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MIDWEST REGION

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USA Lacrosse Grant Spurs Greater Diversity for Shaker Heights Program

BY PAUL OHANIAN

AS A LONGTIME COACH WITH SHAKER HEIGHTS Youth Lacrosse, and more recently, as president of its leadership board, Matt Kelly has continually been surprised by the lack of diversity within the program. At best, the number of minority participants has been less than 10-percent annually.

That figure is all the more surprising to Kelly given that Shaker Heights has traditionally been one of the most diverse communities among the suburbs around Cleveland, Ohio. That diversity has just never been mirrored on the lacrosse field.

“Most of the time, my son was the only Black kid on the field. I knew that a lot of other local kids were missing out on a great opportunity to be involved with this sport,” Kelly said.

Last year, Kelly connected with USA Lacrosse’s regional manager, Matt Burke, to discuss the lack of lacrosse diversity, among other issues.

“We talked about what could be done and Matt was absolutely invested in listening and helping out,” Kelly said. “The idea of changing the sport magically overnight was out the door, but we realized that we could start by changing the sport right here in Shaker Heights.”

With Burke’s help, Kelly applied for and received a USA Lacrosse equipment grant in 2022. SHYL was now poised to deal with one of the biggest barriers to entry for many kids.

“That grant was a huge part in our diversity effort,”



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Kelly said. “It allowed us to go into our community and provide the needed assistance to bring new players into the game. We used every bit of the equipment.”

Kelly says the impact from the grant has been immediate and profound. The organization’s minority participation rate has more than tripled in the past year.

“We are now the most diverse youth program in the area, by far. The grant has had huge impact on these kids and their families. They love the sport,” Kelly said.

He points to USA Lacrosse, and more directly, to the organization’s local representative, as primary catalysts in creating the tangible changes that are now reflected on the field.

“We were able to expand our program and the opportunities to play because of the support we received from Matt Burke and USA Lacrosse,” Kelly said. “It is absolutely rejuvenating to know that USA Lacrosse is sincerely trying to make a difference.”

- ▶ The USA Lacrosse Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that serves as the philanthropic arm of USA Lacrosse. The Foundation helps drive the three main pillars of the USA Lacrosse mission: 1) Fuel the growth; 2) Enrich the experience; 3) Field the best national teams. Supporting the foundation provides thousands of children across the country the opportunity to experience the gift of lacrosse. To learn more about the USA Lacrosse Foundation, please visit usalacrosse.com/foundation

National Scope, LOCAL IMPACT

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Each year, USA Lacrosse receives hundreds of applications for grants designed to **Fuel the Growth** of the game. Grants are available for equipment, player clinics and financial support. The USA Lacrosse Foundation is committed to raising the dollars needed to fund as many of these grants as possible. Philanthropic support from members, partners, and friends is critical in providing these opportunities for players, coaches, and officials in every region across the country.

The **Midwest** region includes **Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio,** and **Wisconsin**. Applications received during the 2023 grant cycle are currently being reviewed with award notifications going out later this year, which means there's still time to invest in the growth of the game in your own backyard!

Here is breakdown of the applications submitted from your region:

46

Total Applications

28

Equipment Grants

6

Player Clinic Grants

12

Financial Grants

\$257,955

Total Retail Revenue

445

Total Girls Impacted

665

Total Boys Impacted



I wish you would see the smiling faces and pure enjoyment the students got trying a "new" sport for them. I even have kids who enjoyed it so much and are playing on club teams this spring and summer. Thank you so much for allowing us to have this grant and give the kids the opportunity."

ALISA FRANKLIN

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