

Baseball Athletes Donate to Animal Foundation

Donation will help programs that educate children on benefits of cat, dog ownership.

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Four Major League Baseball players are making it possible for children in low-income families in Contra Costa County to take advantage of two humane education programs offered by Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation in Walnut Creek, Calif.

San Francisco Giants pitcher Barry Zito, New York Yankees pitcher C.C. Sabathia and outfielder Nick Swisher, also with the Yankees, along with San Diego Padres pitcher Jake Peavy donated an undisclosed amount to the ARF People Connect programs. The animal welfare charity was founded by Tony La Russa, the St. Louis Cardinals' manager and former Major League Baseball player.

The grant makes it possible for students to learn about the human-animal bond through educational activities, said Erika Hart, People Connect manager.

The funds will be split in half to provide scholarships for Camp ARF children, and for students to experience ARF's Learning Center, Hart said. Area schoolchildren will have access to free transportation and field trips to participate in the programs.

The Learning Center is the first interactive museum to be connected to a private animal adoption center. Through hands-on directed play, children learn how to care for animals and the importance of responsible pet guardianship.

Camp ARF promotes the value of the human-animal bond and welcomes children and teens for three hours a day for five days in the summer. The goal of ARF programs is to allow people to experience the benefits of dog and cat ownership.

"As a nonprofit organization, we don't always get opportunities so that we could offer free services for the kids," Hart said. "To have the baseball players go out of their way to get kids involved is very rewarding."