

And now it's up to you



to take the ball and run with it!

by Nancy Kretz

Remember those words? The final line in the New Games slide show is what New Games is all about. The attitude towards play is meant to be passed along. It's also the final message for people who attend a New Games Training.

Like many of the New Games trainers, I was introduced to New Games through attendance at a training. My first training was in January 1977 in the heart of east San Jose, California. It was a low-income community, known for its diverse populations; the stereotype was the incompatibility of these groups.

We had a festival on Sunday afternoon. Even now when I think back at the phenomena of those two hours, I am amazed at what New Games accomplished. The impact on the neighborhood was remarkable. They all came together to play, eat and share the afternoon: families from Chicano, Black and Anglo neighborhoods; adults and youth; lowriders, community workers and students; babies and grandparents; school principals and custodians; police and politicians.

So my initial perception of New Games was its value as an organizing tool: a way to bring people together, get them comfortable with each other so dialogue could take place. Some fine groundwork was laid that afternoon for future meetings on community issues of their concern.

Six months after that first training, I attended one of the first New Games camps. Somewhere during those five days I made a decision to explore becoming a trainer. I wanted to take my play energy and pass the magic of New Games along to more than just my community. It was—and still is—a feeling of wanting to show more people how they, too, can change their way of doing things. What is changed is the attitude, in particular the attitude towards play.

A good many trainings later, my feelings haven't changed. There is still something magical about seeing time and again a group of strangers come together at 9:00 a.m. one day, and two or three days later leave somehow changed. They have changed as individuals and as group members. It never fails to renew my belief in play, and in the power of New Games to bring about play.

In the four years the New Games Foundation has conducted trainings, a lot has changed. It is no longer just a small group from San Francisco doing presentations and play sessions; it's now over 12,000 trained referees passing the ball along to friends, families, co-workers, clients and even strangers.

Most people come to a training to learn about New Games for their work setting; the applications sessions can be the most challenging part of the training. How do you take all this that you've experienced, internalize it and somehow focus on transferring it to others? "What's the first thing you'll do on Monday?"

In applying New Games, we ask people to think of it as a mushrooming effect. You start small, just with yourself, and you get one or two others around you who want to play. You start playing. More people will see you and know you're having fun; they'll want to join. You invite them. You're a bigger group now. You make a bigger noise, and more people see you.

At a training, the trainers are there to plant the first seeds, to hand you the ball, to get you playing. At the end of the two or three days, you're empowered to share New Games with others. It's yours to pass along.

This News/Letter brings to you several people who have been to a training and who have used New Games in different situations, with different people, in different environments. Each took New Games home in a different way.

If there is a common denominator to people who take New Games beyond the training, to their work or life settings, it's that they believe in the Value of Play. It doesn't matter where you are playing; it could be at a dinner table, a staff meeting, a park picnic, an airport or gymnasium. The important thing is that play is contagious—just start playing and others will join you.

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