

Candace Cooper '03, Peace Passer

CHARLOTTE, N.C.
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Candace Cooper '03 understands how the simplest of acts, like kicking a soccer ball around with friends, can bring people the most extraordinary joy. Soccer has always been a part of Candace's life, first when she was growing up in Florida, when she accepted a soccer scholarship at Queens, where she played competitively for four years, and later when she traveled to countries in Central America and even to West Africa. It's not surprising that Candace would stay involved with the game and the life lessons it teaches, but the way she did it is unique.



Candace Cooper '03 (far right) and Peace Passers deliver used Queens soccer gear to children in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua.

In 2008, Candace co-founded Peace Passers, a grassroots non-profit based out of Charlotte, NC and St. Augustine, FL. With the teamwork of her brother Caleb Cooper, and fellow Peace Passers team members Scotty Herlihy, Sean Frye, and Ian Guthrie, they use a collaborative approach to collect new and used soccer gear to deliver to people in need all over the world. Peace Passers collects soccer balls, jerseys, shoes and socks, and has already distributed to underserved areas in 20 countries. In just the past year, Peace Passers has received equipment donations from 19 different states across the nation.

When asked about the creation of Peace Passers and its impact, Candace says, "I can truthfully say the work of Peace Passers is a passion. Creating the organization to be based on soccer with the notion of peace and joy inspires our purpose with a deeper meaning. Once you travel outside the United States you realize that the world you are born in is not the only reality. When you see kids kicking around trash bags tied together with twine, a ball of socks, a coke can, or even coconuts and avocados as make-shift soccer balls, it's hard not to respond. Same goes for shoes and jerseys, it's not uncommon to see players come out of a game and give their boots or jersey to their teammates so they can play. Seeing the smiles on kids' faces when they receive their very own jersey or a real ball that they can use for practice with their team is hard to describe in words. It's worth every minute of the efforts to get the gear to those who will appreciate it most."

Thanks to Candace's leadership, Queens has gotten into the act, with the Royals soccer teams donating items that Candace and her team have distributed to areas in Nicaragua, Belize, Haiti, Ethiopia, and Zambia. Candace explains that as Peace Passers continues to grow and evolve, "Collaboration is key, especially in connecting with other non-profits, mission teams, churches, and volunteers willing to participate in the mission of taking gear to under-privileged areas. Peace Passers wants people to recognize we all have the ability to connect with a shared purpose, and that we can generate hope for others who love the game, but might not have access to the equipment. Soccer is a game that creates a kind of universal joy. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that?"

To learn more about Peace Passers and how you can get involved, go to www.PeacePassers.org.