

Novato Patch

Sports Lessen Stress for NovatoSpirit Kids

The sports that NovatoSpirit offers to children with financial needs in Novato can help lessen stress and boost resilience

Shared By [Marian Schinske \(Patch Poster\)](#) - Updated March 13, 2017 8:42 pm ET



There's nothing like a First Place Smile. There were lots of smiles recently at a karate tournament, where instructors prepared our children well. One of our grateful kids said, "My teachers help me and are very smart. They are good people, very kind, awesome, fast and strong." Her brother added that karate helps him make better decisions in his everyday life. "Karate helps me everyday to be more in control of myself. Every moment I think before I do something. I use my wise mind instead of my emotional mind."

NovatoSpirit kids also praise the emotional benefits of exercise.

One teen said, “Tae kwon do relieves problems and makes me feel happier. Without it, I would not be as active and disciplined, and I would have more stress.”

Chronic stress is experienced by many of our families, who endure the challenges posed by poverty, a lack of stable, affordable housing, and added health problems triggered by living in such circumstances. Additionally, many families who have moved here from another country, contributing to our society as legal residents, now feel anxious and unwelcome. Although legally here, some say they fear deportation. Only those who have U.S. citizenship, they say, can feel safe.

First 5 Marin hosted a timely countywide forum titled “Caring for Kids in Turbulent Times.” Psychologist Marisol Munoz-Kiehne, PhD described how we all can help children avoid feeling helpless, hopeless and worthless. Several professionals working with vulnerable children suggested that we can boost kids’ resilience by connecting them with after-school activities, such as music, summer camps and sports.

One of our NovatoSpirit students told me that dance helps her restore a sense of well-being: “Whenever I feel anxious, I just start dancing and it relaxes me and gets me back to normal. I learned that dance helps me to calm down whenever I have a bad day or if I feel sad.”

“My dedication to dance is making me softer and a better person,” said another dancer. “You changed so much for me and my family and I am very thankful!”

Helping children experience positive change is a great gift—thank you!

And thanks to those of you who made our February Fundraiser a success. Board Members Alison Moore and Suzanne Daggert were among those who helped us raise more than **\$17,000!**

Alison, who is a nurse, hosted a bake sale on Valentine’s Day with medical staff at Novato’s Marin Community Clinic. Lead pediatrician Tracey Hessel offered homemade brownies, and others brought sweet and savory snacks. Amazingly, medical-records specialist Ashley Torres fired up her oven well before Valentine’s Day, baking extra goodies to help our kids.

Things really revved up after our partner One World Children’s Fund and an anonymous donor offered to match all contributions up to \$10,000. Donations poured in from near and far. A philanthropist from New York City gave \$1,250; a gentleman from Napa gave \$2,000; and donors from the Jewish Community Federation & Endowment Fund gave a nice grant. To boot, Jerry Ghirardo and Cindy Grove of Ghirardo CPA gave us a generous in-kind gift.

KWMR (90.5 FM) broadcast a radio show, hosted by Susan Santiago, about our kids. We’re delighted that a partial transcription of the show will be posted on the website of Kidsdata.org, a program of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health.

You can listen to the radio show by going to this link and scrolling down the page: <http://www.novatospirit.org/news-awards/>.

NovatoSpirit was also fortunate to be celebrated by Marin Charitable, which hosted an elegant event for us and about 60 other Marin nonprofits. Marin Charitable volunteers are exceptional at reaching out to all who serve the county's children.

Gifts came to us before February, through holiday giving from many, including the Ginnie & Peter Haas Jr. Fund of the Marin Community Foundation, Soroptimist International, the Novato Senior Citizens Club, Unity in Marin and All Saints Lutheran Church.

Now three of our NovatoSpirit students are in the spotlight! Karate student Maritza Luna Sanchez and dancers Damaris and Aileen Marrufo are highlighted in the "Novato Proud" news, which was created by Peggy Flynn of the City of Novato, Claire Knoles of Kiosk, and others. We deeply appreciate the work of these creative folks.

Maritza, Damaris and Aileen are featured alongside notable leaders, such as former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, NASA Astronaut Yvonne Cagle and pro football player Jared Goff. To read about them, please click on this link and scroll down the page: <http://novato.org/about-novato/novato-proud>

Meantime, our soccer players are enjoying the indoor soccer season led by Diane Ascher at the Novato Youth Center. Most of our kids have never played soccer—or any sport—so they cherish the opportunity to learn.

"Soccer has improved my life because of the team. Teams let you cooperate with people and listen to their strategies," said one of our middle-school students. "Soccer is improving my health, because it helps my asthma. My asthma is improving because of the constant running you do in soccer."

Thank you for enabling our NovatoSpirit kids to feel hopeful and healthy, as welcome members of a team.