



Community Care Western Cheshire

Friday Bike Project – Canal Basin

The Friday Bike Project runs at Water Tower Gardens, off Tower Road, Chester, from 1:00pm until 4:00pm every Friday (except Bank Holidays and over the Christmas period). The project is aimed at homeless people and provides a facility for participants to attend and to build themselves a recycled bike from old bikes that have been donated to the scheme. Excess bikes, in particular children's bikes, are redistributed to families in deprived areas of Chester, through connections with a number of local charities. The project also serves as a regular Doctor Bike Surgery for local residents to bring their bikes along to have them checked and repaired, if possible.



The Project originally began in 2003 and involves people within the Chester area meeting up on Friday afternoons to repair and restore second hand bicycles that have been donated by members of the community, recovered by the Police or reclaimed from tips etc. The repaired bikes are then sold to the participants, who make a donation to the project, which is used to buy spares parts etc. necessary for the continuation of

the project. Members of the public are also welcome to purchase recycled bikes from the project, subject to availability. Excess bikes are recycled within the community to needy groups through local charities.

Originally based in Blacon, at Blacon High School, in 2005 the project moved to a new location within a local park close to Chester city centre, making it more accessible to participants from across the city area. The project seeks to engage local residents by building individual self worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. To encourage collective action, activity and the sharing of skills and knowledge alongside the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

Cycle Chester has funded the employment of a qualified cycle mechanic to attend the sessions to provide guidance on the repairing of the bicycles and also to show participants basic cycle maintenance skills so that they are able to maintain their own bikes. A member of staff from the Specialist Health Promotion Team, also skilled at cycle maintenance, also attends the sessions. The facilities are provided, free of charge, by Cheshire West and Chester Council.



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The beneficiaries of the project are the homeless people of Chester, local residents who use the project to maintain and repair their bicycles and the numerous families who benefit from the recycled bikes that are supplied through local charities. Many of the people attending the project are referred by local charities working with the homeless or offenders, such as Addaction and NACRO, and the project also has a good relationship with the several local medical practices, who also refer people to the project. Although not all participants are homeless, large proportions of them describe themselves as such, or have been homeless in the recent past.

The numbers attending the project varies greatly depending on the season, recently, during the winter months we would normally expect between 5 and 10 participants. Whereas during the summer months a minimum of 10 participants would be expected, numbers in excess of 30 on some occasions.

Although there is something of a widespread consensus on the benefits of cycling, there has been relatively little evaluative research that has explored the potential benefits, to both individuals and the community as a whole, of physically recycling bicycles in projects such as this. However, it has been suggested that for disadvantaged individuals (and particularly those who are homeless) the effect of owning a second-hand or recycled bicycle can be life-changing:



Having a used bicycle may not seem like a big deal to some people, but for a homeless child or adult, it can have life-changing consequences. When you put used bicycles into the hands of homeless individuals, you provide them with an opportunity to do things they often cannot achieve on foot; a chance to get a hot meal across town, find a secure shelter for the night, go to a job interview, accept a job, access medical care, or attend school. Suddenly, a used bicycle becomes their ticket to independence for a better life. (Mitchell, 2006)

The health benefits of cycling are well established and everyday cycling is an effective form of aerobic exercise that has been shown to reduce the risk of developing long term health conditions, such as Coronary Heart Disease, Stroke and Type 2 Diabetes. These are all conditions that homeless people are susceptible to because of their lifestyle, the word choices is deliberately left out of this statement because, for many in this situation, there is no choice. Regular cycling can also help to maintain a healthy weight and, with the current concern about increasing rates of



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obesity, the more we can encourage people to cycle the better the prospects for their long term health. However for cycling to be a safe and healthy activity people must have access to bikes and equipment that are safe and correctly set up for them. This is a service that is provided for homeless people, and the wider local community, by the Friday Bike Project. Also by giving participants advice and instruction on basic maintenance procedures, such as fixing punctures and brake / gear adjustment, means that the bikes remain in a safe working condition.

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