

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## At 'Peer-2-Pier' in Newport, participants promote a positive message

BY LAYLAN CONNELLY

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NEWPORT BEACH – When Jessica Olson first heard about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings in her hometown – and that 8-year-old Martin Richard had been killed – it was devastating: Her own children were so close in age to the young boy.

That’s why Olson brought her family down to the sand near the Balboa Pier to join hundreds of others Sunday morning supporting Peer-2-Pier, an event put on by Irvine-based Team Kids to honor Martin by sending a message of peace and kindness.

“I think it’s an important message for our kids to be kind and compassionate in a world where selfies and Facebook and ‘all about me’ is pretty much in their face all the time,” said Olson, a Corona del Mar resident and mother of Madison Graass, 6, and Jacob Olson, 7.

Madison wore a shirt with the word “love” splashed across it and wrote on a sign, “Be kind, no more hurting people.”

“I think it’s good for them to realize there’s bigger things out there than them, and they can have a big impact in the world,” father Jay Olson said.

The event, a day before the United Nations’ International Day of Peace, brought out about 600 people who lined the sand along the shore as the sun started to blaze. Many people held signs with messages of peace and inspiration. They linked hands, and while the intent was to reach from Balboa Pier to Newport Pier, the number of participants only allowed the chain to reach about a third of the way.

Team Kids board member Joe Burke of Yorba Linda said he was thankful for the people who showed up, and said it was a great turnout for the first-time event.

“We came down here not just for a symbolic sign of unity, but a real sign of unity,” said Burke, sweating from running up and down the line to pump up participants while screaming in a megaphone. “When you start anything, it always starts with an idea, a community and leadership. Today we are very proud, and we know it will continue to grow.”

A cross-country team from Mountain Ridge High School in Glendale, Ariz., was headed for a day at the beach when they stumbled upon the event. Team members decided to grab some signs and join the effort.

Nick Abraham, 17, thought it was important to take the time out of his day “so other generations can be the same way.”

Julie Hudash, who started Team Kids about 15 years ago, said the organization is about empowering youths. She said studies show that only 1 in 4 kids feel important and valued in their community.

“We need our kids to know they matter and they have an important role to play,” she said. “Come down to the beach and send a message not only of peace, but of action. I think that’s what’s most important to me. Learn about charities and get to work, roll up your sleeves and build some strong communities.”

She decided to support the Martin Richard Foundation because the boy’s family set up the charity with the intent of “changing the hearts of people through kindness of children,” a message that is in line with Team Kids.

Along with Newport Beach lifeguards and junior guards, police and fire agencies showed up to give support. Since Team Kids started, the organization has partnered with public safety agencies for collaboration, a needed part of building strong communities.

Irvine police Lt. John Condon said it’s important for police to show they are part of the community and build strong relationships.

“There’s times in these kids lives where maybe they have a bad experience with a police department,” he said. “It’s so important they see us as people they can trust, and we are there to help.”

More information on Team Kids, go to [teamkids.org](http://teamkids.org).

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