

Pass It On®...

Slopes and Wheels.

From the cold wilderness of Alaska to the inner workings of the heart, Preston Pollard is helping kids rethink the way they approach life.

Preston Pollard grew up in Alaska. Not exactly a mecca for skateboarders. But Preston isn't one to follow in anyone else's footsteps.

He moved to Los Angeles after high school and became a professional skateboarder. The journey sounds like a fairytale, but it was the opposite. "I struggled with ADHD and schoolwork," Preston remembers. "I had anxiety and fears like other kids, and it could have kept me from ever achieving anything. Then I discovered one little phrase that changed my life: 'My breath is my miracle'. I changed the way I looked at things, became grateful for every breath." Preston not only made success on the ramps he also became a motivational speaker.

"Through all of my speaking engagements over the years I've realized one thing," Preston says. "Young people need mentors."

The family looks a little different in America than it did just 65 years ago. One in four children are growing up in a single family today, compared to just 9% in 1960. That puts an enormous amount of pressure on those parents. The kids end up with fewer mentors, less supervision, more time alone, more difficulty making connections and a harder time processing negative emotion.

It's unfair that so many children must deal with the feelings of loss and separation today. They need adult role models who have conquered their fears, bridled their emotions, and love life. Preston took the Zen of bending curves on slopes and defying gravity in the air to a form of meditation that teaches kids to breathe in opportunities.

They come into the program looking for an easy way out, but what these kids find is a new way to think about life. The session begins with a deep breathing exercise, a reverence for the life within. Videos of celebrities offer encouragement, and life lessons the kids will look to. Hungry for mentors, they tune in. They then spend time in introspection, writing down goals, feelings, ways to deal with

adversity based on what they have learned. And they get visits from Preston. Sometimes he arrives in person, and sometimes he appears live on screen. Twelve times throughout the year they get to hear from him. It's a huge commitment on Preston's part. "You have to make the commitment to make the change," he says. And change does happen. Attendance rates are up 45% at Preston's schools. Positive behaviors are up. Kids are getting motivated and seeing a vision of themselves they didn't see before. "Whether it's an electrician or a doctor, they start with a plan," Preston says. "I tell them if I can do it, so can they."

Preston is the mentor that has been missing in so many young lives, a rebel skater with a cause: to bring kids out of the darkness of self-isolation into the sunlight of self-acceptance. "Be yourself, and be positive," he says. Breathe in the world around you and exhale the negativity that forms when you forget how much you matter.

Preston has skated his way all over the country. He has appeared in ads for major brands like Nike, Vox, and Jones Soda. His face is on billboards in major cities and the underside of skateboard decks. He speaks to kids about the spiritual act of becoming. He is a skateboarder from Alaska. He is African American. That makes him the perfect mentor to teach kids about just being who you are, about handling the slopes that rise up in front of you and wheeling along carefree when life is good.

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