

THE SUN

Grant Helps Sports Programs Flourish

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LOWELL -- Professional athletes get all the glory -- fame, prestige and money.

But many talented athletes will likely never see the big time, not because they lack talent, but because their local youth sports programs are losing valuable funds.

While professional sports earnings are rising, local sports funding is falling to dangerous levels. Good Sports, a distributor of grants for financially disadvantaged youth sports programs, donated to four struggling programs in Lowell over the past year to fight the decline.

"We work in areas where sports is part of the culture," said Chief Executive Officer Melissa Harper. "We want to keep those programs going."

The Good Sports program started five years ago as an effort to aid struggling sports programs. With donations from manufacturers and retailers, Good Sports is able to donate equipment to programs around Boston, Providence, Philadelphia and Chicago.

"Sports participation has been rapidly declining," said Harper. "Sports manufacturers don't want that."

The list of programs aided in Lowell includes Lowell Youth Soccer, United Teen Equality Center, Greater Lowell Family YMCA and Lowell Junior High Football. Each program chosen was in deep need.

"These are such great organizations," said Harper. "They can't do it alone."

The programs all stood out to Harper, but Lowell Junior High Football especially impressed her.

"They were trying to give kids an opportunity to play free of charge," said Harper. "Football is one of the most expensive sports to play,"

Good Sports believes that the program is essential in lowering juvenile crime.

"We keep them busy, out of trouble, and out of street," added Blake Galvin, president and head coach of Lowell Junior High Football. "Hey! Want to join a gang? Join a gang here."

Football's counterpart, Lowell Youth Soccer, received five replacement goals to make up for two that were stolen.

"Our program has been able to expand to more fields now," said President David Vigeant.

The Greater Lowell Family YMCA received cones, bats, Nerf balls, and goals for its drop-in program. Good Sports hoped these donations would keep kids in positive extracurricular activities.

"Drop-in does not bring in any money," said Youth Director Fred Braun. "(Good Sports) gave us everything we needed."

Donations to The United Teen Equality Center not only aided its drop-in program but helped the growth of its Athletic Department.

"Our athletics program just started," said Sako Long, UTEC director of athletics. "With this grant, we didn't have to wait to start offering any of these programs."

Harper asked for the public to be aware of the Good Sports, but focuses more on the donation recipients. She describes a baseball program in need.

"Yeah it exists, but they have five gloves and 30 kids," described Harper. "If they have 30 gloves they can all play."