

INTERVIEW FROM 2018

Clemente Arrizon



Each year LADF staff conducts interviews with each location's affiliate partner staff. The goal of the interview is to troubleshoot issues with program implementation and to learn about the impact of the program at the park. The following is an excerpt from the interview with Clemente Arrizon, Coordinator at Lincoln Park Recreation Center, located in the Lincoln Heights Neighborhood. Lincoln Park Recreation Center implemented Dodgers RBI for the first time in 2018.

Tell us about the interest of baseball and Softball at your park:

A: This park has always been interested in baseball, but at our park, baseball costs \$65 dollars back in the day; which isn't affordable for all families. The average family size here is six. Our interest has increased, though, because of the Dodgers RBI program.

What about the Dodgers RBI program has helped interest in the sport?

A: Just the price and making it more affordable. Now families can enroll all their kids and no one has to be forced out. We are getting more kids that are new to the park and they are local kids. Another thing that really helps is the brand. Everyone loves the Dodgers. Before RBI everyone wanted to be on the Dodgers, so now everyone has that chance. It helps us create a beautiful sense of community. This has really brought people together at this park. The more we can get families and kids involved here, the more people are learning to respect

the park and respect the sport. We had a single mother with six kids and Dodgers RBI gave us the opportunity to enroll all six kids. I asked a local car club to sponsor the extra five kids and within an hour, they brought a check of \$125 for these kids. This happens more often, than people think.

Has there been any changes to your baseball and softball program since it became a Dodgers RBI program?

A: One thing that I did new this year is name our teams after universities. Now that everyone has a Dodgers uniform, we started naming our teams UCLA, USC, Notre Dame, Harvard, etc. It is planting a seed for the kids to start thinking about college. Kids might not even have thought about college but if their team is named after a college, I hope it'll pique their interest.

What about coaches? Have you seen anything change with coaches?

A: Our program has always struggled with a sort of 'machismo' with our coaches. Our program was becoming too competitive and was a negative experience for our kids. Having everyone under Dodgers RBI with the same uniform has built a sense of community for us. A lot of the coaches that were just wanting to win all the time, they're gone. We're preaching a different message now with Dodgers RBI. A lot of the programming that comes with the program helps the community realize that it's not all about winning. I've even had to ask some coaches to stop coaching because they didn't get what we were trying to do here.

What about softball?

A: The same thing. Softball has increased this year, though. The interest in softball is there now. We're going to increase from 3 teams to 6 teams.

How do you think participation in the sport is helping youth in your community?

A: Kids are making a real effort to play. I had one kid who sold 25 candy bars so that he could play this year. We covered his registration, but I wanted to help him learn a lesson about effort. So, throughout the season he sold candy bars to the community to help teach him about responsibility. You know, things like that, when kids are really bought in to something they put in a lot of effort and can learn about responsibility and confidence. We want to get more kids involved and grow our program. When the park is packed, the park is safe and I really believe that parks should be a safe place.

Can you share any other stories about kids who are learning or gaining something from playing sports?

A: I had a young man who played baseball here go through some hard times. During his baseball season, his mother passed away. I got the call from his grandma during one of his practices and she was coming to pick him up. I brought him to the office with his grandma and we were able to talk together. The young man was sad, obviously. He cried but before he left to go be with his grandma, I told them to come back to the practice and games. There's a lot of gangs in our neighborhood, and I knew that this kid needed to stay involved. The team, the coach and the structure helped him get through a hard time and stay safe. The park became his second home and it really, in my eyes, saved his life. I think that the Dodgers Foundation, the Dodgers Organization, all these sponsors...they really need to know that. I know they like to cut a check and help communities, but they need to know that they are saving lives. I want to let them know that. You drive by from Monday to Saturday and the entire park is Dodger blue. The department of recreation and parks and management believe in me. With their support and Dodgers RBI we save lives, guide kids to college and make our community safer. But most importantly, Dodgers RBI gives us the opportunity to turn the T-ball and Coach pitch players into responsible teens and it gives the minors, majors, juniors baseball and girls softball players the opportunity to become responsible adults. That's our job.