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House of Representatives

A TRIBUTE TO JOVENES, INC. AND ITS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STREET SOCCER TEAM

HON. LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD
OF CALIFORNIA

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize four highly motivated and talented street soccer players and their coach who traveled from Los Angeles to our nation's capital this summer to compete in the Homeless USA Cup. This was the first time a team from Los Angeles joined the street soccer tournament, which this year included homeless and formerly homeless youth from 11 cities throughout the country.

I am especially proud of the fact that this talented and resilient team was sponsored by Jovenes, Inc., an exemplary community organization that provides needed services to homeless and low-income Latinos in my 34th Congressional District.

Jovenes, Inc. was founded in 1989 by Reverend Richard Estrada, Associate Pastor of Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church in Downtown, Los Angeles. Initially, Father Estrada created Jovenes, Inc. – which means youth in Spanish – to address the dire needs of homeless immigrant youth in Los Angeles.

Today, while Jovenes, Inc. remains committed to assisting the immigrant Latino community, the non-profit organization has expanded its reach. Jovenes, Inc. assists at-risk young people ages 16 to 24, foster youth, homeless individuals of all ages, and low-income families. Each year, an estimated 1,500 youth benefit from Jovenes, Inc.'s services, which include emergency and transitional housing, arts programs, mental health services, health education, employment preparation, financial literacy classes for families, after-school programs, GED preparation and computer courses.

Madam Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working with Father Estrada and Jovenes, Inc. on several occasions. He is an uplifting and positive force throughout the community and I thank him for his advocacy and tireless work to improve the

lives of young people and families in my district and elsewhere in Los Angeles County.

Clearly, the notable success of our four street soccer players – Johny, Densi, Carlos and Peter – who competed in the Homeless USA Cup in June have the dedicated staff of Jovenes, Inc., especially Executive Director Ernesto Montaña, and Director of Programs/Team Coach Andrea Marchetti, to thank for working to make such memorable and empowering opportunities available to them.

While our star street soccer players from Los Angeles lost in their final round against a Minnesota team at the U.S. Homeless Cup, their unstoppable performance in the qualifying round got them noticed. They were all selected for spots on the national team. Three of the players will travel to Australia in December to represent the United States in the Homeless World Cup. The fourth player will serve as an alternate. In addition, all four athletes have been invited to come back to next year's Homeless USA Cup to motivate and serve as examples for new teams and players. In between competitions, the Jovenes, Inc. players continue to work to turn their lives around by resuming their education, furthering their careers, and chasing their goals to live independently in a stable and safe environment.

The organization's newsletter poignantly sums up the impact of the street-soccer tournaments in helping to inspire and motivate these soccer players. "For our youth this is the country that is giving them an opportunity for a successful life, and they will do their best to make everybody proud of them, on and off the pitch! ... Through soccer, homeless individuals have a way to find the motivation, energy and discipline to solve their daily struggles and feel appreciated and respected. Jovenes, Inc. will continue this experience in the future to motivate our youth to succeed through sports in their life."

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to please join me in recognizing the significant work of Father Estrada and Jovenes, Inc. in bettering the lives of young people and Latino families in the community. I also congratulate Johny, Densi, Carlos and Peter for their exceptional street-soccer abilities. They are truly an inspiration, on and off the soccer field. After all, as they have shown, with the right support and a lot of hard work, anything is possible.