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Player Assist Program set to help hockey families in need of support

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The Ontario Minor Hockey Association has introduced a player-assist program for the first-time, helping families across Ontario financially impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

?Basically, mirroring the goalie program, is this player assist program. Now what we would do is provide player kits to the association,? Executive Director of the OMHA Ian Taylor says.

?Players can try the sport and sample the sport without having to put all that investment in all that equipment. The goal for us is eliminating another one of those barriers to entry.?

The goalie-assist program, introduced 10 years ago, supplements the cost of goalie equipment for parents by providing rental equipment for children between the ages of five and seven. As per the OMHA's statement, 480 sets of equipment have been rented out since the program's inception.

The same concept will be applied in this player-assist program. Players at or under the age of seven will be given equipment to borrow.

To qualify, minor hockey associations around the province must apply to the OMHA by March 28. If approved, that association can provide the equipment at their discretion.

Depending on the demand it is highly unlikely minor hockey associations will receive equipment in consecutive seasons.

?I don't think we've duplicated anybody yet in the goalie assist, but I guess it all depends on the demand and how many applications we get,? Taylor said.

?We want to spread the wealth. We want to give as much opportunity across the board.?

Taylor recognizes children don't just walk into playing hockey; there are plenty of external factors preventing families from signing up their children that are far beyond registration fees. He hopes this program will have an excellent impact moving forward for families across Ontario. It could be the gateway for children coming into the sport or simply, spending a year trying it out.

The OMHA noted over 350 families through 10 minor hockey associations will have costs eliminated.

Assisting the OMHA with this program is their loyal sponsor since 2018, the Egg Farmers of Ontario.

Historically, they have only been a sponsor during the playoffs, but with the post-season having been cancelled, they found another way to help out minor hockey.

?They could have easily stepped away. They just didn't want to do that. They said, how else can we make an impact in the community?? Taylor said.

?They stepped up, in fact. It will impact kids. It will impact directly and?this might be a more important way to be involved. It's just great.?

For more information, contact your local minor hockey association to find out if they have been approved and how to qualify for either of the assist programs offered.