

Stuart Young captures local skaters utilizing the mobile skatepark his organization, Cousins, won from the City of Calgary. Here, the ramp is set up in the parking lot of local skateboard and snowboard shop, The Source, during a launch of their collaborative deck designed by local artist Sikapinaki.



BOARD

**COUSINS
SKATEBOARD
COMMUNITY IS
CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR FIRST
NATIONS YOUTH,
ONE OLLIE AT
A TIME**

ROOM

**“FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE,
‘COUSIN’ IS A TERM OF ENDEARMENT.
PEOPLE WILL SAY, ‘WHAT’S UP, COUSIN?’
AND IT BASICALLY MEANS YOU’RE MORE
THAN A FRIEND, THAT YOU’RE FAMILY.
THAT’S HOW WE SEE OUR CREW.”**

STUART YOUNG



Stuart Young (left) and C.J. Cutter (right), co-founders of Cousins Skateboard Community.

Skateboarding takes determination and creativity — even, for some, just to find locations to skate. For skateboarders living in urban centres, it can be as easy as skating down the block to the nearest spot. But, for Indigenous youth living on reserves, it can be challenging to

find an adequate piece of concrete. Cousins Skateboard Community has made it its mission to partner with communities to bring skateboard parks to reserves and empower youth to build communities around them.

The name, Cousins, hints at the values of the group. “From an Indigenous perspective, ‘cousin’ is a term of endearment. People will say, ‘What’s up, cousin?’ and it basically means you’re more than a friend, that you’re family. That’s how we see our crew,” says Stuart Young, one of the Community’s co-founders.

Young and fellow co-founder C.J. Cutter grew up as skateboarders on different reserves, and, as adults, they became friends, or “cousins,” long before they formed the organization. In sharing the struggles of being skateboarders on reserves, they bonded over a hope to provide today’s youth with the access to skateboarding that they didn’t have.

By 2020, Cutter had gotten a start by building ramps and hosting contests in Siksika Nation, where he grew up, but he wasn’t sure how to take his work further. Then he and Young received a message in October 2020, linking them to a news article about the City of Calgary selling off mobile skateboard parks and inviting the greater community to submit proposals for their projects. Young had previous experience with similar applications through his time at university and working for various energy companies, and, supported by friends familiar with the non-profit industry, he spent a month completing the application. Their proposal won, and, after receiving their mobile skatepark in March 2021, the Cousins Skateboard Community was born.

With the momentum from securing the mobile skatepark, they next focused their attention on program funding. In addition to the support they continue to receive from

Darrell Healy clears a burning barrel at an event held at Shaw Millennium Skatepark celebrating both Go Skateboarding Day and National Indigenous Peoples Day.



local skateboard stores, they partnered with Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities through its community development grant program.

While getting the mobile skateboard park from the City provided the space for the program, Young and Cutter are quick to point out it's not the literal skatepark that's important; it's the access to a facility that becomes the catalyst for building community.

"We believe youth require access to skate-parks, but skateparks alone are not the answer.

A skatepark is just concrete and angled cement that facilitates an activity. For us, the skatepark provides an opportunity to engage and empower the youth using skateboarding. It's more about building a culture and community. The skatepark is secondary," says Young.

The Cousins team has worked with approximately 500 youth already and their approach is now well established and has proven effective. One of their key tools to building these communities is providing weekly programs



The Cousins Skateboard Community crew holding flags from each of their home Nations.

when the Cousins team visits various First Nation reserves and skates with youth at their local skateparks. They bring lessons, gear, and general support, but perhaps most significantly, they provide local kids with something they can look forward to — a potential distraction from what might be going on in their lives.

"It's not like basketball where you can just run dribbling drills; teaching skateboarding, is more about overcoming mental challenges," says Young. "It's a really neat way to connect with the youth. While they're skateboarding, they don't have to worry about an upcoming math test, or what's going on at home. They are just truly enjoying the practice of skateboarding and that's a beautiful thing."

For the second year, Cousins is hosting an annual skate shoe drive that coincides with the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. Skaters love and need shoes, but the drive has larger symbolism, as well, because shoes have been used as a representation, or a memorial, of those lost from the impacts of residential schools.

"It's not generosity for the sake of it. It's about making sure we always have shoes on hand in case we see a kid that needs them. That feeling of getting a new pair of shoes as a skater, it's better than anything. It's about more than the shoes," says Young.

Like most things Cousins does, it's not about the surface value of what they might be working with. It's ultimately about the support and empowerment of the Indigenous youth — kids who happen to also like skateboarding. 🙌

To support the Cousins Skateboard Community shoe drive, visit a local skateboard shop like Ninetimes or The Source in Calgary, or the Shredz Shop in Cochrane, buy your favourite pair of shoes of any size and style, and put them in the provided collection bins.