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New skatepark sees drop in youth crime

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A FLAGSHIP skatepark was today credited with causing a dramatic drop in youth disorder on a city estate plagued by trouble on its streets.

People living in Broomhouse claim they have seen major improvements in the area since the £85,000 facility opened about four weeks ago.

Despite the winter weather, its half-pipes and ramps have been drawing dozens of young people nightly to the Sighthill Park complex.

Residents in the area - once dubbed Little Bosnia because of persistent problems with anti-social behaviour - say vandalism and other petty crime appears to have reduced substantially since Edinburgh's first council-run skatepark was launched last month.

Police in the area today also confirmed they had received fewer calls related to youth disorder in recent weeks.

Community leaders and a group of teenagers had fought to secure such a facility for almost four years.

Young people even collected a petition boasting hundreds of signatures amid complaints that there was "nothing to do" nearby.

Betty Watson, chairwoman of the Broomhouse Tenants and Residents Association, said that many people had commented on the serious reduction in problems on the estate since the facility opened.

She said: "It's definitely had an impact. The kids were dying for a skatepark so they're up there all the time and things seem to be quieter. It shows that if you give the kids something to do, you will get a reaction."

The BTRA obtained a £39,000 grant from SportScotland, with the remainder coming from the Scottish Executive. Edinburgh City Council provided the site, designed and constructed the facility and has agreed to maintain the complex.

The centre - which caters for skateboarders, in-line skaters and BMX riders - is already regularly attracting people from across the city.

Sighthill councillor Frank Russell, who stays in Broomhouse, admitted the apparent knock-on effect of the new park had exceeded everyone's expectations.

He added: "It's early days but there's a general feeling that there's less hassle in the area since the skatepark opened.

"The kids decided they wanted this in the area, were involved from day one and feel they have some ownership over it. It's certainly been quieter in Broomhouse."

Keith Bell, secretary of the Sighthill, Broomhouse and Parkhead Community Council, claimed the

park had already proved to be a "vital asset".

He said: "It's getting used every day, even when it's freezing cold in the middle of winter. Most kids experience skateboarding on their PlayStations, but now they can do the real thing so it's a positive step that promotes physical activity and a healthy lifestyle."

Lothian and Borders Police officials acknowledged there had been a "slight reduction" in the number of nuisance-related calls to the area since the park opened.

Representatives of the Edinburgh Skate Park Project campaign group said the scheme's early success illustrated the effect a large-scale complex could have on targeting similar problems in the city centre.

Much-delayed plans for a flagship £400,000 skateboard park have stalled with city chiefs unable to identify an appropriate site.

ESPP spokesman Zee Yule, 29, said: "Finally, the council is giving young people something to do. Instead of going out smashing windows and causing trouble they have the opportunity to do something they enjoy. Skateboarding has become a major sport now and every suburb needs a park like that."

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