



# Dream Team puts focus on fun



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Members of the Dream Team raise their hands and cheer following a game at Hermiston's Field of Dreams on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.

## Athletes of all abilities meet for weekly softball game

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

On Tuesday nights at Hermiston's Field of Dreams, a very unusual softball game takes shape.

Both teams wear the same green T-shirts, emblazoned with the words "Dream Team." There are half a dozen shortstops, but zero outs. The game is only two innings long.

The weekly games are part of an annual tradition that takes place each spring when special needs athletes from age 6 and to young adult play together, helped along by members of local Little League teams. On Tuesday, May 4, the Devin Oil Marlins softball team and the Hermiston Generating Cardinals baseball team were taking their turn.

"My favorite part is at the end of each game, when they ask, 'When do we get to play again?'" Coach Tasha Bleyenbergh said.

She and Coach Kristi Smalley gather their 18 players each week at 6 p.m. They start out by pairing up Dream Team athletes with Little League athletes for a game of catch to warm up, then lead everyone in some stretches before the athletes divide into two teams

and the game begins.

"Are we gonna have some fun tonight?" Smalley asked everyone during the May 4 game, while everyone enthusiastically chimes back that fun is the focus.

David Shasteen, age 9, said he has been on the Dream Team for several years now. His favorite part is getting to swing the bat.

There are no strikes — players get to hit the ball as many times as they need, either from a ball pitched by a coach or a T-ball tee — and David said he usually hits the ball right away.

"But sometimes I miss the ball on the fourth time or the second time," he said.

The players' skill varies widely. During the first inning, one player wandered toward third base after hitting the ball before her Little League buddies got her going in the right direction toward first base, while the next hit a line drive past third base and jogged quickly straight to first.

All players run one base at a time, until the last batter brings everyone home.

Outfielders send the ball back to the pitcher instead of to a base, and

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

The Dream Team's Nathaniel Shasteen, accompanied by a pair of Cardinals players, runs toward second base at Hermiston's Field of Dreams on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.

# Foster parents open their homes to children in need

## May is National Foster Care Month

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

For Bianca Osuna, being a foster parent is a dream come true.

"I know it sounds kind of cheesy, but I didn't dream of being a firefighter when I was growing up, I dreamed of being a mom," she said.

When Osuna didn't end up having biological children, she turned to the foster care system three years ago as a way to still provide a home for children. Her first placement — a set of four siblings — lasted about a year. She has continued to care for other children since, and said she has enjoyed the "ever-learning" experience.

Many of the children who come into her home after a last-minute phone call from the Department of Human Services are coming from very difficult situations, such as homes with drugs and abuse. Osuna said she has had to learn a lot about parenting in a different way than the way she was raised.

"People think, 'How hard can it be? It's just babysitting,'" she



Michelle Davis/Contributed Photo

Michelle Davis and her husband, Al, have been doing foster care for about five years total.

said. "But it's not. It's retraining the brain from trauma."

Osuna has no regrets, however, about becoming what DHS now calls a "resource parent." Even her first experience, when she went from having no children to having four dropped off at a moment's notice, was a rewarding one. She said she would do again. She enjoyed taking the kids around to their sports and other activities and spending time with them at home.

"I was like a chicken with my head cut off and I loved it," she said.

There is plenty of support for resource parents, too, she said. Kids have case workers and court appointed special advocates and counselors, and parents have trainings and support groups. A new nonprofit called Sweet Potato's Closet, which opened last year, provides a large selection of clothing, hygiene items and more for

resource parents to stop by and pick things out for free.

If Osuna was asked to advise people who are thinking about doing foster care but are feeling intimidated, she said it would be that "the kids are worth it."

"The journey isn't a walk in the park by any means, but these kids deserve love and a safe place," she said.

### 'We need more kiddos'

Michelle Davis and her husband did foster care for the past two and a half years in Oregon, and for about three years before that while they were living in Kansas.

She and her husband have two biological children, but decided they had room in their home for more.

"We thought, you know what? We need more kiddos in the house," she said.

The Davises have spent on average about a year with each child or sibling set they've taken into their home. They also frequently provide respite care, which provides temporary child care for a child in the foster system while the person or family they are living with does something else, such as traveling out of town for a business trip.

Davis said if someone wants to dip their toe into the world of foster

care to see how they like it, doing respite care for a day or two at a time can be a good way to start.

There's always a risk that biological children and foster children in the same home might not get along well, similar to biological siblings, but Davis said her children have always been great about accepting everyone.

"My oldest just turned 9 yesterday and he has the biggest heart of gold," she said. "He just accepts anyone who comes in."

She said the other day when she asked her 4-year-old where babies come from, he answered that someone comes and drops them off, of course.

### No more empty nesters

Tonya Wilson and her husband are just coming up on one year of doing foster care. So far they have welcomed three teenagers, all related, into their home.

"We're empty nesters, and we suck at it," she said when asked why they decided to get certified as foster parents. "It's so quiet and empty."

Wilson said it can take up to a year to get approved to be a foster parent, but in this case she and her husband were first approved as

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