



---

Mar 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

To whom it may concern:

Re: Nomination letter for Jay Mandarino re “Order of Ontario”

I am writing this letter in support of the work Jay Mandarino does with his Not-For-Profit CJ's SKATEPARK and its work with children and teens with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders and Learning Disabilities (LDs) all over Ontario.

As a child psychiatrist and an expert in ADHD, I know that classical therapy with children in this patient population can be a challenge. Often times, children with these disorders are reluctant to sit in a therapy office and truly engage in the process. They are, however, often willing to learn a new skill, like skateboarding. Their desire to do a 'cool' activity motivates them to try hard and propel forward.

CJ's has provided an opportunity for kids with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and LD's and to learn a new skill, and in so doing, improve their self-esteem and functioning skills. The kids who attend CJ's think they are going to learn to skateboard. I know that when they attend, they are actually improving their mental health, developing listening skills and building their self-esteem.

I am writing because I have referred several of my patients to CJ's over the past 15 years to learn, develop, and benefit from their experiences there. Like 'John' a 16-year-old who has been asked to help to teach the younger children. Despite his ADHD and poor functioning at school, he has taken on this leadership role with enthusiasm and excelled with his passion for skateboarding. In the psychiatric office, he is quiet, reluctant to engage and doesn't benefit from 'therapy'. In the skatepark, he rises to challenges all the time, demonstrates flexibility with younger kids, and builds his self esteem. Or 'Mike', an 8-year-old with ADHD and Non-Verbal Learning Disability. Attending CJ's gives him the opportunity to learn and grow - which he does with enthusiasm. Whereas at school he feels often left out socially, and struggling academically, he excels with skateboarding, and feels right at home at CJ's. These are just a couple of the success stories that I have heard from the young people that I have sent from my office to CJ's.

Certainly, if you open the psychiatric textbooks, you don't hear about '*skateboard therapy*' in child psychiatry. This is not a standard approach. However, when you look at the principal of CJ's- Jay Mandarino - he has been a leader and supporter for learning disabilities, ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorders for years. His dedication and support of young people led me to consider sending my interested patients to see him, and benefit from CJ's. **His innovative approach is helping young people in a way that other programs haven't been able to do.**



Centre for  
Integrative  
Mental Health

**Dr. Kenny Handelman, MD FRCP(C) ABIHM**  
Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychiatrist  
Assistant Clinical Professor, McMaster University

Although the psychiatric textbooks don't discuss '*skateboard therapy*', if you look for methods to improve self-esteem, you will begin to understand how CJ's benefit youth. Many people think about different therapies to improve self-esteem. Though at the core of it – the best way to improve self-esteem is to set a goal, challenge yourself, improve, achieve that goal, and have others acknowledge you for it. CJ's provides the perfect opportunity for interested youth to achieve this. As they set their skateboarding goals and achieve them, their self-esteem grows. Improving self-esteem in one area can 'overflow' into multiple areas of one's life, leading to significant positive change.

I am writing this letter to support the nomination of Jay Mandarino for the “Order of Ontario” for his significant contribution through the work that he has done at CJ's SKATEPARK because I truly believe in this program. As an expert in ADD/ADHD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, and an Assistant Clinical Professor of at McMaster University, I put my support behind Jay Mandarino and his unique, welcoming and therapeutic program for youth struggling with their mental health.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance. Sincerely,

Kenneth Handelman, MD FRCP(C)  
Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychiatrist  
Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, McMaster University