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## Women's Soccer

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## Brandeis Women's Soccer Gives Back - And Looks Forward

One of the core tenets of Brandeis women's soccer philosophy is the idea of recruiting not just good players to the program, but good people. In 2020, with COVID-19 taking away the opportunity to prove how good the Judges were as players, they instead focused their time working on how they could become even better people.

To do this, head coach Mary Shimko '14 worked with the organization Sow Good Now, run by Mary Fischer-Nassib, and Sheryl Seller '11 of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at Brandeis's Heller School for Social Policy and Management. One of the core missions of the Sillerman Center is promoting philanthropy among younger people. This was something that Fischer-Nassib has certainly found to be true in her experience as the founder of Sow Good Now.

"[The Sillerman Center] put together a brief that found that youth philanthropy is good for youth - it develops leadership, collaboration, planning, confidence - but also for communities, because of the way it brings parties together," Fischer-Nassib explained. "It unites parties that might be separated by just a few miles geographically, but culturally and socially, might be very different."

Fischer-Nassib went on to say that the effect is good for philanthropy as a whole. By demonstrating the importance of action in addition to just giving, it invests those taking part on a much deeper level. This sort of giving back also helps cut through the barriers that are often formed between donors, their managers and the non-profit organizations that are seeking help.

This past spring, Shimko and the Judges, with the aid of Sow Good Now and the Sillerman Center, established a donor advised fund (DAF) in order to raise money for Lawyers for Civil Rights and the Boys and Girls Club of Waltham. One advantage of the DAF is that it extends the good that the team is able to do beyond just one season, one event or one fundraiser. It will extend well beyond the 2020-21 season and be a part of the Judges' program for the foreseeable future. It can also extend beyond just the women's soccer team as well, as other teams will be welcome to contribute.

"The donor-advised fund is the tool that any team needs to build their program," Fischer-Nassib said. "It helps build a team's lasting legacy. I like to say that a donor-advised fund is the opposite of a fad. Ten years down the road, I would expect this team to be well-recognized as community leaders, as philanthropic athletes, as experts, as being able to inspire other teams to do the same thing."

The relationship between Sow Good Now and Brandeis women's soccer started well before the team ran their first event with the Boys and Girls Club. Former assistant coach Katherine Ponce, a Heller student, also worked for the Sillerman Center and introduced Shimko and the team to some of the ideas that Sow Good Now was espousing. Ponce bridged the athletic department and the Heller School so that Shimko could better cement the connection between her team and the community.

Fischer-Nassib and Shimko consulted with the team and the Sillerman Center to brainstorm organizations with whom they could partner. Ultimately, the Boys and Girls Club made the most sense for the Judges, especially with the restrictions put in place by COVID-19 over the previous 12 months.

The team began fundraising in earnest over the winter, using an Instagram Storyboard to collect pledges. They set an initial goal of raising \$5000 - which they ultimately exceeded by more than \$1000. At a clinic with the Boys and Girls Club on April 23, they met with the kids in the community to determine where the money from the DAF would go. After the Judges showed the Waltham kids a presentation on several causes that they were considering, the collective decided to make their to Lawyers for Civil Rights, in order to contribute to and address some of the national social events surrounding racial inequality over the previous year. Then Shimko and her team were able to excite the local kids even further by presenting them with the extra \$1000 that they had raised.

"In the fall, our team went through [diversity, equity, and inclusion] training," Shimko said. "We knew from those conversations that we wanted to increase our involvement in the community and use our platform as a soccer program to make a difference with regard to racial justice.

"My favorite part was seeing our players connect with those boys and girls from Waltham, seeing those relationships build. Coming together at the end of the event, both the members of the Boys and Girls Club and the players on our team, decided on the organization of the future of the collaboration between the two groups together."

The Judges were led by a quintet of team leaders in their efforts: Morgan Clark '23, Lexi Krobath '24, Sydney Lenhart '24, Charlotte Li '24, and Caroline Swan '22. They helped plan out the clinic, prepared the presentations on the organizations they wanted to help, and kept the rest of the team on track for their clinic at Waltham's McDevitt Middle School on April 23. Working with local kids ranging from eight to 14 years old, the Judges had a wide variety of skills and comfort levels attend the event.

"We shared our warm-up with the kids and tried to introduce ourselves," remembered Clark. "We did a couple of skill drills to get their feet wet if they hadn't played much soccer before, but some of the kids impressed us with how good they were. We played seven-on-seven, and it got a little bit competitive at the end!"

"The numbers maybe weren't as high as we might have had without COVID-19," said Lenhart. "But I think it helped everyone connect on an even deeper level. Seeing our players and the kids work together was really cool."

"The way our players connected with the kids from Waltham was one of the proudest moments of my coaching career," Shimko said.

With their first successful event under their belts, the Judges hope a long-term relationship is underway. The Boys and Girls Club members will be invited to games when the Judges return to the field next fall once fans are allowed back in the bleachers. The Judges will also plan a Day of Giving in the fall to help continue to grow the DAF. Another clinic is already in the works for the spring of 2022 to help strengthen the bonds between the team and the Boys and Girls Club as a new crop of first-year players join the team.



Brandeis Women's Soccer presents the Waltham Boys and Girls Club with a check for \$1000 (Photo by Erin McDermott '21)



"At the end of the day, the kids all said how much fun they had and how much they were looking forward to coming to our games," player Morgan Clark said. "One kid even told me that they were going to get some cleats right away after the clinic, so I feel like we really accomplished what we set out to do with the community with this event."

— by Adam Levin '94/MS '21, sports information director

## Brandeis Women's Soccer Gives Back - And Looks Forward (Photos by Eric McDermott '21)



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