Mend and Ride Project Report

Lewisham Cyclists is a very active community group in the London Borough of Lewisham, which has provided some led rides for local people in the past, helped local cyclists to get improved facilities for themselves and their communities, and generally worked within the borough to promote active forms of sustainable travel.

We applied for the CCFL to funding to develop our rides programmes further, to involve more people across the borough, from a wider range of the borough’s population and to add a bike maintenance project to our work. Although our rides were always fairly well attended, we wanted to increase the numbers of BAME and women on them, and to run rides for families, as it was apparent the majority of people on our rides in the past tended to be male.

We had also found that a significant proportion of our riders had little or no maintenance skills, many not even able to mend a flat tyre. On a few occasions we had even had to turn people away from rides because their bikes were so poorly maintained as to be unsafe to ride. We had run several Dr Bikes in the past at summer fair events and these were always over subscribed. So the idea of the Mend and Ride project was born.

We already had a group of committed volunteers who attend our monthly meetings and set up a management committee of nine people for the Mend and Ride Project. Every ride we ran since the project started has a leader, back marker and at least one marshal, more if there are more than twenty people on the ride, which has happened twice this year already.

At the workshops we have at least one trained mechanic, sometimes two, (City and Guilds level 2) and from two to four volunteer helpers. At any one time in the workshop, there have been three people working on bikes. We could accommodate four people maximum at any one time working on bikes. It is a drop in service and each workshop lasts around 3 hours. People are encouraged to come early and provided with refreshments if there is no space on repair stands available when they first arrive. We talk people through the problem with the bike, show them what needs to be done to sort the problem and give them ongoing advice on care and maintenance. We show them how to use the tools we provide safely.

We have also run four short pre ride sessions where riders can bring their bikes for a quick check before the ride to make sure they are road worthy and, if necessary, make quick repairs to get them riding rather than send them home because their bike is not safe. Seven participants were able to attend rides in this way who would not have done so, as we were able to help them fit new brake pads, replace a badly frayed cable, adjust gear mechanisms and tighten chainring bolts.

One of our volunteers is a Nationally Accredited Instructor and we have also offered follow up sessions to the council’s free two hour lesson to six people.

We also have a small pool of five loan bikes.

So far this year we have run 12 rides at weekends plus a fortnightly short evening ride. The average number of participants is 14. The most well attended ride had 26 participants. The youngest rider was 7 and the eldest 84. A third of our participants have been women, which is an increase of about 10 percent (previously it was around 1 in 5). On the shorter local rides the percentage of women increases to 50 percent with a couple of rides (International Women’s day Ride and Olympic Park Ride) having 65% women riders.

We have run four full workshops so far. Two in our Grove Park location at the local community centre and one in Forest Hill at the Young Lewisham Project. Average number of participants was 4. One session had six participants. So far we have operated these on a drop in basis. 50 per cent of participants have been women.

Project outcomes

The grant enabled us to finance the high start up costs for a workshop: tools and parts, and pay for a mechanic to be trained so that now we can continue to run the project, with volunteers and the money we raise from our normal yearly funds.

We have increased the number of rides we run, adding more local, shorter rides, which have attracted more women participants and families.

We have enabled people who would not have been able to attend rides due to mechanically unsound bikes to mend their bikes and ride safely.

We have provided the means for people on low incomes to service and repair their bikes and learn the skills to keep doing that in the future.

We have widened our involvement in the local community, especially through our Grove Park Project, where we have made links with the Friends of Chinbrook Meadows with whom we are setting up a joint “Ride into Spring” day in the park on May 16th open to the whole local community in Grove Park. We plan to work with the Grove Park community, which is poorly served in terms of cycling routes compared to the rest of the borough and has low levels of cycling compared with the north and west of Lewisham, to campaign for some key links in cycle routes which would make walking and cycling much easier for residents. We are already planning a series of weekly family rides for the school holidays, starting at the community centre.

We also work with the Young Lewisham Project to deliver the Forest Hill based workshop.

Lessons learnt

Advertising, monitoring and targeting particular groups we wanted to involve more, have been the most difficult things to get right.

We have used all our media platforms, Twitter, website, Facebook but had problems distributing leaflets and posters due to time constraints for volunteers….people are willing to volunteer time for rides or workshop activities, but delivering leaflets and distributing posters is very time consuming and it’s difficult to assess if the benefits are worth the time given.

Our monitoring could have been more extensive…we did not monitor age or ethnic origin, yet one of our aims was to increase families with under 18’s and BAME, so can only assess this anecdotally now. In the future we will include this in our monitoring.

We wanted to increase the numbers of women and BAME on our rides and encourage them to attend the workshops but we found targeting these groups problematic. We did increase the numbers of women and this seems to have arisen due to the inclusion of shorter local rides and family rides. We did increase our BAME participants slightly, but struggled to find ways of explicitly targeting these groups. We have decided to canvass the opinions of the BAME riders we do have, to develop more effective ways of doing this in the future.

 Our budget for tools was overspent, largely because our original budget was for cheaper versions than we actually purchased. This was due to advice on tools from people running community bike workshops already in existence, who strongly advised buying stronger, tougher sets of tools than we had planned because we would find this more cost effective in the long term. We also ended up buying more parts than we originally budgeted for such as small brake parts and bearings as, almost immediately, some of the bikes arriving needed these parts. This will in the end still be cost effective as we charge cost price for parts. We’d advise anyone to get a lot of extensive advice before preparing the budget!

Testimonials

I have included scans of some of the participant questionnaires.

In addition, these have come from members in person.

“After a bike malfunction on a bike ride, Lewisham Cyclists helped me fix my bike. Their continued support during rides, from my taking up cycling last year, has encouraged me to continue with cycling. They are great mentors and good friends. A laugh is guaranteed on their well-organised and attended social rides.” Fiona MacKillop

“After unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to ride my bike for months. Lewisham Cyclists offered a way back into the saddle, as I joined them at Grove Park mend & ride and went on the Kent flat ride, and it encouraged me to ride more on weekday evenings (like this week's Tuesday totter). I can't afford all of the tools needed to maintain my bikes , so M&R allows me the opportunity to maintain my travel independence in a friendly social setting. “ Alex Raha

“After being a slow but consistent runner for years I took up cycling. For years I kept to cycling on paths or very quiet roads, walking my bike on the pavement to avoid busy roads. I went on a couple of Lewisham Cyclists beginners rides and began to gain confidence enough to cycle on busier roads. They helped me learn how to deal with busier junctions and I am now a confident commuter cyclist. I have also used some of their routes for running! An added bonus. The rides are very inclusive and friendly and when I have had punctures on rides they have helped me learn how to mend them.” Kemi

“The ride to Surrey Docks Farm was my favourite. The goats had huge tummies!” Sarah, aged 8

“I would never have taken the children out on bikes all the way from Ladywell to Surrey Docks on my own before. I was amazed how much of the route was free of traffic and, where there was a little bit it wasn’t a problem. Now I know the route and realize how far even my youngest (aged 8) can ride (as long as we stop for snacks!) we’ll definitely do it again on our own.” Bedimisi