

Off the Sideline Offers First Team Sports Scholarships to Youth in Need

In partnership with organizations like Volunteers of America, Care Oregon and the Timbers Army, Off the Sideline is helping low-income youth participate in team sports this spring.

PORTLAND, Ore. —May 3, 2016 — Off the Sideline, a newly formed non-profit that seeks to increase youth participation in sports by providing scholarships to low-income children, has given 14 kids a chance to get in the game. With assistance from local and national groups, Off the Sideline has teamed up with Volunteers of America to serve kids living in public housing in N/NE Portland and East Multnomah County.

“We are thrilled to partner with VOA Oregon for this pilot program and to be awarding our first scholarships with the help of their Youth Prevention Services team,” says Leslie Mestman, Off the Sideline founder. “As a mother of a 13-year-old boy, I’ve seen firsthand how playing on a basketball team has helped him hone some essential life skills, foster new friendships and boost his self-esteem.

“Studies show that as sports become more expensive, it is the low-income kids who are left behind. Our goal is to focus on equity and inclusion by giving them access to the same programs and sports their peers are playing.”

[Research and anecdotal evidence](#) suggests the benefits of team sports are substantial and long-lasting. Playing sports reduces the risk of obesity and obesity-related illness, deters risky behavior, boosts self-esteem, helps kids do better in school, provides positive role models via peers and coaches and fosters better relationships with family and teammates. As costs increase and traditionally free programs disappear, lower-income families are having to [forego sports for their children](#).

Off the Sideline partners with community agencies working with at-risk youth to reach the kids and families that stand to benefit the most from team sports. Scholarship awards are up to \$300 per child/per season. This past spring, Off the Sideline enabled kids to play a variety of sports, including basketball, volleyball, soccer and football in Portland and East Multnomah County. Following the success of the spring pilot, Off the Sideline plans to expand the reach of the program to serve additional communities in Oregon. In addition to the VOA, Off the Sideline is supported by [Care Oregon](#), [the Pollination Project](#) and the [Timbers Army](#).

“[Volunteers of America](#) is excited to partner with Off the Sideline to help our program participants engage in activities they otherwise wouldn’t have access too. We know that the more pro-social activities youth engage in, the more likely they are to be successful

in school and at home, says Clair Raujol, VOA Youth Prevention Services Program Supervisor. “This partnership provides one more avenue for us to offer positive alternative activities to at-risk youth.”

About Off the Sideline

Off the Sideline is a 501C(3) non-profit dedicated to promoting youth involvement in team sports and increasing access by providing financial scholarships to low-income families. For more information, visit www.offthesideline.org

About Volunteers of America

VOA Oregon nurtures the most vulnerable, providing them with the tools and support to help themselves. Our mission is to change lives by promoting self-determination, building strong communities, and standing for social justice. We strengthen vulnerable families and adults; facilitate transitions into the community from prison and addictions treatment; provide support to domestic violence survivors; prevent child abuse and neglect; and enhance the lives of seniors and disabled adults and their caregivers. We serve 17,000 people in three main service areas: children, family and seniors; public safety/rehabilitation; and business enterprises.

For more information, press only:

Leslie Mestman 971.322.3911, leslie@offthesideline.org.
Clair Raujol 503-560-4373, craujol@voaor.org