

#PERSPECTIVE

# Bringing street children out of despair through SKATEBOARDING

In chaotic Dhaka city, the swift roll and clack of skateboards might not be a familiar sound. However, the street children huddling together and spending days without care is most certainly a common scenario that city dwellers regularly witness. But what if we pair these underprivileged children with skateboards? Will this give them joy and something to strive for?

Susie Halsell — founder and CEO of Bangladesh Street Kids Aid (BSKA), and a passionate skateboarder herself — came up with such a unique skateboarding programme that not only offers street children a rush of adrenaline, but also nurtures their potential, helping them build confidence, community, and dreams for a brighter future.

## The spark of a skateboard

Bangladesh Street Kids Aid (BSKA) uses innovative and self-empowerment initiatives to address the unmet needs of street-based children and adolescents and the idea to introduce skateboarding into BSKA came from a deeply personal place for the founder.

"When I first visited Bangladesh in 2007, I was skateboarding around Cox's Bazar, and these children would run up to me and ask to try out my skateboard. After seeing how quickly they progressed, I realised what an empowering tool it could be in their lives," Halsell recalls.

For Halsell, skateboarding was a tool for empowerment, much like it had been for her growing up in California, USA.

This sentiment resonates with the girls in the programme, who are not only learning to skateboard, but are



growing into confident young women and even coaches within the BSKA community.

"The top three female skateboarders in Bangladesh grew up learning to skateboard in BSKA's skate programs. They are also now working as paid coaches for BSKA," Halsell highlights.

Currently, BSKA is also running a programme under the name, Bangladeshi Girls Shred, to increase the number of female skateboarders in Bangladesh.

## Royal Bengal Skatepark

Although initially self-funded by Halsell and her network, the skateboarding programme has grown considerably — leading to the establishment of Royal Bengal Skatepark in Gazipur, a major achievement for BSKA, which was funded by a grant from the Belgium-based B-Corporation, the Skateroom.

With the hope of expanding the programme, Halsell shares, "Looking ahead, BSKA plans to open sports hostels next to each skatepark. These hostels will provide a stable environment for street-based children who have excelled in skateboarding."

## Community response

While community support within Bangladesh has been limited, Halsell remains optimistic and driven. "Most people here tend to think any programmes or services offered to street-involved youth are a lost cause.

We only have a few key Bangladeshi supporters who are mostly based in California, USA and only one solid supporter that resides in Bangladesh," she mentions.

Despite this, the program has seen international support and is planning expansions. "I have recently been hired by UNICEF Bangladesh's Child Protection section as a foreign technical expert to establish skateboarding for children and adolescents in street situations across Bangladesh," Halsell proudly shares.

## A rewarding journey

For Susie Halsell, the joy comes from seeing the

transformation in the children. "Seeing these kids realise their potential and experience lasting freedom and joy has been the most rewarding," she reflects. From witnessing their growth from vulnerable street children to confident individuals and national skateboarding champions, she finds immense fulfilment.

The goal of BSKA is to empower street children and the skateboarding program is one of their initiatives. The organisation takes care of street children with drug problems and offers them medical and psychological support in their shelter homes.

Sports can serve as a powerful means of empowerment, and BSKA's skateboarding programme exemplifies this beautifully. This inspiring initiative showcases the strength of empathy, community, and the firm conviction that every child, no matter their circumstances, has the right to thrive and reach for the skies.

Essentials –

Website: <https://www.bskaid.org/>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/BSKAID?mibextid=LQQJ4d>

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