



With LPF's Boost, Jackie's Softball Dreams Cross Home Plate

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Jackie arrived for her first day as a high school teacher excited to face a new challenge. As a former softball player, Jackie wanted to share her knowledge with the school's softball team, however, she learned the team was no longer active following the COVID pandemic. Jackie was willing to revive and coach varsity softball, but building an entire softball program from the ground up was a challenge she never expected. Step one was to recruit players.

"We promoted it in classes, during announcements, and put signs up around the building," said Jackie. "During lunch I'd sit at a table with a glove, ball, and a signup sheet. A lot of girls ended up joining through word of mouth."

Jackie found three girls with previous softball experience, but many of the girls interested had never even played a sport before, let alone softball. Some girls brought their friends to practice. Others made the switch from sports like lacrosse and track. With players willing to play, Jackie felt confident she could teach her girls how to have fun and play like a team, but many of the girls had one thing in common: no softball equipment.

With administrators unable to produce extra money, Jackie reached out on social media for help. A friend recommended Leveling the Playing Field for her sports equipment needs at no cost.

After submitting an application for gear, she traveled from an hour and a half away to LPF Baltimore and was blown away by the amount of equipment available for her team. Jackie loaded up her car with softball bats, gloves, pants, cleats, sports bras, and more. Then, she gave away the equipment to her team. Even better, players were allowed to keep the gear.

"It's hard to describe the difference I saw from when we first started, to getting the gear. It made the girls feel like real athletes. It gave them the confidence to play and feel good about themselves. It changed their attitude when they went out on that field. From sneakers and jeans to brand new cleats and softball pants and a glove in their hand. They started playing better and were more interested in practice."

Jackie's softball team measured their success by more than wins and losses. Students exercised while playing a varsity sport, made plenty of new friends, and created plenty of memories that Jackie hopes they will never forget.

"We weren't the best, but we had a great time. The girls pumped each other up and when we scored a run, I had tears in my eyes. Watching them have fun and encourage their teammates...They became good role models for each other."

Since that first season, Jackie has not only helped her school, but other local schools, as well. She has picked up gear for other school sports, such as volleyball. She has passed additional gear down to the local middle school softball team and has taught their coaches how to run practices. She's also shared LPF with other schools in need of equipment around the area. Jackie's determination got her softball program up and running but she says LPF provided a boost to bring her plan across home plate.

"I will always tell people about your organization. I can't even begin to tell you the incredible experience we had because of you all. They felt great about themselves and we were able to do so much more from them because of the gear we got from you."

Here are ways to get involved with LPF:

- Drop off your new and used gear at your closest donation bin
- Volunteer at one of our warehouses
- Make a financial donation to help sustain our mission
- Share the application link with a program who could use our resources