**BP’s Ashby coaches from the heart**

By Kris Malecha
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Volunteerism is a cultural norm at BP Alaska – both on the Slope and in town – and BP employee Brendon Ashby, CCP operator, is a true example of the BP spirit.

Ashby’s co-workers describe him as “amazing” with a “heart of gold.” While Ashby might disagree with the amazing part, it’s hard to argue with a “heart of gold."

Ashby spends his two-week home hitches every June and July coaching soccer. He grew up playing soccer in his native Trinidad and has coached teams through the Anchorage Youth Soccer Club (ASYC) for years, including his own kids’ teams. His teams are good and with his focus on drilling fundamentals and keeping it fun, kids want to play well into their adulthood.

Over in Mountain View, a mix of older teens ages 13 to 18 organized a team called AK Fugees that was supported by Catholic Social Services (CSS) and coached by a CSS volunteer. These teens represent the many refugee cultures in Alaska – Somalia, Pakistan, Laos and other countries – and many come from tough lives in their home countries.

CSS asked AYSC to sponsor the AK Fugees in a local tournament. AYSC agreed, and that was when Ashby and his fellow coaches first took note of the enthusiasm and desire the AK Fugees players brought to the game.

Ashby stepped in to co-coach the team in 2012 with friend Kash Kinder, and since then, has worked two hours each day, six days per week in the summer coaching this special team. He instilled a little rigor in their training, adding pushups and drills and focusing on teamwork.

“They got used to doing a whole lot, fast!” he says. Kinder coaches on the weeks Ashby is on the Slope.

They win more now and through Ashby’s efforts have better shoes to wear and even jerseys. They are enthusiastic players, albeit somewhat irregular in attendance due to family commitments for work.

Ashby sees a bright future for the team. “The younger brothers come and watch,” he says. “They play on their own, around the edge of the field. They are interested and want to play one day, too.”

Jessica Kovarik, Program Director/State Refugee Coordinator for CSS, commented in a recent email to Ashby that “the youth soccer program is a source of pride for our program and we are so grateful to have wonderful partners like you!” She is thankful for the broad community support that makes the refugee soccer program possible.

Ashby would like to see the team play in other tournaments, but to do that they need entrance fees, which are expensive. If you are interested in supporting the team financially, donations may be made through the [CSS donation page](https://www.cssalaska.org/donate.php). Click on Donate Now then RAIS and enter “Refugee Soccer” in the Special Instructions field.