Heading into its eighth year, the First Stick Program has leveraged the support of generous individual, foundation and corporate donors into more than $9.2 million worth of equipment to give 22,370 kids on 768 teams (448 boys, 320 girls) in every region of the country the opportunity to play lacrosse—many for the first time.

Better still, the First Stick Program is evolving — along with all of US Lacrosse’s programs and services — to help even more teams get started (the “introductory” phase) and help them grow.

One new expansion in the First Stick Program is that non-profit organizations can now apply to receive a Starter Kit Package, which provides 30 lacrosse sticks, two dozen soft practice balls, and two 3’x3’ goals. This provides a new way for program leaders to introduce the sport to new participants.

“Our goal is to make sure kids get the right lacrosse at the right time,” said Joshua Christian, managing director, sport development and hall of fame. “So, we’ve looked closely at our programs, especially First Stick, to make sure they’re meeting the needs of those we serve.”

This approach is derived from the core values of the Lacrosse Athlete Development Model (LADM), which focuses on “fun and kid-centered play.” With the starter kit and guidance from LADM-centric teaching materials, program leaders can help kids with different ability levels discover and enjoy the sport.

In subsequent years, those programs can then apply for First Stick grants as the players – and the program itself -- mature. As always, the goal is to help programs, particularly those in urban and non-traditional areas, to move from “active to excellence” with the assistance of other sport development and diversity and inclusion grant programs.

“Sometimes the organizations themselves aren’t ready to field full-on competitive teams,” said Christian, “so the Starter Kit Package may work best for them.”

Of course, there is no requirement to start with the “Starter Kit.” Teams may still apply for a Youth or High School Team Grant, which provides enough equipment for 20 field players and 1 goalie. Organizations that receive a Team Grant are required to be part of the US Lacrosse Member Program, and will receive complimentary US Lacrosse membership for up to 2 adult coaches and up to 20 youth or high school players.

An additional “evolution” that should benefit many teams is that the First Stick Program grants have moved from an annual grant process to a rolling one. Previously, applications were due in the early Fall, awards were made at the end of the year and equipment was delivered in late Winter in time for the Spring season. This meant that a program that was not awarded or missed the deadline would have to wait another year for assistance.

Now, awards are granted monthly October through May and are coordinated by US Lacrosse regional staff rather than through the national office. This has allowed US Lacrosse to be more responsive to prospective new programs and to the needs specific to particular regions of the country.
GRATITUDE

Edward P. Nordberg, Jr. | Chair US Lacrosse Foundation

When I reflect on my experiences in the game of lacrosse, as a player, coach, fan and now member of the US Lacrosse Foundation Board, appreciation and gratitude are foremost in my thoughts. I am grateful for my coaches, many of whom were volunteers, that introduced me to the game and encouraged and supported my growth as a player. I appreciate the many life-long friendships I have made and continue to make through my participation in lacrosse.

While like you, I may have questioned a call made on the field from time to time, I am also thankful for those who have committed to officiating our game, making it possible for players of all ages and abilities to play lacrosse in a safe and consistent environment. Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues on the Foundation Board and to all those who supported our recent campaign to build a national headquarters for US Lacrosse, providing a world-class facility where we can train and showcase our men’s and women’s national team programs.

As I have come to appreciate first-hand as a member of the Foundation Board, through the leadership and stewardship of US Lacrosse, thousands of young boys and girls can now begin their lacrosse journey. Some of those journeys will culminate in representing the United States in international competitions and other journeys will simply result in the enjoyment of the game and its many benefits on hometown fields across America. None of this would be possible without your support, and for that we are very grateful.

Steve Stenersen | CEO and President US Lacrosse

Sometimes it seems that the pace of life has become overwhelming. The growing demands of family and career leave little time for reflection, and the best intentions often go unfulfilled. Gratitude is often felt but less frequently expressed. The opportunities that emerge throughout our involvement with the sport are almost always enabled by others... and our experiences as players, coaches, officials and parents are more meaningful and impactful because they are shared. After all, lacrosse -- like most things in life -- is a team sport.

Our mission is fueled by a team of members and donors whose support is an expression of gratitude for the value of their lacrosse experience -- or that of their children -- and their appreciation for the cumulative and ongoing leadership and investment required to advance the sport.

In this, the 20th year of US Lacrosse, we remain humbled by and grateful for the engagement of our members and donors. We’ve come a long way over the last two decades because of your investment in our mission, but we have much left to accomplish. A new strategic plan will soon be unveiled. The goals of that plan represent unprecedented vision and the generosity and gratitude of a growing community of US Lacrosse members and donors will continue to be essential to our success.

Steve Stenersen | CEO and President US Lacrosse

TEAM USA INDOOR ON UPWARD TRAJECTORY

Two U.S. Indoor National Training Teams participated in the Lacrosse All Stars North American Invitational in September, finishing second and third behind Thompson Brothers Lacrosse. Matching up with some of the best in the world in the championship game was just where the team hoped to be on Saturday, and hopefully next September.

“You’re chasing Canada and the Iroquois,” said head coach Regy Thorpe. “We’re trying to build something here and playing Thompson Brothers was another step in the process of gauging where we are.” Many of the Thompson Brothers team could appear in an Iroquis uniform in the World Lacrosse Championship in 2019.

“They are a fast team and a physical team,” Lyle Thompson said of USA Blue. “This is a tournament where you’re playing every day. That’s where they shine. I see US Lacrosse really growing. They are going to really compete in the world games next year.”

Thorpe brought his team - which included many with limited indoor experience - to the Onionagda reservation on Wednesday and left with a team full of optimism.

CHEERS TO THE CHAMPIONS CIRCLE

The Champions Circle Fundraiser on October 5, 2018, raised $30,000 for the national team. Hosted by US Lacrosse Foundation Board members Serena Black Martin and Whitney Nye to surround the team with the support they need, 40 Team USA players, coaches and staff members joined 130 guests at the home of Alex and Whitney Thompson Martin and Whitney Nye to raise funds for these incredible female role models who are training for the 2021 FIL Women’s World Lacrosse Championships in Towson, Md.

“IT is a true privilege to be surrounded by excellence. This team is the best in our country but needs our commitment to be the best in the world. I want to do everything I can to support these remarkable women, to build a team around the team,” said Martin.
NOTES OF GRATITUDE FROM YOUR FANS
YOUR DONOR DOLLARS MAKE THIS POSSIBLE

“Thank you so much for today! Thank you for the clinic and equipment donation, allowing our student athletes to better understand and develop their skill level. But the clinic was much larger than this… it showed that others care about their health and well-being, and support their passion to play the game of lacrosse. The Field of Dreams Academy is truly humbled by your continued support of our vision and mission.”
—Terry Johnson, Executive Director, Field of Dreams Academy, Atlanta, GA

“Thank you all so much for the start of a great relationship. You have really helped put sticks in our youth’s hands and introduced them to one of the greatest sport of the ages. You all are so excited. That kid on his face! He was so excited. That kid and smile alone was enough of a reason and more is required. ‘All we can do is to try our best’ and that is what we did. Thank you!”
—Steve Gallo, Waterboro, ME

“I wanted to say thank you to you and Cascade for the youth helmets. They are a work of art. I shared the gold medal with our church this Sunday and informed them it is time to get to work. ‘To whom much is given, much is required.’ All were overjoyed and on board. Thank you again for making our quest to introduce the great sport of lacrosse to less fortunate individuals and helping to eliminate the cost of equipment and transportation possible. We didn’t have the city to provide them with equipment for them. The reality is they simply could not have been able to afford lacrosse. First Stick has been transformative for us.”
—Steve Gallo, Waterboro, ME

“After teaching for three years in the South Bronx, I have stepped down so I can now run Bronx Lacrosse full-time. The results of our program have been very successful and a lot of it can be attributed to the help from US Lacrosse. Located in the poorest community in the United States of America, our program is helping students stay on track and is getting them on the road to major breakthroughs with continued support and information.”
—Dan Levinthal, Founder and President of Bronx Lacrosse, Bronx, NY

“Thank you so much for helping to expand our program. We brought in many new players this year who will only improve with experience, becoming varsity caliber players in the future. This was only possible because we could tell them that anyone can play regardless of whether they could purchase their own equipment. Thank you again for all your help and support. The Salem Witches lacrosse program would not be what it is without your help.”
—Shamus Mruk, Beverly, MA

“Thank you for believing in me and helping support my goal of running a camp for players by players. This camp was amazing - the kids loved the week, worked hard and didn’t want the camp to end. The high school staff came together and not only helped the campers but it was a team bonding experience for us. We were very grateful for the stick you gave us and we saved that for the last day and used it as a prize for the kid that worked the hardest and demonstrated real lacrosse character. You should have seen the smile on his face! He was so excited. The kid and smile alone was enough of a reason for me to want to run this every year. Thank you so much for believing in me and helping me accomplish my goal.”
—Colin Warme, Bellevue, WA

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—Steve Gallo, Waterboro, ME

“Your dedication to our efforts have resulted in putting lacrosse sticks into hundreds of new players hands around the world, resulting in many new countries becoming part of the international lacrosse community.”
—Tom Hayes, Clifford Township, PA

“Thank you so much for everyone involved with the US Lacrosse clinic at Feaster Charter School. It was such a successful event! The clinicians were awesome. You guys rock! Was great to have so many kids out there. I’ll never forget this day. It was a big deal for my PUCKidz organization. I truly appreciate you working with all my kids.”
—Keith Quigley PUCKidz, Inc., Chula Vista, CA

“Thank you so much for today! Thank you for the clinic and equipment donation, allowing our student athletes to better understand and develop their skill level. But the clinic was much larger than this… it showed that others care about their health and well-being, and support their passion to play the game of lacrosse. The Field of Dreams Academy is truly humbled by your continued support of our vision and mission.”
—Terry Johnson, Executive Director, Field of Dreams Academy, Atlanta, GA

“I just returned from a special weekend in Baltimore (at the US Lacrosse Convention). I cannot even begin to thank you for your help on this historic occasion of coordinating the inaugural Continental Federation Development Meeting. We are on our road to major breakthroughs with international lacrosse and your unwavering support has been a key factor.”
—Bob DeMarco, Federation of International Lacrosse Development Director

“Your dedication to our efforts have resulted in putting lacrosse sticks into hundreds of new players hands around the world, resulting in many new countries becoming part of the international lacrosse community.”
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KEEPPING PLAYERS SAFE

Thanks to donors, the US Lacrosse Center for Sport Science has awarded four research grants to studies that will provide helpful scientific data to lead to a better understanding of the impact rule changes, educational initiatives and protective equipment can have on athlete safety. The Center seeks to grow the body of knowledge to objectively advise the lacrosse community on factors that enhance player safety and quality of experience.

Dr. Shane Caswell, George Mason University: Collecting data on practice and game injuries, concussions, concussion symptoms and concussion symptom resolution time in youth lacrosse.

Dr. Daniel Herman, University of Florida: Incentivizing athletic trainers to report injuries incurred by female high school lacrosse players to develop an understanding of the effect of headgear in girls’ lacrosse in Florida and Virginia, assessing safety ratings, uncalled penalties, style of play differences between players that use approved headgear and those who do not.

Dr. Blair Evans, Penn State University: Studying the effectiveness of peer-based intervention to foster mental health literacy and positive team/individual identities in youth lacrosse players.

Dr. Thomas Bowman, University of Lynchburg, and Dr. Richard Boergers, Seton Hall University: Researching to determine the time to first chest compression and first AED shock in full equipment removal vs. leaving shoulder pads in place in providing immediate advanced care to catastrophic patients.

FUELLING URBAN LACROSSE HOLISTICALLY

Growing lacrosse in urban areas is fraught with challenges: financial resources, equipment, field space, transportation, shoes, lacrosse literacy for players, coaches and parents, etc. In 2014, the Urban Lacrosse Alliance (ULA) was formed to provide US Lacrosse resources to like-minded organizations to expand lacrosse opportunities for urban youth.

Kenny Benoit had limited exposure to lacrosse growing up in Atlanta. When he moved to Evansville, Indiana and started pursuing community involvement opportunities, he volunteered as a girls’ lacrosse coach. He eventually agreed to help launch and coach a JV program at Bosse High School, beginning with clinics and instructional sessions. A US Lacrosse First Stick grant helped support the new program. In 2018, Bosse fielded their first varsity squad and won nine games. Benoit also worked to create a middle school team. The ULA provided support. Benoit was able to get 50-60 players involved. He is not alone. Quite often, coaches associated with urban programs are also the program fundraising and donor support, juggling administrative and coaching duties, building a team culture, understanding player personalities, instilling character education and using best practices for urban sport development. Dealing with urban program challenges. In addition to networking and round-table opportunities, attendees took part in formal sessions led by subject matter experts, including harnessing fundraising and donor support, juggling administrative and coaching duties, building a team culture, understanding player personalities, instilling character education and using best practices for urban sport development.

“There’s a great sense of community in lacrosse, and the ULA exemplifies that. Having a chance to talk to other people and hear their stories is very impactful. We’re all focused on youth engagement and growing the game,” Benoit said. “Without the help of US Lacrosse, we would never have been able to get our program off the ground. It’s the gift that keeps on giving.”
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