

The VIP program carries the AYSO philosophy of "Everyone Plays" to a new height, giving **everyone** a chance to play. Through participation in VIP soccer, our goal for every player is to:



**Have fun playing soccer**

**Understand the fundamentals of the game**

**Learn teamwork and fair play**

**Increase positive self-esteem**

**Become more physically fit**

**Meet and be comfortable with new people**

"The thing I'll remember most about this, our first year with a VIP program, is that several special people in my community found out that 'yes, they can' play soccer: be part of a team, make new friends and increase their mobility. These VIP kids are a great asset to our AYSO program in that they show some of the best sportsmanship I've ever seen."

**Teresa Wray**, *VIP Administrator*  
*Clio, MI*

"We had one player who had always been told there wasn't a team for him. His older brother played AYSO and his father was a coach. When he was told he was signed up for soccer he started sleeping with his soccer ball. That began in March...and he continued to sleep with his ball until soccer started in August!"

**Stephen Ekegren**, *VIP Administrator*  
*Bakersfield, CA*

*For more information, please contact:*

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**Everyone plays!**





The AYSO VIP program provides a quality soccer experience for children and adults whose physical or mental disabilities prevent them from successful participation on mainstream teams. VIP teams may include individuals with Down syndrome or mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy, emotional disturbances, visual impairments or other conditions that impair mobility, strength and/or comprehension.

In the American Youth Soccer Organization, these individuals are Very Important Players (VIP). AYSO recognizes that everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. Through participation in soccer, VIP players experience all of these and more.

### **Everyone Plays**

People with disabilities are members of our community: the children of friends, neighbors, relatives; our classmates and coworkers. Special programs and schools can isolate these individuals, but VIP provides integration with non-disabled players, or "buddies," who assist VIP players on the field. These relationships frequently grow beyond support into meaningful friendships.

### **Everyone Benefits**

VIP benefits all participants, not just the players. Buddies and other volunteers increase their understanding and appreciation of people with special needs. They find their lives greatly enriched by their involvement with these new VIP friends.

For parents and caregivers who may have thought they would never see their children playing a sport and belonging to a group, VIP renews hope and gives them joy. They are able to relax and enjoy watching their VIP players having fun like everyone else.

### **The Players**

VIP teams are typically small and coeducational. As few as three players on each side can play! VIP teams are balanced by size, mobility and ability rather than by age. When numbers allow, older and younger age divisions may be formed as well. Players who have reached the age of four may participate.

There is no upper age limit for VIP players as long as they remain on VIP teams, and teams can be formed anywhere. Expect a wide variety of ability levels and sizes. Flexibility is the key!



### **TO FIND A TEAM:**

**Contact AYSO with the name of your city or community to discover if a local program already exists.**

## **Getting A Program Started**

Within AYSO, VIP functions as a separate division. Within other leagues or groups, AYSO will provide training and materials to assist with start-up. The goal is to provide more opportunities for individuals with disabilities to play soccer, regardless of affiliation.

### **Follow these simple steps:**

Contact the AYSO NSTC to receive a packet of information on the VIP program.

Identify a VIP Administrator, someone with an interest in coordinating the program who will act as liaison to the regional or league board and advocate for players with disabilities.

Recruit other volunteers and begin meeting to plan several months before the season begins. Hold at least one player registration.

Publicize the program through schools, rehabilitation centers, other adapted sports such as Special Olympics, doctors' offices and your local media.

Schedule coach and referee training through the AYSO NSTC.

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