

## TE employee unleashing potential of refugee kids in U.S., through soccer and mentorship

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TE's Abbas Al-Wishah, coach and founder of the Michigan FC, speaks to his team before a game.

Abbas Al-Wishah, field application engineer, Industrial & Commercial Transportation, knows what being a refugee is like. When he was 9 years old, he and his family escaped danger in Iraq after his father helped the U.S. Army in the Persian Gulf War in 1991. They spent about a year in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia before coming to the U.S. Now, over 25 years later, Abbas is helping refugees in his community in Detroit, Michigan, and his efforts have caught the attention of the ESPN global sports network for their award-winning E:60 series.

"I remember what it was like to be a refugee, seeing suffering firsthand and then finally coming to the U.S.," said Abbas, whose first home in the U.S. was in Erie, Pennsylvania. "We were around refugees from different parts of the world—Somalia, Ethiopia, Bosnia—and the one thing that united us was soccer. Soccer was our passion."

In Detroit, when Abbas noticed how many families were struggling and how easy it was for kids to go down the wrong path, he decided to turn that passion into a purpose. He created the [Michigan Futbol Club \(FC\)](#), a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, as a way to prevent neighborhood kids from using drugs, dropping out of school or turning to a life of crime.

Like TE, the Michigan FC bases its foundation on certain values:

- Emotional discipline
- Teamwork
- Work ethic
- Personal responsibility
- Leadership and sportsmanship



Kids on the Michigan FC, which is made up of mostly refugees from other countries.

Coaches act as mentors to the children and, in addition to teaching soccer skills, they help the kids build character, learn to follow instruction, learn how to conduct themselves and maintain respect even in competition.

Many of the coaches are professional soccer players who normally charge between \$75 to \$150 an hour to train youth soccer teams, but volunteer for free with Michigan FC. In fact, everything is free for the kids. Abbas and the Michigan FC provide soccer balls, snacks, water, shoes and more. Their only stipulation is that to play, the kids must keep up with their schoolwork, which is another area the Michigan FC mentors help with.

Abbas and other mentors introduced the team to the library, which sits across from the soccer field. Here, the adults help the older (high school) students with college preparation including preparing for the SAT and ACT, exams crucial to getting into a university. Even Abbas' 8-year-old son Elias helps out—coaching grade-school kids in English reading skills.

**"Many of these kids have nightmares and PTSD from their experiences...We try to put smiles on their faces and help in whatever way we can. Now, many of these kids are dreaming about scoring instead of escaping chemical attacks, and focusing more on their future instead of their past."**

— Abbas Al-Wishah —

Fellow TE employee Michael Cuevas, account manager in Automotive, is helping Abbas create an app on which the older players can create profiles to share with universities. Some local university professors even volunteer with the club to help the kids improve their schoolwork and get ready for college.

Abbas and the other volunteers of the Michigan FC want to extend their outreach to girls as well. They are currently looking for women in the Michigan area who can coach soccer and help mentor the girls. The ESPN producer Abbas talked to said she would talk to some professional women's soccer players about potentially volunteering as well.

If you would like to help Abbas, email him at [abbas.al-wishah@te.com](mailto:abbas.al-wishah@te.com). In addition to the Michigan FC website, which is linked above, they also have a [Michigan FC Facebook page](#) you can follow. We will let you know if ESPN ends up including Abbas' Michigan FC in a future E:60 episode.