

Do you believe that our youth will become our future leaders? If so, we need to look at how we build their skills, confidence and encourage them to explore the healthy activities offered in the community. We can encourage youth to build healthy bodies and minds that lead to good decisions and choices. One youth/young adult project that has been underway for some time now is the skate park project. This project has been led by a community of volunteers who have put considerable time and thought into the project. They have started the fundraising process with no desire to turn back. Jerome Conaty, one of the players involved, has been creating conversations involving youth, young adults, community service groups, Kelsey Recreation and the Town of The Pas. All of these conversations have moved the project forward with the group securing over one third of the total project cost to this point. This has been achieved through fundraising and various provincial grants. As well, the Moffat Foundation has provided a notable grant for the skatepark project. Fundraising is where most of the time is spent to secure community financial commitment or corporate gifts in kind.

There is no better time than now to move forward with the project. The land is now allocated by the Town of The Pas. The new skate park site will be located east of the Wellness Center and south of the outdoor arena. This space is well lit and will become the hub of the community in both the winter and summer months. The skate park organizers believe that the youth need a modern outdoor skate park structure now more than ever because of the pandemic lockdown and its adverse health effects. COVID-19 is here but we can still go outdoors to participate in individual activities that keep us mentally stable and physically fit. The freedom to move about outdoors is more important than ever, allowing youth to get their daily dose of physical exercise, playfulness and skill development that comes with sport.

Skateboarding is a popular sport that involves riding on a wheeled board. With experience it can be a great way to perform tricks becoming its own form of art and expression. It allows the people passing by to be entertained, drawing them into the sport through the pure visual appealing flow of energy between the rider and the board. There are many styles of skateboarders, some moving to the streets and using rails, ledges, stairs, and obstacles to skate on. The sport has generated popularity during the pandemic as it one way to explore the vertical space around us, all while staying safe and distanced. It is an individual sport.

Skateboarding emerged in 1970 with a variety of slopes and banked surfaces developed for sudden turns and stunts. Half pipes and u-shapes became a part of the riding surfaces that allow for aerial stunts. The Pas created the first skateboard park at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2000). At that time, skate park design was changing from asphalt foundations towards concrete structures. It was during this transition period that the current skatepark became affordable. Kelsey Recreation found money in their budget to create the current skatepark at what was considered a deal, somewhere around \$20,000.00. The skate park has been a place for many youngsters for the past 20 years. At that time, existing tennis courts not being used became the base foundation for the current skate park. This base cracks easily during the harsh climate changes of our northern community. Concrete skate parks are the standard, allowing the surface to withstand years of skating, and providing many hours of fun and skill development for multiple generations. The concrete skate park is durable, practical for our climate and long lasting (upwards to 100 years).

The cost of the project escalates each year that it is not built. The current design is estimated to cost \$450,000.00. Comparatively, this price is quite reasonable when you consider that a new home costs

\$250,000.00 to construct. The new concept will allow multiple sports to use the skate park including skateboarders, BMX bikers, in-line skaters and scooters. It will be suitable for multiple youth groups with varied interests.

The demand is here! Many events targeting skateboarders and BMX bikers have been hosted in The Pas and neighboring towns of Flin Flon, Thompson, Cross Lake, Swan River and Brandon. The sport tends to cycle with 20 youth up to 100 youth actively participating daily in the current skate park. It changes, but interest has grown since youth cannot currently gather at indoor sporting activities. This is the general trend across Canada. Jerome, Funky Threadz founder and operations manager, indicated that it was difficult to purchase skateboards, wheels and bearings to repair the equipment. This is a pattern in all outdoor equipment availability as people of all ages are changing their behavior, getting outdoors, and enjoying the space, freedom, and dealing with the barriers that COVID-19 has created.

The Pas Families Building a Better Community executive includes Jerome Conaty, Davide and Marcia Novo, Katherine Sanderson, and Jodie Madden. Many of these volunteers were involved in the splash pad project since the idea was proposed, designed, and now is a part of our community as of a few summers ago. Youngsters and family spend many hot summer days playing and enjoying the splashpad. It has been a great addition to our community. The skate park will serve a different group of youth who are feeling a bit more adventurous and competitive. It will be another avenue to promote wellness for our youth and for the community. The group has incorporated plans into the skate park design to include snow skating in the winter months. The open space design is away from busy streets, but close to many other venues where people meet outdoors. This creates a self-policing system that protects all skate park users and other users of the park area. The wellness center outdoor space will be a great place as so many people already gather here. It is a safe place to engage in recreational activity, with the necessary lighting and security systems already in place.

The skate park group feels that the stars are aligning. They have spent much time connecting with various groups with support from many local organizations. They are focusing on applying for additional grant options, seeking out gifts in kind, connecting with local corporate sponsors and getting this project off the ground. This summer they are focusing on starting into Phase II, the excavation of the skate park. Phase III will be the actual park build which is slated for 2022. They are not looking for handouts but will not say no to donations. If you would like to donate there are multiple options available. You can email donations to [thepasfamilies@gmail.com](mailto:thepasfamilies@gmail.com). They have set up credit card donations at [paypal.me/tpfbbc](https://paypal.me/tpfbbc), use Grub Box #986 or donate your empties at the Wescana Inn. All you have to do is let them know you would like to donate to the Skate park (The Pas Families).

The town has many good projects that at one time were just a thought that came to be. These include the outdoor arena, the skating rink oval, the splashpad, and the wellness center, to name a few. The skate park is the next one that can become a reality. Possibly within the next two years!

For additional information on how to get involved with this worthwhile project, contact Jerome Conaty at [mail@funkythreadz.com](mailto:mail@funkythreadz.com), or connect on Facebook #newpark623 and Instagram (@newpark623).

Make Shift Happen.

Written and Submitted by Denise Duncan