

Brandon Means and other volunteers builds a skate ramp at Siempre Para Los Ninos Children's Home in Tijuana.



Volunteers and orphans on the skate ramp at Siempre Para Los Ninos Children's Home in Tijuana.

It took almost six months of planning, but Brandon Means and Melissa Clark were finally able to achieve one of their humanitarian dreams – building a mini skate ramp for orphans in Tijuana.

“Fundraising and getting the word out definitely takes its time, but it was crazy how fast everything was able to come together within that one day of us bringing the ramp down and seeing the smiles on the kids’ faces and how stoked they were once it was all built,” said Means, a resident of Ocean Beach and full-time freelance photographer. “They really had no idea it was coming.”

The project was funded through Olio Artistry, a collaborative artistic design brand created by Means and Clark that aims to make a charitable impact across borders. Fashioned with multi-media illustrations featuring photography by Means and graphic arts by Clark, Olio’s products include journals, iPhone covers, travel mugs, laptop sleeves and more.

“We were actually just doing laundry one day and started randomly printing out some of Brandon’s photos that he’d taken all over San Diego and throughout all of our travels,” said Clark. “So, I got some paint pens and just started doodling all over the pictures. That’s how Olio pretty much started.”

But the art business is frosting on the cake to what Means and Clark are most passionate about – charity work.

Since its launch in the summer of 2017, Olio’s art gallery fundraisers and farmers market proceeds have gone to support San Diego’s local charities, such as Ride for Water, a nonprofit organization that raises funds through cycling to deliver clean drinking water to countries like El Salvador. The couple also became connected with Unity 4 Orphans (U4O), which is based in San Diego but seeks to help neglected orphanages in Mexico and Latin America.

“We wanted to have our brand support local non-profits in the area and encourage

A graphic for the 'LA JOLLA VILLAGE NEWS READERS CHOICE AWARDS'. The text 'LA JOLLA VILLAGE NEWS' is at the top in a serif font. Below it, 'READERS CHOICE AWARDS' is written in large, bold, yellow letters on a background of four colored squares (yellow, red, blue, purple). Underneath that, 'VOTE HERE' is written in red, with a checkmark inside the 'O'. At the bottom, the text 'Cast your vote for a chance to win a dinner for two!' is written in a smaller black font. The entire graphic is enclosed in a red border.

people to get involved with local charities,” said Means. “This is our two favorite passions coming together in a way that inspires people.”

After participating in mission trips to Mexico’s cities through Ocean Beach’s Newbreak Church, Means and Clark decided to put together their own “hands-on project” in Mexico. U4O paired Olio with Siempre Para Los Ninos Children’s Home in Tijuana, the name meaning “Always For The Children.” With Clark and Means both having grown up in the West Coast surf and skate world, building a skate ramp for the kids at Siempre Para Los Ninos was a natural move.

“We just love the creative expression those kind of sports can bring,” said Means. “I also love to get the chance to influence children in a positive way and help give them that creative outlet. The goal is ultimately to find a way to bring joy to their lives every day.”

Olio started its fundraising for #BoardsAcrossBorders in June 2018. During that time local residents and Ocean Beach businesses like Wonderland Ocean Pub donated skateboards, helmets, pads and even bikes for the 40 children at Tijuana’s orphanage. Long Beach’s Keen Ramps also provided a ready-to-assemble discounted ramp for the cause. Then, on Dec. 8, Clark, Means and seven volunteers from Keen Ramps drove down to the Children’s Home to install the ramp.

“What was the greatest part of the day was the kids were all at a festival down the street, so they didn’t see the ramp until after it was all put together,” said Clark, whose mom and brother also drive down to Tijuana to help the group. “Right when we finished, they all showed up and it was like a little Christmas present for them.”

The team finished building the mini skate ramp in under three hours. Since most of the children at the orphanage had never skated before, this gave Clark, Means and the rest of the team most of the day to teach the kids how to use their new toys. To Clark, this was the most valuable part of the experience for everyone.

“A lot of our volunteers, they don’t speak any Spanish at all, so what’s great about bringing in sports and art to these orphanages is it doesn’t matter if we don’t speak each other’s language because we still have fun together,” said Clark. “It’s fun bringing people down to Mexico who are a little uncomfortable going down there, thinking they’re not going to have a connection with a child because of the language barrier, but they instantly do. Once you start enjoying activities together, it’s pretty awesome what happens.”

“Once those smiles are exchanged, it’s magic for sure,” added Means.

Clark and Means are in the process of planning another board drive in the hopes that every child at Siempre Para Los Ninos can have their own skateboard, scooter or bike. Helmet and skate deck donations are still rolling in from the community and Clark is also collecting art supplies so, on their next visit, she and Means can paint the ramp with the children.

“Just so they can see their artwork out there every day,” said Clark.

“Mel and I both think it’s so important to connect with others, and with San Diego and Tijuana being right next to each other... I don’t think a lot of people see how different life can be just a few miles south of us,” added Means, who also hopes to bring professional skateboarders down to the orphanage for a day of fun. “We definitely want to build on this idea and go back. That’s where our hearts are right

now.”

For those interested in donating to Olio’s #BoardsAcrossBorders, you can message Means and Clark on Instagram @olioartistry or email them at info@olioartistry.com.

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Susan O'Brien | January 07, 2019

Mel & Brandon are the real deal. Giving because it's fun and everyone gains in heart and spirit. So excited to see their generosity.

[Reply](#)

Melissa Clark | January 07, 2019

Aw, thank you so much Suzi!

Sandra Asbury | January 07, 2019

Susan O'Brien, I couldn't agree more. They have the most generous hearts of almost anyone that I know. I had the pleasure of working with them on this trip and on there very first trip to volunteer at an orphanage.

I had invited them to join me through Newbreak Church, to come down for the day. We all took the kids to Walmart which allowed them to shop for themselves or others. Most of the kids only wanted to buy for others while they had little of their own.

This planted the seed to consider helping others in some way.

Im so proud of this recognition that they so deserve. Every child deserves a chance regardless of the fence that divides our countries.

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