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Youth sports are assumed to play an integral role in the development of the children and youth involved. In addition to the more obvious physical benefits, participation in youth sports brings both psychological and social benefits for the patrons involved (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). As with any sport participation, youth sport participation, through either organized sports or recreation sports, brings a number of physical benefits including cardiovascular fitness, weight control, muscular power, and muscular endurance (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Seventy percent of kids drop out of youth sports by age 13 (YellowBrick, 2017). Children who have a coach or mentor are less likely to drop out of sports (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004).

Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) is a national nonprofit organization with the ultimate goal of keeping kids in the game. With that goal in mind, this research team and PCA worked together to create the Student-Athlete Mentor Organizations (SMO). The SMOs work with local high schools and parks & recreation departments (PRD) to connect high school student athletes to elementary-aged after-school participants in PRD programs. The goal of PCA SMO is to make a direct positive impact in the lives of children participating in the PRD after-school programs (Hanson, 2018). SMOs use high-school-aged student-athletes to encourage children to stay involved in sports by serving as mentors for younger children. In doing so, the younger children will want to continue in athletics, continuing to receive the multitude of benefits that sports provide them. Additionally, the high-school student-athletes will be more cognizant of the life lessons they have learned through athletics and can be more purposeful in their sports journey, as well as feeling good and forming connections with the youth in their community.

These mentor organizations create positive one-to-one as well as one-to-many relationships between the student-athletes and younger kids and increases the likelihood that children will stay involved in sports and continue to receive the social, emotional, and physical benefits of sports participation.

This research analyzes and describes the development of this new nonprofit initiative that brings high school and elementary-aged students together at an after-school program and the impact it has had on the community. This nonprofit initiative was of my own creation, so conducting research on a project I helped create was a very meaningful experience. This qualitative research project consisted of multiple interviews with affected participants and considerable study of various concepts surrounding the world of youth sports. After completing this study, we found that this initiative had a direct positive impact on youth in the area of mentorship, teamwork, and emotional intelligence.