

# THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC SKATEPARKS

## WHY HIGH-QUALITY SKATEPARKS BECOME VALUABLE COMMUNITY ASSETS

Skateboarders and the skateparks they call home are often misunderstood. When compared with the traditional team sports like football and baseball, which have become engrained in our culture, skateboarding and action sports are still on the fringe of mainstream society. Negative stereotypes continue to portray skateboarders as social outlaws with little respect for authority. It is not surprising then, that skateparks are looked upon in a similar light and are often a low priority in a city's planning efforts.

When you move beyond these outdated stereotypes though, it becomes clear that skateparks provide a vital space for people to stay active and be a part of a unique community. In countless cities around the world, well-built skateparks have proven to be valuable community assets with **tremendous benefits**. Instead of viewing skateboarding as a negative problem that needs to be solved, these forward-thinking communities have found ways to embrace these sports while **showcasing their artistic and acrobatic spirit**.



## GUIDANCE FROM EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS ENSURES SUCCESS

With the help of an experienced skatepark construction and design firm, such as Spohn Ranch, communities can feel confident knowing their skatepark will adequately serve their action sports athletes for years to come. When functional and **well-balanced designs** are combined with high-quality construction methods, skaters will stay in the park – instead of continuing to fight through traffic and damage property around town.

Since partnering with ESPN in the early '90s to develop the X-Games competitions, Spohn Ranch has continued to lead the way in municipal skateparks. With hundreds of successful projects under our belt, we have **the experience it takes** to help your community design responsible skatepark solutions.

# 5 BENEFITS OF A SUCCESSFUL SKATPARK

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## 1. COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACES HELP BUILD SOCIAL SKILLS

As our world becomes increasingly overwhelmed by television, video games and internet browsing – kids are spending a lot less time on face-to-face interaction with their peers. How are kids expected to grow and develop the skills they will need in the real world if they spend all day sitting in front of a screen? **Engaging outdoor environments** such as a skatepark are great places for kids to interact with one another and build vital social and interpersonal skills.

When a skatepark is built, a community develops around it. For kids who are struggling to identify with team sports, this community gives them a valuable sense of belonging. When they show up to the park, race, gender and age are all thrown out the window – all that matters is that they have a good attitude and a passion for skating.



In comparison to snowboarding, where lift tickets, transportation and specialized gear can cost a thousand dollars or more – skateboarding is a very **cost-effective activity** that anyone can enjoy. In this skatepark, many lifelong friendships will bloom – often between very different types of people.

In a recent study by the Journal of Adolescent Research, Dr. Graham L. Bradley explains that “skate parks are positive places, which **encourage civic responsibility and social skills**.”

We also watched and observed kids acquiring social skills, learning to cooperate, to take turns, to take some responsibility for their sporting arena. They have pride in it and they look after it.

We think young boys at the skatepark are learning the beginnings of some civic participation, some responsibility, and some **involvement in their community.**”

***Source:** Journal of Adolescent Research – “Skate Parks as a Context for Adolescent Development”  
Graham L. Bradley, March 2010; vol. 25, 2: pp. 288-323.*

## 2. SKATEBOARDING HAS POSITIVE EFFECTS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Skateboarding is a unique activity because it combines extreme physical exertion with precise muscle coordination and balance. The complexity of performing tricks on a skateboard improves brain function at a fundamental level and stimulates new cell growth in the brain.

In 2006, an elementary school in Boulder, Colorado began incorporating skateboarding into the physical education curriculum – calling the program “Skate Pass”. The program’s director, Eric Klassen, wanted to “bring in activities that are alternative, non-competitive and individual. Most kids in schools feel intimidated when it comes to competition.”



Klassen says the biggest benefit might be something kids don't realize they're learning. While skateboarding helps with eye-foot coordination and balance, he says it also improves performance in the classroom.

"When they're involved in an activity that involves balance -- both hemispheres of the brain are equally stimulated," Klassen says. He points out that researchers have shown that the body also produces a hormone that makes students **more receptive to learning for the rest of the school day**.

***Source:** 9News - "Local school becomes first in nation to teach skateboarding" 3/6/2006*

In his new book, *Spark: The Revolutionary Science of Exercise and the Brain*, John J. Ratey, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, also makes a very convincing case that **kids who regularly exercise perform better in school and are able to learn more effectively** than their peers who do not consistently exercise.

"Less traditional sports, such as rock climbing, mountain biking, whitewater paddling, and – sorry to tell you, Mom – skateboarding, are also effective in the sense that they require complex movements in the midst of heavy exertion. The combination of challenging the brain and the body has a **greater positive impact than aerobic exercise alone**."

In addition to skateboarding’s positive effects on learning and comprehension, it also build self-confidence and helps people combat stress and depression.

"Skaters at The Pipeline ride back and forth and up and down for hours and hours, practicing tricks over and over. In the process, they develop self-discipline, stamina and self-confidence.

"It definitely teaches you self-discipline," said Rob Abbott, 30, skateboarder and salesman at Sequence Skate Shop. "There's that mentality when you go out there, and you want to accomplish something. You practice it over and over for days and weeks at a time. And once you do it, **you feel good about yourself and what you've accomplished.**"

*Source: The Juneau Empire – "Riding the Concrete Wave" Teri Tibbett, September 13, 2007*

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An interesting case study on skateparks as positive environments comes from Evan Knappenberger, who is a skater-stepfather and OIF '05-'07 veteran with PTSD and depression. He is a student at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, WA.

"How do these veterans cope? What hope is there in treatment, be it medical or spiritual, for ex-soldiers with mental illness? What exactly is it about emotional trauma that demands such a thorough and time-consuming healing? How is that healing facilitated in post-modern suburban America? One surprisingly effective answer for many veterans has been the local skateboard park.



Go to any skatepark in America and an astonishing number of young veterans from every political and economic background will tell you about the **curative properties of skateboarding**. Many claim there is a meditative quality to the sport that promotes relaxation and emotional balance. Some claim skateboarding as a miracle cure for their various ailments. Before looking into the physical and mental benefits of skateboarding, it is necessary to take a moment to realize the more important community benefits of the skatepark itself.

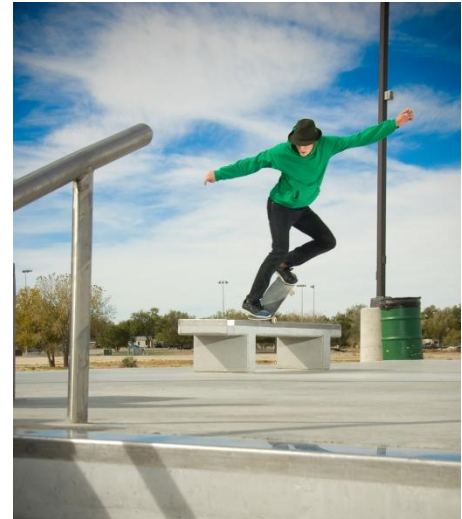
By providing veterans with specialized topics for discussion that are unrelated to warfare, such as skating equipment, tricks, and famous skaters, skateparks offer veterans a means of conversational engagement and a milieu of interpersonal connections. Skate culture transcends political differences and focuses on sportsmanship and camaraderie. This can be reassuring to veterans who are wary of politically charged causes or groups.

Many soldiers with depression, PTSD, or combat injuries struggle to maintain a healthy weight. For some it can be difficult to find the motivation to exercise as a civilian because it is usually a lonely activity whereas in the army it was social. **Skateboarding is an excellent way to get exercise in a social environment without having to pay hundreds of dollars for a gym membership.**



By acquiring new skating abilities a veteran can take pride in peaceable accomplishments while improving his or her self-esteem. Veterans learn how to overcome fear by facing a steep drop on a concrete ledge at a high speed; they learn how to overcome the past by focusing on the task at hand, which is keeping upright.

Notably, it is important that a skater not be drunk while attempting maneuvers. Veterans have a very high rate of substance abuse and alcoholism and are discouraged from using and drinking while they are skating, if only to save themselves from injury. I have yet to see a drunk vet at the local skatepark, though there are plenty at the VFW lodge down the street. The emotional rewards in skateboarding are performance-based, so alcohol becomes an obstacle between the skater and his or her reward.



These benefits, taken together, constitute a picture of skating as a healthy, healing activity for veterans returning from war. Whether by promoting physical exercise, community or relaxation, **skateparks and skateboarding are a positive and low-impact way of providing therapeutic treatment to the emotionally-damaged.** As a peaceful, constructive and creative activity, skateboarding at a well-designed and well-maintained public skatepark can be one of the most valuable and fun things to do for the entire family.

By building public skateparks, a city or town is ensuring the health and well-being of their children, veterans, and disaffected teenagers, both physically and mentally.”

Spohn Ranch has a long history of working with the military to design and build skateparks for military bases. On a recent project at the Fort Irwin Military Base, the Fort’s Marketing Chief echoed Evan’s thoughts with these inspiring words.

“There are not enough words to adequately say thank you to each and every one of you for your support of our Fort Irwin Community. People on post can only say wonderful things about the design, the project and the incredible skaters who showed up for the event.



Each of you made a huge difference in the lives of our soldiers and their families yesterday. The skatepark is having a huge impact on our children and soldiers who need a place for recreation. On behalf of our soldiers, families and civilians – thank you for your generosity, talents, and heart!”

### 3. SKATEBOARDING PROMOTES HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

Arguably the most important reason for participating in action sports is the fact that it keeps you healthy and physically fit. Finding an activity that gets kids off the couch and keeps them in shape is vital for the youth of this nation, especially in this time of a national health crisis.



- The US Surgeon General has officially declared that obesity is an epidemic. Obesity is the most pressing health problem America is facing, costing the health care system an estimated \$90 billion per year.
- Three of every five Americans are overweight; one of every five is obese.
- A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* predicts that a child born in 2000 has a one-in-three chance of developing diabetes.
- Some 30% percent of U.S. schoolchildren are overweight – six times more than in 1980- and another 30% are on the cusp.
- Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults. This increases to 80 percent if one or both parents are overweight or obese.
- Only 6% of U.S. high schools offer a daily physical education class.
- Kids are spending an average of 5.5 hours a day in front of some sort of a screen – television, computer, or handheld device.

Forcing kids to participate in some form of exercise isn't enough to remedy all of these problems though. It has been proven that if you give a kid limited options for exercising, it feels like punishment or boot camp, and they will not continue doing it. Experiments with lab rats also suggest that forced exercise doesn't have nearly the same effect as voluntary exercise.

Providing our youth with a wide range of physical activities to choose from is essential because it allows them to find a form of exercise they can excel at and continue doing. For a growing number of American youth, action sports have become *the* form of exercise that helps them maintain a healthy lifestyle. If we fail to provide these kids with adequate facilities for their activities though, they will most likely fall back onto the couch, or even worse.

A recent study by Johns Hopkins University researchers said regularly skating, rollerblading and biking increase children's chances of fighting the flab as they grow. The odds were better than for those who played baseball and other organized, and often seasonal, sports.

## 4. SKATEPARKS REDUCE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Unfortunately, skateparks are often perceived as negative environments that attract delinquents and illicit behavior. Misinformed community members conjure up images of graffiti, smoking, fighting and inappropriate language when they talk about skateparks. More often than not though, these problems are the result of a few bad seeds – not the majority of skatepark users who are there to exercise and progress their skills. These problems are also the symptoms of adolescent behavior in general and are unfairly associated with skateparks as the main cause.



A lack of adequate skateparks is one of the easiest ways to turn kids onto criminals. With nothing to do and nowhere to go, kids will usually find less positive ways to occupy their time. A town in England released some profound findings after opening their skatepark in 2006.

"DRIFFIELD Skate Park is helping to reduce youth crime, it has been revealed. PC Steve Wilson, of the Driffield Neighbourhood Policing Team, said: "From my experience, I am aware that the skate park is regularly used by numerous young people from Driffield and the surrounding areas, **offering a valuable diversion from anti- social behavior.**"

The officer said in a letter to Skate Park organizers, which was read at a meeting of the Driffield Town Council policy and finance committee: "Since the skate park opened there has been a **noticeable drop in calls to youths causing annoyance and related matters.** I would fully support this facility being made into an all weather, all year round resource."

In September of 2008, Spohn Ranch teamed up with world-renowned professional skateboarder Paul "P-Rod" Rodriguez to create a truly amazing concrete skatepark for the youth of Wilmington, CA a community ranked as one of the most dangerous communities in the US. Knowing the skatepark could serve as a valuable recreational space for the easily-distracted youth of Wilmington, Spohn Ranch presented the City of Los Angeles with a \$100,000 grant to ensure the project would come to fruition. Since its opening, the park has averaged 250-300 skaters a day, has become a drop-off location for seven neighborhood schools, and has helped reduce violent crime in the area by 90%.





## 5. SKATEPARKS ATTRACT TOURISM

A professionally-designed and well-maintained skatepark can bring new life into your community. When you take the time and effort to create a unique facility, the economic rewards can be felt almost immediately. Word travels fast in the skateboarding world and with a new showpiece to offer, skateboarders and their families will flock to your community and spend their vacation dollars.



“To emphasize how much impact our skatepark has had since its opening, I would like to note that one of the most frequent questions at our Colorado Welcome Center is now, “How do you get to the skatepark?” The volunteers at the welcome center have requested that signs be placed throughout town to guide out-of-towners to the park.

There have been, as I am told, numerous skaters from across America that have come here specifically for the purpose of trying out our new facility. I’ve heard reports from local enthusiasts that fellow riders from as far away as Maine, Vermont, Florida, Washington, Oregon, Texas, California, and Indiana have been here to skate. For a city with a population of 10,000 we are impressed with the results. Tony Hawk even stopped for a ride with his group a couple of weeks ago. Word travels fast when a world class skatepark is constructed.”

*Mayor Joseph A. Reorda – Trinidad, Colorado*

“The immediate response to our park was overwhelming. Both the youth of our town, and visitors alike bombarded our new park each and every day. This was a **huge economic boost for our town**, and continues to be as this contest has put Carbondale and our skate park on the map. Never underestimate the draw that a skatepark will have on your town.

Our town has been very pleased with the economic impact that the new skatepark has brought to Carbondale. With many visitors staying here over the Summer months just to skate our park, with large contests being held here and the free advertisements that skaters pass on to each other about Carbondale, **our skatepark has been exceptional for town business.**”

*Carbondale Recreation & Skatepark Coordinator Chris Woods- Carbondale, Colorado*



# 8 COMMON SKATEPARK MYTHS

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## 1. Skateparks are dangerous

A professionally-designed skatepark with precise geometry and thoughtful traffic patterns is the best way to keep your skaters safe. When you build a skatepark in your community, skaters are no longer forced to ride on the streets where they share space with pedestrians and cars. Although skateboarding is often perceived as dangerous, national studies show that it is safe when compared with other sports.

“The best research which quantifies risk of skateboarding comes from the Journal of Trauma, Oct. 2002, and is written by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. They determined the number of skateboarding injuries per active skateboarder and compared those numbers to in-line skating and basketball. Skateboarding had an injury rate of 8.9 per 1,000 participants. In-line skating was 3.9/1,000 and basketball produced 21.2 ER-treated injuries per 1,000 players. **Statistically, skateboarding is safer than playing basketball.**”

Skateboarding on public streets or adjacent to traffic is more dangerous and can produce serious injuries due to collision with motor vehicles. The potential benefit from the skateboard park is that it will shift riders from the sidewalks and streets to the park, and there will be **fewer falls due to surface irregularity.**”

*Dr. Michael Yorgason is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon with additional fellowship training in foot and ankle surgery. He practices at Montana Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, PC.*

## 2. Skateboarders are delinquents

Although the average skater is an adolescent male, skaters come in all shapes and sizes. It is not uncommon to see 50-year-old moms and dads riding with their sons and daughters at the skatepark. Skaters are often perceived as delinquents, but this is usually because their lack of a designated facility turns them into a nuisance and liability. As these negative stereotypes gradually fade away, it becomes clear that the majority of skaters are athletes with a passion for their sport.



### **3. Skateboarders are a small minority**

Skateboarding is one of the nation's fastest growing sports and now rivals football and basketball as the most popular activities among youth. National studies estimate the number of skateboarders in the U.S. at around 13 million, with a 10% increase over the last three years. These studies also estimate that about 16.5% of US youth population (5-24 year-olds) are active skaters. When you account for the BMX bike riders, roller bladders and scooter riders – it becomes clear that most communities will have a significant action sports population. Skateboarding is not a fad and it is here to stay!

### **4. Skateparks attract illicit behavior**

Any public park can attract unsavory elements, but skateparks often deter disruptive behavior and vagrancy because skaters populate the park. Parks that are remote, secluded or seldom used by the community are the ones that get abused. Without a positive environment like a skatepark in the vicinity, skaters are forced into the streets.

"Activities you might not expect -- like skateboarding -- might be just what teens and adolescents need. Research out of the University of North Carolina found that skateboarding is among the activities that might help keep children out of trouble. "I think skateboarding kids are a focused group of kids," said Diana Harris, a parent.

Compared to their couch potato peers, active adolescents -- including skateboarders -- were less likely to engage in risky behavior like smoking and drinking. "I think that is a group we see as being a little more on the risky side, but instead of being on the risky side, they were actually protected from those behaviors," said Dr. Penny Gordon-Larsen, a researcher."



*Source: NBC Philadelphia - "Keeping Active Best Way To Keep Kids Out Of Trouble" April 3, 2006*

### **5. Skateparks are noisy**

A professionally-designed concrete skatepark is not louder than any other type of recreational facility. All recreational facilities generate some noise and skateparks are no different. Steel ramps though, are a different story and should generally be avoided if noise is a potential concern. A 2001 study by Portland, Oregon's Noise Control Officer compared the noise from a skatepark to a basic conversation between two people. Noise from a skatepark blends into the background at around 50 feet. This figure can also be reduced by designing the park with sound barriers in mind.

## 6. Skateparks are messy

Like any athletic activity, skateboarding will generate refuse. In skateparks that benefit from strong community support such as Burnside (Portland, OR) most litter removal is done by the skaters themselves. Professional skateparks allow the skating community to take pride in their facility. Equipping the skatepark with basic site amenities such as trash cans and a drinking fountain will also encourage environmental stewardship.

“We didn’t see very much misbehavior, certainly when compared with what you would expect as per the stereotypes or what is to be reasonably expected in any social setting where youth congregate.

We didn’t see any physical or verbal bullying or intimidation. We saw no graffiti. We saw hundreds of kids, but fewer than 3% of them were smoking cigarettes. 2% littered at any time we were watching.”

*Source: Journal of Adolescent Research – “Skate Parks as a Context for Adolescent Development”  
Graham L. Bradley, March 2010; vol. 25, 2: pp. 288-323.*

## 7. Skateparks are expensive

A world-class concrete skatepark averages \$40/square foot. Even at full capacity all day, all year, a properly built park won’t show signs of overuse. Compared to the relatively limited use of a tennis court or baseball field, it’s an efficient and popular use of public funding. When the park is built by professional such as Spohn Ranch, long-term maintenance expense is minimal. Spending money on a skatepark is a worthwhile investment for the health and safety of your community’s youth.

## 8. Skateparks are intimidating and uninviting

The modern skatepark has made significant changes to improve the aesthetic quality of the environment. Spohn Ranch has been a pioneer in steering skateparks away from fenced-in ramp parks and upgrading them to unique environments with integrated landscaping and plaza-style features. Spohn Ranch is also leading the field in creating mixed-use public spaces that are designed for skating, but also appeal to the average community member by incorporating unique spectator seating and engaging sculptural pieces.

