

Eleven members of the 2015-16 Assumption College women's soccer team traveled to Haiti over the winter break to volunteer their time working with children in the impoverished country. This marks the second year in a row that members of the women's soccer team have been involved with the project, in conjunction with the Hands Together organization.

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WATCH VIDEO OF THE HOUNDS IN HAITI HERE!

The eleven Hounds to make the trip increased from four last year and include **Paige Radomski**
(Kingston, Mass. / Silver Lake Regional)
,
Meg Campbell
(Springfield, Mass. / Cathedral)
,
Katie Bealka
(Freetown, Mass. / Apponequet Regional)
,
Caroline Arnold
(Foxboro, Mass. / Bishop Feehan)
,
Nikki Callini
(West Springfield, Mass. / West Springfield)
,
Kelsey Pietruska

(Durham, Conn. / Mercy)
,
Tayla Morais
(Taunton, Mass. / Taunton)
,
Amanda Arnold
(Saco, Maine / Thornton Academy)
,
Carolyn Cook
(South Hamilton, Mass. / Hamilton-Wenham Regional)
,
Kallie Villemaire
(Plattsburgh, N.Y. / Beekmantown)
and
Rose Lipinski
(East Bridgewater, Mass. / East Bridgewater Jr-Sr)
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Hands Together is a nonprofit organization devoted to educating, inspiring and encouraging people to understand the importance of responding to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. The organization has several project locations, including Hands Together Catholic Schools.

During their four days in Haiti, the student-athletes spent time with the students of the local schools, brought gifts to Christmas parties and also played soccer with the local girls. They were immersed into the daily life of the local people and distributed gifts to 5,000 children among seven campuses of the Becky DeWine School in City Soleil. Members of the team also handed out bags of rice and beans to the elderly.

"We completed an artificial turf field at one of our school locations in the slum, accomplishing what many said was not possible because the area is so desperate, volatile and forgotten," said Doug Campbell, Executive Director of Hands Together. "Now that it's complete, it's being used by all of our students and has done more to instill hope than anything I've ever seen in my 30 years working in Haiti."

One of the most monumental projects the squad participated in while they were in Haiti included playing soccer against an all-star team made up of Becky DeWine School girls.

The Hounds competed on the new turf field, which was constructed primarily by locals with equipment provided by the United Nations, in front of the ambassador of Brazil, the Secretary General of the United Nations Carl Alexandre, the mayor of the city of Soleil and other influential guests. The field took nearly a year to complete.

"The men there built that field themselves and it was awesome to see how proud of it they were," Lipinski said. "It was an honor for them to let us play on it and inaugurate it. They were truly some of the nicest people I have met and they made us feel welcome. I'd go back in a heartbeat if I could."

In addition to sharing their love of soccer with the students in Haiti, the Hounds also spent time sharing stories with the local students.

"This was my second experience there, and although nothing could top the first trip I had, being there again was very special," Bealka said.

"It was really great to gather around a common bond that we share, playing a sport that we love," Radomski said. "We played against the girls' Haitian soccer team and we were also able to have them over for dinner for a night and we were able to connect with them and hear their stories."

"We had sing-off battles," Bealka said. "They were definitely better than us! Although they have so little coming from an area such as Cite Soleil, a very dangerous area, it was nice to see that everyone could relate to one another, and all of their spirits shone with happiness."

"We passed out Christmas gifts to the kids at the schools and just seeing how happy they were for the smallest things was really amazing," said Lipinski.

"I think this was the most impactful trip I have ever been on," Radomski said. "It put things in perspective for me, things I am very grateful for at home, opportunities that I have. The trip wasn't about us, we were there to visit a community and gather around our common bond - our love of soccer."

"Yes, plenty of hardships were witnessed, but being fully present with the people and seeing how they live despite their conditions is truly inspiring. This trip was not about soccer, that was only an aspect of the trip - it was more about building relationships with the people of Haiti, especially the high school girls, and getting the most out of that experience."

As this is the second year the Hounds have participated in the project, many student-athletes are already showing interest in next year's trip, and even an additional trip over the summer.