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Miramonte Baseball Gives Back Through Partnership With Grateful Gatherings

By Emily Dugdale



Miramonte baseball players spent a Saturday helping a family in need. Photo provided

Jocelyn said a few days after the big move. "After six months in the shelter, it's like taking that final breath and saying 'this is what I've been waiting for.'"

Grateful Gatherings was notified by Shelter Inc. that Jocelyn's family needed help gathering household items for their new apartment. The family - Jocelyn, her husband, Rigo, and three young daughters - entered Shelter Inc.'s Emergency Family Shelter in Martinez last July, when they lost their affordable housing last year due to a family medical crisis.

Rigo recently received a small salary increase in his position as a janitor at Diablo Valley Community College, and Jocelyn's family was eligible to move into Shelter's transitional apartments in Antioch.

Partnering with Grateful Gatherings, the Mats sprung into action by sending out a list of household needs a few weeks before the family's move-in date.

"The baseball team worked really hard this weekend," Chris Flitter, Grateful Gatherings' co-founder, said of the Mats. She detailed how the team picked up donated furniture on last Friday, and was up again for Saturday's move-in to vacuum rugs, set up furniture, and meet and greet the family as they tearfully entered their new home.

Sterling Kasslea, a 16-year-old sophomore second baseman on the Mats, described taking breaks during the day to play football and meet some of the neighborhood kids. "They were so energetic and they never stopped talking or moving around."

Kasslea especially loved the family's overjoyed reaction to their new apartment, and hopes to return. "Grateful Gathering is a great idea and I was lucky to be able to help out," he said. "We were all sad when we had to go. I really hope we get to go back soon."

According to Miramonte parent Anna Tague, the service project was the first for the baseball team

When Jocelyn walked into her new two-bedroom apartment last Saturday afternoon, she was speechless. Her kitchen was fully stocked. Bunk beds were already set up for her young daughters. There was even laundry detergent, curtains on the windows, and fresh towels - all thanks to a partnership between a local nonprofit and the Miramonte baseball team.

Grateful Gatherings, an Oakland-based organization that provides donated goods to people transitioning out of homelessness, received help from the Mats players and their families last weekend in collecting furniture and setting up a new apartment for Jocelyn (who asked that her last name not be used) and her young family, who were transitioning out of a local shelter.

"I'm still in that phase where I'm full of joy,"

in recent years, and she hopes it will become a trend.

She also underscored the wider point that socioeconomic divisions in the area can make meetings like that witnessed on Saturday a rarity. "I really liked the crossover between boys of all grades as well as adults from families that otherwise would not have a chance to meet," she said. "I haven't stopped thinking about it since Saturday."

"It's a model for children to see that it doesn't matter what society you're from, you can still come together," Jocelyn said.

Jocelyn's story is all too common in the Bay Area, Flitter explained.

"It's important to get local groups involved because sadly, there is a steady stream of people moving out of shelters with no personal belongings, a foster child aging of the system, [or] a family faced with an unbearable tragedy that they cannot work," she said.

Inspired by their weekend of service, the Mats are actively looking for more local volunteer opportunities. "I think that this work is a great way to get a community together as well as help a family in need," Kassela said. "I believe our team will get involved with more service activities, and I really hope we do.

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