For this project we worked with an organization called AECA, located in Atibaia, Brazil. After many delays due to the global pandemic we were able to complete the project in August 2021. Our initial plan was to install a 9 hole course on the property of AECA, but plans for a construction project led us to change course. This led us to a new partnership with a children’s camp called Acampamento Novo Caminhar, a camp that was looking to provide new outlets for the children they worked with. We were grateful for the opportunity to add 3 holes to the complex at AECA while installing an 8 hole course at the camp.

ABOUT AECA AND ACAMPAMENTO NOVO CAMINHAR

AECA is an organization located in Atibaia that serves youth from the region. The organization started as a location to teach youth tennis, and has evolved to a sports complex that includes tennis courts, a basketball court, and a soccer field. The organization is run by a small team of individuals who offer after-school programs and events for youth. AECA hosts programs for approximately 60 kids on a daily basis, and works with hundreds of kids on a monthly basis through events and other offerings. Always looking for opportunities to engage more youth, disc golf was an appealing option to add to the ever-growing complex.
In this project AECA was excited to bring in a partner organization from the region in Acampamento NOVO Caminhar. The camp has been around for over 20 years, and their primary function is offering camps and events for youth. Located in one of the valleys of Serra do Lopo, Acampamento Novo Caminhar enjoys untouched nature and a waterfall of breathtaking beauty. It is on the border between São Paulo and Minas Gerais, in the city of Extrema, approximately one hundred kilometers from the capital of São Paulo. The camp’s facilities include soccer, basketball, and volleyball. Like AECA they are always looking for new ways to engage young people!

ORGANIZING THE TRIP

Planning for the trip started all the way back in 2019 with sights being set on a 2022 trip and installation. AECA has an agreement with the government to use the land, and all approvals were secured for the project. Everything was put on hold until further notice due to the pandemic. When plans were revisited in 2021 we learned of a new construction project that would affect the plans we had for the course. While AECA was still interested, we had to call an audible and adjust the plans.

Campamento Novo Caminhar emerged as a natural partner after the staff of AECA put out a few feelers of who might be interested. The staff of both organizations were not familiar with disc golf prior to this project, but all were convinced that disc golf would be a great sport to introduce to the youth they worked with on a regular basis. The new plan was to put a few holes on the AECA property while focusing on the camp for a 9 hole course.

From there we recruited a team of 7 individuals who committed to make the trip to design and install both courses. The team was headed up by Jim Schultz, (PDGA #11741) who has a long history of course design both in the United States and abroad. Jim has also created and perfected his own version of the tire basket which we planned to use in Brazil due to the challenges of shipping and importing the items we would need.

BUILDING THE COURSES

With the added challenges that existed in 2021 we decided that getting materials in Brazil and building tire baskets was the best option. Jim Schultz has refined his tire basket plans over the years, and has had great success installing highly functional and durable baskets, especially overseas. We were also relying on Jim’s vast course design experience to design both courses.

Our team from the US worked closely with the staff from AECA and the camp on both the basket building process, and the design and installation. Our philosophy is always to start small and simple and let the course grow organically. The staff from both organizations should be well prepared to move things forward in the future as they experience success with the kids.
TEACHING DISC GOLF

The target audience of both courses is kids, and having a built-in captive audience for clinics is always a great thing. In addition to building the course through the week, the team led clinics for a large number of kids through the week. More importantly, the team led dedicated teaching times for the staff so that they would have a lasting ability to teach the sport to kids in the programs. There was a high level of enthusiasm and excitement from everyone which led up to the final day when everyone participated in the grand opening of the course!

One of our staff members, and the trip leader, Ben Campbell had this to say about the time working with the kids. “The grand opening of the course was an amazing day. The excitement of the kids to learn something new was evident, especially when the rain did not deter the kids from playing their brand new course!”
A LASTING IMPACT

David Taylor Jr, PDGA# 24603, has been playing disc golf for a long time, and has been part of many experiences, including the course design in Zambia! After the trip he had this to share with us, “One of the best parts of the courses being built in Brazil was seeing the joy of the locals playing for the first time. So many kids and adults enjoyed the course while we were there and they continue to enjoy the courses. Seeing locals playing the course on the camp’s IG account 6 months later was so encouraging. A seed has been planted. There was immediate talk by the locals of organizing events and getting more involved now that there are places to play.”

Both of these organizations host regular programs for youth, large events, and host groups at their facilities. They also have a dedicated staff committed to working with youth in the region, with sports being a primary focus of that time. Because of this we think the future is bright for disc golf in this region, and are excited to see what comes of it. One of the camp staff reported that during their summer, December through January, disc golf was a big part of their camp season with kids playing the course every day!

Currently the plan is to continue to provide discs and other equipment through continued trips to Brazil. We will continue to evaluate the opportunity to expand the courses, and run leagues and tournaments at each location. The staff in Brazil is already thinking of creative ways to use disc golf, and we can’t wait to see what comes of it. We are so thankful to the PDGA and the Marco Polo grant for the great investment they made in these courses!