

Straight Up Abilities Hosts First Ever Glow Ride Fundraiser

Supporting Dancers with Special Needs

Jacob Navarro Oct. 31, 2024

LOS ANGELES - Surrounded by the livelihood of the Venice Beach Boardwalk, Straight Up Abilities helped light up the Venice Beach sky during their first-ever Glow Ride Fundraiser on Oct. 13. With participants equipped with glowing neon bikes, the event aimed to promote inclusion while raising funds to provide performing arts opportunities for students of all abilities.

Throughout the clear sunny skies of a Venice Beach afternoon, the electric sound of dance music emitted from a booth run by Straight Up Abilities. Those passing by were greeted by a scene of students grooving to the music's beats encouraging many to join in on the fun. At the heart of this energetic display was founder Robin Olive seated behind a selection of vibrant merchandise to which all sales contribute to their mission of inclusivity and acceptance. Since starting Straight Up Abilities in 2006, Olive has provided several opportunities for students to learn and express themselves in several creative ways through performing arts. As she watched her students in action Olive reflected on the impact of these events stating:



(Early Display of SUPA's Booth/DJ/Merch Table)

“I think my students are amazing, I mean you saw how energetic they are and carefree and I think that they deserve to be seen and have a platform and the more people see this genuine energy that flows off of them, that maybe it will inspire them to be the same, to be more authentic and genuine and receptive and empathetic and inclusive, you know.”

As the day went on, the energy continued to be full of life thanks to the man behind the booth DJ Hymn, a teacher at SUPA who kept the crowd going until the main event. Hymn, a long-time friend of Olive has worked with students teaching music and DJ classes, helping them develop new skills while expressing them on the dancefloor. As the music continued to fill the air, these skills were put on display as student and music artist John Tucker VII also known as MC Down hopped on the mic to bring an extra boost of energy to the crowd. It is Hymn's love for music and genuine desire to lift people up that resonates with many of his students and although he is regarded as a teacher by many, he has also gained a great deal of wisdom himself.

“It’s cool to just harmonize with people and you find out what makes them sick and sometimes, like, I feel like a student sometimes maybe a teacher to some—I teach kids, but a lot of times I feel like I’m learning at the same exact time as I’m teaching,” said Hymn.

As the sun began to set, the fun had only just begun as participants lit up their LED bikes filling the boardwalk with vibrant colors. Leading this crowd is the captain of the ship and founder of the non-profit Venice Electric Light Parade, Marcus Gladney. Since Gladney founded the non-profit, he has hosted his glow ride bicycle event every Sunday since 2015. As a long-time resident of Venice Beach and friend of Gladney, Olive contacted him after seeing a previous collaboration with his electric light parade in support of people with cystic fibrosis. With inspiration taken from other fundraising events within the special needs community and Gladney’s previous collaboration, the two agreed to organize a unique event to help shine a light on a community that many may not know about. The fundraiser was a fun event for all, but for Gladney, collaborating with SUPA held a special meaning.



(Gladney Preparing Alongside Other Riders)

“I have a son that has asperger's but he’s high-functioning asperger’s and so you know, anything that has to do with special needs people out and having a good time and exercising and helping them to not think about their disabilities, I’m all for it,” said Gladney.

As the group of 45 participants joined hundreds of other weekly riders along the four mile route across the Santa Monica pier and back, Straight Up Abilities’ first-ever glow ride fundraiser was a success, raising about \$2,000 dollars for students with special needs. With communities joining together, the glow ride embodied the spirit of Venice Beach as riders from all backgrounds and abilities came together to enjoy the scenic views of the beach while also providing the opportunity to support a worthy cause. Following the event's success, it is safe to say that this will become an annual tradition for Straight Up Abilities as they continue to promote inclusivity and help provide many students with creative and inclusive performance arts opportunities.