



Marco with local children who will benefit from the new community football pitch

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Student volunteers return from Marseille charity project to graduate

A group of football fans from Northumbria University, Newcastle, who caught the attention of the French media when they volunteered in a community project in Marseille during Euro 2016, have returned to Newcastle for their graduation ceremonies.

The 12 students all play futsal for Northumbria University girls and boys teams and are the current league and cup double champions in the British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) League.

Their good deeds were praised by local media and community leaders in the city's 10th Arrondissement in the wake of the violence which tainted the England vs Russia match at the Stade Velodrome.

During the tournament, the friends spent two weeks volunteering their time and energy building a football pitch, changing rooms and picnic area on wasteland in an underprivileged area of the city as part of a football volunteering project.

Now back in Newcastle, the group aged between 20 and 23 years-old are swapping their shorts and trainers for graduation caps and gowns.

[Newcastle Business School](#) student, Marco Baldelli, from London, who graduated with a 2:1 BA (Hons) in Business Management this week, said: "Volunteering in a football mad city like Marseille presented the perfect opportunity for us to do something meaningful together before graduation and also get to see some of the Euro matches at the Velodrome Stadium.

"We're all crazy about football and were saddened by the behaviour which overshadowed the beginning of the tournament. We were also very conscious that there's a community that is as much a part of the Euros as the football itself.

"Once we arrived in Marseille we were keen to get stuck into the build and give something back. For the two weeks we were there the local community really took us to their hearts.

"It was a fantastic project to work on and an experience none of us will forget. We met some wonderful people and made new friendships, it felt good working together on something that will benefit the community and make a difference to the lives of others for many years to come."

The group spent the day England crashed out of the tournament after losing 2-1 to Iceland conducting football training in a nearby social centre. They also spent time with students at a school for children with special needs and gave football and English lessons to children at a school across the road from where the football pitch was built.

The girls from Northumbria University also played in a football tournament

on the outskirts of Marseille and won very convincingly.

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