

Couple Brings Roller Skating to Guatamalan Children

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When David Smith and his wife, Vanessa went on their first missionary trip to Guatemala in 2017 with Manna Worldwide, they had no idea the kind of impact they would make on the residents of the orphanages and feeding centers they visited.

While the purpose of the mission trip was to spread their faith and help local residents meet their practical needs, David brought along skates to share his love of roller skating.

Back in 2017, the Smiths preached the message of how God has a gift for all of us; it's up to us to find out what that is and to share it with others. David took that message to another level by sharing his love of roller skating. In every location they visited, he skated for the residents and related it to the story about God's gifts.

During their last day of that trip the Smiths stayed at the Guatemala City Manna Orphanage. "When I skated before the kids at the orphanage they wanted to put my skates on. I had 20 orphans lined up ready to try my skates on, no matter how big or small their foot was. I pulled them around the basketball court." David was able to make a connection and impact on the kids that lasted until their return visit in 2018.

Motivated by the kids' reactions, he wanted to give each a pair of their own skates. Upon returning from the mission trip, David reached out to his skating community to request skates for the kids. The response was amazing. He's had at least 50 to 100 people respond asking how they could help. Skates were shipped to his house where he still has about 50 pairs that he was unable to carry this year.

Vanessa said they "were so moved" by their experience last year they returned to Guatemala this year, in early June for a week.

This year's trip was a bit more challenging. David's family happened to be in Guatemala a week after the Volcán de Fuego erupted on June 3, 2018. While the village the Smith's helped was not hit by the volcano, it destroyed all the roads getting to it. Instead they had to travel through the jungles of Guatemala, taking nearly four hours to deliver 1,500 pounds of supplies to one village that had yet to receive relief. The journey took them across three raging streams in a Guatemalan school bus for 90 minutes of service since they had to get out of the jungle before dark. "It was crazy; it was exciting; it was a little scary; but definitely



David Smith performs on roller skates in front of Guatemalan children.

something I would not take back."

They visited feeding centers and orphanages in different cities every day.

When the kids saw David's roller skates again, they instantly remembered him and said, "las pantines," which is roller skates in Spanish. "It was really cool that many of the kids remembered me specifically from last year because of the skates," he said. They were ready for a repeat performance.

David was ready for them. He and Vanessa brought 20 pairs of roller skates to the main orphanage in Guatemala. While visiting the Mayan village of El Arado, they also gifted a pair of skates to the pastor's son, who has autism.

The skates helped the missionaries "build a rapport and relationship with people" who speak a different language. The looks on the kids' faces and their responses to skating was amazing. But their reaction to the experience was priceless.

David brought the skates in three suitcases and as soon as they got to the basketball court and was able to connect

with the kids, it was "like a beautiful chaos." He started unzipping suitcases and holding skates



A Guatemalan boy tries a pair of roller skates.

up next to their feet saying, "Yup, that's close enough. Go with that one." Each of the people



David and Vanessa Smith brought roller skates to orphans in Guatemala.



A group of Guatemalan boys try out roller skate moves.

in the group partnered with a kid and pulled them around the basketball court.

When the youngsters were called for dinner, he looked around and observed their

appreciation for the skates: they were lined up against the wall from smallest to biggest. "It was a treasure. They appreciate everything. It was awesome to see their reactions."

Vanessa explained that Guatemalans are very segregated when it comes to the Mayan people. Mayans are ostracized and forced to live in the mountains; they aren't allowed to live in the cities. "Mayans are already ostracized but when you have a developmental disability, you're ostracized within your community."

As for the pastor's son, he immediately began to mirror everything David was doing and "it made everybody's heart melt." David started working one-on-one with him, showing him skate moves and dances. His mother, the pastor's wife, was in the corner sobbing with joy.

Not only did they show love to her son, they helped him become accepted in their community. That doesn't really happen to children with autism. "David's gift was more than just a pair of skates. It was something beautiful, as his uniqueness made him cool instead of isolated."

"There was never a plan or agenda to execute this type of project," says Vanessa. The skates became something unique they got to bring. It gave kids something to do. There's not a lot to do in Guatemala, especially for the older kids. Missionaries that come typically bring things for younger kids. The older kids really get a kick out of roller skates because they don't feel "baby-ish".

According to David, "Skating has always been a big outlet for me throughout my life. A lot of these kids come from rough pasts and that's why they ended up where they are. I figure if it's been an outlet for me, who knows who it could be an outlet for. To see the look on their faces when they were trying something new was pretty amazing."

David has been skating for about 21 years. He started speed skating at age 10 and got involved in jam skating, which he did competitively for nearly 15 years. Vanessa

inherited the love for roller skating through marriage. Their three girls have their own skates and try their own tricks.

Last year he had an idea during the mission trip: to use skating to spread the love of God as well as grow the global skate community. Currently, he's developing a new skate school program to introduce to rinks around the country in order to give kids a more official outlet to be involved locally with their rink and surrounding community.

Globally, David wants to continue to introduce skating to people that have never seen or experienced roller skating and see what happens. "We don't know what it's going to be like in 10 or 15 years. Roller skating could be a new thing in Guatemala if it continues."

They can't wait to go back to Guatemala next year to see the kids in action. To keep up with the Smith family's mission, check out their Facebook page, Rolling On a Mission and to learn about mission trips with Manna Worldwide, or visit Mannaworldwide.com.