

# Summer Show 2021

SHOW NEWS

## Bridging Communities Worldwide

The Climbing Initiative supports sustainable and equitable growth for climbing in underrepresented groups.

By Chris Van Leuven

**“CLIMBING IS IN A STAGE OF** growth, especially with the Olympics this year,” Veronica Baker, founder and executive director of the Climbing Initiative (TCI), says. “We have an opportunity with emerging climbing communities to get them off on the right foot. That’s how we can shape a more equitable future for this sport.”

Baker’s inspiration to start her nonprofit came to her while earning her master’s degree in global affairs from Yale University. Her qualitative, interview-based research took her to the Middle East and Europe, where she studied the growth of climbing worldwide. “With the goals of sharing this research, providing a platform for voices not traditionally heard in the outdoor industry, and supporting projects that use climbing as a force for positive change,” as she wrote on *climbinginitiative.org*, she took her research a step further in 2019 when she founded The Climbing Initiative. “Through that research, I concluded that there was a need for more climbing communities to be connected and learn from each other,” she says.

Now in its third year, TCI researches impacts of the “big

three” types of issues affecting underrepresented groups—economic, social, and environmental—and engages climbing communities from France to Ecuador to Kenya, where it helps with building projects, fundraising, and gear distribution.

At this summer’s Outdoor Retailer Show, TCI volunteers are meeting with vendors and retail buyers to make new connections and source gear. They currently have equipment support from La Sportiva, Rab, and The North Face, and are in discussion with more. The nonprofit is also accepting donations via the QR code found at its booth (41035-UL).

Baker believes her most significant success since starting The Climbing Initiative is creating a web of affiliated organizations. For years, many groups have existed, she says, but each was reinventing the wheel. Her biggest hurdle is to match each team’s passion with the structure to make projects sustainable in countries including Lebanon, Kenya, and Malawi. To accomplish this, she shares best practices and documentation by 100 climbing authors as well as steps to apply these principles in economic and social scopes. Today,



Veronica Baker

working together with TCI, these climbing communities are stronger. “By sharing experiences and lessons learned from people who have gone through these processes, we are providing applicable steps and guidelines to use climbing as a catalyst for economic and social change,” says Baker.

Joining Baker at the Show is Nikki Simon, The Climbing Initiative’s senior editor and a climbing-industry veteran who studied international affairs at the University of Nevada, Reno. During her studies, she began to envision a space where she could blend her passions for sustainable development and climbing to create positive social impact. With TCI,

she’s developing an engagement strategy to connect companies, athletes, and other organizations in the industry to the international climbing community. “I’ve made some great connections at the Show so far with companies that have similar values,” she says. “Before the Show, we’ve achieved this through Zoom meetings. Now that we’re able to travel again, we can work directly with dozens of communities around the world.”

Baker and Simon’s highlights from the Summer Show include connecting with all climbers and friends of climbers. “We’re able to engage with them in this growing sport, and we’re really excited about that,” says Baker.