



Kick start:
Lyndsay McLaren
(far left) builds
confidence in
female skaters

NEIGHBOURHOOD SKATE CLUB

Boarding pass

Meet the all-woman skate crew packing out an east London park and creating more space for female board-riders

When skater Sky Brown won bronze in the inaugural Olympic women's park skateboarding final in August this year, it was a watershed moment. Not only was the 13-year-old Britain's youngest-ever Olympic medallist and the youngest pro in her sport worldwide, but her achievement issued a clear message to the as-yet-uninformed: yes, women do skate.

This would hardly be news if you've ever strolled through Victoria Park, east London. On any given day you'll see

a crew of around 40 women weaving across the tarmac on their decks. This is the Neighbourhood Skate Club, an all-female skateboarding collective founded by marketing director Lyndsay McLaren.

The 33-year-old began teaching one-to-one skate lessons in her local park in April this year. "There was a huge demand from women who wanted to learn but felt intimidated by skateparks," McLaren explains. But over time she spotted an increasing number of female beginners skating on their own. "It's hard to make friends in your twenties, thirties and forties," she continues. "So I wanted to start a community of like-minded women from different backgrounds who all want to learn." And so the club was formed. The motto: empowering women through voice, movement and skateboarding.

McLaren first discovered the sport after moving to Miami for university in 2008. But it was only when she relocated to New York City that she found the skateboarding community for the first time. "It took over my world. Before I knew it, my whole friendship group was skateboarders," she recalls. She began entering competitions and spent the next two years zipping across the US, supported by sponsors including helmet brand Bern.

After moving back to the UK, it took McLaren a while to find her tribe again, but now it's bigger than ever. The Neighbourhood Skate Club's free workshops and gatherings draw all levels of skater, from total beginners to experienced riders, and the most recent event ended with a few laps of the park as one giant crew. "It was a head-turner," McLaren says. "I'm used to negative experiences while skating – being catcalled, or people telling me to watch out – so it was amazing to see such big smiles on everyone's faces."

McLaren is determined to create a safe space for women skaters and other marginalised groups in what remains a male-dominated sport. Removing the skatepark setting was key to making the club more accessible. "You don't have to learn tricks to be a skateboarder. There's a simple joy that comes from just cruising around. With such a big group of women it's really empowering."

This is a crucial part of the Neighbourhood Skate Club: it builds confidence on the board and beyond. "I want women to take the lessons they learn from skateboarding – the feeling of strength and sense of self – and apply that to their day jobs," says McLaren, "whether that's using their voice to stand up for themselves or remembering that it's OK to take up space." neighbourhoodskateclub.bigcartel.com