

Active Travel case study: Mobilise! Cornwall

Gwellheans on Wheels project

January 2009



LOTTERY FUNDED



NHS
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly



Active Travel case Study: Mobilise! Cornwall Gwellheans on Wheels project

Intervention: Cycling programme

Activities:

- media appeal for 2nd hand bikes
- construction of an on-site cycle storage/maintenance shed
- regular led cycle rides

Aims:

- to engage with a hard to reach group (recovering drug and alcohol users)
- to encourage outdoor physical activity as part of a holistic intervention programme
- to raise awareness of the natural environment and its accessibility
- to address sedentary lifestyles and related diseases including obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, and mental health issues.

Target group:

- recovering drug and alcohol users

Setting: Gwellheans substance misuse day centre and environs, Redruth

Geographical area: West Cornwall

Overview:

Gwellheans on Wheels began after a request was received by the Mobilise! project to organise a led cycle ride around a nearby country park for a number of Gwellheans clients. Mobilise! Project Leader Euan Mahy takes up the story:

“This ride was different. We normally take people on a set, five mile course, but it soon became apparent that Gwellheans wanted more. We threw away the rule book and tracked across country to the cliffs at West Cornwall’s Hells Mouth. It was stormy and a great place to watch the Atlantic breakers crashing against the north coast.

From here we used a new, incomplete trail that will form part of a 23 mile section linking up existing cycle paths built on old railway tracks. These paths were originally built to transport tin and coal for the mines of west Cornwall. We finished with a climb through the little used but beautiful Illogan woods and then made our way back to the park’s cafe.”

As a result of an enjoyable day for all, over tea it was decided that Mobilise! would run regular rides for Gwellheans on alternate Thursday afternoons. The substance misuse day centre is based in Redruth and surrounded by moorland dotted with the remains of old engine houses. Euan explains how this environment formed the backdrop of a second ride with the group:

“A trail called the Great Flat Lode circuits the Redruth area. However, this name is misleading as ‘flat’ refers to the way that the tin sat in the bedrock. In fact, the path is high and has some steep

climbs. We hired bikes for Gwellheans and five of us set out on the second ride. It was tough going but they really enjoyed it.”

Soon after, keen cyclist and Gwellheans’ Sports and Healthy Living Co-ordinator Shane Arthur decided to form Gwellheans Bike Club (GBC) in partnership with Mobilise! The first step was to organise a fleet of bikes that the club could use. Euan explains how a successful relationship with the media led to bike donations:

“I persuaded BBC Radio Cornwall to make a feature on us as a way of appealing for 2nd hand bikes. Several listeners rang in and we have a motley collection of hacks, which with a bit of maintenance work well enough.”

How participants have benefitted:

The programme at Gwellheans is holistic, meaning it focuses on both body and mind to give recovering drug and alcohol users the best possible opportunity to stay clean and integrate back into society. The centre has regular head massage and tai chi classes; whilst it also helps clients find work or study opportunities. GBC fits into this programme neatly because physical activity promotes a sense of well-being and improves fitness.

Gwellheans client Darren is now studying at a local college and finds the course stressful. He says:

“Shane encouraged me to go on a ride one Thursday afternoon and I enjoyed the opportunity to get away from a desk and do something physical. I’m working really hard at college at the moment and this has meant my fitness has lapsed. I’m determined to get back into shape, using cycling.”

Physical activity helps clients cope better with difficult or stressful situations; times when before they would turn to drugs or alcohol. It’s also enabling some to develop new skills, as work is now underway to build a bike shed next to the centre. Mike, a client who has a degree in construction, is leading this project and is teaching others basic block laying techniques. Mike says:

“I have a very green ethos and so for me cycling is the obvious way to get around. I’m enjoying sharing my building skills with others and in turn look forward to learning how to take apart and rebuild bikes, something I have little knowledge of.”

Jez is a former tree surgeon who is working on the bike shed construction. He says:

“Mike’s a good teacher because he’s patient and I find that supportive. I love the cycling sessions because I’m discovering new tracks and some inspiring places right on my back doorstep.”

Sustainability:

It is now anticipated that the project will take a more formal shape in that cycling will become a structured, 12-week programme where clients learn both off-road riding and bike maintenance skills.

Plans for the future:

Bike shed construction will take a number of months, but once built, the shed will be used for both storage and maintenance classes. Some of the women who attend the centre have also expressed an interest in joining the cycling club and will be attending separate, female only rides.

Mobilise! and Gwellheans are funding the purchase of six new mountain bikes from a local bike shop to enable a fully functioning fleet to be available early in the new year, whilst donated bikes undergo refurbishment.

Local partnerships:

Mobilise! is delivered on a local level in partnership with Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust; Cornwall County Council; Penwith, Kerrier, Carrick, Restormel North Cornwall and Caradon District Councils, Natural England, Imerys and the Eden Project.

National partnerships:

Active Travel Consortium

Mobilise! is working with Sustrans on Active Travel local projects as part of a Consortium of leading walking, cycling and health organisations being funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Well-being programme, which provides funding to support the development of healthier lifestyles and to improve well-being.

The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004.

Sustrans

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity. Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. We work on practical programmes to enable people to incorporate health-enhancing active travel - walking and cycling - into their daily routine, thus helping to improve public health, address disease prevention (including obesity, cancer, CHD, diabetes and mental ill-health) and make a major contribution to the government's physical activity targets.

Sustrans is the charity behind the award winning National Cycle Network, Safe Routes to Schools, Bike It, TravelSmart, Active Travel, Connect2 and Liveable Neighbourhoods, all projects that are changing our world one mile at a time.