et al., 2011).

Specifically, I followed what Stake (2005) described as an intrinsic case study approach. I selected the Victoria Dreams, not because I felt they would be representative of all street soccer teams, or sport for social inclusion programs, but primarily because I wanted to explore and share the culture of this particular team (p. 445). By incorporating social capital theory; drawing comparisons to other street soccer research; and exploring impacts of social inclusion; I do also demonstrate aspects of an instrumental case approach. However, the approaches are not mutually exclusive, and rather exist in a “zone of combined purpose” (p. 445). My study is bounded by key participants and volunteers of the Dreams, and framed by my own observations.

While the earliest conceptions of this study seemed to fit squarely within the case study model, it evolved to incorporate significant tenets of ethnographic research. This methodological evolution was a response to what I observed and experienced over sixteen months. I believe this evolution helped to present my data in a richer and more dynamic format, while also better answering my research question. Thus, while the essence of my research question remained constant, data analysis and presentation grew

to include both realist and fictional ethnographic techniques including interviews, participant observations, and an original fictional representation. (Riessman, 2007).

**Conveying truth, validity, and verisimilitude using fictional representation**

A portion of my data and results are presented as a fictional representation, because I believe it offers readers a chance to discover more truths than facts alone would allow. As demonstrated in Vickers (2010), by manipulating and creating characters and scenes, a range of truths and perspectives can be experienced which readers would otherwise not be exposed to.

A well written fictional representation is one that creates a strong sense of truth, an account that resonates with the reader. As Clough (1999) suggested, the experience and knowledge found in fictional representation is “as true and untrue as the reader makes it in consciousness” (p. 439). In a sense, how believable and engaging the researcher’s story is, will determine the extent to which it becomes incorporated as knowledge and accepted as truth. Sandelowski (1994) further offered: “when you talk with me about my research do not ask what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data...I have told the truth...the proof is whether you believe them and whether they appeal to your heart” (p. 442). In this passage, Sandelowski (1994) demonstrated researchers “have found nothing” in the objective and empirical sense, but have selectively crafted an experience for the reader to elicit an emotional response—ultimately, it is the reader who “finds” something. Some creative ethnographers have noted that fictional representation actually allows readers a chance to discover more truths than facts alone would allow. As demonstrated in Vickers

(2010), by manipulating and creating characters and scenes, a range of truths and perspectives were experienced which readers would otherwise not have been exposed to.

While “influenced by the truth,” Vickers created an entirely fictitious character and dialogue between the character and character’s husband (p. 560). In some ways, Vickers envisioned fiction as setting the truth free from the restraints of factual reporting. Vickers (2010) suggested fiction could help us better understand real phenomena. Thus, it is assumed the insights and knowledge a reader gains from a fictional representation are very real, and therefore can be internalized and used as legitimate knowledge.

Fictional representation also assumes the reader will internalize their reading experience and draw knowledge out of this experience. It is assumed the reader cannot separate themselves from the text, and as an emotional being must react. The reader response is real, thus the “knowledge” they acquire is real, and therefore legitimized. The question is raised whether this knowledge is “valid” or not. Sparkes (2002) discussed this at length, and suggested when evaluating the fictional representation genre we cannot use the traditional “scientific” views of validity. Instead, we should judge validity based on whether “the writing has made a difference and whether it has moved people to action” (p. 202).

The goal of fictional representation is to create an “experience of believing.” Based on my experiences as a researcher and accounts of real events from participants, I have attempted to create plausible accounts representing Victoria Dreams street soccer

culture. To be deemed successful, readers must believe what they've read is an authentic representation of Victoria Dreams street soccer. In this way, a sense of verisimilitude may be achieved (Hopper et al. 2008).

### **Entering the setting**

Before discussing data collection, it is prudent to briefly discuss site entry.

According to Thomas, Nelson and Silverman (2011) site entry may be the most critical step in conducting qualitative research. For this study, first contact was made by e-mail to the founder of Victoria Dreams. I outlined my interest in working with the Victoria Dreams, and the founder welcomed and encouraged me to attend practices. The founder stated she was excited at the possibility of increasing awareness about the program, and hoped the intended research might help to recruit more volunteers and participants.

Upon attending the first practice, I introduced and identified myself to all of the volunteers and participants. Future intentions to conduct formal research were communicated and well-received by all parties in attendance.

In discussion with faculty, concerns were raised about attending practices prior to obtaining ethical consent. After further consultation with my supervisor and other faculty members, it was determined that attending practices would not violate good ethical protocol—until ethical approval was obtained from the University of Victoria (UVic), and in line with recommendations from Magee (2011), I attended practices in an effort to build trust and rapport with players and volunteers during this "preparation" phase. This proved to be a valuable process, allowing me to solidify friendships with both volunteers



and participants before beginning formal observations and interviews. Further, I believe this approach proved the least intrusive and stressful for participants as they got to know me first as a soccer player, prior to seeing me as a researcher (Magee, 2011; Sparkes, 2002). Thus, participants could understand and feel reassured my motivation as a researcher was to honour the experiences of the Dreams.

### **Data collection**

For this study, data was collected and triangulated from three sources—participant interviews, volunteer interviews, and researcher observations. Stake (2005) noted triangulation is often suggested as a way for researchers to demonstrate the repeatability of their observations, but argued no observations will truly be repeatable. Triangulation though remains valuable, as it helps to present multiple realities. Therefore, in this study I combined the perspectives of volunteers, participants, and myself—not as a means to suggest my findings are repeatable or valid because of commonalities that may be revealed—but to highlight the diversity of perceptions and emphasize the different ways that street soccer is being experienced (p. 454).

### **Interviews: selection, recruitment, consent, ethics**

An essential source of data in a qualitative study is the interview (Yin, 2003). To gain a more dynamic understanding of participant and volunteer experiences with the Victoria Dreams, a total of four individual interviews were conducted, comprised of two volunteers, and two participants. Interviewees were purposively selected as those I felt could best "illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990).

Interviewees were recruited in-person, at the Victoria Dreams weekly practice. Interviewees were given both a written and oral explanation of the interview process, the research purpose and implications, and sample questions. Prior to conducting interviews, both verbal and written consent were obtained as per UVic Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) policy. Interviewees were informed of their right to refuse or withdraw from an interview at any stage of the process. Recognizing interviews could pose possible psychological or emotional risks—specifically to participants—I considered their level of function, stability, and enthusiasm before proceeding. Because the street soccer program itself is voluntary, and participants attend of their own volition, I hoped discussing social inclusion in relation to the program would be a positive experience. I also avoided questioning participants about experiences if they indicated it was upsetting. Finally, I drew on my extensive professional experience working with marginalized populations to ensure interviews remained constructive.

#### **Interview protocol and sample questions**

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. Interviews were conducted at the interviewee's location of choice, and transcribed verbatim shortly after. Interviewees were reminded at the start, midway point, and conclusion of the interview of their right to withdraw from the interview process.

The interview questions transformed and emerged as I spent more time with players and volunteers. As I gained a more intimate understanding of the program, I determined what I felt would be the most revealing and relevant questions to answer my research question. I casually asked sample questions to volunteers and participants

during practices and mealtimes, and asked which topics they felt should be further explored. In addition, I constructed a range of questions which I hoped would elucidate a complete understanding of both player and volunteer experiences. In conducting interviews, Yin (2003) stated the process should be fluid but focused, with the researcher asking questions in an unbiased and friendly conversational manner. In keeping with these recommendations, interviews were loosely guided by the following questions:

#### Questions for Participants:

- What are some experiences or stories you'd like to share about your participation with street soccer?
- What are some things you like about street soccer, and what are some things you might like to see change?
- How is your time playing street soccer different from other aspects of your life, or communities that you are involved with?
- Do you feel that street soccer has impacted your life off the field? Could you share some examples?
- How could this research study benefit the group? What kinds of stories would you like to be told or findings to be shared?

#### Questions For Volunteers:

- Why did you decide to get involved with street soccer and what maintains your interest in volunteering? Why this group and not another?
- How do you feel the program impacts social inclusion? Could you provide some examples or stories?

- What are the challenges and benefits of volunteering with Victoria Dreams?
- What direction would you like to see the group move in the future? Get bigger? Be more or less competitive? Be more visible?
- How could this research study benefit the group? What kinds of stories would you like to be told or findings to be shared?

### **Observations**

Casual observations offer valuable insights into the climate of an organization and its participants, and are an important additional source of information (Yin, 2003). To gain a firsthand perspective of the Victoria Dreams, an important source of data was my direct observations. As noted by Thomas et al. (2011), collecting good observational data takes time to understand the nuances of what is happening. Therefore, my observation period spanned sixteen months—from February 16th to June 16th, 2013. Observations were conducted every Sunday afternoon, during one-hour practices. In addition, I had the opportunity to join the Dreams on two out-of-town tournaments, including a three-day two-night trip to Vancouver, and a full day trip to Comox. In becoming a regular fixture at practices, I was also able to limit reactivity to my presence. I logged my observations informally, periodically making notes on my computer after practices and during the week as experiences and stories of interest were encountered. I also continuously discussed and recounted my observations during weekly meetings with my supervisor, which strengthened my retention of events and promoted ongoing reflection. Here is a sample entry:

*Having a difficult time figuring out exactly who this program serves. Today there was a noticeable range of players—from teenagers to seniors, and several who do not appear to be very street-entrenched. Need to ask Katie more about the recruitment of players, how does she find people? Does she keep track of who is coming or how they found out about the program? Very surprised that some players arrived in cars and have nice shoes. Also, amazed at the level of skill and competitive nature of some players. Heard from a few players today about a past player who went to the World Cup. Would like to learn more about his story.*

In following the HREB guidelines, Appendix VI indicates for observations, a researcher does not require informed consent if observations are conducted in a public place, such as a municipal soccer field—unless observations allow for identification of individual participants. In consultation with the my supervisor, it was determined for observation of practices, general ongoing consent obtained from the founder was sufficient, to which HREB concurred.

### **Data Analysis And Presentation**

Determining how to analyze and represent qualitative data is a discussion wrought with conflict and ambiguity (Lichtman, 2013). However, I believe a major strength of qualitative research is this lack of hard boundaries, empowering researchers to draw on a combination of methodological and epistemological approaches.

### **Providing context with fictional representation**

Chapter Four, the results, begins with a fictional representation offering important insights and context on the social dynamics of street soccer and The Dreams. In

constructing this representation I drew heavily on my participant observations and on the weekly notes I made. In addition to contributing to the larger body of research on sport and social inclusion, this story is also intended as an exploratory contribution to the discussion and progression of the fictional representation genre.

As Sparkes (2002) noted, for qualitative research to continue its progression and subsequent contribution to humanity, researchers must continuously push the boundaries of academic research through emerging genres—such as fictional representation— while exploring ways to improve dissemination of academic findings into mainstream communities.

### **About the genre**

Fictional representation is an emerging genre of qualitative research. It is helpful to imagine fictional representation on a continuum. At one end of the continuum, positioned next to the realist tale, there is creative non-fiction. Here the researcher stays very true to factual events, but deliberately falsifies some non-essential details which may protect the identity of vulnerable groups and individuals (Sparkes, 2002). This end of the continuum is situated closest to the realist tale. While realist tales may use pseudonyms or change details for ethical considerations to protect participants, fictional representations go a step further. Leaping to the opposite end of the fictional representation continuum, the researcher imaginatively produces a fictitious work, sometimes termed “fictive imagining,” to produce creative fiction (Vickers, 2010). Regardless of place on the continuum, the goal of fictional representation remains as a “useful contribution to scholarly research” (p. 556).

I created a fictional representation because of its ability to tell a “better story,” one that is vivid and engaging, and appeals to a wider audience, while maintaining a factual basis and inspiration (Sparkes, 2002). To create an engaging story, I used a number of conventional literary techniques. I actively considered aspects of, “story, situation, persona, character, scene and summary” (Narayan, 2007, p. 130). Compared to a strictly factual ethnography, this fictional representation provides a colourful and more memorable account.

### **Writing and Editing**

In creating this fictional representation, I researched the genre and began experimenting with different literary techniques. A “first-draft” fictional representation was shared with fellow graduate students, and qualitative research professor. Through this reflective process, I gained valuable insight on the meaning readers were drawing. In response to these comments, I reworked the story with the intention of creating a more meaningful and emotional account of street soccer.

Narayan (2007) highlighted the role of editing as a critical piece of fictional representation noting: “While all ethnographers extract, curtail, and rearrange materials from their fieldwork situations to make texts, perhaps it is in the editing of other people’s stories that the interventions of an anthropologist as editor come into the clearest focus” (p. 133). Granted, Narayan is identifying specifically as an anthropologist, the influence of the editing process is of paramount importance. Here we are reminded of the negotiation between reader and researcher. While I packaged events and observations

into the text, the reader must “unpack” and experience them in relation to their own history. A truth is negotiated through this process, and at its most successful, catalytic validity achieved. In seeking catalytic validity—and contrary to traditional, more positivist conceptions of validity—I propose my fictional representation will be legitimized based on its ability to create empathy in my readers and move them to action; and on its ability to empower and emancipate the street soccer players the story focuses on (Sparkes, 2002).

### **Interview analysis**

A unique and important feature of qualitative research is that data analysis begins simultaneously with data collection (Thomas et al., 2011; Yin, 2003). By conducting data analysis from the beginning of this study, I discovered important findings that influenced my research process (Thomas et al., 2011). In determining how to analyze and present the interviews, I first transcribed them verbatim, and listened to them multiple times. As I listened to each interview, and read over the transcripts, I saw a number of similarities and differences between the interviews. Initially, I considered a directed content analysis approach, to code the interviews and look for emergent themes (Miles & Huberman 1994). However, I felt such an approach would be too constraining on my findings. As Lichtman (2013) suggested, coding and theming into five or six basic themes operates from a reductionist perspective and may risk losing the heart of the story.

Therefore, in an effort to honour the voice of each interviewee, I borrowed from a narrative analysis approach, and provided the interviews in their entirety to stand as stories (Riessman, 2007). Further, I removed my own interjections from the interviews,



and wrote simplified, contextualizing transitions. In combination with the fictional representation—which is shaped entirely by my voice—I believe this “hands-off” treatment of the interview analysis provides an excellent balance to my study. Following the presentation of interviews, I “re-enter” to offer some summarizing thoughts.

### **Conclusion**

In qualitative research there is no single best method or set of guidelines to analyze interviews and stories—rather, researchers should follow their own plan (Lichtman 2013; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I employed intrinsic case study methodology to explore the culture and experiences of the Victoria Dreams. My observations directly influenced and informed the interviews I conducted and fictional representation I wrote. While this study presents my interpretations, it also expects, and allows the reader to experience the culture of the Victoria Dreams and draw their own interpretations (Stake, 2005).

## Chapter Four: Results

This chapter begins with an original fictional representation. Following the fictional representation, four interviews are presented. The fictional representation aims to provide context for readers and provides an overview of Victoria Dreams street soccer. Following the fictional representation, four interviews—transcribed verbatim—provide readers with additional insights. Through this approach, readers are afforded the opportunity to compare the fictional representation directly with interviews from which it was partially based. Before presenting the fictional representation, a brief discussion of the genre is presented highlighting some salient points for consideration.

### **Ontological And Epistemological Assumptions Within Fictional Representation**

In producing a fictional representation, certain philosophical assumptions about knowledge and truth are made. Fictional representations “work” based on the ontological assumption that people’s subjective experiences are the foundation of their own beliefs and knowledge—their own reality. However, in reading a fictional representation, there is an interaction that takes place between the researcher and reader—together they create shared meanings and understandings of knowledge and truth, through an intersubjective process. This interaction may also be referred to as “relativistic ontology” (Hopper et al., 2008). For example, when reading this story, the reader also draws on and incorporates their past experiences, and their “location.” In processing new information from this fictional representation, the reader contextualizes the new information with their old knowledge. This experience generates a response, and new piece of knowledge. Epistemologically then, for fictional representation to be effective, readers are treated as

active agents, in control of their emotions and decision making—essentially, assuming a voluntaristic view of people (Hopper et al., 2008; Richardson 2000; Sparkes 2002).

### **Authenticity and “being there”**

To achieve verisimilitude, the researcher must have an intimate and “authentic” understanding of the subject they are writing about. Within fictional representation, this intimacy is often characterized as a result of the researcher “being there” through prolonged engagement and observation (Sparkes, 2002). Over sixteen months, I interacted with a wide range of players, volunteers, community sponsors, and national-level organizers. In particular, I established trusting and meaningful relationships with several of the participants. In the following composition, I have combined a multitude of these experiences and characters to form the basis of my fictional representation.

### **An Original Fictional Representation: A Goal For Social Inclusion**

#### ***The rendezvous—this is our team***

*It’s five---fifteen am Saturday morning, and I’m supposed to pickup Jerry before meeting the rest of our group. He’s 20 minutes late, but he finally shows up. Jerry is flustered and sits down in the passenger seat beside me. He’s an imposing frame, bald with tattoos and shifty blue eyes. He’s in his mid---sixties. He’s talkative, unpredictable, and a true soccer fanatic. I like Jerry, but I’m already plotting how I might get him into the back seat for the rest of this road trip. He smells terribly of smoke and sweat, so I crack my window. Jerry apologizes for oversleeping. “The cops woke me up at three in the morning,” he says. “My son died last night, he was in a plane crash—so we have to win today, we have to do it for my son.”*

*“I’m so sorry Jerry, that’s terrible, I didn’t even know you had kids.”*

*“Yes, my son was a pilot. I have two daughters, they’re both doctors, they’re millionaires. I used to be a pilot too, in the Vietnam War—I’m an American, but they still won’t pay my pension.*

*It’s the first time I’ve really chatted with Jerry. He has some incredible stories. He served together with Elvis and they became best friends—he has a picture at home to prove it. Following his army days, he moved to Brazil where he played professional soccer for ten years. He’s wearing a Barcelona team jersey, personally autographed by some of the world’s greatest players. It was a gift in honour of his commitment to the*

*game. I don't push Jerry on any of the details, but I wonder which parts of his incredible stories are really true.*

*We meet the rest of our group on a familiar if not notorious downtown street corner. Our team, "The Victoria Dreams" was cobbled together at last week's practice and through a Facebook invite. If you were available and wanted to join, you were in. Our team is impressively diverse. Marie and her teenage kids Galen and Sabrina are a First Nations family living in subsidized housing. Edgar, from Mexico, spent the last couple of years in and out of homeless shelters—he has a job now and rents an apartment. Edgar is our unofficial captain and best player.*

*Edgar has been with the team since it formed two years ago. I've gotten to know Edgar well—he's an open, honest, and sensitive individual. According to Edgar, he's been playing soccer his whole life, and played in a competitive men's league back in his hometown. When he first immigrated to Canada he struggled to make connections in the community. Already shy, his limited English compounded his lack of confidence.*

*"When I first came here, I was really depressed. I didn't know anybody, and I didn't have any family here. In Mexico family is with you everyday, you are never alone. I wanted to leave, I didn't want to stay no more in Canada. I found a shelter where they played ping-pong, and I started going there every night. I'd play ping-pong all night, with anyone—some of them were drunk, but it was really good. Then I met an old guy who spoke Spanish. He was my first friend here, so I kept going back to this shelter to see him. One day, a lady came into the shelter. Actually, I remember it was a really bad day. I was so depressed; I thought I would go home in the next couple weeks. Well, the lady, Lisa, she put up a poster and told everyone she was starting a soccer team and needed players. It was the best day of my Canadian life—you know, I love soccer, but I could not afford to play here. Well, she said everything would be free, and they would have food at every practice. A lot of people wanted to join. I think a lot of bad things were happening in people's lives that day, but the feeling changed in the shelter, people were really excited.*

*Since I joined this team I feel like I have a new family. It's different than friends you make on the street. We play for each other and we got really nice team shirts, and new soccer boots. I've been to Vancouver twice for tournaments, and to Kelowna. We came first place in Kelowna—I want to be the champions again this year. Actually, the Dreams helped me a lot, because I also found a job through them. Darren is the guy who owns a catering company and makes food for us every practice. After a couple months playing, he invited me to come and work for him. So I go to different parties and help setup and make food. My life is a lot better. I miss my family, but I want to stay in Canada. The Dreams means everything to me. When I have a bad week, it doesn't matter because I can come play on Sunday and score some nice goals. I want to make this team the best. But it's hard—a lot of players stopped coming and our head volunteer isn't around. They asked me to make Facebook posts but I'm not so good at writing, so I need more help. I'm worried the team won't last. But in the future, I'm*

*going to have my own little restaurant. I want to have all the team players over, make them some dinner—you know, I'm going to do that, it would be really nice."*

*Paul is the newest member, and has moved here from Ghana. Paul is charismatic, always smiling but shy. He's lean and athletic, with bursts of speed. I wonder how he got involved with this group—he's a high school student, and seems well cared for. Evan is about thirty—he's struggled through his life battling addictions and a learning disability, but recently took up soccer. He is dedicated to the team, and loves to play. He's a bit "top-heavy", but is an effective defender despite his lack of fitness and skill. Evan commutes an hour on the bus to attend practices—he is a die-hard member, and refers to himself and teammates as a "bunch of misfits." The final player for today is Robert. Robert is also First Nations and a regular since the team's formation two years ago. Robert is short and round, but displays gifted hand-eye coordination—he played "any sport he could join" growing up. Robert has two young daughters and lives on a nearby reservation. Robert has attended every tournament the team has ever played—he is our goalkeeper.*

### ***The supporting cast***

*It's a three---hour drive each way to the tournament, but we're planning to make it there and back all in one day. I'm driving my station wagon, and Edgar is driving Darren's BMW. Darren is a long-time street soccer supporter and generous "food-guy" for the team. We get the "team debit card" from Darren to cover gas, and a grocery bag full of bagel sandwiches he's made as snacks. Darren never plays soccer with the team. Darren is not independently wealthy, nor is his business a runaway success, yet he never fails to deliver food after practice. Darren is a friend of Lisa's, and helped her form the original team.*

*Lisa, the founder, is a reporter at a local newspaper. She heard about street soccer a few years ago, and thought Victoria would be an ideal community to start a team. She worked tirelessly the first year building connections and support for the team. She secured free soccer balls, jerseys, and cleats from a local sports store. Through a charity tournament, she received donations from the local fire station, and police association. She published a series of articles documenting the rise of the team, including the qualification of a Victoria player to the world cup tournament in Paris. This past year Lisa has been away on assignment in Asia, and team leadership and sponsorship efforts have suffered. In her absence volunteers have come and gone, and the team has dwindled. Lisa is keen to get back, to "keep her baby alive." Lisa is genuinely committed to social justice and improving the community, but she is also busy professionally.*

### ***Navigating the road trip***

*Jerry's gone inside Seven-Eleven to buy a coffee, so I offer Marie the front seat of my car, and she accepts. I'm nervous about offending Jerry but he doesn't seem to notice. He assumes his new spot in the backseat without protest—I hope he doesn't*

*have bedbugs, and I feel guilty for thinking it.*

*It's a beautiful drive to Comox Valley, and conversation flows effortlessly. Robert explains the usual format for Street Soccer Canada tournaments. Teams play on mini-fields, about a quarter of a full-sized field. There are three players plus a goalie on the field per team. The nets are hockey-sized, and the goalie must stay within the six-foot crease line. Substitutions are unlimited, and made frequently "on-the-fly." At the official Homeless World Cup men and women play separately, but for local tournaments like this, everyone plays together. Today's tournament is the "Western Qualifier" for Street Soccer Canada, and will be used to select six players for the national team. The team will head to Poland for two weeks, all expenses paid. Robert says he was selected to go last year to Mexico, but there was some confusion with paperwork and his Visa—the disappointment is still raw in his voice.*

### ***The big tournament***

*I'm getting excited to meet the other teams. There will be representatives from Calgary, Kelowna, Comox, and three teams from Vancouver. When we arrive at the field teams mingle, smoke and laugh with each other. There's familiarity between players, with lots of returning members. Everyone has soccer cleats, matching team jerseys, equipment, and coaches are running warm-ups. I'm introduced to the head of Street Soccer Canada and learn more about the program. The model in Ontario, where Street Soccer Canada started, is vastly sophisticated from the fledgling teams here in BC. There are six teams in the Toronto area, and a board of directors running things. Street Soccer is promoted on a regular basis through workshops at the Salvation Army, and players have the chance to work in a laundry and dry-cleaning business started by the team.*

*In contrast, the Victoria Dreams appear to have very little infrastructure, but somehow stay afloat. They meet every Sunday, and play soccer for an hour. Teams are assembled as people arrive, usually four players per side. If a team is too strong, someone swaps sides. The games are fun, but competitive. The first time I showed up, about six months ago, I was struck by the diversity of players. I spoke to an older man who said he'd come with his friend to cheer him up because he was having a terrible day. They'd seen a poster at the shelter, and noticed it said soccer and free food. I haven't seen either of them since. Now, for the summer season, we are playing outside. The game format remains the same, but it seems like fewer players are showing up. Two weeks ago only 3 people came to play. Most of the players fit the bill of "marginalized" but others I can't figure out—a government worker, a law student, and a young couple driving a new car, but none of them are acting as "volunteers." The regular members know I'm a student, and know I'm there to research the team, as well as play soccer. I feel like an insider now, and today's tournament has solidified my membership into the group.*

### ***Let the games begin***

*Our first game of the day is against Vancouver. They have a talented side, and boast a former Homeless World Cup team Canada member. I am instructed to “watch out” for him, not to let him shoot. He scores three goals—our team scores none.*

*“That’s ok guys. First game, we just got to get focused. We need to move the ball faster.” Edgar is upbeat despite the lopsided loss.*

*Our second game we really do play better. It is a close match. We finally score a goal, but lose two to one in the last minute. By game three our group is determined to win. Sabrina scores the opening goal, top corner and even the other team is cheering. The game goes back and forth with great goaltending at both ends. It ends in a tie, and we earn our first point of the tournament. With only one point, we have to win our next game to make it into the playoffs.*

### **Eye on the prize**

*Edgar leaned over the ball and struck a perfect shot just inside the far post. Our team erupted—we’d secured a spot into the quarterfinals. There was a sense of relief, mixed with a burden of new expectations. Ecstatic, our team captain Edgar gathered everyone together, and explained we must win our first playoff game if we were to become champions. We were introduced to our newest teammate. His name was Abelo. Edgar had spotted him on the adjacent field, playing with a young and athletic group of African men. Edgar didn’t need to explain further. Those who were supposed to get the message did, and sat on the bench. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being selected to play while seeing the dejection of those sitting on the sidelines. Edgar’s enthusiasm to win at any cost was painful, but we were not the only team guilty of this kind of exclusion. Our opponents also played their best four players, and their coach shouted instructions aggressively from the sidelines. I was selected to start for this important game, but was soon called off the field by Edgar for a substitution—my lack of production was frustrating him. As I took my place on the bench beside Jerry, I considered the mantra of street soccer, and the goal of social inclusion. There was an irony to the whole tournament, as a selection process for the world cup team—only three players would be chosen for the Canadian team, while another forty would be excluded. In the end, we lost our only playoff game, despite Abelo’s dominant play. The finals saw Vancouver versus a team from Calgary. The level of skill was impressively high, as was the competitive drive of the players. The game was a draw and required a shootout. Vancouver’s goalie stopped all three shooters to secure the championship.*

*At the conclusion of the tournament our team seemed proud and cohesive again. Edgar and Robert replayed their goals, and surmised we were probably the third best team, because we’d lost in the quarterfinals to the eventual champions. Marie, Galen, and Paul seemed more impressed with the outing and sunshine than with the outcome of the games. For some players, winning was a really big deal, for others, it wasn’t. Throughout the day there was background chatter of who might be selected for the World Cup team, mixed with an impromptu water-fight, smoke breaks, a free lunch, t-shirt, and lots of soccer.*

### ***The barbecue—a chance to be heard***

*The tournament culminated with a barbecue staged at a nearby campground turned permanent housing spot for many of Comox's otherwise homeless people. The dinner was incredible, a bounty of food and legion of volunteers serving it—beyond hotdogs and hamburgers, there was steak, halibut, homemade salads, and chocolate desserts. It was revealed one community member had covered all of the food costs, but wished to remain anonymous. The barbecue was followed with some thoughtful and moving words by one host organizer:*

*“In the small community of Comox, homelessness and addiction has been a pervasive and contentious issue. Last year city council wanted to shut this very campground down, because it was not zoned for permanent residents and they claimed it was not safe. With the support of community members and a new mayor, we have maintained this site as a viable housing option for the homeless. Further, this space has become home to the new Comox street soccer team. Every week the team welcomes new players to play soccer and share a meal together. Today, we have been honoured and humbled to share good sportsmanship and friendly competition with all of you. I know some days in the future may not be as good or easy as today—but in those down times, and cold nights, we hope you can draw on and find resiliency in the special memories of today. There will be more soccer in the future, and more opportunities for everyone to enjoy together. We hope you found some inspiration in playing soccer today and can transfer the positives you have gained into other avenues of your life. You are all part of our team, and the greater street soccer community.”*

*Next the mic was passed around so a member from each team could speak. I was struck by the words of one young man who remarked with such earnestness:*

*“When I started playing street soccer just a few months ago I never imagined how far it could take me. I never imagined in my life that I could be here and do this. Thank you so much, and thank you for the volunteers and food.”*

*A player from another team, wearing large hoop earrings sitting at the far end of the table yelled at him “I can't hear you!”*

*The first man replied, “clean the shit out of your ears and maybe you'll hear me.” The man's teammates cheered at this quick retort. The young man who'd asked him to speak up looked sheepishly away. I saw nervous whispers between volunteers—the tone of camaraderie and sportsmanship waned temporarily. It was a revealing exchange. I was reminded that so many of these players came from “hard” lives. It was clear that egos were fragile, and maintaining “face” remained paramount to the participant's survival. However, as the mic continued around, and different players had their chance to speak, the significance of the day was not lost. Players who'd likely never held a microphone, were asked to share their thoughts—one anxiety ridden man managed a simple “thank you so much everyone,” but he was beaming with pride, having demonstrated the courage to stand up and speak. It was incredible to witness.*



### ***A final word***

*The Comox team coach and outreach worker for the homeless campsite closed with a final story. That morning one of his players had woken up early, unable to sleep in anticipation of the tournament. He'd decided to walk into town, and had come across a man asleep on a bench in the park. He walked past the man but then noticed a pair of soccer cleats clutched under his arm. He woke the man up, and led him back to the camp where they had breakfast. It turns out the sleeping man had missed the rendezvous with his team caravan the night before in Vancouver, but decided to make it out on his own. He'd caught the last ferry, then hitchhiked the rest of the way up island. He didn't have a phone and didn't know where the tournament was, but he figured he'd find it. He turned out to be the goalie for the eventual tournament winning team—the same goalie that'd stymied our chances in the quarterfinal. I pondered what compelled him to go to such lengths for a street soccer tournament—what does street soccer offer that isn't available in his daily life? As I considered the answer to this question, I realized the motivation for each and every participant was unique, but centered on belonging.*

### ***Back to Victoria***

*It was nearly midnight by the time we got back into town. Everyone was exhausted but thrilled with the day. The following week there was practice as usual for the Victoria Dreams. Most of the group from last week's tournament, plus a couple of new players turned up. Paul had invited a young woman to come and play, also a new immigrant from Africa. She'd never played soccer before, but was keen to try. She'd heard from Paul about the adventure of last week's tournament and wanted to get involved.*

*I saw Jerry later that week walking through downtown. He was carrying a soccer ball and talking loudly to himself. I realized then Jerry is schizophrenic, but more importantly, I realized the true significance and potential of the Victoria Dreams street soccer team. Soccer is the one place that Jerry fits, where he feels comfortable. The Victoria Dreams provide a safe place, where anyone is welcome, without public declaration of housing status, socioeconomic status, mental health or disability—you aren't required to prove you belong here, inclusion is absolute.*

### **Reflecting As An Author And Researcher**

Fictional representation encompasses a range of techniques and therefore the process each researcher uses varies (Sparkes, 2002). Contrary to a scientific tale, fictional representation does not always follow a strict methodological approach. While some fictional representations include a highly detailed methods section including data collection, analysis, editing, and the writing process, others include no methods section at

all. In the author-evacuated positivist world of scientific tales, an omission of methods would be incorrigible. However, in fictional representation, some researchers maintain such details are unnecessary and may actually detract from the impact of their work (Clough, 1999). While I have not explicitly revealed which aspects of this story were invented or factual, I have included methodological details within this study, and offer the following insights into the writing and research process.

### **On the writing**

As a relatively inexperienced writer attempting my first fictional representation, I was excited at the freedom I perceived fictional representation would provide. However, as I quickly encountered, fictional representation was not an “easy” part of my research study as I had envisioned. Stylistically, I was particularly apprehensive of falling prey to clichés and self-indulgent writing.

As I wrote, edited, and re-wrote the stories, I envisioned street soccer from multiple perspectives, and recognized the power I had as author and researcher. Whereas some methodologies imply objectivity and constrain the researcher with the burden of a strict “scientific” process, fictional representation enlightens the researcher to include their own subjectivity while also considering the subjectivity of the reader, in exploring and interpreting social phenomenon (Sparkes, 2002).

### **Respecting those who inspired the story**

To truly honour the voices of the participants I was required to think deeply about all aspects of their lives—what would they say, how would they act, what was most important to them? In essence, I tried to live in their shoes, and embody their

experiences. The more I wrote, the more intimately I felt I understood each of the real participants from the Victoria Dreams. While my characters were based very closely on actual participants, I do not believe simply interviewing, recording, reproducing verbatim, and analyzing the participant's words would have spawned this same sense of understanding or empathy for me as a researcher nor would it translate to the same level of verisimilitude for my readers.

### **Animating the significant**

My story grew very quickly, and it was challenging to isolate which aspects of street soccer I should portray. Knowing this story would act in concert with the interviews I had conducted—and would further be conducting—I tried to ensure an interplay between the two. Specifically, I highlighted: the role of competitive play, tournaments, and the homeless world cup; player motivation and expectations; friendship, trust, and tensions between players and teams; the role of food; player and volunteer interactions; connections to social capital through bridging and bonding links; and street soccer organization and infrastructure. As previously noted, it is each individual reader who will determine if this story has been successful, if it has achieved catalytic validity and evoked an empathetic response (Sparkes, 2002).

### **Unique Narratives Through Interviews**

The following four interviews are presented separately to highlight the unique experience and perspective of each interviewee. The words of each interviewee primarily follow the chronological order in which they were spoken and have not been rearranged. By presenting the interviews in this manner, it is hoped a more intimate understanding of the interviewees thought process will be gained. I have provided my own thoughts to

help transition between sections of dialogue. While I have attempted to provide context to the interview, I have refrained from detailed analysis, which will be undertaken in Chapter Five. The intention of presenting the material in this format is to allow the reader to engage with the discourse in a free and uninfluenced manner.

### **Interview With Katie Derosa, The Founder**

The genesis of the Victoria Dreams Street Soccer group began with founder Katie DeRosa. After seeing some footage on TV about Street Soccer in Ottawa, Katie thought it would be an ideal fit for Victoria, and a manageable volunteer opportunity for herself. As a reporter for the Times Colonist, Katie leveraged her connections in the community and to generate support for the project. A fellow reporter and friend whom she played soccer with at the YMCA, worked to spread the word. She created a Facebook page and was interviewed on a local radio station. Andrew, “the food guy,” heard the radio spot and contacted Katie about getting involved. Together they formed the beginnings of the Victoria Dreams Street Soccer group. Katie recalled her interest to find a volunteer opportunity and how street soccer evolved:

I wanted a new volunteer opportunity. I thought this would be easy, all we'd need was a ball and a field. It actually kind of started as a New Year's Resolution and it turned into this amazing non-profit. It's something that I think really speaks to just the power of one idea you know. At the first practice we had 25 people, there was media, and Andrew cooking hamburgers. I could see there were people that were heroin addicts, those that were really deeply entrenched homeless, and people who were in the middle.

### **Accessibility and Privacy**

From the onset of the project, participant accessibility and privacy was a central consideration. Katie was concerned about intruding on the personal lives of participants, but at the same time cultivating genuine relationships:

My goal at the first practice was not to drill everyone, because I did not want it to be a prohibitive thing. For some people that's the biggest anxiety when they get assistance, like drug rehab, there's all this grilling, and I'm not a social worker...I'm there to be their friend, to be their soccer coach, and provide something so simple that they don't have to think about it.

Part of Katie's vision was creating opportunities where people could embody different roles within the group, while also ensuring room for transformation and growth within those roles:

I felt there was a lot of room for everyone, if they were a volunteer they could get a reference or volunteer experience, or someone in-between could go from being that lower income person to sort of a leader...which I think Luis has largely been.”

For startup advice, Katie looked to another local non-profit, the Cool Aid Society's Every Step Counts. The group also strives to promote social inclusion by providing opportunities for marginalized people to run and train together. As Katie explained, the running group has a more established infrastructure but still offered some valuable ideas for getting street soccer organized:

At the first tournament we gave the players a survey about drug use and some personal history and asked them to sign a waiver. This idea came from Julie from the running group Cool Aid. They have a lot more money, and she is paid full time. If I could get that it would be a dream, her program has been really successful because she has been able to focus on that not off the side of her desk. She suggested the waiver and these questions which were not too intrusive. So we took each player aside and found out their story and goals, to figure out what tasks they could do and have more leadership roles. We didn't want to be seen as the coaches, we hoped that El Salvador Mike would become more of a leader but he was shy...we wanted him to be a leader to encourage him to keep coming.

In the first year, one of the Victoria players, Richard, was offered a spot to represent Canada at the Homeless World Cup. The selection included a trip to Paris, and intense media coverage:

He [Richard] was one of our biggest successes and biggest challenges. We tried to explain to him the types of questions he might face. He was worried the whole

focus of articles would be about his past drug addiction. He was fine with saying he was homeless but did not want to discuss what caused it. Reporters were respectful. There was coverage from 6 different media outlets of him going to Paris.

### **Highs and lows of competition**

Some disappointment arose when players, certain players, were not selected for the Homeless World Cup, but Katie still felt the potential for selection was a positive and significant motivator for many participants. Further, a number of participants had no interest or awareness of the Homeless World Cup at all. However, Katie felt hosting local tournaments and games on a regular basis was important to keep participants engaged:

It's a concern, but on the flip side, for future years it gives people something to look forward to, and gives people who want to be really serious, a reason to be serious about it. Some people just come on the weekend and that's it. When we first started, I wanted to have something every three months. I had a tournament against the fire department when we first started.

Katie felt playing games in the community was as an important opportunity to introduce people from varying demographics:

I wanted them to play other teams in the community, because then they are meeting other people. That's also the biggest reason why I always wanted fifty-fifty volunteers to street, but with no designation of who is who—I just wanted volunteers to be mentors. Some soccer clubs have offered me that if we have a player who is good enough they can play with their club team for free.

While the desire to be inclusive was a primary goal, Katie discussed the challenges of reaching the target population on a consistent basis:

I wanted the team to be integrated, but it's always a challenge to make sure there are not other people who are not in the street category and who do not want to volunteer, but they just come to play. When I noticed it was mostly non street and non volunteers, I would subtly remind everyone at the end of practice that it is street soccer, and sometimes give people tasks, like give out flyers... There was a

group of aggressive guys who started to come...so I had to stop them from taking over...I never wanted to ostracize anyone.

When considering why participants choose this program versus other drop-in sports programs, Katie pointed toward participants' ability to identify with one another:

I think because they find like-minded people. They see each other on the street and there is a silent contract between them—that they know they are sort of in the same position.

The Kelowna Kodiaks, another team in BC, recently received a \$2000 grant, part of a \$30,000 grant from the Ministry of Community, Sport and Social Development, through the Local Sport Program Development Fund. The challenges of securing such funding for the Victoria Dreams have been multifaceted, as Katie discussed:

I'm looking for ways I can get grants...I applied for a grant through BC Ministry of Sport but didn't get it because we need to be a registered non-profit, but we are still under the Street Soccer Canada charitable organization number. To be a non-profit we would have to set-up a board of directors, and I think you have to be dealing with at least ten thousand dollars in yearly fees...I think being a non-profit would make it easier to get money, and I've had people offer to be on the board of directors, but it would have to be setup and it would definitely be a process.

### **Participant recruitment and turnover**

Katie noted the turnover of participants and difficulty of recruiting to be a recurring challenge. While things flourished in the first year of the program, there have been significant ebbs and flows. Notably, a number of participants have moved on to find employment, which she recognized as a positive. Yet, Katie feels responsibility to recruit more players and suggested repetition and connection to other agencies as critical:

The first year was beyond my expectations, we had people dealing with alcoholism and very street entrenched. But now guys like Sean, he lives in Sydney now and has a job, so I think that is great, I understand he can't come, but he used to be homeless. I need to start from scratch again, going to all the shelters, and email to client service workers so they can tell their clients. When I started I did talks at many shelters. This year I held an open house at Our Place, and I thought we would get more people, but it didn't work. I think we need more

repetition, we need to talk more to the client service workers....If they don't know who we are I am not doing my job. I put posters up, but are they still up? I don't know. The biggest success we've had is connections with client service workers, we need the client service workers to help select people. Cheryl used to pick people up in a van. I need to do more outreach to service provider. That's one of the challenges, I have to make new posters each season because the day and time changes.

### **Suitability and participant fit**

In discussing the overall impact and benefit of the program, Katie identified people at a “functional” level as being those most likely to benefit—those not suffering from severe addictions issues or absolute homelessness. She also suggested these participants are more capable of transitioning into volunteer and leadership roles.

People who are functional could benefit...I want Jessica and Peter to be leaders and help recruit from youth shelters. I'd like Jessica to come with me, she could help connect, come with me on presentations. I need to target the youth shelter, but never really have—there is a lot of privacy around it, I don't even know where it is.

Last year, the third year since the team's inception, Katie took a job overseas. There was genuine concern for the program, and recognition sustaining it would be a challenge. In particular, Katie felt Luis, a participant who had transitioned into more of a leadership and volunteer role, was at times overwhelmed:

My fear was when I left the whole thing would collapse, but we all left at the same time, an unfortunate circumstance. It all fell on Luis' shoulders, but it was too much for him. I'm at a computer, but Luis isn't so it was more difficult for him...the communication is huge.

Fundraising was a prominent topic, as Katie discussed the trials of securing community partnerships and finding the right fit for the participants:

I tried to setup a Boston Pizza event, but the manager got frustrated and it fell through. Fundraising has been a struggle. Planning fundraisers, I want them to fit with street soccer, so a tournament is best. Players need to feel comfortable, I want it to be fun, so the players can play soccer and not feel underdressed and things.



**Maintaining viability**

While sustaining the program has been a challenge, it has nevertheless entered its fourth year. Katie is proud of this achievement and those who have contributed to its longevity. As Katie noted, in contrast to other groups with paid employees, the Dreams have managed to survive through a collaborative effort of those passionate about the program.

Street soccer is so grassroots, that's what I like, it is fuelled by the passion of volunteers. I like having confidence that if one bolt is removed it doesn't fall apart. That's the main idea, the foundation is strong because everyone likes the idea. Vancouver is a great model but they have been at it much longer...they are run through the Portland Hotel Society so have a lot of support. Every Step Counts is the closest to our group, but Gillie Easton, she is paid.

When discussing competitive play and tournaments, Katie was cognizant of the tension between winning and having fun. Yet, she believes positive reinforcement can quell the negative feelings that might otherwise emerge:

When you bond as a team you become protective of your teammates, so you wouldn't say something to offend, like we only want the good players on the team--but that is always a concern or part of sport. It all has to be a positive atmosphere, you don't want a coach screaming on the sideline. We tried to be chilled and positive. We were really reinforcing specific instances, like you almost got that goal there, that was so good. So we did that with Sean, because he was really trying to build up his skills as a player, and we tried to give technical help, like try this next time. For the most part people are positive, but there is always that time when someone may be a little bit negative but that is where the leader has to say none of that and nip it in the butt before it goes too far.

**Core benefits**

At the core of the program Katie indicated self-esteem building and friendship opportunities are the greatest rewards:

More than building their soccer skills, yes, it is about building their self-esteem, getting them friendships that are positive. I see them on the street, smile and chat for ten or fifteen minutes. It's so simple to address someone by their first name, and it's so simple being happy to see someone, and they feel like they are part of society. That's why I want the players to be with volunteers to be integrated with

people who are positive role models, navy, firefighters, police, positions of authority, to help breakdown past negative experiences or perceptions the players could have, to see they are just guys on the field. It is 100 percent about self-esteem and relationship building which are key stepping stones to recovery.

One of the goals of the group is to challenge perceptions that volunteers or community members have about street-entrenched people. Katie believes the bridging of diverse groups has been a constant positive:

Oh definitely, it breaks down the stereotypes of what a street person is, and the people who come out as volunteers sometimes don't know what to expect...and maybe at that one practice, there is only a handful of street players, but it doesn't really matter. Everyone has a great time, it just doesn't matter, that is why sport is so key for breaking down barriers and building community, because it doesn't matter what your social class is. When you get on the field, everything is out the window, you are just a player with passion and drive and a goal which is maybe to score a goal or win that game, but you have a goal and other people on that field have a goal as well, so you're all sharing in that and helping each other reach those goals. That's why to be honest I play soccer over, I jog a bit, but I like soccer more than running, because it is a team sport.

After each practice, volunteer Andrew provides food for all. Katie feels this has been an integral part of the experience—not just the food, but also the opportunity to share and bond together:

Also, eating together. Andrew is so important. I don't want the players to leave right away, because when we eat, we make jokes and interact together in a social setting. It is a huge community experience in any culture. When I go to the shelters and say we have food, I can entice people to come, people spark up and they come. For instance, we went to Rock Bay landing to give away leftovers, and talk about street soccer. I can't overstate how good the food aspect has been.

Recognizing street soccer will not solve many of the barriers which participants face, Katie feels the experience of playing with the Dreams offers a chance to build self-esteem and a sense of inclusion. Armed with this increased confidence and sense of support, she hopes participants will be better equipped to deal with other challenges they are facing:

So many things they try to do, like get an apartment, but they are told no, you don't have enough income, or try to get a job, but you don't have a resume. So there are many ways that homelessness, it is a cycle of exclusion. I think Victoria is really good in terms of its social support network. There are a lot of programs, a lot of social assistance, but it's one thing just to give a cheque and food, and then say well here's all the job websites, but to really motivate them to do all that stuff, there needs to be a really fundamental change within that person. They need to set their own goals to say, I need to do this, I'm never going to touch drugs again—it's nothing but a cycle of destruction. And I'm not saying that just coming to soccer is going to do all those things, but it is one thing in their life that is bringing positivity, friendship. It's increasing their self-esteem, and if all those social networks that are trying to get that person a job, trying to help, if that person doesn't have like that self-esteem, and willingness to change, than none of that will happen.

### **Transferability of experiences, and aspirations**

Katie recalled a specific player who was motivated to control his drinking by his desire to be part of the team. Ideally, Katie hopes this self-control could transfer into other aspects of the participants' life. Of particular importance, she suggested, is the player themselves is the one making the choice to change:

When Niko started coming he had a reason to come sober, because we made him sit out if he was drunk. Next week he would come sober. He wanted to be fit, he wanted to play. He had a reason to be sober, and we are giving that to them. He would play in net drunk, but be told not to yell. Even for one hour a week, they know to be sober, so they can also apply that principle to work when they have a job or go for an interview for an apartment or something like that I really think it is a way for them to choose to be sober and not for other people to tell them you have to be sober, it's their own choice because it's something fun and they want to be there.

I think that is the huge thing, giving them something to look forward to, so that they are making their own choice, saying I'm doing this for me, I'm not doing it for my parole officer or wife, or mother of my kid. They're doing it for themselves, which is like the biggest motivator.

In concluding the interview, I asked Katie how she'd summarize her experience with the Victoria Dreams, and what her aspirations for the team moving forward were.

Evident is her desire to further entrench the team into the community and to further strengthen partnerships to improve recruitment:

It's a story of ups and downs, nothing's perfect, no agency is perfect...Some charities get so big the majority of their fees go to executives...There's a happy middle ground, we are at the very grassroots end. There is definitely room to grow. Maybe becoming more entrenched in the community, in the way that shelters will think of programs, ours as well. So if we have other people who are ambassadors, like the person in client services really believes in street soccer she'll start or organize a little meeting-thing at Our Place. So people who are helping us because they know about us and believe in us. We need people in the community just thinking of ideas, and we have had that, like people donate cleats or I've got, basically donations. But the more people know about us, and what role they have, they can think of ideas. Even like the Gorge and some of the other local soccer teams, they can say 'we'd like to host you guys at our clubhouse,' and have a game, like basically on their own accord, like Esquimalt High did, they organized a tournament all on their own—they raised \$850 dollars and donated it to us. They just approached us three years ago, I don't know how they heard about us in the first place, we were the charity of their choice which we were over the moon about!

### **Introducing Luis, the participant come volunteer**

Luis has been playing soccer with the Victoria Dreams since the group first formed, and has transitioned to become one of the main figures of the group. While his story is unique to his own circumstances and location, it provides valuable insights into the participant experience. Luis discussed how he became involved the Dreams:

I started with the team almost 4 years ago. I remember I was at the Mustard Seed, I was having a hard time getting my papers, I didn't have a job. So I was there, and I was looking at this girl [Katie] putting a poster up on the wall, so I went to talk to her, and she right away invited me, like you should come play with us you know, so I came to play, and people came to play.

Luis included himself as one of the organizing members, not just as a participant. From the outset of his involvement he felt responsibility and commitment to the team. In particular, he valued the opportunity to create a sense of community:

So we started the organization with the focus to help people from the streets, we tried to bring these people to come and play soccer with us, and have a good time and get a new experience, because sometimes when people use a lot of drugs, I don't know, you know they get away from the social life, and they don't want to do anything. So this project is to create opportunity for people to come here, and try something different, some sports, and like I said many times, you know it

helps the community to get together, and these days it's hard to find stuff to make people get together that has a community, and I think it is very important.

### **A sense of inclusion and motivation**

Luis discussed the challenges of being a new immigrant to Canada, and the feelings of isolation he experienced. For Luis, the Dreams have provided him with a sense of community and family. He discussed the day he joined the team, and the significance of the team name:

I come from Mexico and we are very, very family oriented, and when I came here I didn't have any family so I was like, ok I got to find something, friends, people that make me feel like I am at home, and I couldn't find anyone, it was really hard. Since I found Victoria street soccer I feel connected with them, you know, I remember that day Katie asked us, ok you have these paper here, and we are going to put some names for the team, and then we are going to decide what name we are going to use for the team. So, I have my dream, I always had dreams in my life, to have my papers, to be here and help my daughter, you know, so like everybody has dreams in life, everybody wants to move forward, to get to the end of their dreams. So I decided to put that name and everybody agreed that day, because there was a lot of people with problems that day, I remember it was very emotional, because it was like people that didn't even have food, or didn't have clothing, it was kind of hard to see people like that. But it was good because they started coming with us, playing, get together, and uh yeah, it went good. I think like I say, it's very important, because you change life you know, it feels good at the end of the day.

The opportunity to help others has been a motivator for Luis to stay involved with the Dreams. Luis discussed the sense of responsibility he feels to attend practices and keep people involved with the team:

Like today I didn't do too much, but I was like I got to be there you know. I didn't bring the equipment you know, I didn't have all the shoes that I need you know, but its more the passion, I saw these people coming every Sunday you know, and it makes me feel motivated. Even if it's just like one person or two you know, I think if you come here and bring some of your free time for them, they will appreciate that, and they will start showing more, and being here, and interested about it. Yeah, like I think it's just about take care of the people you know.

During our interview it seemed important to Luis to identify as a non-drug user. Getting involved with the Dreams began as an opportunity for Luis to play soccer and meet new people. However, Luis quickly embraced the chance to be a leader and helping others became an important motivator for him:

I didn't have problems with drugs, I just decide to come here because I was looking for a team to play with, and I couldn't find a team that I really like it, but when I saw this organization I was like ok great, I'm going to go play soccer right. But I never could have imagined that I was going to get involved in a totally different thing, you know. It wasn't new to me, because when I was in Mexico I used to always help people, all the neighbours always help each other. So I was like ok, I got soccer, have great people, have fun, why not get together every Sunday.

### **Common threads**

The Dreams are an eclectic mix of people, and Luis sees soccer as a way for participants to uncover some of their similarities. Luis referenced a mother and daughter who have some Latin heritage, but are not connected to the Latin community nor familiar with the culture:

It's a good opportunity for Jess and Maria to meet other Latin people, because we have many Latin. Now they try to speak Spanish. Like you said, you know, it is very multicultural, which is important because these days we live with so many people from different parts of the world, different religion—and at the end of the day if everybody gets together as a community, we can live, no matter if you are Christian or Buddha.

Luis also noted the ongoing challenge of sustaining the team and improving participant engagement. Luis suggested that increased communication and a closer relationship with Street Soccer Canada could help:

I think it is very important to keep doing this. There were a lot of people that was coming here before but honestly I don't see them anymore.

I think a good way to do this going forward is get in touch with the guys from Street Soccer Canada, talk to them on the phone, we have the guys here, we want to know all the information.

I think we are losing control now actually, because we aren't very connected to them, we don't talk to them. That's the reason why, because Katie is a reporter, its very easy for her to do this kind of stuff, she can always just make a call and get everything organized, she has really good skill to do that, but we don't have that. It doesn't mean there's not people who can't be doing that, like you and Nikita and me.

Like you say you want to be part of this, and it's just about like getting together, because myself I really want you to help me because it's very important. Like Katie is not here, but we can do it, but we need to have more communication, but it's very important to talk to the guys at street soccer Canada.

### **Organizational concerns**

Luis discussed how his involvement with the Dreams has transitioned into a great passion in his life. He again discussed the lack of players and leadership as major concerns, and the need to improve communication:

I think we need to sit down, and get focused, put the cards on the table, and say like this is what we need. Get your opinion, my opinion, and Terry's opinion, and see where does the problem lie and get a solution because what I see is there is a lot of good people here, and there's a lot of volunteers that want to help, but sometimes they don't have time. Like I'm pretty sure if I don't come here on Sundays, it would be hard for another volunteer to come, that's why I stick around here because when Katie left, I saw Fernando doing it, and he never showed up. Sometimes I come to Fernwood and there was just like the players there, and people were like what's up, who's running this? And I felt really bad because like I have feelings for this team you know, and it's like I'm a volunteer, but I'm not a volunteer any more, it's a passion, something that makes me feel good.

Luis recognized the Dreams website as an important tool for player recruitment and expressed his desire to utilize the site.

The website helped, we had so many people, we had pictures and stuff...I'm going to get a camera and start recording:

Luis discussed the diversity of people he has met at shelters, and suggested that sports and soccer provide some common ground for people to engage in. He remarked at the simplicity of soccer:

When I hung out at the shelter I played a lot of ping pong, I went there and met Felipe, and that's how I started meeting a lot of street people...people thought I was homeless, but I had a home...if you go there you would be surprised about the skills, some people are engineers, mechanics, soldiers, you know.

There's so many people from different parts of the world sometimes it's hard to find something to really communicate, so sports is the key, everybody like sports, everybody likes soccer, or ping pong. You don't need the best equipment or best soccer shoes, just to come here and start playing and smile and take the stress out you know?

Over the years, a number of different organizations have offered support to the Dreams. Luis discussed the need to be proactive when fundraising and his desire to raise the profile of the Dreams:

I think that is because its our fault, it's not the program or anything else, it's the organization that we have here right now, we need to get together maybe more. Because all the places are there, all the resources, like the Mustard Seed they can give you food free, you can make for here. I would love to do that, I don't mind cooking. We have Soccer World, they always give us shoes. It's just to go and knock on doors you know. The city of Victoria, go and talk to the police, and bring them, and go to Check news, and get an interview with them and talk about what we do and why we do it and the changes we've been doing what we do to get this community. It's just about to talk to people, all about communication and relationships, we have so many people with good skills, its just we got to start doing.

Luis discussed Katie's absence and the challenges he faced trying to organize practices:

Andrew said Katie and him started this 3 years ago, and I said I have been here since the first day, not because I was mad but because I've been here, and I talked to Katie before she left, and she said you got the equipment and Fernando and you got everything, you are the stars, you don't need my help you know how to do this.



Yeah, sometimes it is hard, sometimes I get stuck with things, with computers, I can do it but it takes me more time...and I have my job and my daughter, and I have to come here.

Again, Luis discussed his desire to have a more structured leadership group and suggested regular meetings would be beneficial:

I actually point to that before, seven months ago...I told Fernando, but he never call me, he disappeared...I told Lindsay you know I think we should get together every two weeks to talk about things, the changes we are making you know.

Luis also discussed the impact and importance of sharing the Victoria Dreams story. Again, he recognized the team as providing him with a purpose and motivation to succeed in other areas of his life:

I think it is really important to share our story. Like I say I was having such a hard time...I broke up with my ex-girlfriend, and I didn't have any friends, didn't have much, didn't have my papers, I was going to go back to Mexico. Seriously, if I didn't find Victoria Street Soccer I would go back to Mexico, because I didn't have any motivation, like nothing even my mom or like nobody, but soccer and this team helped me to find a way to keep going straight and just push myself you know. It was hard, like you say this story about the guy who missed the ferry; I have so many stories like that one...You should talk to Sean.

I want to have a barbeque at my house, and have everybody get together you know, and share our stories. Everybody can say when they came, that would be so much information for you because you would have so many people talking.

According to Luis, it is important part for the Dreams to consider the schedules and barriers that participants could be facing off the field. For example, Luis discussed the importance of ensuring there is food available when it is promised:

He was coming drunk all the time, but he stopped drinking and started coming more and started riding his bike. But he was homeless you know, and that's why we changed the schedule because he came one day and I asked why he hadn't been coming for awhile, you love soccer what's going on? He said, 'Luis what happened is I get dinners for free at five in the shelter and if Andrew doesn't come with the food I won't get dinner.' So we changed

that and it is very important to listen to people you know, to their necessities, and that's how you're going to find all your answers right.

### **Interview With Andrew, The “Food Guy”**

Andrew has been involved with the Dreams since the team was first formed. For the past four years Andrew has prepared and delivered food at the end of each practice. Andrew runs his own private catering business, and has been actively involved in various volunteer roles and community groups throughout his adulthood. As Andrew discussed, he has seen a number of successful and positive outcomes with the Dreams soccer team, and also encountered a number of challenges. To begin, he discussed meeting Katie, and the challenge of Katie's absence:

Katie was really passionate about this from the start, it was her brainchild, and I heard her on CBC radio. So I called her up and asked what she is doing, so we went for coffee, and I saw she had a great passion for the idea. That doesn't translate well into sort of communicating and then disconnecting, and uh passing on this small group with very little infrastructure. Because Katie's passion and abilities that she personally had a handle on, her ability to get the Times Colonist involved, to go into shelters. Once you go into all the shelters and meet people, you develop a rapport with them. So you lose these things, and I think part of the problem when she left was you almost have to hand it off to someone exactly like her, which is no disservice to Lindsay, she worked her ass off, but through passing it off to Lindsay and passing it off again is like playing that game of phone booth, where things get lost along the way. That sort of was the issue when you came along, a lot of the drive was missing, and competitive nature.

### **The role of competition and expectations**

Andrew suggested winning a trophy, and having a goal, has helped to stimulate motivation for the team and himself:

You know winning trophies may seem like a secondary goal, but I think it's really important, and important to me to get some hardware and the guys. You don't want to go to Vancouver and spend the time and energy to not come back with results. I'm sorry this is a result driven lifestyle that every single one of us leads, and if you want these guys to have goals of getting

their lives together and getting their shit cleaned up, but you don't have any expectations on their recreational abilities then you're wasting time.

The team faced many challenges early on, and adapted the program accordingly.

The opportunity to play in their first tournament and committing to play every Sunday were pivotal moments as recalled by Andrew:

Well I guess for us when we started we had no idea what to expect, so we started outdoor in March and we had at-risk and homeless guys running around on a cold soccer pitch, and it ended, and we fed them some food and then you know, fuck off until next week. But it's hard to get guys like that who are at-risk wet and cold, because what do you do you know? So really, the first protective measure we took was to run it as a friendly, and to run it summers outside, winters inside. The first couple weeks we did it we were happy with the results, then Katie came to me and said there was a tournament in Vancouver, and it dawned on her, it was a new holy thing, a whole other aspect, an I was like alright what does this entail? Because the first time we sat down, I said when do you want to do this, and she said Sunday, and I said ok, but then she said EVERY Sunday, and I thought I don't want to do this every Sunday but then I thought why can't I, and here I am three years later, every Sunday.

According to Andrew the first tournament uncovered the competitive nature of the players. It also served as a face-to-face introduction for the team to Street Soccer Canada organizers.

So anyway, we went to this tournament in Vancouver and it took a lot of work to get the right guys together, my pastor drove everybody out in the church van out to the ferries and dropped everybody off. We had my church involved we had an organization involved with fundraising, we had all this stuff going on, just to go there for this little fucking tournament. So we took the ferry and came in right to the pitch, no flying in. So I packed each guy two lunches. We got hotels at UBC on the super cheap, and the next day we were two wins away from going to the finals, and the guys suddenly got really excited and really passionate and this guy from street soccer Canada came over and he was like 'hey, we like your guys' and we are like what? We had only been together for 3 months and didn't know Street Soccer Canada, and were like, oh it's a real organization?

So the competitive nature really started burning in these guys because now there is a chance to win a trophy, you know, what does that mean? And there is a chance that one of our guys is going to get picked to go to the national team, and that just lit everybody right up.

As the team found success in the tournament, Andrew noted pressure also began to build and ultimately led to some conflicts within the team. Andrew discussed how this tournament was a catalyst for one of their players to join the World Cup team:

We end up getting to the final game and started infighting because the pressure was building, and the infighting led us to a one goal loss to the team that was hosting the tournament, and they had their own building and drop in center. We couldn't beat these guys, they were organized. That tournament really got the ball rolling for everybody and Rich got taken to France.

The infighting started with people yelling at each other for missing the ball and then people not wanting to play. But it was still ok, it was a learning experience. But here's the problem, you can learn from these events, and we came back, and we got SSC phoning saying we want to send one of your guys to France but we need some money from you guys. But we were saying what money? But we can't tell Rich no, because the newspaper wrote him up, so we started hosting fundraising tournaments.

#### **Player interest and logistics**

In the beginning the team built momentum very quickly, but according to Andrew, it was hard to retain the core group:

So we went from goofing around, to participating in a tournament, to getting one of our own guys picked for SSC, to hosting our own tourney, and this all happened within a matter of four months ok...so it was running really hot right from the start, and it kept running really hot, but if you don't keep the same core guys around, you don't have that energy." When Katie was around she would go and find them, but now she isn't around.

Keeping players consistently engaged was seen by Andrew as a major challenge—in particular he noted the need to generate player interest in preparation of tournaments:

These guys lifespan is a week at a time, they don't see the summer yet, these guys are trying to get by from week to week, so if you start talking about a tournament in July, they will be like: 'what are you talking about?' So just to keep these guys interested at some level is the key. So a month before you start telling people about the tourney, who wants to go, but you'll find the guys you talked to a month ago a few weeks later who were gung-ho you

haven't seen them in two weeks, because who knows what happened? So a week before you see who is able to go, because you don't know what has happened to some of these people. So the whole experience is hindered by what the experience is. The experience is working with the at-risk and homeless and you can't plan, all you can do is show up and be there.

### **A World Cup experience**

Andrew provided insight into the selection of Richard to the Homeless World Cup. When asked about the team's reaction he again noted there was some conflict.

Further, Andrew discussed his observations of Richard's reaction to the selection:

There was instant pushback by one guy who thought he was better than Richard, but for only about 30 minutes, but then it was over, and then it was all about Richard and getting him to the tourney...But here is the thing, with a guy like Richard who was a great athlete, but then purposely ducked out of society and out of the spotlight, but now you are putting him up on a pedestal. And Richard was like 'I don't want any of this, this is making me uncomfortable, but he grinned his teeth, smiled, and bared it, because he knew how much it meant to everyone. But he doesn't even like playing winter street soccer because he doesn't like being inside. He has issues.

Andrew escorted Richard to Vancouver where he met the Canadian team for the first time. Andrew described the environment and noted the sense of pressure surrounding the team:

When it started focusing on him I could see him getting uneasy and nervous, but I know he was exhilarated and excited to go, but I also know he had issues with it. He thought it was beneficial to himself and the group, and he was happy about that. I went and hung out with him in the Vancouver airport before leaving and it was nerve-wracking. It was a big deal, they were getting their uniforms given out, and the prayers being said, it was intense. Meeting some teammates for the first time, and Richard is saying like 'where is my juice box man, I'm thirsty, and hungry.' He had a place (home) but it was very low-income.  
Significance of semantics, and volunteerism

It is important to Andrew that people understand the significance of the term street soccer. He explained why he feels it is a significant identifier:

Let's get the wording right, it is Street Soccer, not homeless soccer. Let' get the wording right, you're not working with the homeless, you're working

with at-risk people. We don't have that huge population of homeless like some cities, we have some, but more we have people that are at-risk. So to me street soccer is a way better title because you don't put people any lower than where they may already be. Street soccer is an excellent term because it is an inclusive term, where as homeless soccer is an exclusionary term. But I think the wording can be important.

When discussing why he got involved, Andrew cited his past volunteer work and his desire to build a common thread:

I saw the Germany world cup on TV and thought that sure is cool and that would be something, then heard Katie on the radio. I feel charity is good for other people and for your own soul. I could see myself working with people with my food. I really thought we would be in a different place today, I thought we would be more organized, more of a core group, an extended family...I've got my own family you know, but for these guys I want to see some kind of thread between them.

### **Leadership and Politics**

Andrew discussed some of the issues encountered with leadership and other volunteers that had come and gone over the years. In particular, he referenced a volunteer named Fernando, and voiced his frustration with the dissention amongst main organizers and the fracture of leadership:

Politics and movement in these groups, it is very difficult to be political and all be on the same side and not step on each other's toes, when you've got a dickhead floating around in the group who's got his own agenda, so self-involved, that he couldn't see the light of the day, and remarkable trying to see him maneuver, and he spent more time trying to get out of the way of street soccer than doing his job, and also glory-hogging. But the breaking point was the tournament, where he didn't do a thing, then showed up and sat at the president's table but I was busy doing my own thing and he put the whole thing on it's ear, but that is an example of what happens when things get too fractured.

If you don't force things, things don't happen. That's the issue because with Fernando and these other guys—we used to have these meetings and sit down and talk about things, and that's when stuff got done. We didn't meet for a long time and all of a sudden we had a meeting about the tournament and low and behold that tournament came off fine until the brackets got all fucked up.

As a volunteer, Andrew highlighted his desire to improve communication through regular meetings, but also expressed concern about being overwhelmed:

The point is, with these organizations, if you can have regular meetings, everything goes way smoother. Luis felt totally dumped on the whole time. Fernando was dumping on him, and I'm one guy doing the food. I don't want to be on the board, I don't want Lindsay coming to my house, and she is dumping this fucking portfolio on me with all the receipts and things I don't want. But I have been doing this since day one, because I have been able to do one thing, but when you overload me with more than I can or need, that's when we get into trouble. Like that's what happened to Luis trying to take on too much. Like you driving up to Comox was a saving thing. Taking the balls those minor things keep it going.

When asked about the possibility of creating a Board of Directors, Andrew suggested it would be a good thing and could help in a number of ways:

Yes that would be a good thing...You need structure for this group if it is going to go anywhere at all. I am so disinterested in SSV in a sense where I have got to get whatever I am doing, stop what I am doing, go and shop, put food together out of my own pocket, spend time earning money to shop, spend gas to run it down there. And I am not saying I not happy helping, but when I get to the field and there are six volunteers and two street players I wonder who didn't go and recruit from the shelters and wonder what is going on. Why am I wasting my time? I got three kids at home. Who's not doing their job? Who committed to doing something and is not doing it? That kind of collapse of infrastructure is driving me up the wall, it is. We should be miles ahead now, and we should have thousands of dollars in the bank, not hundreds. I told Katie, (29:18) when you get back there will be more money in the bank than when you left, and I made that happen. But Moksha Yoga threw in, and I did the fundraising but I am the food guy, I'm the one passing on these fundraising leads to Fernando, but he shit on every one of them, didn't want to have anything to do with it anymore, so fine I had to go after people for money because I promised Katie I would.

In concluding the interview, Andrew again lamented what he sees as missed opportunities, and his desire to see the group improve its infrastructure and leadership for the future. While he is committed to the team, he also acknowledged it is just one avenue of his life:

We have had some success stories. Richard was one and Luis is a success story... Without a solid infrastructure and people staying in their own lane, it falls apart.

To me it all has to do with the leadership, when Katie was here we'd have meetings every couple months and everyone knows what page we were on, but the leadership group last year totally let us down. We should be miles ahead, miles ahead. Everyone has their outside life.

### **Sean, The Participant**

Sean got involved with the Dreams mid-way through their first year. Since joining the team Sean has been a common fixture at practices and has participated in several tournaments. Sean described his introduction to the team and first contact with Erin, who was one of the original founders of the team:

I was at an open house at Our Place, which is a homeless shelter in Victoria and community center as well, and it was just exhibiting all the different programs that are open to anyone, free programs, and I was just kind of browsing at different things and this volunteer actually stopped me and asked me if I was interested in soccer. And I was kind of curious, and she gave me the run down that it was open to anyone, and there was a free meal afterward, all stuff was donated, and all you really had to do was show up and play. So I was pretty interested because I had some passion for soccer, but I hadn't played it for years. But just the open invitation for showing up.

Having battled with addictions and low-income Sean has spent time on the streets and in transitional housing. He described his life situation, as it was when he first joined the team:

I went through a ninety-day program in Mission through the center where I worked. I came out, I didn't really know what to do, was in a recovery house, went to meetings...I don't know about other places but the place I went to had volleyball and basketball, and little tournaments where they gave away chocolate bars to the winners, and just that alone kind of gave the urge to want to play sports...I actually had my own place although I was on a disability pension. I had enough money from that, and at that time I was working one day a week at the homeless shelter. I was under margin as far as finances go, but I was comfortable with where I was at with my living.



### **Positive opportunities and connections**

Sean described the significance that street soccer played as a means to stay connected to others and keep occupied. He also described how street soccer has played an important role in maintaining his sobriety:

Oh yeah, most certainly, that's the thing, I was waiting to go into school, and it was a long drawn out process, between waiting for school and not having a whole lot of work. Because I was only working one day a week, I needed to find something to do to keep myself occupied. I was only about two years clean, I had ties to the street community, although not using I knew lots of people down there because I worked there at the shelter. And you know I'm a little reluctant at first to join any kind of group, because I'm really shy. So I just kind of took a chance and showed up, and the first day I showed up it, although I was nervous, I seen the level of everyone else, and my skill levels were low, but it didn't really matter because I was just there to make friends and be a part of something, and to stay active and busy. Health was and still is a big part of my life, so showing up to that and connecting to other people was a huge part of me staying clean during that time.

I asked Sean about his current work situation, and keeping contact with other team members:

I finished my seven-month program for sheet metal. I'm still keeping ties with what I consider to be my street soccer family because I still see them around and through the years I've really gotten to know these guys and they are like brothers and sisters to me. You know we see each other on the street and we stop and talk and really ask each other how we are doing.

Sean discussed what he feels is a significant difference between regular street connections and soccer connections, and the trust necessary within a team:

Yeah, not only just the camaraderie, but we build real strong friendships through our ties in soccer you know together as a team. And sometimes we have our differences but all in all we always get along. And every time we go to a tournament or we play a game I always walk away with a feeling of a little stronger friendship with these guys. You know before when I was on the street, yeah I had friends, but they weren't really friends, they were just people that I knew, like I wouldn't trust them. But I feel like I could trust the people I play with, and I kind of have to because they are my team.

### **Engaging the street community**

A constant challenge for the Dreams has been participant recruitment. I asked Sean how he felt we could engage more participants. Once again, food was seen as a primary draw. Sean also suggested the importance of outreach and coming to the participants, as well as the need to build trust:

Well the field we play on is pretty central to downtown, any shelter except Rock Bay, you could walk it within fifteen to twenty minutes, and I think a huge turn-on is obviously Fat Daddy's. When you're talking about the good food, people are like yeah the good food. But I think a lot of people struggle with being addicted, you can't really play a lot of sports drunk, or you know messed up. Or people on the streets don't have enough rest, because they have a hard time getting enough rest. I think one of the best things for us to promote street soccer is to go to shelters and put up posters, and just go one on one with people and do like a little outreach with them. Maybe just bring a ball down and start kicking it around. Because it is the trust. When you are on the street you can't really trust anyone, but when you can start building a little trust they see you're not going to hurt them, or you don't want anything from them. They are open to kind of experiment with the trust, get out of their comfort zone. Like when me or Luis or whoever is there and we're welcoming them in, and we're giving them a family kind of sensation, why wouldn't you come back.

Like when I'm walking around, I'm also involved with other free non-profit exercise groups. So whenever I'm there (Every Step Counts) and I see someone who's more involved than just running, I ask them to come out, to come play. You don't have to be that good, just come, there's free food, we go to Vancouver on trips, and they are like "what?" I'm like all you got to do is just show up man. A couple of them have shown up a couple times.

Sean discussed the importance of treating teammates with respect and encouragement. He described the sense of security he feels with the Dreams, and the impact this has had on his self-confidence:

With my experience, I've always noticed that it starts from within. You start healing within, and it goes outwards. Your life becomes so much better when you've overcome the inner struggle. When other people see the blossoming in other people, that inspires them to blossom too. They see if they can do it, maybe I can do it too. That's all it takes right, is just that little step forward. When we're bringing people in, and giving them that little sense of security, and we're helping them out, that's maybe starting off some sort of chain reaction in these people to get better right. And who knows what that looks like, but I think for me, that's

the goal of my existence, is to try to help other people, almost like the golden rule right. Do unto other people as you would have them do unto you. Treat them like your brothers and sisters, that's how I've always felt since day one when I came to soccer right. People were patting me on the back when I scored, encouraging me, that's what I really need. I need a sense of community and building my confidence in life, because when you're down and out you have no confidence, you're just down spiraling out.

### **The ups and downs of soccer**

This summer, Sean scored his first ever goal in tournament play. He described the experience and discussed the opportunity he had to socialize with other teams:

I haven't touched drugs in a long time, but that goal gave me the same feeling, I was just lifted, it was like a magic moment man, it was a magic moment. Not only that, but this year I really came out of my shell and started talking with other people in the gym, and shook their hands, and made connections with other people. I know most of those people are going to be at the next tournament, so it's kind of like, maybe you're not best friends, but you're friends, and next time we play it's like, oh I remember you.

I asked Sean about the Homeless World Cup and whether possible selection to team Canada has been a motivator for him:

Well I know there were a couple of opportunities where it was suggested that I could go, and it didn't happen for whatever reason. Honestly, it was kind of a little bit of a setback you know. And after I worked through that, and was like ok there's always next year, and that's the key, next year. Because that's the dream, ok improve, maybe try a little harder, they started making connections too, and you never know right. But I'm not really into it to go on travels, I'm there just to play, and if I get picked, all the better. It's really for me, all just about having fun.

I asked Sean what he felt motivated people to come to practice. Again, he indicated the importance of the food, and also the opportunity to play in tournaments:

I mean, you know, people some show up, and it's for the food, and not like they feel like they are entitled to have to play, but like nutrition and food is like a key. When I was down and out, if someone said there's free food, I was always there, regardless of what I had to do. Like I said, it all starts from within, you guys have good food, and you're like yeah, this is alright. And you walk away and you may feel kind of bummy for the rest of the week, but you look forward to the next Monday when you're going to have that pulled pork sandwich, and be in a warm place, and you know, with caring feelings. And you know once you've been on

one tournament, and the next one is coming up, and you know what's going to happen, you're really looking forward to it.

At a recent tournament the Dreams were awarded with the "fair play" award. I asked Sean about the significance of this honour. He discussed team dynamics, and the carryover of skills learned on the soccer field transferring into other areas of life:

I think that is a direct reflection on how we work as a team right. I think we are all courteous, and it radiates from one person to another. It's almost an osmosis, you see how one person is acting, we kind of keep tabs on each other. If there's an argument that breaks out, as a team we all kind of try to resolve the issue before it becomes an issue. We take our player back and talk him down, and show kind words and say we don't need to be like this. And that goes even from the soccer out into the public. You kind of rethink about your reaction to things, and is it really worth it? A lot of times it's not.

In concluding the interview, Sean discussed and highlighted the value of current participants sharing their stories and suggested it might inspire new participants:

I think the key thing like we were talking about is just to bring ourselves to the centres, and start little matches, little games, and have fun. Show them that you can overcome wherever you are at. A lot of times people ask how did I get clean right, and if I can share that experience with someone else, you know it's just helping out my fellow man.

### **Converging Four Unique Perspectives**

Each of the four Dreams members I interviewed discussed their experiences from their own unique location, which provided clear differences in their view of the Dreams. However, there were a number of interesting commonalities in their stories and the topics they discussed.

#### **Friendship and integration**

A core focus of the Dreams is building friendships while creating a sense of community and expanding social connections. As Katie stated, her intention in forming the Dreams was not to act as a social worker, but to be there as a friend. For Katie, arranging games with other community teams offers the chance to bridge groups that

otherwise might not interact, or have had negative interactions in the past. Further, Katie values having a high number of volunteers to ensure bridging links foster friendships across sociodemographic lines. As Katie noted, the role of soccer has been key in levelling differences. The moment people step on the field, they become teammates with a common goal.

For Luis, the Dreams have acted as a surrogate family and provided him with a strong sense of community. Since playing with the Dreams, Luis has leveraged his friendship with volunteer Andrew into a part-time job assisting Andrew with his catering business. Luis also remarked on the multiculturalism of the Dreams and suggested players have made links to new communities—he pointed to Jess and Maria, who have Latin heritage, but prior to joining the Dreams did not have connections to the Latin community. Since joining the Dreams, Jess and Maria have taken an increased interest in Latin culture and are learning some Spanish. Luis also isolated sports as the key to activating these friendships, specifically noting soccer’s global following and simplicity to play.

While Andrew also explained his desire for the Dreams to embody an extended family, he feels players need to attend more consistently to deepen their bond. Andrew also highlighted some of the conflicts which have arisen, both between players and between volunteers. As Andrew recounted taking Richard to meet the Homeless World Cup team, it was clear he felt a sense of kinship.

When Sean spoke of the friendships he has built with the Dreams, he too referred to his street soccer friends as “family,” identifying them as “brothers and sisters.” While Sean affirmed player conflicts sometimes arise, he suggested every time the team plays, friendships are strengthened. Sean also identified soccer’s role in building trust, noting teammates inherently must trust each other to be successful, with trust being a foundation for genuine friendship.

Through my own time playing with the Dreams, I have procured a number of new friendships. Attending tournaments together, in particular, seems to accelerate and intensify the bonds between players. Recently, I drove six players ranging in age from 18 to 68, born in five different countries, to a three-day tournament. We slept together in a gymnasium, played soccer all day together, ate all of our meals together, and shared our free time in the evenings at the pool. The camaraderie and sense of community we built was tremendous. I believe the teamwork required playing soccer was the thread that brought us together and solidified our group.

### **Eating together**

All four interviewees also spoke about the importance of food. Recognizing the role food has played for the Dreams, Andrew has committed to shopping and preparing team meals every Sunday. Katie suggested eating together at the end of practice provides both an incentive to join, and more importantly an opportunity for participants to connect.

Luis further affirmed the importance food plays in recruiting participants and pointed out some players stopped coming when practice times overlapped with shelters’

free mealtime. While food is almost always provided at practices, there are occasionally circumstances where it is not. For Luis, listening to the players needs, such as holding practices earlier or later to avoid interfering with free shelter-meals is an important part of the Dreams being responsive to participant needs, regardless if food is provided or not.

Sean also remarked on the role of food throughout our interview. He suggested some participants may show up just to eat, but are inspired to play soccer once they arrive. Further, Sean connected receiving a quality home-cooked meal to a sense of security and feeling cared for. For him, it was something to look forward to each week and provided a sense of comfort.

Having participated with the Dreams, I also experienced the sense of camaraderie gained while sharing a meal together. One of the hallmarks of a street soccer tournament is that the host team provides all meals for all participants. Typically, the final meal is a banquet-style buffet. Without question, during these meals, teams strengthen their friendships and expand their social connections. During meals, volunteers also have an increased opportunity to interact and bond with participants.

### **Motivation, self-confidence, and the role of competition**

Motivation to change was another benefit which all of the interviewees discussed. Katie recalled when a particular player kept coming drunk to practice, and was asked to sit out. Over the weeks his desire to play and be part of the team motivated him to show up sober. Katie remarked on the importance of this change being self-directed. She

suggested such intrinsic motivation was highly valuable and could be channelled to inspire other lifestyle changes.

Katie also discussed the Dreams impact on self-confidence and self-esteem. By creating a positive atmosphere and reinforcing players' efforts on the field, Katie suggested players may be better equipped to deal with challenges off the field. Katie pointed to the cycle of exclusion many players face, and proposed the Dreams absolute acceptance may bolster self-esteem. Further, it is Katie's hope inclusion with the Dreams will instil players with the confidence to set goals in other areas of their lives. While Katie remarked Victoria has a strong network of social support services, she believes people need self-esteem so they have confidence to access these services.

For Luis, the opportunity to help others has motivated him to be active and stay connected with the team. Further, he suggested joining the Dreams provided him with a sense of motivation that he could persevere in a new country, and to "keep going straight."

Andrew connected player motivation directly to expectations and tournament play. He suggested it is important for volunteers to believe in players' abilities, and try to win at tournaments. He proposed such goal setting could also motivate players to make other positive lifestyle changes. Andrew implied by holding high-expectations and showing confidence in the player's abilities, players would perform better and also feel more confident.



Sean also touched on motivation and discussed his desire to help motivate others to get clean. By sharing positive stories about his time playing with the Dreams, and ability to overcome hardships, Sean suggested others could be inspired to do the same. Sean also spoke about the disappointment he felt not being selected for the Homeless World Cup team, but noted he has used it as a motivator to improve for the following season.

I have encountered many players who suggest they have been motivated to make further positive lifestyle changes since joining the Dreams. While having fun and making connections seems to be their primary motivation to play street soccer, the chance to play for the Homeless World Cup team does seem to provide further motivation and inspiration. Through my own experiences, I have observed when local and regional tournaments are approaching, player attendance and engagement increases. Players are highly competitive at tournaments, and display great self-confidence and pride in their accomplishments. The Dreams Facebook site is an active forum where players post pictures and updates about tournament results.

### **Concluding The Data**

Through the data provided above, a wide range of stories and experiences can be seen. While I have identified and converged some of the points I felt were most salient, many points remain open for further exploration. The fictional representation provided readers a chance to engage with street soccer culture and join the Dreams on an out-of-town tournament. Four interviews were transcribed and transitioned into narratives that

highlighted unique perspectives. Finally, I offered brief summaries of experiences which all of the interviewees touched on including: friendship and integration; the importance of food; motivation, competition, self-confidence, and the role of competition.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The primary research question of this study sought to understand the culture and experiences of Victoria Dreams street soccer volunteers and participants. Chapter Four provided a fictional representation and transcripts of two player and two volunteer interviews. Through further analysis of these interviews and my own experiences, this chapter discusses major findings and implications for: access and inclusion; the role of tournaments; social capital theory; and communication and leadership—each section also provides suggestions for future research. A closing note on fictional representation is then offered. Finally, the study concludes by examining some of the challenges I faced, and limitations of this research.

### **Researcher Reflections—Reconnecting To The Literature Review**

#### **Access and inclusion**

As noted in Chapter three, Trussell and Mair (2010) recommended social programs for marginalized people ideally should be free, easy to access, and allow participants to participate without public declaration of poverty in order to gain membership. From my experience, the Dreams attempt to implement these very characteristics, which has helped in creating an accessible and inclusive environment. All equipment, travel costs for tournaments, and food are provided free. Anyone is welcome to join the team, and practices are centrally located. No declaration of housing status, financial status, or health status is ever required. Yet, playing with a street soccer team could be viewed as an implicit public declaration of poverty. Notably though, most players embrace this identification, and appear proud to wear clothing emblazoned with the words “street soccer” both on and off the field.

As Andrew emphatically suggested, the term “street” may be more inclusive and appealing to players than “homeless.” In fact, all of the teams across Canada refer to themselves simply as street soccer teams (Street Soccer Canada, 2014). At the international level however, the Homeless World Cup (2014) organizing body and tournament uses the term “homeless.” Recently, the Kelowna Kodiaks street soccer team received funding through a Local Sport Program Development grant. Notably, the news release issued by the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development (2014) was titled “Homeless street soccer team scores sport grant.” It seems media is intent to attach the moniker of homeless, while the Kelowna Kodiaks homepage is simply titled as a street soccer team. The importance of this semantic designation, including effects at both the local and international level appear unclear.

Future research on access and inclusion should include a more in-depth analysis on public perception of team membership, and on the impact of naming as “street” versus “homeless” soccer. For example, a teen-aged participant with the Dreams was recently scouted for the Homeless World Cup Team. The teen has never been homeless, but has lived in foster care and in supported housing. She attends public high school, and it is certain that playing for the national team would involve significant media attention. How might this affect her, and how would her peer group respond if she were a member of the “homeless” team? Further, how does she—or other players not heavily street-entrenched—navigate membership with a “street” soccer team and membership with the rest of their personal life and social circle?

### **The role of tournaments**

While Magee (2011) focused on player experiences at the Homeless World Cup, a number of their findings correspond with the experiences documented in this study. Specifically, Magee (2011) credited participation at the Homeless World Cup for (1) encouraging and motivating players to be physically active, (2) providing an inclusive environment to raise self-esteem and personal dignity, and (3) challenging stereotypical views and media representations of homeless people (p. 162). Similarly, players I interacted with frequently reported efforts to be more physically active, and cut down on smoking to improve their level of play with the Dreams. Particularly, those who attended tournaments, such as Sean, seemed motivated to “get healthy.” Through my experience participating in tournaments, interacting with players, and conducting interviews, I also noted players improved self-esteem and personal dignity. Thirdly, tournaments I participated in, though held at a local level, always involved a wide range of community supporters and local media coverage. Through numerous conversations with volunteers and players, I observed a strong undertone of respect and improved understanding. While initially I wondered about the role of competitive tournaments in promoting social inclusion, evidence from this study also suggests they are a valuable component of street soccer and effective avenue to promote social inclusion.

Future research could further explore the importance of local level tournaments by investigating the motivational impact and incentive tournaments provide to players, and the impact on surrounding communities. As a further extension, a potential study could include interviews with local residents who are not involved with street soccer, but

may have been exposed to the tournament as a result of their proximity and local media coverage.

### **Social Capital, bonding and bridging**

Having examined the experiences of four different people involved with street soccer—five including myself—the existence and flow of social capital became evident. Consistent with sport and social capital findings from Uslaner (1999), each story presented in this study clearly highlighted the role of street soccer in 1) the expansion of social contacts and friendship, 2) the portability of lessons and skills learned on the field into other life situations, and 3) the positive impact on self-esteem membership with the Dreams has provided. Similar to previous sport and social capital research findings (Coalter 2007; Jarvie 2003; Seippel 2006; Sherry & Strybosch 2012; Skinner et al., 2008) it appears the Dreams street soccer group does generate social capital.

Returning to Putnam's concepts of bridging and bonding capital, we can find examples of both in the stories provided in this study. Luis now works part-time for Andrew at his catering business—a clear example of bridging capital, with both parties benefitting from this cross-demographic relationship. Further, I frequently observed volunteers connecting with players, and myself cultivated friendships with a number of players from very different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds than my own. Without the platform of street soccer, it is very unlikely these connections would have been made. As Welty Peachey et al. (2011) concluded, and this study also observed, street soccer can significantly impact players and volunteers by building mutual

understanding and encouraging a sense of community across social strata, thus promoting social inclusion and developing social capital that may be accessed by all (p. 35).

Bonding capital between players is also evident, as Sean discussed the strengthening of street relationships into true friendships characterized by reciprocity and trust (Coalter, 2007). The Dreams effectiveness to build bonding capital was also demonstrated by the increased self-esteem and motivation which both Luis and Sean discussed, and Katie, Andrew, and I, frequently observed. As Sherry and Strybosch (2012) noted, it is the positive social interaction and increased sense of inclusion that allow participants to procure these benefits.

Future research studies could examine which conditions provide the greatest opportunity to promote social capital. For example, would an extended mealtime provide more opportunity for bonding? Or, are bonds solidified more through practices, gameplay, and tournaments? Findings could help teams improve their programs by emphasizing the components determined to be most beneficial. Also, how far outside of the team do the connections that are forged extend—for example, are participant's families and friends aware of and impacted by their participation with street soccer? Similarly, as a result of their involvement with street soccer, do volunteers promote understanding and respect for marginalized people to friends and family outside of the program?

### **Communication, and leadership**

According to Katie, Luis, and Andrew, communication and leadership have proved challenging, and at times, the sustainability of the team has been a concern.

While Katie discussed a desire for players to transition into leadership roles, it appears successful transition could be a complex process. As evidenced by some of the challenges Luis faced, there are benefits and burdens in accepting increased responsibilities as a volunteer. Future street soccer studies should seek to better understand this process. Further investigation into organizational structure of non-profit and volunteer based sport organizations could also provide valuable insights for organizations such as the Dreams. In particular, an action research project with the Dreams or with Street Soccer Canada could help develop a framework to ensure current and future street soccer teams are more equipped to serve the street population they strive to help. Specifically, as Sherry and Strybosch (2012) suggested, providing links to other social services and avenues for civic engagement is key to ensuring the initial benefits of street soccer “eventuate in social change that benefits participants (p. 497).

To effectively increase social inclusion and develop social capital for marginalized communities, Skinner et al. (2008) concluded sport for social development programs should include “monitoring and evaluation as an integral component of the program...and should contribute to the evidence base (p. 272).” In conducting this study, I corresponded with players, volunteers, and organizers of street soccer teams from across Canada, and was struck by the lack of research and documented evidence into street soccer and social inclusion. While street soccer has received significant attention in popular media, academic insights remain sparse. Based on personal discussion with various team organizers, including the founder of street soccer Canada, it seems there is a strong desire to generate closer working relationships with university researchers.



### **A Final Note On Fictional Representation**

By using fictional representation, Hopper, Sanford, and Bonsor-Kurki (2011) reasoned their research allowed for a deep and engaged reader experience—one that should be “judged for the empathy they offered the reader with the students, but also for the plausibility of the exchanges, and the verisimilitude of the events presented” (p. 6). In keeping with the benefits described by Hopper et al., (2011), my intention with including a fictional representation was to create a highly emotional account and engage a wider audience by using accessible and appealing language, prose, and caricatures.

Specifically, the purpose of this fictional representation was to provide an engaging and meaningful snapshot of the Victoria Dreams through which readers could develop their own assessments and insights into the program. Upon reading this fictional representation, it is hoped the reader developed a more intimate understanding of: (1) the demographic of players and their interpersonal interactions, (2) the atmosphere at local practices and regional tournaments, (3) basic gameplay and rules, and (4) the potential contribution of street soccer to social inclusion. Through a better understanding of the aforementioned considerations, it is hoped that individuals and communities will be inspired to support street soccer programs and experience increased empathy toward marginalized people (Welty Peachey et al., 2011).

While I strove to construct an authentic story, I exercised some latitude in blending fact with fiction. Within this flexibility of praxis, I sought to construct a

stronger truth, and greater sense of verisimilitude—to influence and engage the reader, and hopefully encourage a positive dialogue on homelessness, social inclusion, and the inspiring role of street soccer (Sparkes, 2002).

### **Challenges**

This study was intended to be descriptive and exploratory in nature. The study followed an intrinsic case study model, and evolved to include a strong ethnographic tone. The study also employed a basic social capital theory framework to provide context and connections to existing street soccer research. While interviews were semi-structured, interviewees were encouraged to discuss aspects of street soccer they felt were important. Each participant and volunteer shared their own perspective on the Dreams, and provided a number of salient findings.

As noted throughout, I have been actively involved with the Dreams, and recognize what I have presented is a highly subjective interpretation and analysis based on my own intimate experiences. While I perceive this as an underlying strength and advantage of my study, it is important to explicitly acknowledge the personal connection I developed to street soccer and the Victoria Dreams players and volunteers.

A persistent concern in presenting this study, was achieving a balance in openly exploring the tensions and negative aspects that exist in street soccer, while also recognizing the positive implications. For example, the situation I described where a new player was brought in as a “ringer” for the semi-final game and several players were implicitly told they could not play, was a very factual account of a

difficult situation I was a part of. By including these types of “negative” events, I felt some trepidation about damaging my relationship with certain participants and volunteers. However, as a researcher, I felt a responsibility to maintain a certain “neutrality” and honesty in constructing my observations and presenting my “data” with integrity.

Through the exploration of the Victoria Dreams culture, and player and volunteer experiences offered in this study, a number of positive occurrences were observed. Both players and volunteers cited the positive impact team membership and inclusion had on their lives. Increased motivation; improved self-confidence and self-worth; and an extended social network, were all discussed as central benefits. A number of disappointments also had to be navigated including: being passed over for playing time in games; not making the World Cup Team; unrealized aspirations to act as a leader and volunteer, and lack of team leadership. Fundamentally, street soccer and the Victoria Dreams achieve many of their desired goals. However, there remains room for improvement and an opportunity for researchers to increase their understanding of the mechanisms street soccer employs.

Finally, it is expedient to recognize, this study is not an exhaustive representation of the Victoria Dreams, or all street soccer players and volunteers. However, this study does identify some important findings and offers a number of points for future research. Specifically, this study presumes to add to the literature base for social inclusion sport programs, social capital theory, and fictional representation as a research genre.

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