

→ This Non-Profit Is Encouraging the Next Generation of Problem-Solvers With Creativity and Play

A LITTLE CARDBOARD GOES A LONG WAY

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#IMAGINATION



"What was unexpected was the response to the film..."

—Nirvan Mullick

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—Nirvan Mullick



NAME: NIRVAN MULICK
JOB TITLE: FOUNDER, IMAGINATION.ORG



FOR

filmmaker Nirvan Mullick, the day began with an errand—to stop by a used auto parts shop in East LA for a door handle. For 9-year-old Caine Monroy, it started with getting his cardboard arcade open and ready for business in front of his family’s shop. It was a chance encounter that would turn into a viral video and the documentation of how a small act of kindness and a spark of creativity can transform into an incredible blaze, benefitting millions. This was the beginning of Imagination.org.

When Mullick met Monroy and saw the ingenuity and raw creativity of his cardboard arcade, he knew he had to share it with the world. Mullick spoke with Monroy’s father, the owner of the used auto parts shop, and began to interview and film for a 10-minute video called “Caine’s Arcade.” That Sunday, Mullick filmed the last portion of the video: a flashmob to come and play at the arcade, which resulted in a wave of overwhelming support across the internet as well as in LA itself. Shortly after the film was published, it went viral.

“What was unexpected was the response to the film,” Mullick says. “I got thousands of emails from parents and teachers showing me pictures of kids starting to make arcades out of cardboard after watching the movie...asking, ‘What can we do to foster their creativity?’”

Unlike some humanitarian efforts, Imagination.org wasn’t a lifelong vision; it was the result of pure kismet, and a few days after Mullick saw the public’s reaction to “Caine’s Arcade,” both in views and in outreach, he “decided to try to make a non-profit to support more kids like Caine and make creativity a core social value [and] really foster the creativity in every child.”

Fate continued to work in Mullick’s favor; the then-unnamed effort began receiving grants, and the organization blossomed. “We didn’t have any programs at the time, and

now we have multiple,” he explains. “Our first program was the Global Cardboard Challenge, which invited kids around the world to make anything they could imagine with cardboard, and then on the anniversary of the flashmob we did for Caine, [we started] Global Day of Play, [which prompted communities to have] flash mobs for their kids who were building things out of cardboard.”

There’s no doubt how impactful these programs have been. Since Imagination.org started Global Day of Play in 2012, they have had over one million kids participate.

The organization was also starting to get noticed. “We started getting invited to speak and share our story at conferences and various events for different companies,” notes Mullick. And it was at one of these conferences where Vans heard their story.

“[Vans was] thinking about their first International Checkerboard Day to really foster creative expression,” Mullick explains. The two companies found a connection through cardboard, and their partnership led to an incredible event, which premiered on Nov. 21, 2019, as well as a jaw-dropping donation of \$1 million. “That million dollar grant is going to really help us go to the next level with all of our programs,” he says.



STATS

- 175 Chapters Worldwide
- 1+ Million Kids Have Taken Part in the Global Cardboard Challenge
- 5+ Million Views of "Caine's Arcade" in the First Five Days of Going Live

Kidding Around

• "We have had... tens of thousands of kids take part in our Inventors Challenge," Mullick says. "And thousands more in our Chapters, STEAM Carnivals and Maker Spaces."

Lend Your Support

• Interested in supporting the cause? "Connect with us on social media, share our story ("Caine's Arcade" Part 1 and Part 2 on YouTube), share our free programs with parents and educators in your community and tax-deductible donations to help us bring these programs to underserved kids and communities worldwide."

"It means over 100 new chapters in countries around the world, including China, France and for kids in refugee camps," Mullick continues. "[And] we'll be expanding our upcycling materials through our Trash 4 Teaching Division and our STEAM Programs." But it doesn't stop there. Imagination.org plans to launch a program where the organization will team up with retailers to add a "ReImagine" symbol on their boxes "that will invite kids to reimagine the box before they recycle it."

Imagination.org has an endless stream of ideas on how to benefit the lives of children around the world that parallels the spirit of that creative little boy in "Caine's Arcade"—and it should! Monroy, now 17, is still a big part of the organization and wears the official title of Junior Board Member, serving as a reminder that a little ingenuity goes a long way.

"It's really about the combination of imagination and creativity," Mullick says. "Imagination is the ability to dream up something that maybe hasn't existed before, and creativity is the ability to actually create what you imagined."

Mullick keeps this sentiment close to Imagination.org's mission and future goals. "What we want is to raise this next generation and give them the creative confidence to build the world that they imagine," he explains, "but then also raise the next generation of problem solvers who can help us imagine the world that we can build together." ■



For Kids of All Ages

• Don't let adulting get in the way of living. "Always buy the Fun Pass," Mullick encourages. "Creativity and play are as important for us as adults as they are for kids!"

Event Photography By: Vivian Leung & Two Bit Circus Foundation