Novato organization spearheads extracurricular sports with spirit

NovatoSpirit has overcome a year dominated by a pandemic that continues to cause widespread loss. Especially hard hit are families already living in poverty, which afflicts about 3,000 children in Novato. Hundreds of these students are homeless. Many are also challenged with a health issue, such as asthma, diabetes, motor-skill difficulties, depression or severe anxiety. Doctors, social workers and therapists refer these kids to NovatoSpirit because they believe the nonprofit can boost their health.

The organization's mission is to strengthen children in-need through sports that are offered for five continuous years to all participants. NovatoSpirit has three strong sports mentors: Heather Parker of Hooves for Harmony, a nonprofit horse-therapy program, Master Myong O of Kyung Ki Taekwondo, and Tara Caprice Broadwater of Love2Dance. All three instructors have operated in Novato for many years and have been selected to ensure that all children are treated equitably while they flex new muscles.

Leadership skills are often fostered on fields of play. For example, recently retired Marin County public defender Jose Varela said that football inadvertently launched him into law practice. Varela recalled his law school admissions interview: "When I explained that in my hometown, Martinez, football coaches and counselors guided me to sport instead of what some of my friends were doing, selling drugs and so forth, they understood that sport was my entryway to mentoring. If it wasn't for sport, I would not be who I am."

Giving Marin Community Partnership, a major initiative of 11 North Bay businesses, offers local nonprofit organizations assistance with marketing and outreach. At the end of 2020, Giving Marin gave back a significant percentage of funds generated through the program to Marin nonprofit organizations, including NovatoSpirit. Almost 100 organizations applied for the grants. Through a rigorous process, 12 organizations were chosen to receive $5,000 or $10,000 grants for a total of $75,000.

The Giving Marin grant helps the boys and girls of NovatoSpirit enjoy the benefits and byproducts of sports. Those wishing to empower these young people can visit NovatoSpirit.org.

-Photos of Parker with Cowgirl Camilla, Master O with Alan and dancer courtesy of NovatoSpirit