

Case Study: Mountains Beyond Borders And Indoor Climbing Gyms

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Credit: Laurianne Ploix / Tout Va Bien

Mountains Without Borders international team during the "Speak Up" youth project in Ailefroide, France. Left to right, top to bottom: Daila Ojeda, Jazmin Hernández, Alma Esteban (MBB Director), Iker Hernández, Alejandro Fuentes (EF Director), Tiffany Hensley (MBB Founder), Fernanda Rodriguez (Mexican Pro Climber), Saúl Flomeno. Credit: Laurianne Ploix / Tout Va Bien

In November, I had the privilege of chatting with Tiffany "Tiff" Hensley, founder and CEO of [Mountains Beyond Borders](#), a 501(C)(3) in Boulder, Colo. dedicated to the empowerment of youth and their communities around the world. Join us for a brief dive into the non-profit's origins, its mission, and how to get involved!

Editor's Note: Tiff's answers have been edited and formatted for print.

What is the mission of Mountains Beyond Borders (MBB)?

Our mission is to empower underserved youth and their communities through rock climbing and international solidarity. We essentially connect international resources to local programs around the world - like gear, funds for mentor training, and leadership opportunities.

As climbers, we often travel to places and see broad issues like extreme poverty or crime for ourselves, but we don't know what we can do. What if their climbing gyms and communities could support these areas just by donating their used gear and lost and found items?

The United Nations once wrote that the largest resources in a developing nation come from international aid: it's true. And yet the US shockingly gives relatively very little international aid when compared to other developed countries! We need to change that.

Can you describe the genesis of MBB? How and why did it get started?

The genesis for MBB was after three amazing years of meaningful work with Escalando

Fronteras in Mexico, keeping kids from an extremely poor neighborhood out of drugs and crime...and then wanting to do more for more programs.

The truth is, underserved youth climbing programs are social work. The issues they battle are systemic, the cycles generational, and the health risks chronic, but many are little programs with a big heart, working in the mouth of the lion.



Founder Tiffany Hensley. Photo: Francois Lebeau

I have gained a profound appreciation for the people and programs leading grassroots efforts to change our world. Community leaders, like Joseph Wong of Vancouver's [Climb and Conquer](#), or Dr. Nadia Vazquez from [Escalando Fronteras](#), are doing something for their community every single day.

How does MBB operate?

In 2022, MBB began supporting Wilderness First Responder (WFR) mentor certifications, which is the most crucial training for building outdoor leaders in remote and low-resource areas.

We also started collaborating with NGOs to forge unique experiences for young future mentors and leaders, such as "Speak Up", our Mexico-France cultural exchange that brought kids together with pro-climbers and NGOs to bring awareness to the importance of multiculturalism and young voices.

This year, we raised \$10,000 for 'Speak Up' and coordinated our first MBB-specific event to create awareness around and build young voices to speak up for their community. We also dedicated 500+ hours of work to consulting, coordinating, and fundraising for programs in five countries. And we supported four WFR certifications in three countries.

Can you tell us some of the places where MBB has had an impact?

In the last few years, we have sent gear and helped pay for mentor certifications in places like Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico, Colorado, and even Fiji. This year, we coordinated our first direct program thanks to Alma Esteban, a cultural exchange between Mexico and France that gave three future mentors the chance to learn about leadership, equality, and international solidarity for three weeks from professional climbers and France's largest international solidarity organization, CCFD.

READ ALSO: [Keep Your Climbing Teams Injury Free](#)

How can the indoor climbing industry best support MBB's work?

Well, they can ask their indoor climbing gym to donate their lost and found! It's pretty easy!

A big concern with re-using climbing equipment stems from the challenges of certifying something once it has been used. Is there a procedure in place to protect climbing gyms from liability?

Yes, absolutely! Here are key points every gym director and manager should know to fight for their ability to donate their gym's gear:

- First and most significantly all, gear is not earmarked to its donor. When a climbing gym ships MBB a box of gear, it is immediately added to inventory until it is sorted for sale or shipping to youth programs.
- If sent to our partner, [Boulder Sports Recycler](#) operates with over 30 years of experience in sorting used gear safely. They recognize manufacturer standards of maintaining and retiring gear, conducting thorough checks and doing extensive research to stay up to date. If sent to a program, the gear is sorted by me, with the same used gear store experience and respect of the manufacturer's recommendations. Almost all gear is donated abroad.
- Programs receiving gear must sign waivers releasing MBB and our partners from liability.

Interested in Donating?

Support the growth of the indoor climbing industry as it grows around the globe by donating items today.



About the Author



Chris Oshinski is the assistant director for [Sportrock Climbing Centers](#) Sterling, VA location, passionate for teaching youth and addressing inequalities. Having obtained an MA in Public Sociology in 2018, Chris loves to explore the myriad forms of agency vis-a-vis individual and collective efforts at fostering social justice and human rights.



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