

arnold schwarzenegger

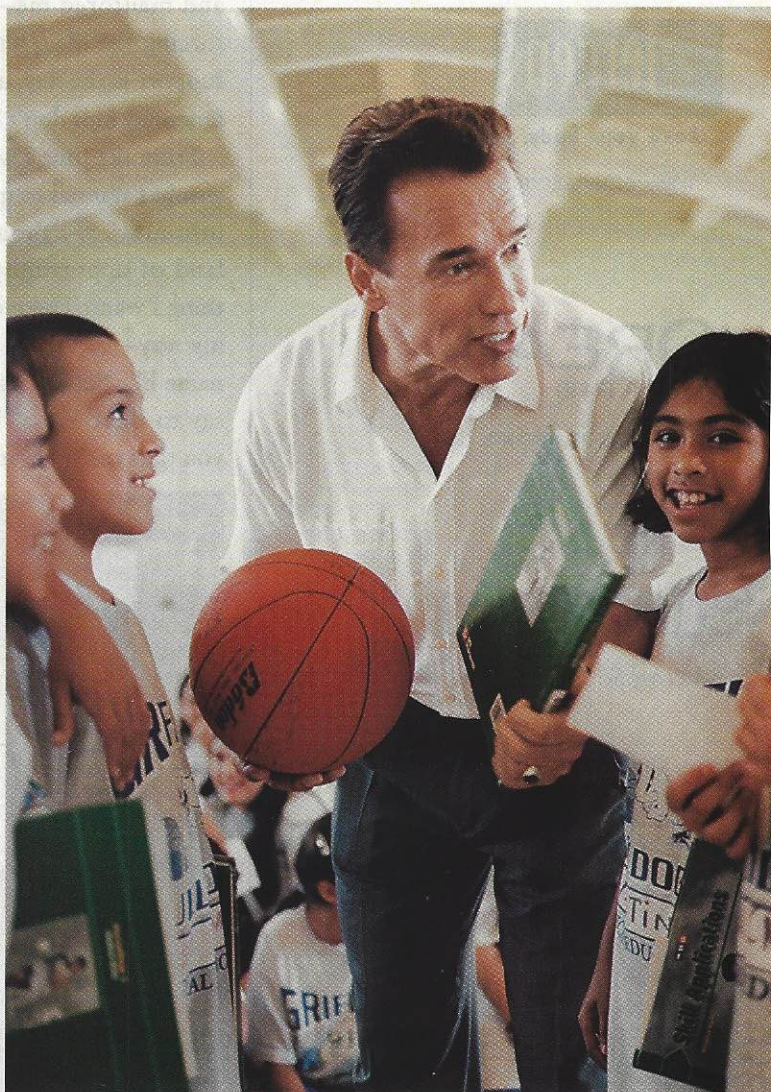
he's got games

Action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger helps inner-city kids get into sports, stay off the streets—and follow their dreams

Twelve years ago, then President Bush appointed me chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. My job was to travel to schools around the country, promoting health and fitness. During my visits I went to a large number of inner-city schools, and what I saw in those low-income neighborhoods shocked and angered me. I discovered that the hours between 3 P.M. and 6 P.M. were a danger zone when kids would be on the streets, getting into all kinds of trouble. Without after-school supervision, they were vulnerable to drugs, alcohol, pregnancy, gangs and violence. I thought, This has to change. We can't let our children destroy their lives when all it takes is a few hours and a few adults who care enough to make a difference.

In 1991 I got an invitation to visit the Hollenbeck Youth Center in East Los Angeles. I was so impressed by what I saw—kids being active, having fun, and staying out of trouble—that I vowed to do as much as I could there. I'd visit every few weeks and work with the kids, organizing basketball games, showing them how to lift weights, even teaching them to play chess. Eventually, with Daniel Hernandez, the director of the center, I started the Inner-City Games, an after-school organized-sports program for kids in the L.A. area. The games were such a success that four years later we decided to go national with the Inner-City Games Foundation. It has grown to include more than 400 locations in 15 cities and now offers after-school, weekend and summer activities to almost 200,000 kids in elementary and middle schools. We also expanded to include sports like horseback riding and fencing, as well as classes in computers, theater and dance. Thanks to the games and

"I want to make sure that every child has a safe place to spend after-school hours," says Schwarzenegger, here at Griffith Middle School in East Los Angeles.



their community partners, there have been huge changes in these neighborhoods: Juvenile crime and gang participation have been significantly reduced in many areas.

I still like to visit as many schools as possible to share my personal story. I sit with students in an auditorium and ask, "How many of you have TVs? Refrigerators? Toilets that flush?" They raise their hands, and I add, "Then you already have more than I did when I was growing up in Austria. I had none of these things, not even toys at Christmas. Now look where I am." They are, of course, surprised to hear this; they assume that to be successful you must be born with millions of dollars and privilege. But I came to this country with empty pockets. I *was* rich, but not in the financial sense. I had plenty of dreams, determination and self-confidence. Those things came from my parents, who made sure that I was always involved in activities that stimulated my mind. I was also lucky enough to have coaches and teachers who nurtured, tutored

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and mentored me—all constantly reinforcing the idea, “You can do it!” That support is the key, and that’s what many inner-city kids don’t have.

From the time I was a teenager, I had a vision: I wanted to go to America and get into movies. I thought, America is the land of opportunity, and I can do anything I want. There is nothing standing in my way—not even a funny accent and a name like Schwarzenegger. That’s what I say to these kids: “Don’t let people tell you that you’ll never get out of the barrio

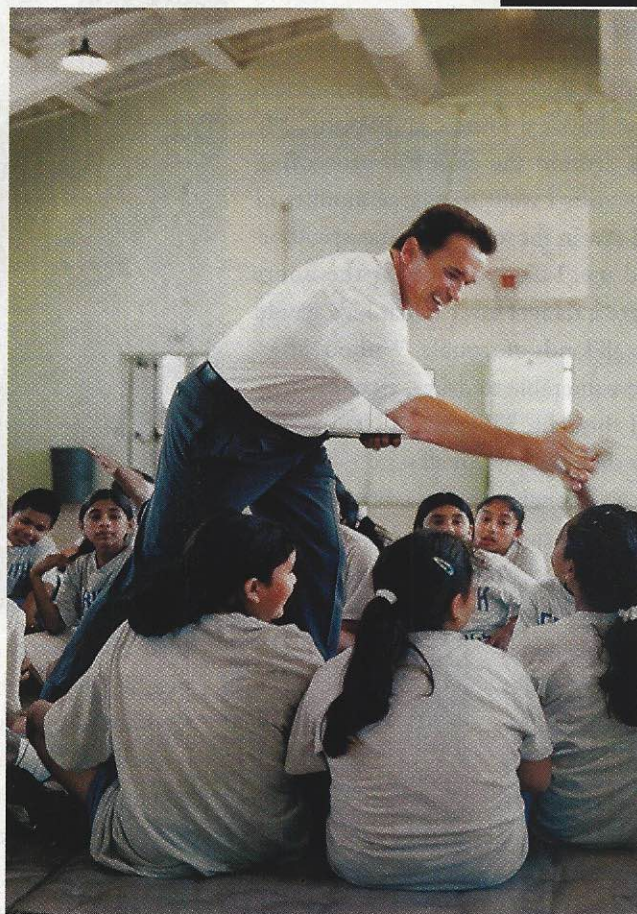
Alfred was one of these kids. He was 14 when I met him—a boy from Atlanta who was running with the wrong crowd and getting into trouble. He heard me speak

“There are no short-cuts in life,” says Schwarzenegger. “At 15 I was studying hard and training. Some kids made fun of me. But now who’s laughing?”

at his school, and when I returned several months later, he introduced me to some other kids. Alfred now studies business administration at Georgia State

University; he’s also on the board of the Inner-City Games Foundation. He tells me that our message has given him the inspiration to study harder and become a role model.

It comes down to this: We need to roll up our sleeves and work with children. They are our hope for the future, yet we don’t treat them that way. In California I’m sponsoring the After School Education and Safety Act of 2002 (on the ballot for the November election), designed to make grants available to every public elementary and middle school in the state that wants after-school programs, such as



or ghetto, or that you’ll never amount to anything, because I’m living proof that you can be someone if you work your butt off and believe in yourself.” Each one of the kids has the potential to do great things. I’ve seen it happen: A student finds focus and support through our programs and turns his life around.

the Inner-City Games. We have to recognize it’s our responsibility—everyone’s responsibility—to take care of these kids. —as told to Sheryl Berk

To find out how to donate money or dedicate time to the Inner-City Games Foundation, visit innercitygames.org.



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