FIELD HOCKEY LETTING KIDS “BE MORE” IN B’MORE

By Jenna Ortega, USA Field Hockey’s Senior Sport Development Coordinator

“I will. I will persevere. I will set very high goals. I will achieve my dreams. I will commit to quality. I will not make excuses. I will lead with honor and integrity. I will feel my passion. I will score!” These are the words that are plastered across the wall at the front entrance of the UA House at Fayette in Baltimore, Md., as a reminder to all of those who walk through its doors to continue to set goals, soar high and seize opportunities. The UA House at Fayette, operated by the Living Classrooms Foundation, provides daily academic enrichment, health, sports and physical fitness education, and career development to more than 100 students from nearby public housing and low income East Baltimore City neighborhoods.

USA Field Hockey connected with the Living Classrooms Foundation through The Aspen Institute’s Project Coordinator for Project Play Baltimore. Andre Fountain, Project Play Baltimore is a multi-year initiative, organized by The Aspen Institute Sports and Society Program and Under Armour, to increase the quality and quantity of sport offerings available to youth in East Baltimore. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance study in 2015, only 26% of Baltimore City high school males and 16% of Baltimore City high school females met the recommendation of 60 minutes of daily physical activity. The number of recreation centers in Baltimore City has dwindled since 1985, from 130 to 60 centers in 2017. Project Play Baltimore recognizes that Baltimore City youth are in need of access to high-quality and affordable sport activities. To maximize effectiveness and create sustainable opportunities for youth to be active through the 2017 initiative is focused on a two-square-mile area in East Baltimore. One of the facilities located within the two-square-mile area is the 30,000-foot recreation center, the UA House at Fayette.

Since last fall, USA Field Hockey, the Living Classrooms Foundation and Project Play Baltimore have worked together to arrange playing opportunities for Baltimore City youth. A 2016 calendar was created to provide field hockey offerings throughout the year. These offerings included a Learn to Play Clinic (March 2016), and include summer camp (June 2016) and a fall middle school league (Fall 2016). With the start of spring sports and the coming together of the field hockey community for the inaugural USA Field Hockey Summit, presented by Astro turf in Baltimore, Md., March presented itself as the perfect time to introduce a Learn to Play Clinic to Baltimore City.

The clinic took place Wednesday, March 14 and consisted of two, one-hour sessions offered to the Living Classrooms Foundation’s students, and a two-hour session open to the public, ages 5 and up. Volunteer coaches were summoned from colleges, high schools, clubs, former national team players and some even came from overseas. The enthusiastic group of coaches included Casey Ferrigni-Smith, Laurel Francis, Kris Jay Johnson, Corey Lohr, Valerie Lohr, Cathy Miller, Jason Mulder, Jamie Nath, Katie Neureither, Isabelle Russo, Becky Smith, Stefanie Vessel and Ian Wagge. Although the volunteers came from different areas of the field hockey community, they worked together seamlessly throughout all three sessions.

The day of the clinic began with the sound of rapid footsteps and laughter echoing through the halls of the UA House at Fayette. Coaches looked back and forth at each other in anticipation of the energy and excitement that would shortly welcome itself onto the turf. Groups of children quickly shuffled onto the turf minutes later, and the coaches were still shivering with anticipation to begin an afternoon of organized chaos with children running around left and right and playing small sided games in their designated areas. Laughter and high fives were exchanged between players and coaches throughout the event. Just like clockwork, at the end of each session, multiple kids would ask, “When are we going to play field hockey next?”

In a matter of four short hours, 120 kids in Baltimore City were exposed to field hockey, and most loved it. They got a taste of the game and were hungry for more! So, what now? The Living Classrooms Foundation will offer a summer camp June 25-28 followed by a 5-6 week long fall middle school league. The league will consist of 1-2 practices and one competition per week, but is that enough? USA Field Hockey recognizes that a year-long plan is just the beginning of building sustainable growth in the area. Thanks to the generosity of Girl’s Sports, Baltimore and the Living Classrooms Foundation now has a beautiful set of regulation field hockey goals for their camps and programs. Let the games begin!

Kevin McCloskey, Coordinator for Athletics and Events for the Living Classrooms Foundation, and fountain, Project Play Baltimore will continue to play a key role in creating field hockey opportunities for Baltimore City youth. Local players, coaches and universities including the University of Maryland, Towson University and Stevenson University have brought into the vision and excitement of providing sustainable field hockey in the area. They recognize and believe that field hockey has the opportunity to be more than just a sport in Baltimore City. It has the potential to be a child’s physical outlet, a safe space, a gateway to college, and a child’s “I will.”

“Use single organization can do this alone. Only through cooperation and collaboration can we as parents and caregivers provide every child an opportunity to play,” states Project Play Baltimore’s mission statement. With the help of local organizations and volunteers, field hockey has the chance to grow in Baltimore City as well as in other communities across the country.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED In learning more about or helping our USA Field Hockey Baltimore Plays Field Hockey Project, please contact sportdevelopment@usafieldhockey.com.