



A Health Impact Assessment of a

SKATEPARK

IN CITY HEIGHTS, SAN DIEGO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new public skateboard park in the City Heights area of San Diego would provide thousands of youth with more opportunity for exercise, social connection, and development, all of which lead to better health and well-being. The skatepark would also mean safer streets, less crime and fewer injuries for skateboarders who use it, according to a Health Impact Assessment that drew on research of skateparks in other cities, surveys of City Heights youth, interviews with key community members, and a focus group with skateboarders.

The Health Impact Assessment was conducted by Human Impact Partners for the Mid-City Community Advocacy Network (CAN), a nonprofit group serving lower-income, predominantly Latino, neighborhoods in northeast San Diego. The Youth Council of Mid-City CAN is advocating for a skatepark, which could be built with state grant funds, on a vacant lot adjacent to Park De La Cruz and near Cherokee Point Elementary School.

City Heights already has an estimated 1,800 skateboarders, but because the closest public skatepark is more than four miles away, most skate on the streets, sidewalks or other public properties. A new skatepark in the proposed location could not only attract up to 1,400 new skateboarders – increasing physical activity for about one in 10 City Heights youth – but could increase their safety, both by reducing injuries and eliminating the need to travel across town if they want to use a skatepark.

BENEFITS OF SKATEBOARDING

Skateboarding offers many benefits for young people, including:

- **Exercise.** Skateboarding can increase fitness, strength, balance, and coordination and these are associated with lower rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, mental health, stress and more.
- **Transportation.** Skateboarding is an inexpensive way for youth to escape geographic isolation.
- **Low entry cost.** Many beginning skateboarders rely on hand-me-down equipment.

- **Do-it-yourself ethic.** Skateboarding does not require coaches, teams, or specialized training.
- **Community.** Skateboarding is an individual activity, but skateboarders often skate together and learn from, support, and challenge each other.
- **Options for youth.** Skateboarding provides an alternative for young people who are not inclined towards organized or more established sports.

Studies show that skateboarding, and skateparks specifically, can contribute to youth development by increasing self-esteem and motivation, building skills, creating social connections and support, and providing opportunities for leadership. It can facilitate a sense of social belonging, and bring people from different ethnic or economic backgrounds together. All of these factors are linked to better mental and physical health and better outcomes in life.

Researchers have noted that skateparks may be a particularly effective means of engaging youth who might otherwise be socially isolated. One participant in the focus group said of his skating companions: “We’re like a family. Within the group, we have each other’s back, no matter what.”

FALSE STEREOTYPES

The Health Impact Assessment shows that two stereotypes often attached to skateboarding – that it is dangerous and that skaters are delinquents – are outdated and erroneous.

- Compared to skateboarding in the street or on public property, skateparks are designed for greater safety and getting skateboarders off the street also greatly reduces the potential for collisions with automobiles, the most dangerous type of skateboard accidents. Statistically, skateboarding is more than twice as safe as football, safer than basketball and on par with soccer.
- Skateboarders are no more likely to engage in vandalism, graffiti, drugs or drinking than other youth. The most common interaction skateboarders have with law enforcement is being stopped or ticketed for skating on streets or public property, which decreases when skaters use skateparks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

But City Heights youth said they have no alternative place to skate, and they feel that police unfairly target them because of negative stereotypes. “I feel frustrated because it is not like they are stopping us because we are doing something bad – they are stopping us because of who we are,” said one skateboarder in the focus group.

Illegal activity in and around Park De La Cruz would likely decrease if the skatepark were built, since more people and activity would discourage crime. Well-designed and operated skateparks have been shown to have positive effects on urban neighborhoods where they are located.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on input from experts in skatepark development, recreational planning, public health and community organizing, the Health Impact Assessment makes recommendations to promote the positive impacts of building a skatepark at Park De La Cruz. Sample recommendations include:

- Convene a meeting between police and skateboarders to collaboratively create and agree on skatepark policies.
- Engage youth who will use the skatepark and members of the City Heights community in the design, development and operation of the facility.
- Promote skateboarding through local schools with clubs and events and by providing skate lockers at schools.
- To prevent exclusion, create skatepark programs for girls and other groups who may feel marginalized by the male-dominated skateboard culture.