

Case Study

Bespoke Biking -

The successful development of a Community Interest Company

Background

Cycling is one of the easiest ways to fit exercise into your daily routine because it is also a form of transport. Cycling also:

- Saves you money
- Gets you fit
- Helps the environment

A 2010 Transport survey for London study 'Analysis of Cycling Potential' found that 'safety, traffic and lack of facilities are the greatest barriers' to uptake amongst existing infrequent cyclists.

A 2014 survey carried out by Northern Ireland's Department for Regional Development asked respondents what would discourage them from cycling for short trips of under 3 miles, from a list of options; 42% of respondents did not have access to a bicycle; 28% chose 'traffic/danger' as their main reason for not cycling for short trips; 22% chose 'poor cycling infrastructure'; and 19% chose 'inconsiderate car drivers'.

Hampshire resident Heather Evans found local evidence of these identified barriers in her work delivering cycle training for children in the Winchester area.

With no family-friendly bike hire service in the area Heather identified a need to help residents and visitors to Winchester to begin cycling with the provision of encouragement, training, and safe, accessible cycle routes around Winchester and into the South Downs National Park.



The project

With strong motives also focused on the benefits of cycling for the community, the environment and personal health it was felt that a Social Enterprise would be the best 'organisational' vehicle to develop a bespoke biking service.

Heather attended the School for Social Entrepreneurs and through the training developed her skills and confidence in putting a strong business case together. Heather decided that 'Bespoke Biking' would take the form of a Community Interest Company, which gave her a good basis to begin fundraising.

As Heather's training drew to an end she shifted her focus to project development and started working on a bid to the Sustainable Transport Solutions Fund (STSF) of the South Downs National Park Authority.

In 2013 Bespoke Biking began working in partnership with YMCA who provided the premises for their activities. They were also awarded £15,000 from the STSF, which was spent on capital items such as the bike fleet (for hire), maintenance facilities and tools.

With these foundations in place Bespoke Biking started operating 1 day per month in September of 2013. It also received additional support from Hampshire County Council who sponsored a 'bike doctor', which is an onsite bicycle mechanic and marketing in the form of a flyer delivered to every house in the SO23 postcode.

Members of the team attended a social media course and resources were dedicated to this important marketing tool. The internet and social media were Bespoke Bikings shop window because it did not have fixed premises. Bespoke Biking has received excellent feedback on websites such as TripAdvisor.

“I can’t believe the difference in me. Previously I had only ever cycled abroad, now my bike is setup for me it feels wonderful, I have learnt to use gears and my confidence is growing each week. I get out to see the countryside, keep fit and enjoy good company on a group ride. What I always say to people is that cycling makes me happy! Just getting on my bike makes me feel good.”

Mary, user of Bespoke Biking

The outcome

After a 3 month trial period Bespoke Biking increased from monthly to weekly opening on Fridays.

In 2016 the bike repair facility began operating three days a week and the team started looking for facilities where they could open the workshop seven days a week.

By 2017 Bespoke Biking had;

- hired out 82 bikes
- held 120 Hub days
- hosted over 200 people on rides
- repaired over 350 bikes

The team made up of mainly volunteers has grown from one to 20 members.

Heather is a member of the steering committee, which is dedicated to developing bike hire across the National Park, specifically a-b hire where a bike can be collected at one point and dropped off at another.



The future

Bespoke Biking are planning to introduce Discovery Rides, which will provide a range of educational rides teaching participants about the National Park’s heritage, wildlife and landscape.

Participants of the Discovery Rides will be encouraged to become cycle ambassadors and will be trained by Bespoke Biking to deliver Discovery Rides.

Bespoke Biking are delighted to be working in partnership with SPUD on the Handlebars Café project in Winchester (winchester.gov.uk/n/spud-youth-project/).

Please visit bespokebiking.com for more information on the work of Bespoke Biking.



southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/supporting-communities-business/funding-for-your-project

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