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RBI Program Brings Inner City Kids Out To Play

POSTED: 4:34 pm EDT July 16, 2008



JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- A local church group has reached out to children in a troubled apartment complex by showing the youngsters how to swing for the fences and much more.

Group Brings Baseball To Inner City Children

For the past six years, Roger Maness of Riverside Presbyterian Church and a group of volunteers have brought the game of baseball to inner city kids with a program called RBI -- reviving baseball in the inner cities.

This year, the group decided to run a weeklong baseball camp at the Cleveland Arms Apartments in Northwest Jacksonville with goal of reviving the sport in the inner city.

For residents of Cleveland Arms the sound of gunfire is not uncommon, but this week people there have been hearing another loud pop -- the crack of a bat striking a ball.

Maness has been making sure the youth of the area know it's all right to strike out, pop out or even get caught stealing when it comes to the game of baseball.

"Basically, RBI is organized sandlot. We show up with leaders and balls and bats," Maness said.

The four-day camp began on Monday and as word spread and sounds of joy made their way into the apartment complex, the number of youngsters ready to play ball grew.

"People see other kids playing in the park or parents hear about and want their kids to be involved," Maness said.

"We get here around 9:30 a.m. and we're supposed to start at 10 a.m. There were kids waiting for us this morning. They were waiting to get a glove and for the bats. They wanted to play ball," said volunteer Emily Miller.

While the children have been learning how to swing a bat and throw a baseball, RBI is about more than fundamentals on the baseball diamond.

"It is about baseball, but it's a lot more about bringing kids together, having supervision and keeping them away from just running in the streets or just sitting in their houses and watching TV," Maness said. "If we can keep these kids in wholesome, healthy events and prevent them from getting into drugs and alcohol and gangs and that sort of thing, then they are going to be much better for it and all of Jacksonville will be better for it."

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